

Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Dorset
Annual Report 2021–22



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Healthwatch Dorset is the county's health and social care champion. We are part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across England. We cover the geographical area of Dorset, which includes the unitary authority areas of Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and Dorset.

Message from our Chair

Healthwatch Dorset works hard to provide the community with up-to-date information and to gather local people’s views on health and social care services.

Our small staff team and amazing volunteers are passionate about giving people the opportunity to share their experiences of using services and making sure this valuable feedback reaches the powers that be and leads to positive change.

We work closely with NHS commissioners and service providers, local councils, care providers and the voluntary sector, sharing people’s concerns and queries to help improve local services, and to contribute to change nationally.

This report outlines how the feedback we gathered last year is helping the NHS and councils to make improvements to services. We were able to share valuable insight that we gained through our engagement with children and young people, our community outreach work with people experiencing homelessness, and our investigations around the lack of access to NHS dentistry and people’s experience of using A&E services.

I hope you enjoy reading about our work over the past year and learning about our plans for the forthcoming year.



Dorset’s Integrated Care System (ICS) comes into power in July 2022, and this will change the health and care decision making process. We are really pleased to be working with all our partners to develop a strategic approach to put local people’s views and experiences at the heart of decision making.

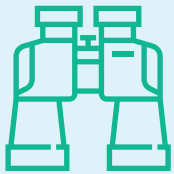


Viv Aird
Healthwatch Dorset Chair

About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Dorset is your local health and social care champion. From Christchurch to Bridport and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

To be the independent consumer voice for people across Dorset, making sure their views and experiences help improve health, social care and wellbeing services.



Our mission

To support individuals and engage with communities to influence providers and commissioners to improve health, social care and wellbeing services.



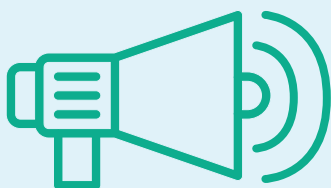
Our values

- **Inclusive:** we celebrate and embrace diversity.
- **Ethical:** we act with integrity, transparency and respect.
- **Accountable:** we accept responsibility for all our actions.
- **Empowering:** we build understanding, confidence and influence.
- **Collaborative:** we work in partnership to maximise the impact of all we do.

Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

Reaching out



1,798 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

2,916 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as dentistry, mental health and COVID-19.

Making a difference to care



We published

5 reports

about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was about

The Young Listeners Project

highlighting the challenges young people in Dorset face when accessing health and care services.

Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

62

outstanding volunteers, who gave up **140 hours** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021–22 we received

£ 201,928

We currently employ

2 full-time & 2 part-time staff

who helped us carry out this work in the previous year.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring

953 people shared their feedback about Dorset's COVID-19 vaccination programme. We told care leaders what was working well and what changes would improve vaccination delivery in the county, including clearer information about vaccine eligibility, side effects, and issues around vaccine booking and transport.



Our volunteers carried out phone interviews with 147 people who had recently visited Poole Hospital A&E. Most people were happy with the service, but there were areas for improvement around waiting times, facilities, staff attitude, and clear information.



Summer

Our volunteer Young Listeners finished their training and designed their own engagement project. They spoke to 70 young people across Dorset to find out about their experiences of using health and care services.



We supported the Healthwatch England #BecauseWeAllCare campaign which saw 54,000 people from across the country come forward to share feedback about the issues they faced with services.



Autumn

We published a new report shining a spotlight on the health and care needs of people who are homeless and the challenges they face when trying to access vital care and support, such as dental care.



Our volunteers carried out 256 phone interviews with people who recently used Dorset County Hospital A&E. Most people gave positive feedback. Areas for improvement included access, information, and waiting times. Our report will guide plans for a new, modern, Emergency Department.



Winter

We supported our Young Listeners to influence positive change in the health and care services they use. They shared their findings with those responsible for services, calling for better communication and coordination of care.



We alerted NHS leaders that people were struggling to get NHS dental care in Dorset. Over half our enquiries this year were about dentistry and we found only three of Dorset's NHS dentists taking new adult patients at the end of last year.



Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve.



Making health and care better for young people

We gave young people in Dorset the opportunity to directly influence improvements in the health and social care services they use.

Between January and May 2021, we recruited and trained a group of young volunteers aged 16–23 to become Young Listeners. They designed and delivered a peer-to-peer engagement project to find out how young people in Dorset want to improve the health and care services they use.

In summer 2021, they gathered feedback from 70 young people and they also heard the views of 46 young people with disabilities. They heard about the challenges young people face when seeking care, and the changes they want services to make.



- Listen to young people and act on what you hear.
- Communicate better, with young people and each other.
- Improve how you coordinate young people's care.

What difference did this make

Our Young Listeners reported their findings to Dorset's health and care decision makers including Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (BCP) Council, Dorset Council and Children's Services, and Dorset's NHS Clinical Commissioning Group. We shared our findings at national conferences including the Child Health Forum and we are working with local councils and NHS to ensure our project is used to make care better for young people and their families.

Local Special Educational Needs (SEND) offers across Dorset now involve more young people and provide clearer information, and Ofsted are using our report to inform their SEND inspections this year.



If we really want to see the outcomes for all of our children improve, we know we will do that much more effectively by working every day in co-production with our children and young people and their families.

**Theresa Leavy, Executive Director for Children's Services,
Dorset Council**



Read our Young Listeners report: healthwatchdorset.co.uk/reports-publications

Watch the Young Listeners video: vimeo.com/644718072

Highlighting a lack of access to NHS dentistry

Thanks to local people sharing their experiences with us, we have been able to highlight a lack of access to NHS dentistry in Dorset and the whole country.

COVID-19 brought challenges to the delivery of health and care services. The lack of access to NHS dentistry has become a major area of public concern. We have been tracking how this is affecting people in Dorset.



Over 50%
of enquiries this year were about NHS dentistry.

People told us they are struggling to get urgent and routine dental care in Dorset, for themselves and their children. Our volunteers called all 99 NHS dental practices in the county to find out why.

- Only 3 dental practices were taking new adult NHS patients; 6 were taking new patients who were pregnant.
- 4 were taking new NHS patients who were being treated for cancer; 5 said they might see cancer patients if referred and/or they had additional needs.
- 13 were taking children as new NHS patients, 2 of these only in emergencies; 7 said they would see children if their parents were registered as private patients.
- 18 dentists had a waiting list for new NHS patients; waiting times varied or were not known.



I've been unable to find a dentist who will take me as an NHS patient. I've had infection and pain and required emergency care.



We heard from Phil who had been homeless for 18 years and desperately needed dental treatment. He'd been using superglue to cover the nerves in his teeth to stop the pain. He waited six months to see a dentist and another six weeks to get hospital X-rays because he didn't have access to email, before being treated by the charity [DentAid](#). While waiting, Phil had multiple infections, was in extreme pain and unable to eat properly.

What difference did this make

We alerted local health and care leaders about why people are finding it difficult to get dental care in Dorset. We shared our report with Dorset NHS commissioners and providers, local councils, the Dorset Local Dental Committee, South West Dental Commissioning Team and NHS England. We are working with Healthwatch England, calling for national reform of NHS dentistry to help address issues around access and affordability.

Read our NHS Dentistry in Dorset report: healthwatchdorset.co.uk/reports-publications

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

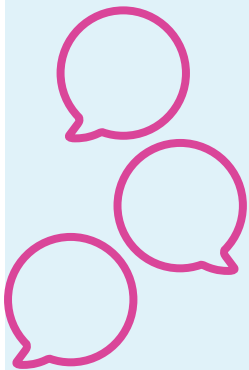


Getting to the heart of the issue

It's important for the NHS and social care to hear experiences people have with their local services as this provides a deeper understanding than using data alone.

We spoke to people who are experiencing homelessness in Dorset to support the Care Quality Commission's work on tackling health inequalities. By sharing their feedback we showed how people who are homeless struggle to get the care they need due to a lack of access to information and technology, and transport costs. Read our report: healthwatchdorset.co.uk/reports-publications

We told Andy's story to raise awareness of the challenges around end-of-life care for people who are homeless. Andy had spent many years living in his tent with his dog. He had special needs and sometimes people wouldn't take the time to explain things to him or to find out about his needs. Andy had lost most of his teeth through poor diet and struggled to eat. He had an operation for cancer, and it was suspected that the cancer had returned, but Andy sadly passed away before this was diagnosed.



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

We worked with Dorset Healthcare and Dorset Community Action to make sure feedback from carers is used to help improve the Home First programme. Our volunteers interviewed 45 carers about their experience of supporting someone as they are discharged from hospital and receive ongoing care at home.

Half of the carers reported a negative experience, highlighting the need for more support, an improved process for leaving hospital, more person-centred care, and better staff training, information and communication.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.

In 2020, we worked with Healthwatch England to help the NHS understand what matters most to people when they use A&E, to inform a review of A&E targets. Since then, due to the pandemic, there have been changes to the way people access A&E services. This year, we found out about people's recent experiences of A&E to inform improvements locally, including the development of a new A&E department.

Our volunteers interviewed over 400 people who used A&E at Poole or Dorset County hospitals. Almost 70% of people rated the A&E service as very good, though improvements were suggested around communication, signage, facilities, and staff training. Read our reports: healthwatchdorset.co.uk/reports-publications

Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Dorset is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we will listen and can provide confidential, free information and guidance to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding a local service or discovering how to make a complaint – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination programme
- Helping people to access the services they need.



Supporting people who need dental care

Dentistry was the top issue raised with us this year as people have struggled to get the care they need. We shared up-to-date information and directed them to NHS England for advice, explaining how we would use their feedback to try to improve local access to NHS dentistry.

"I am really struggling to find a dentist to take my daughter as an NHS patient. My own dentist is refusing to take her despite the fact I am registered. The many other surgeries I've tried are taking private patients only and have advised me to try my own practice, as they would have registered her if I was registered with them. Please can you advise where is taking on NHS child patients in Dorset and if there is anything I can do about my own practice?"



Helping people find support for long COVID

As more people are being diagnosed with long COVID they are seeking information and support. We share information and advise them of what support should be available through their GP, including a long COVID assessment, specialist services, self-care and support groups.

"I am feeling broken by the system and a friend suggested I contact you for help. I am trying to advocate for my daughter, while managing my own symptoms. We have both had long COVID for 19 months. Last night she required another A&E appointment for severe abdominal pain. She hasn't had any meaningful care and I feel I've exhausted every route. I'm not sure what to do next."



The projects that Healthwatch Dorset have worked on this year have helped people's experiences to be heard. There are great examples of collaboration, particularly around the Young Listeners project, and the feedback and learning from that work has been shared with health and social care services to ensure lived experience influences future services. For a small team, I am always amazed at the amount of work Louise and her colleagues achieve.

Nicky Mitchell, Quality Assurance, Adult Social Care Commissioning, Bournemouth, Christchurch & Poole Council



Volunteers

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are the heart of Healthwatch Dorset. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving in NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say, carrying out interviews over the phone and online.
- Created digital content for our website and social media.
- Checked local services' publications to make them easier to read and understand.
- Helped with the local volunteering efforts supporting those who were self-isolating.





Cliona

Cliona studies psychology at Bournemouth University and she is passionate about helping people who are experiencing poor mental health. Since she started volunteering with us in 2020, Cliona has carried out 70 phone interviews, gathering people's feedback for three projects.

"Volunteering for Healthwatch is really rewarding. You can help shape healthcare services by gathering views of the people who are experiencing them. The team is great, and volunteering has helped me develop my communication and active listening skills."



Lee

Lee volunteered as a Young Listener, finding out what other young people in Dorset like about the health and care services they use and what changes they would like to see. He also produced an insightful [blog](#) for Carers Rights Day, about his experience as a young carer.

"Participating in the Young Listeners project has been very beneficial for me, not only as something useful to add to my CV, but it is also an empowering feeling knowing that I have been part of influencing a positive change relevant to the residents of the county I live in."



Bob




Bob has volunteered with us for many years. He is always keen to support our work, volunteering for almost every project we present. This year Bob contributed an amazing 61 hours of his time and completed 96 feedback interviews with A&E patients.

"Recognition should go to all those patients who were confident enough to take on a telephone interview and open their hearts to voice their own particular experience – not an easy task at the best of times. I can only confirm my dedication as a volunteer, to help people in the community live a well-deserved life through the service and the help we give them in times of stress, ill health and tragic situations."



Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

-  healthwatchdorset.co.uk
-  **0300 111 0102**
-  enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authorities under the Health and Social Care Act 2012. This year, we also received additional funding from Wessex Voices, the Care Quality Commission, Public Health England, and Healthwatch England, to support specific public engagement projects.

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£201,928	Staff costs	£116,570
Additional funding	£8,150	Operational costs	£22,336
		Support and administration	£62,972
Total income	£210,078	Total expenditure	£201,878

Top three priorities for 2022–23

In 2022–23, we will focus on the following areas to make the biggest difference in the communities we serve:

- **Dentistry:** More people contact us about NHS dentistry than any other service and it is a regional and national priority. We will work with colleagues in the new Integrated Care System (ICS) to share patient feedback as they prepare to take on responsibility for NHS dentistry in 2023.
- **Access to GPs:** We continue to hear from people who are having problems accessing their GP surgery. Locally GP surgeries are struggling to meet demand, and the NHSE&I national priorities include "expanding primary care capacity to improve access, local health outcomes and address health inequalities". Healthwatch England will be focusing on access to GP services this year. We will gather feedback locally, around clear accessible information and support for people with mental health problems and children and young people.
- **Carers:** We will use feedback gathered this year from carers of people using the Home First service when they leave hospital, to develop a longer-term project with carers looking at hospital discharge, support at home and in the community.

Championing better care for everyone

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard. Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that's because of where you live, income or race.

We will continue to address health inequalities in all our work over the coming year and work with colleagues in the ICS to develop a new integrated care strategy.

Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Dorset, The Bridge, Chaseside, Bournemouth, BH7 7BX.

Healthwatch Dorset is run by Evolving Communities CIC, a community interest company limited by guarantee and registered in England and Wales with company number 08464602. The registered office is at Unit 2, Hampton Park West, Melksham, SN12 6LH.

Healthwatch Dorset uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.



The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision making.

Our Healthwatch Dorset Steering Group consists of six members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny to our activities. Our Steering Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the group met six times and made decisions on matters such as creating a Quality Assessment Framework and developing our workplan for 2022/23.

Steering Group members regularly attend Health & Wellbeing Board meetings, Quality Surveillance Group, Primary Care Commissioning Committee, and they have been involved in stakeholder and interview panels for the new Integrated Care Board.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by using insight from our information and signposting enquiries, surveys, focus groups and engagement activities throughout the year.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities, and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, face-to-face engagement with people experiencing homelessness and through our Young Listeners project engaging with young people across Dorset.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website and promote it to the press and on social media, and we share our report with partners across health and social care in Dorset.

Responses to recommendations and requests

All providers responded to requests for information or recommendations. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to the Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Dorset is represented on the Dorset Health and Wellbeing Board by Margaret Guy, Steering Group member, and on BCP Health & Wellbeing Board by Louise Bate, Manager. During 2020/21 our representatives have effectively carried out this role by attending meetings and sharing Healthwatch Dorset reports and public insights.

2021–2022 Outcomes

Read all our reports: healthwatchdorset.co.uk/reports-publications

Project/activity area	Changes made to services
<p>Dorset’s COVID vaccination programme: Public feedback. (Initial findings, March 2021)</p>	<p>Dorset CCG used our findings to target their communications about the vaccination programme and set up additional vaccine pop up centres at community venues and churches.</p>
<p>A&E at Poole Hospital and Dorset County Hospital: What works well and what could be improved? (Poole report, September 2021; Dorset report, April 2022)</p>	<p>Both Poole and Dorset County hospitals have used our findings to improve facilities at their A&E departments, develop clearer information for patients, and enhance staff training. Dorset County Hospital is using our report to inform development of a new emergency department.</p>
<p>Tackling inequalities in health and social care: Promoting the voice of Dorset’s homeless community. (Report, October 2021 and video: vimeo.com/643968179)</p>	<p>CQC used our report to inform their new strategy and help them achieve their core ambition to tackle inequalities in health and social care. Our findings have also influenced Dorset and BCP homelessness strategies.</p>
<p>Young people’s health and care services: What changes do young people want to see to improve the care and support they receive? (Report, November 2021 and video: vimeo.com/644718072)</p>	<p>BCP and Dorset Council’s Special Educational Needs offers have been informed by our project and we’re involved in current Ofsted inspections. We’re continuing to work with Children’s Services and the local NHS to implement the Young Listeners recommendations.</p>
<p>Accessing NHS dental Care in Dorset: Why are people struggling to get the care they need? (Report, February 2022)</p>	<p>Our findings have supported Healthwatch England’s call on the Government and NHS England to speed up dental contract reform and provide significant and sustained funding to tackle the underlying problems of dental access and affordability.</p>
<p>Dorset’s Home First programme: Carers experiences of supporting someone through hospital discharge and ongoing care. (Report due summer 2022)</p>	<p>The feedback we gathered will now be used to improve the Home First service, to support NHS staff training and we’ll continue to work on carers rights this year.</p>

Thank you

We want to thank everyone who has shared their stories with us this year, and asked us for information, advice, and support. Health and care services need to know your experiences to understand what works well and how to make positive changes. Your feedback really does help to improve health and care in Dorset and nationally, so do please continue to get involved.

We also want to thank those who work in health and social care, for providing such vital services, for valuing the voice of local people and patients, and for contributing your insight and experience to help make care better.



Healthwatch Dorset continue to demonstrate their ability to identify the pressures on local health systems and to highlight the experiences of our residents when accessing services. Their work to elevate the voices of the people of Dorset has become an essential part of how we learn from our communities and deliver better services. The reports on homelessness, dental care and the Young Listeners project are incredibly valuable pieces of work and underline how important it is that we listen first.

**Joseph Morrell, Partnerships & Engagement Officer,
Major Contracts, over 65s, Dorset Council**





healthwatch Dorset

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