

# The impact of working from home

November 2022

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# Introduction

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay is the independent consumer champion for health and social care services, ensuring the voice of the community is used to influence and improve services for local people.

There are almost 370,000 people in employment in Devon, with the proportion of self-employed workers (14.7%) being higher than the national average (9.3%). The Covid-19 pandemic changed the way that many of us work; in spring 2022, 38% of working adults in the UK reported having worked from home at least once in the past seven days.

Healthwatch wanted to find out about the physical and mental impact of working from home, and how working from home has affected people's work/life balance.

# Methodology

A survey of six multiple-choice questions and four open-ended questions was used to ask people about their experiences of working from home, its impact on health and work/life balance, and their use of mental and physical health support services. Additionally, four optional questions were used to collect demographic information. 127 respondents answered the survey. The survey was circulated via Healthwatch social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), the Healthwatch Assist network, the Healthwatch e-bulletin, and the Healthwatch website. Reach and engagement figures for the Healthwatch social media posts are available in Appendix 1.

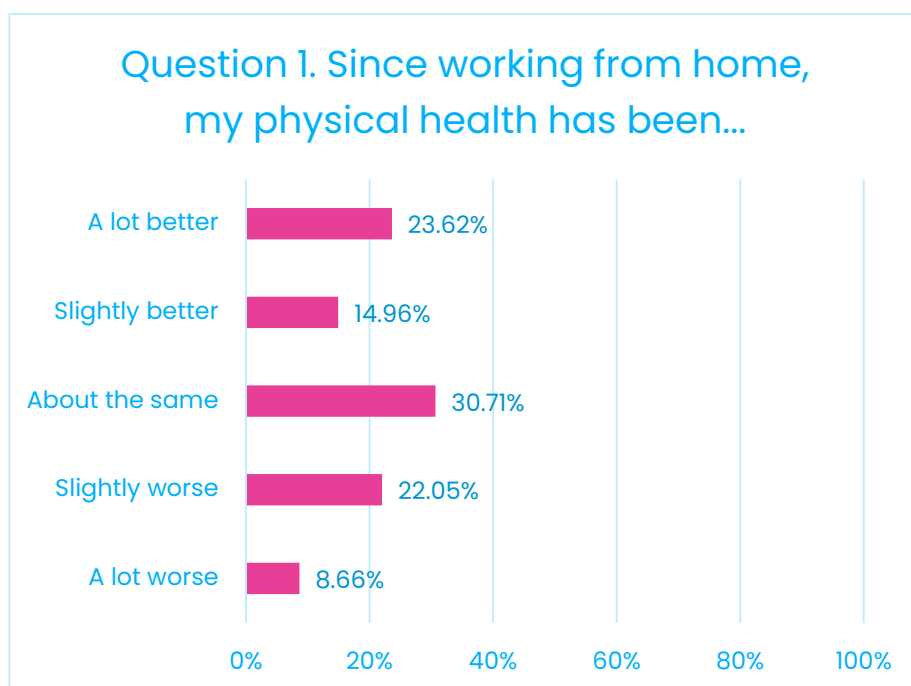
# Key findings

- 38.58% of respondents said their physical health had been “slightly better” or “a lot better” since working from home. 30.71% said it had been “about the same” and 30.71% said it had been “slightly worse” or “a lot worse.”
- 37.01% of respondents said their mental health has been “slightly better” or “a lot better” since working from home. 27.56% said it had been “about the same,” and 35.43% said it had been “slightly worse” or “a lot worse.”
- 74.02% of respondents said they were aware that physical and mental health support was available, 20.47% said they were somewhat aware, and 5.51% said they were not aware.
- 70.08% of respondents said they had not accessed any physical or mental health support, 17.32% said they had accessed mental health support, and 15.75% said they had accessed physical health support.
- 59.84% of respondents said their work/life balance had been “slightly better” or “a lot better” since working from home, 11.81% said it had been “about the same,” and 28.35% said it had been “slightly worse” or “a lot worse.”
- When asked where they would like to find information about support services that are available, the top three answers were social media (64.81%), nhs.uk (61.11% people), and friends and family (27.78%).

# Detailed findings

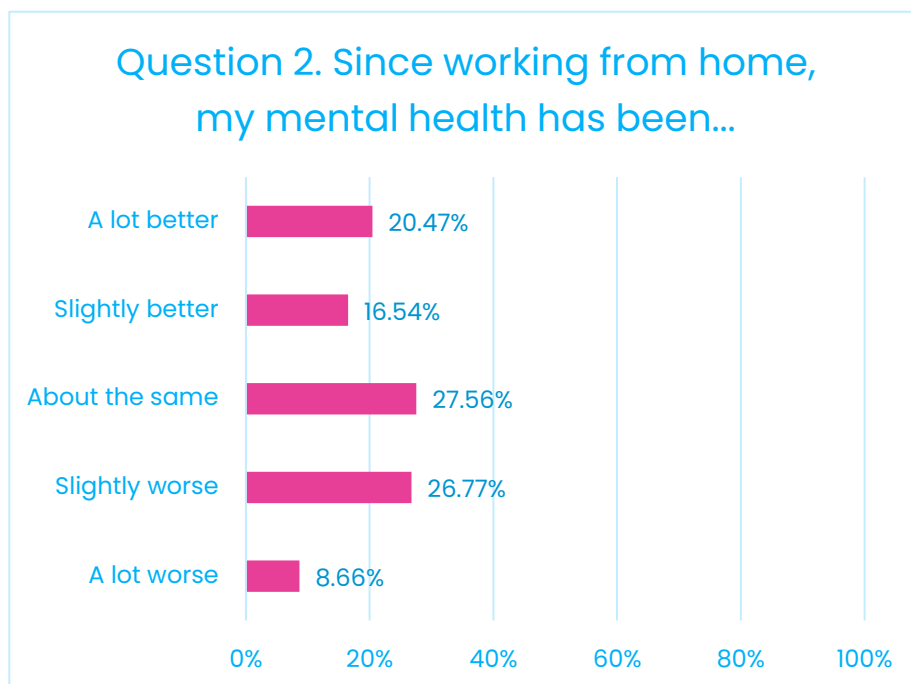
## Question 1. Since working from home, my physical health has been...

All 127 respondents answered this question. 8.66% of respondents (11 people) said their physical health had been "a lot worse," 22.05% (28 people) said it had been "slightly worse," 30.71% (39 people) said it had been "about the same," 14.96% (19 people) said it had been "slightly better," and 23.62% (30 people) said it had been "a lot better."



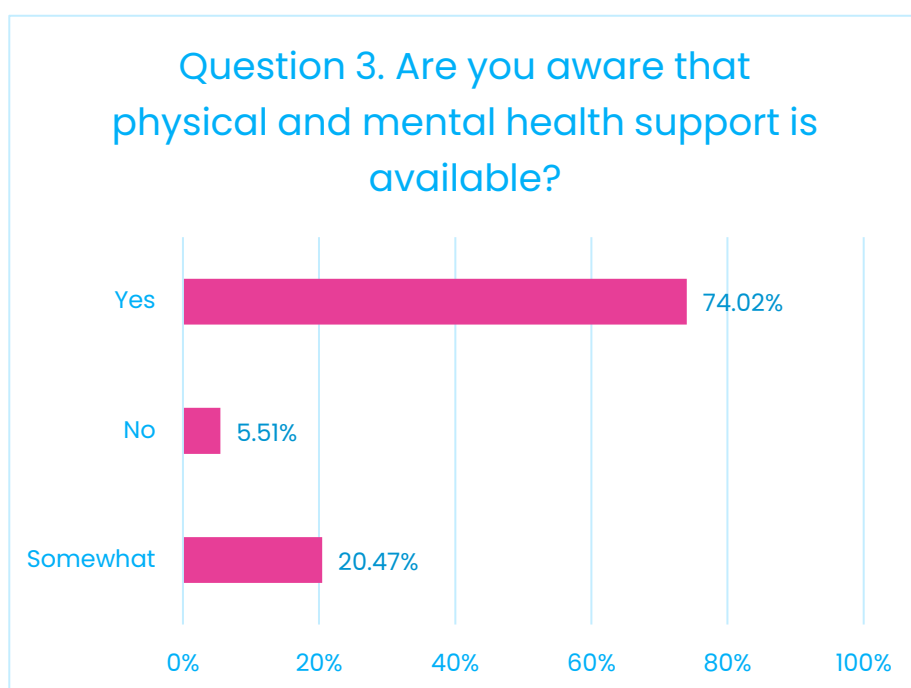
## Question 2. Since working from home, my mental health has been...

All 127 respondents answered this question. 8.66% of respondents (11 people) said their mental health had been "a lot worse," 26.77% (34 people) said it had been "slightly worse," 27.56% (35 people) said it had been "about the same," 16.54% (21 people) said it had been "slightly better," and 20.47% (26 people) said it had been "a lot better."



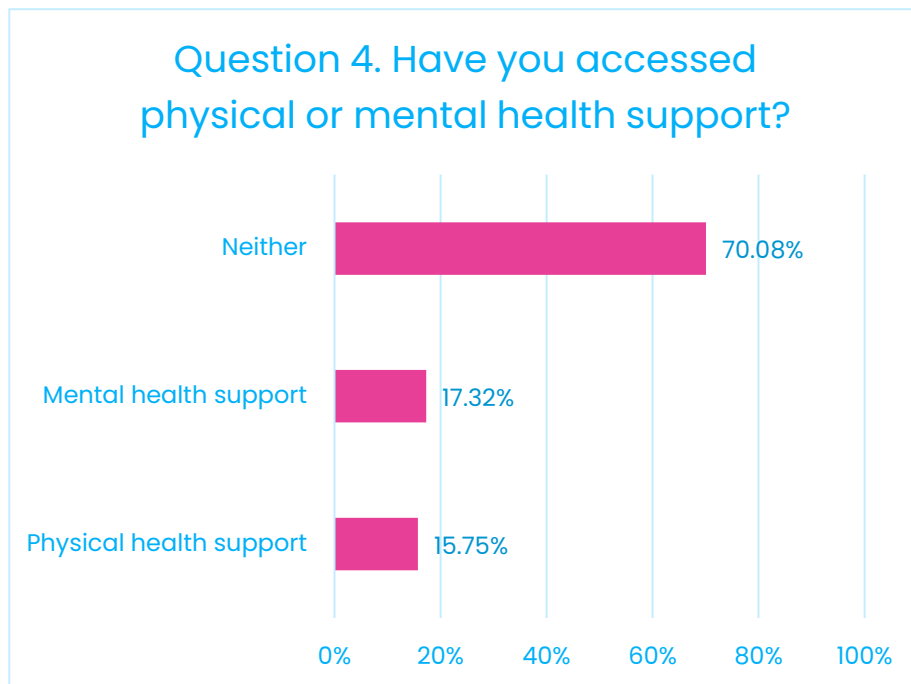
### Question 3. Are you aware that physical and mental health support is available? (e.g. GP, mental health services, community support, employer-provided wellbeing packages)

All 127 respondents answered this question. 74.02% of respondents (94 people) said they were aware, 20.47% (26 people) said they were somewhat aware, 5.51% (seven people) said they not aware.



## Question 4. Have you accessed any physical or mental health support?

All 127 respondents answered this question. As respondents could select more than one answer, percentages may total greater than 100. 70.08% of respondents (89 people) said they had not accessed any support, 17.32% (22 people) had accessed mental health support, and 15.75% (20 people) had accessed physical health support.





## Question 5. If you used support services, which ones?

49 respondents answered this question and 78 did not, though some respondents left answers that were unclear or not applicable. 11 The number of respondents that used each service is listed in brackets.

### **Mental health (14)**

- TalkWorks (5)
- Livewell Southwest (2)
- Torbay Mental Health Team (2)
- Health and Wellbeing Hub (2)
- Outlook Southwest (1)
- Community Mental Health Team – unspecified (1)
- Unspecified mental health service (1)

### **Physical health services (11)**

- Physiotherapy (7)
- Exercise program (1)
- Minor injuries unit (1)
- Chiropractor (1)
- Unspecified physical health service (1)

### **GP services (8)**

### **Employer-provided support (7)**

### **Community and voluntary sector support (4)**

- Devon Clinic Single Parent Program (1)
- Togetherall (1)
- Help for Heroes (1)
- Unnamed mental health app (1)

## Question 6. Are there any support services you would have liked to access, but couldn't?

44 respondents answered this question and 83 did not, though some respondents left answers that were unclear or not applicable. The number of respondents that named each service is listed in brackets.

### Physical health (7)

- Dentistry (3)
- Long term condition support (1)
- Physiotherapy (1)
- Menopause support (1)
- Unspecified physical health service (1)

### Mental health (6)

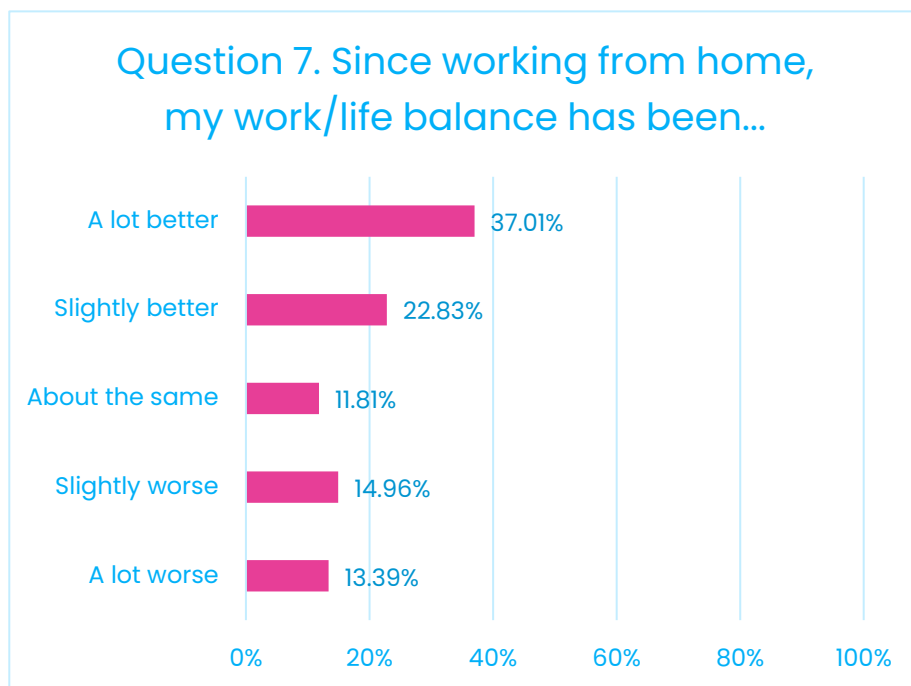
- Counselling/talk therapy (5)
- TalkWorks (1)

### Employment-based support (3)

### Community based support (1)

## Question 7. Since working from home, my work/life balance has been...

All 127 respondents answered this question. 13.39% of respondents (17 people) said their work/life balance had been a lot worse, 14.96% of respondents (19 people) said it had been slightly worse, 11.81% (15 people) said it had been about the same, 22.83% (29 people) said it had been slightly better, and 37.01% (47 people) said it had been a lot better.



## Question 8. If your work/life balance changed since working from home, how has it changed?

105 respondents answered this question and 22 did not, though some respondents gave answers that were unclear or not applicable. 62 respondents said that working from home gave them more free time or flexibility, with some saying this allowed them to spend more time on social and leisure activities. 12 respondents said working from home made them more productive with their job, nine said it saved them money, and eight said it had reduced stress.

21 respondents said that working from home caused them to work longer, or increased their workload. 24 respondents said working from home made it harder to “switch off” from work and separate their work from their personal life. Six respondents said working from home had a negative impact on their social life, and six respondents said it had a negative impact on their mental health.

### Positive feedback

#### More free time and flexibility (62)

- “Better connected to family and local community, able to get out for exercise more regularly, and get out in daylight more during winter.”
- “I no longer spend hours each day stuck in traffic which gives me back a lot more time.”
- “It makes it easier to sort out the day-to-day issues like attending appointments.”
- “I have more time for me as I don’t need to commute, put work clothing on and prepare my lunch to get to work. I use this time for my own benefit.”

#### More productive at work (12)

- “Not having the commute has enabled me to invest more time in work.”
- “I feel more able to manage my work priorities without being interrupted.”
- “Flexibility to work free from office distractions has meant I can get more actual work done in my working hours.”

#### Saving money (9)

- “I am able to pick my children up from school with no money spent on after school clubs.”
- “I spend less money on school and parking.”

- “[I] was needing to stay in digs [but now I can work from home] the majority of the time.”

### **Reduced stress (8)**

- “I worry less about work.”
- “It has been much less stressful without the hectic travelling to various meetings.”
- “Less stress with childcare [in the] holidays.”
- “No office politics to navigate, if I was having a bad day, I didn’t need to explain myself.”

### **Negative feedback**

#### **Switching off from work (24)**

- “Working in the same environment as I live means I don’t get a ‘change of scenery.’”
- “It is harder to switch off from work when work and home are the same place.”
- “[It’s] hard to get my mind away from work.”

#### **Increased or longer work (21)**

- “I tend to work later into the evening.”
- “No clear start and end points, so the working hours have increased and impacted on family interactions.”
- “I work more than I used to as it’s easier to check emails or log on in the evenings and weekends at home, then I end up working or replying to emails.”

#### **Negative social impact (6)**

- “The printer conversations are important for connection and that can easily be lost when home is both home and work life.”
- “[I] don’t see work colleagues very often, other than on Zoom/Teams meetings. Much less face-to-face interaction.”
- “[I] miss the social interaction of working with other people.”

## **Negative mental health impact (6)**

- “The job has become more stressful due to students needing more support.”
- “[I am] stressed and snappy.”
- “Not having a workplace to attend affects my ability to motivate myself and makes work harder.”

## Question 9. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experience of working from home?

87 respondents answered this question and 40 did not, though some respondents gave answers that were unclear or not applicable. 24 respondents mentioned the social isolation and impact of working from home. Nine respondents mentioned that they struggled to maintain a healthy work/life balance while working from home. Five respondents said that working from home had impacted their physical health, four respondents said it had led to them working more, and two said the equipment needed to work from home had been expensive.

14 respondents said that working from home had improved their productivity. 13 respondents expressed a general positive sentiment about working from home. Seven respondents said working from home gave them more free time and flexibility. Six respondents said that working from home had benefitted them financially.

### Negative feedback

#### Social impact and isolation (24)

- “Working from home is very isolating. I don’t enjoy not seeing anyone all day, and get fed up with being in the house 24/7.”
- “[Working from home] is isolating.”
- [Working from home also brings] negatives: the main ones being isolation from other people, especially for those who live alone, with interactions only via a laptop screen.”

#### Balance and switching off (9)

- “[My] job is quite intense and [I have] dealt with a lot of crisis situations, which being at home I couldn’t switch off from.”
- “I felt an overwhelming need to justify why I wasn’t chained to the computer.”
- “You always feel like your office is right there in the room with you.”

#### Physical health impact (5)

- “I’ve developed shoulder pain due to sitting at a computer much of the day. No walking to work which was often my main exercise.”
- “I am fatter due to being surrounded by food. I have back and shoulder pain due to inadequate desk and chair.”

- “[I am] more sedentary... when working from home, you can sit for two hours without moving.”

### **More work (4)**

- “[The] pace is a lot faster.”
- “There is more expected of me to do work wise, I can go from meeting to meeting, task to task without a break.”

### **Expensive equipment (2)**

- “I had to change a room so that it was an office space with desk, computer, phone etc. That was costly to start with, as everything needed was not supplied by the company.”
- [My company relied too] heavily on staff having a workspace close to [an] ethernet cabled PC, [the] lack of laptops or tablets [was] very restrictive.”

### **Positive feedback**

#### **More productive at work (14)**

- “Video meetings are more efficient than face-to-face meetings.”
- “I can achieve more, as I am much more productive.”
- “I have found I have achieved more working from home as you don’t get the same distractions.”

#### **General positive sentiment (13)**

- “I’ve enjoyed it so much I’ve opted to keep working from home. I understand it’s not for everyone but to me it’s a much nicer and calmer way to live.”
- “I appreciate being able to work from home and avoid contact during Covid.”

#### **Flexibility and free time (7)**

- “It’s more effective than wasting time travelling to and from [the] office in bad traffic. [It] also allows better support to the cared-for.”
- “It brings positives: [...] reduction in commuting time, time wasted travelling to meetings, and flexibility to put a load of washing on between work tasks.”

#### **Financial benefits (6)**

- “It’s saved me lots of money, I had to use public transport, which was both dreadful and expensive.”
- “Working from home saves money for both employer and employee.”

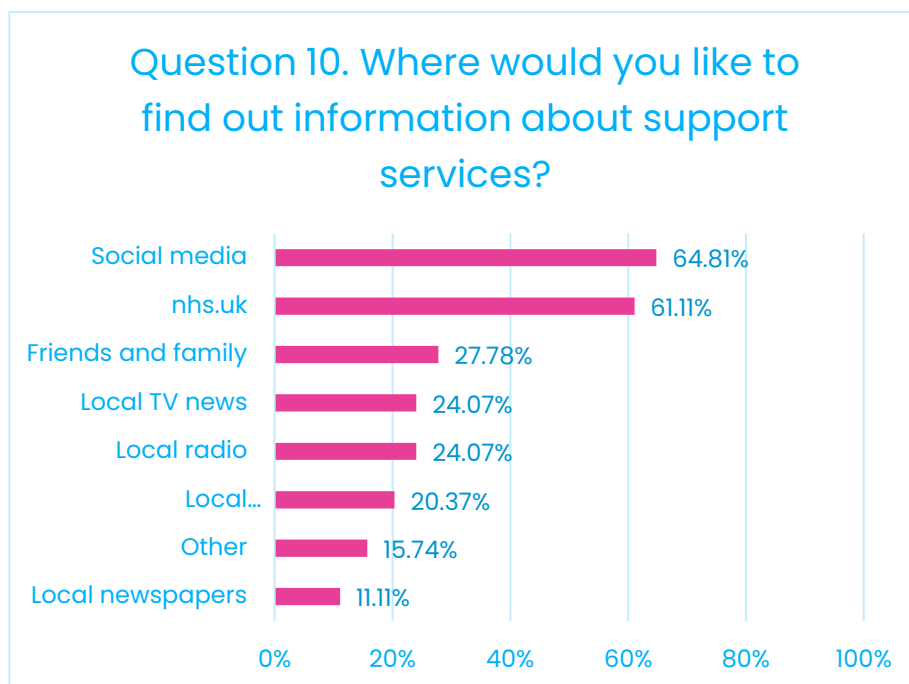


## Question 10. Where you would you like to find out information about support services that are available?

108 respondents answered this question and 19 did not. As respondents could select more than one response, percentages may total greater than 100. 64.81% of respondents (70 people) wanted to find information from social media, 61.11% (66 people) wanted to find information from nhs.uk, 27.78% (30 people) wanted to find information from friends and family, 24.07% (26 people) wanted to find information from local TV news, 24.07% (26 people) wanted to find information from local radio, 20.37% (22 people) wanted to find information from local magazines, circulars, or newsletters, and 11.11% (12 people) wanted to find information from local newspapers.

15.74% of respondents (17 people) selected "other." These responses were:

- Google (4)
- Unspecified websites (4)
- GP surgeries (3)
- Email (2)
- Workplace (2)
- Word of mouth (1)
- None (1)

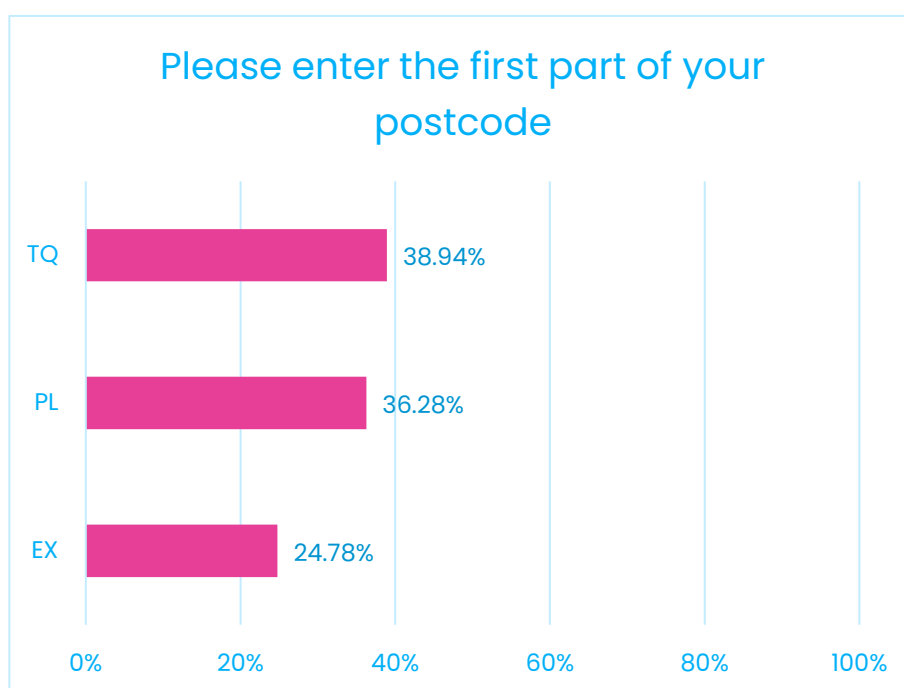


## Demographics

Where fewer than five respondents belonged to a particular category, those categories have been collated and labelled as "other."

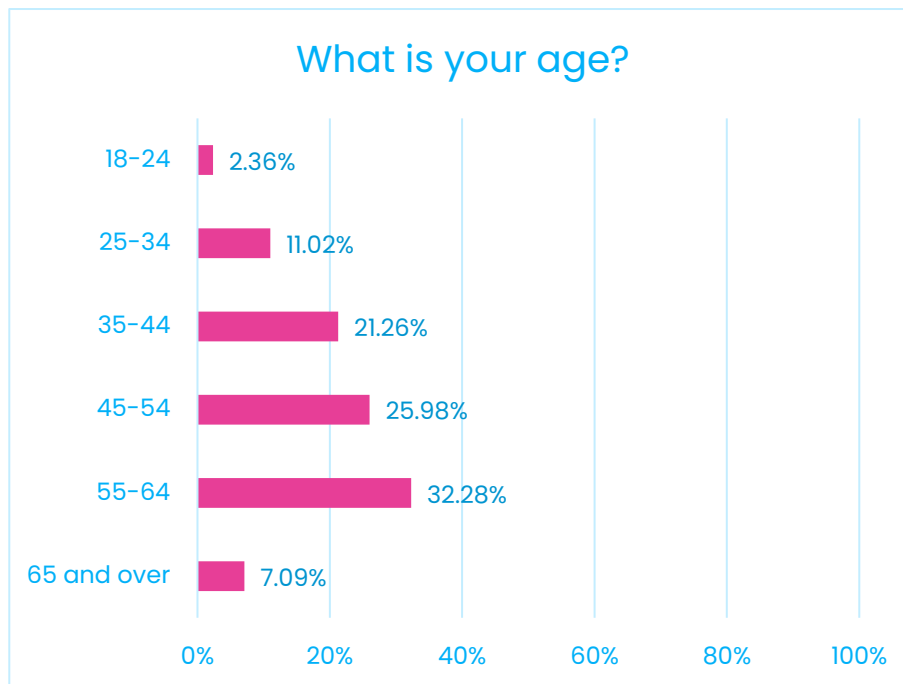
### Please enter the first part of your postcode.

113 respondents answered this question and 14 did not. 39 different postcodes were represented in the responses. 44 respondents (38.94%) were from the TQ area, 41 respondents (36.28%) were from the PL area, and 28 respondents (24.78%) were from the EX area.



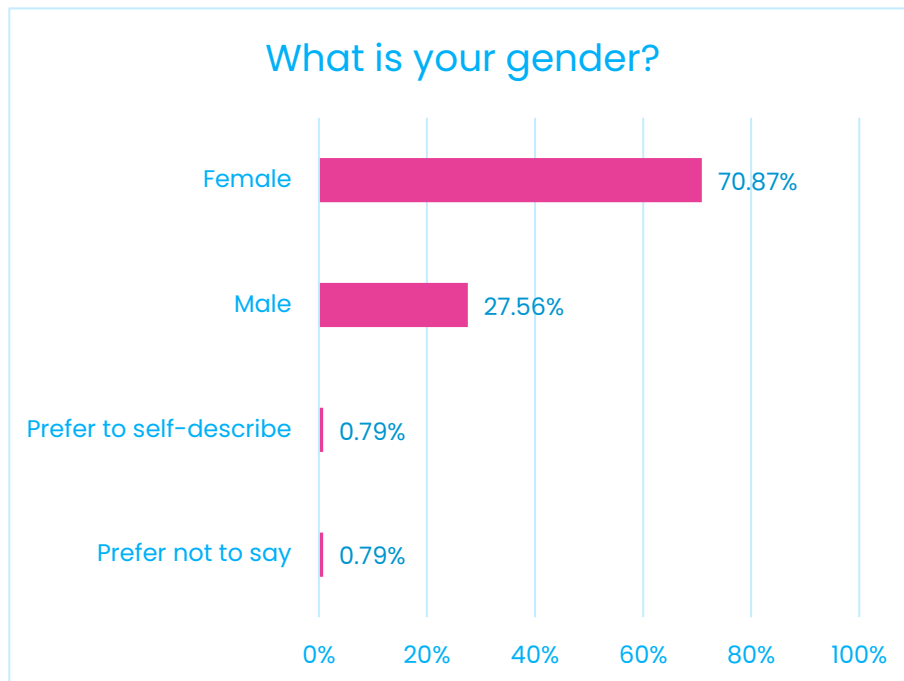
## What is your age?

All 127 respondents answered this question. 2.36% of respondents (three people) were 18 to 24, 11.02% (14 people) were 25 to 34, 21.26% (27 people) were 35 to 44, 25.98% (33 people) were 45 to 54, 32.38% (41 people) were 55 to 64, and 7.09% (nine people) were over 65. None of the respondents were under 18.



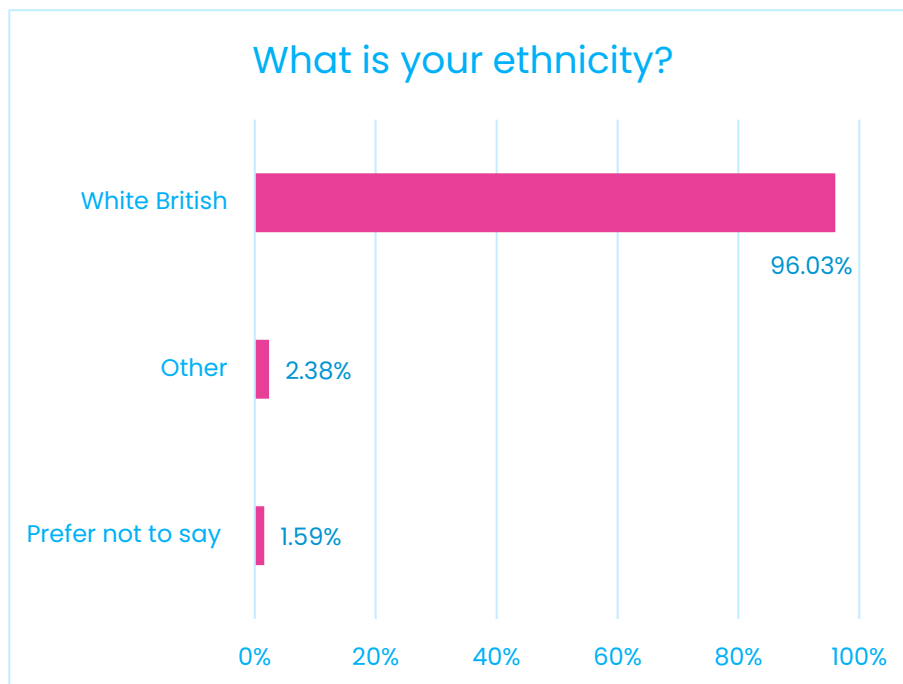
## What is your gender?

All 127 respondents answered this question. 70.87% of respondents (90 people) were female and 27.56% (35 people) were male. One respondent (0.79%) preferred to self-describe and one respondent (0.79%) selected “prefer not to say.”



## What is your ethnicity?

126 respondents answered this question, and one did not. 96.03% of respondents (121 people) were White British and 2.38% (three people) were of another ethnicity. 1.59% of respondents (two people) selected "prefer not to say."



# Healthwatch Observations

Whilst the number of responses to this survey is small compared to the number in employment across Devon, the results align very much with other surveys conducted during the Covid pandemic by other organisations and agencies and reported through national and regional media organisations.

Advantages and disadvantages of working from home are highlighted in the experiences given, particularly in response to Question 9. As business starts to recover from the affects of the Covid pandemic it is becoming clear that a more hybrid way of working is being established with a mixture of office and home working becoming the norm for some business and individuals.

It is equally clear that some individuals have coped better with working from home than others and that for some, their physical and/or mental health have suffered. Knowledge of some of the additional support services (such as the 24-hour mental health support line) that were provided during the pandemic appears to be high among those that responded to the survey. Maintaining these support services moving forward should be viewed as positive and part of the overall offer in providing information and advice to the public, especially given the current issues in accessing some Primary and Secondary care services. However, for these to become truly embedded, their purpose and accessibility needs to be continually communicated to the public to support the overall message of accessing the most appropriate service for an individual's needs.

## Next Steps

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay will continue to monitor patient and public feedback about services and report that feedback to the Integrated Care System in Devon to inform service delivery and change.

# Recognition

Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth, and Torbay would like to thank everyone who took the time to complete the survey and give their feedback. Healthwatch would also like to thank everyone who helped to distribute the survey, including members of the Healthwatch Assist network.

# Appendix

## Appendix 1. Social media engagement data

Social media platform	Reach	Engagement
HW Devon Facebook	1,359	36
HW Devon Instagram	92	2
HW Devon Twitter	264	12
HW Plymouth Facebook	887	59
HW Plymouth Instagram	39	1
HW Plymouth Twitter	145	3
HW Torbay Facebook	9,032	38
HW Torbay Instagram	54	3
HW Torbay Twitter	149	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,021</b>	<b>162</b>



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