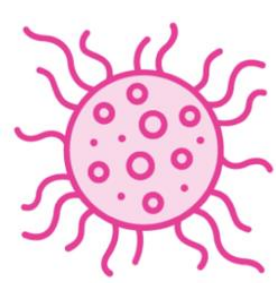


# Listening event

Gathering feedback on the health and social care experiences of individuals in Luton who are going through the menopause

**Menopause**  
**January 2022**



## Introduction

The menopause is defined as the ending of menstruation, usually for a period of 12 months or longer. The usual age period for menstruation to cease is between 45 and 55 years old, with the average age for women in the UK being 51 years old. (1) However, menopausal symptoms can also be experienced at a younger age with 1 in 100 women experiencing menopause before 40 years of age and the perimenopause, which is the transitional period to menopause, starting years before the end of menstruation. (1)

Additionally, women undergoing treatment for women's health conditions such as treatment for infertility or endometriosis can experience symptoms that mirror those of the menopause and these can be ongoing (2,3). Whilst the majority who go through menopause identify as women, trans, intersex and non binary people are also affected by symptoms.

The symptoms which often characterise menopause include hot flushes, low mood and problems with memory; however symptoms are vast and experienced differently by individuals.

Whilst the menopause is a natural and normal part of the ageing process, societal barriers continue to be present. Delays to diagnosis and treatment, lack of workplace support and stigma stemming from a limited awareness and structural ageism and sexism, are just some of the issues that can exacerbate struggles that individuals are already experiencing with their menopausal symptoms.

BUPA (4) discovered that almost one million women had left the labour market due to an absence of appropriate workplace support measures in place for menopausal symptoms.

Due to the lack of education on menopause, misdiagnosis and delays to treatment are commonly reported; Research by Newson Health and Wellbeing Centre (5) discovered that a third of women had a waiting period of three years before they were diagnosed correctly. This can occur as a result of doctors being uninformed of different menopause symptoms, which stems from a lack of menopause training.

All this evidence reinforces that the menopause is not only an equality issue but a significant workplace issue as well as a health and safety issue. There is a need to begin a conversation and listen to the accounts of individuals going through menopause, the start to implementing a compassionate and proactive approach to create more positive and supportive experiences.

Healthwatch Luton carried out a virtual listening event on the 13<sup>th</sup> January 2022, aimed towards those who were currently going through the menopause, experiencing menopausal symptoms or had already been through it. The purpose of the event was to explore people's experiences, what they felt worked with regards to support from health and social care services, what hadn't worked and their thoughts on improving support.

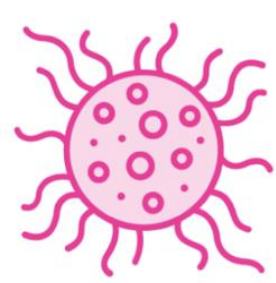
1. NHS, Overview: Menopause, available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/menopause/>

2. NHS, Overview: Infertility, available at <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/infertility/>

3. Endometriosis UK, available at <https://www.endometriosis-uk.org/information>

4. Burden, L. Bloomberg Equality, (2021), 'Many Women Exit Workforce for a Little Talked About Reason', available at <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-18/women-are-leaving-the-workforce-for-a-little-talked-about-reason>

5. Newson Health and Wellbeing Centre, <https://www.newsonhealth.co.uk/>



## Methodology

The listening event was promoted to the public through internal mailing lists, social media platforms and shared by organisations with their contacts. Once attendees had expressed interest, joining information was sent by email, with both videoconferencing and phone in options on Microsoft Teams. Two members of staff facilitated the event and to ensure accurate note taking.

Participants were informed that their data would be reported on anonymously and translated into recommendations for the wider system in Luton.

The topic guides for the questions focused on individuals' experiences of the menopause and views on health and social care services. There were in total four questions, following a similar format to the four questions format of the 'How are you doing?' campaign:

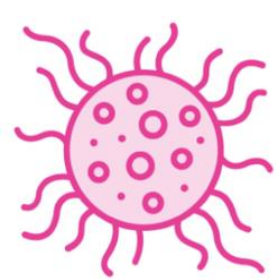
- **What have your experiences of the menopause been like?**
- **What has not worked well?**
- **What has worked well?**
- **How can things be improved?**

The open ended nature of the questions allowed for greater exploration into individuals' experiences, with question prompts also used to gain further insight.

### Attendees

All attendees who had registered were present. There were a total of five attendees, from a range of backgrounds and professions.





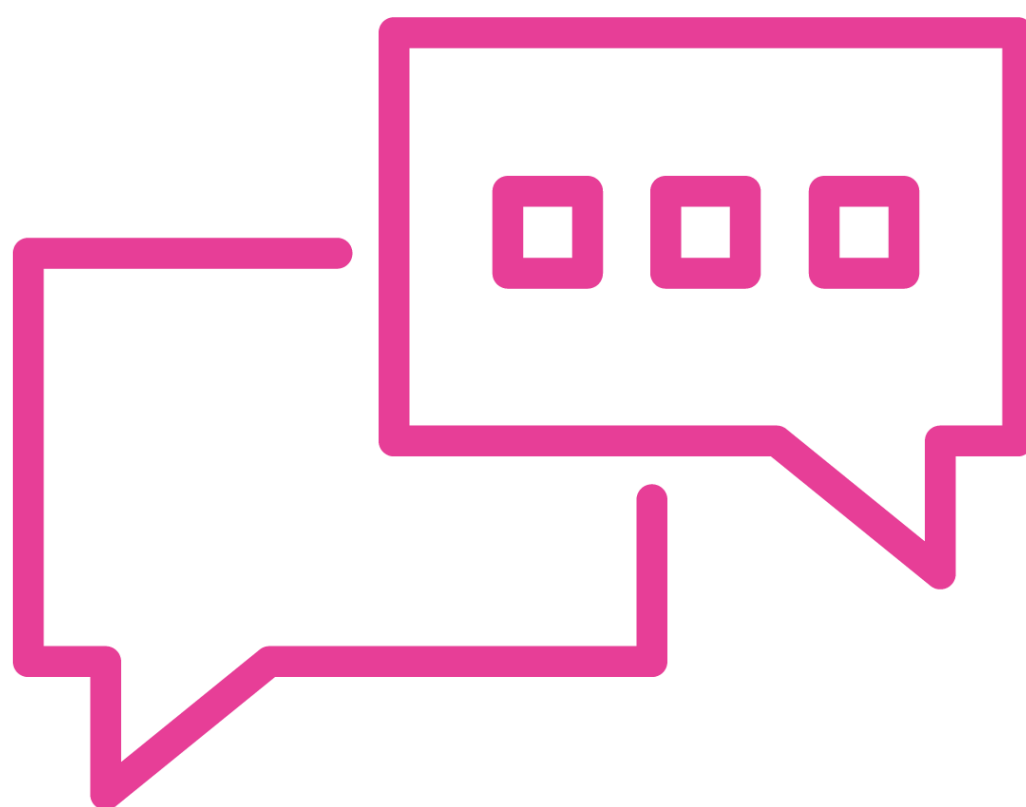
## What is not working well?

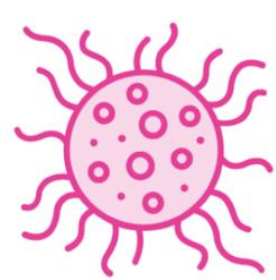
The overall consensus amongst participants was that there was a **lack of support and consideration** for menopause within the workplace.

Hot flushes was a widely reported symptom and this was especially problematic at work for some; one participant recalled an experience at work where opening a window had been met with **judgemental remarks** by a colleague.

All participants reported **ignorance** of work colleagues and managerial staff; this prevented them from wanting to share their struggles.

One person explained that the myriad of perimenopausal symptoms they were experiencing such as tiredness, joint pains and brain fog, were making it very difficult for them to work. They felt that there was a **lack of helpful communication** from their manager, who seemed to dismiss symptoms citing that it hadn't been an issue for themselves; this statement held a **lack of understanding** on the fact that the menopause affects people differently and can be debilitating for some.





## What is not working well?

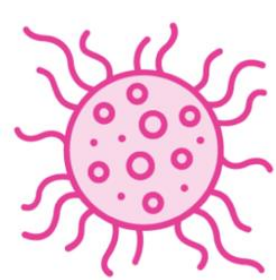
In agreement with this experience, another participant opened up about going through menopause at a young age and struggling at work, however the **ignorance** shared by their manager and colleagues coupled with an atmosphere of **'you're here to do a job'** left them feeling unable to be transparent about their struggles. This led them to develop their own coping mechanisms. The individual remarked that nothing much seemed to have progressed with regards to menopause awareness, in the 19 years since they first experienced menopausal symptoms.

This led to a discussion on the **lack of overall awareness** about the menopause, one person commenting that by now going through the first signs of menopause, **'it doesn't look promising'**. There were questions raised on the **'reason for the silence'** and why people across cultures were struggling, considering that the menopause is a very common and natural part of life.

## What worked well?

There was **limited discussion** on what participants found worked well as unfortunately participants felt there wasn't much support available; however one participant did mention that the **GP was understanding**, but with the caveat of **appointments being short** and not a place where struggles could be discussed in length.

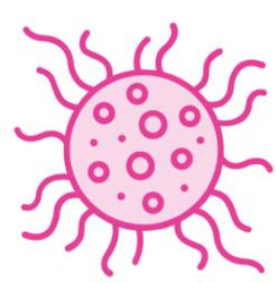




## What could be improved?

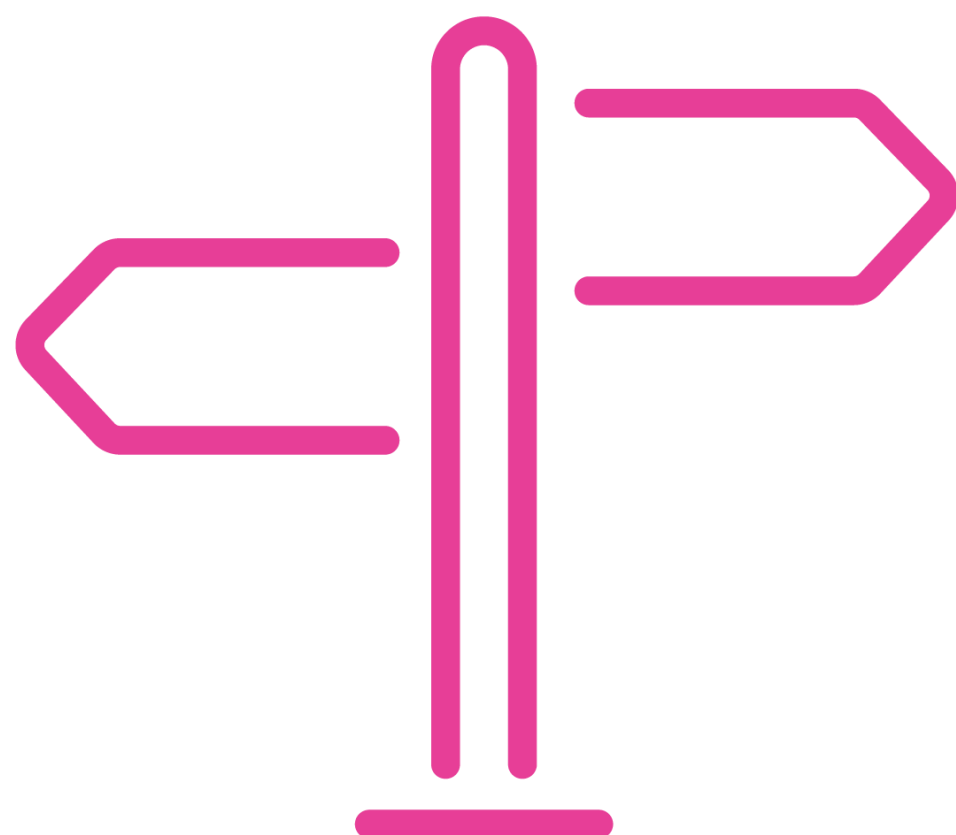
- All participants agreed that **raising awareness** about menopause in the work environment is crucial
- There is a need for appropriate **support measures** that are gender sensitive and confidential
- Having a **flexible working environment** for menopausal symptoms was also considered important by participants

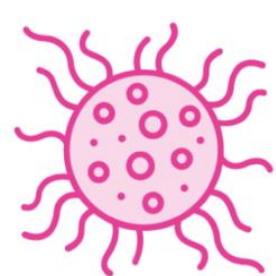




## Recommendations

- Menopause training for GP and clinical staff
- Mandatory menopause awareness sessions for workplace- especially line managers
- Menopause champion within workplace as a single point of contact for employees and line managers and to help make adjustments and signpost to information and services
- Employees to be made aware of their rights- especially the equality/discrimination act.
- Flexible working options to retain talent and boost productivity
- Community menopause support hub/support group with a regular visit from a mental health professional to support those struggling and signpost appropriately





## What next?

- Healthwatch Luton will remain part of the Menopause Steering Group within Luton
- Healthwatch Luton will carry out Listening Events focusing on Women's Health
- Healthwatch Luton will produce recommendations for the wider system in Luton in relation to the Menopause
- Healthwatch Luton will continue to share information, advice and awareness of the menopause in Luton







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