



# Improving Access to Primary Care

Enhanced Care Arrangements

September 2022

**healthwatch**  
Bolton

# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Summary of findings .....	2
Methodology.....	3
What People Told Us.....	4-11
Recommendations.....	13
Demographics.....	14-17
Appendix.....	18
Acknowledgements.....	19

## Introduction

Access to primary care was the top priority, as voted for by our public consultation for our thematic workplan for 2022-23. This work follows on from the work we did in 2021 where we looked at people's experiences of accessing their GP practices. Our previous work showed that many people struggled to make appointments with GPs via the telephone, by using apps and a lack of face to face appointments being offered.

We know a lot of work has already been done, and continues to be done to improve this situation. Our report and the response from Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)\* can be viewed here: [Accessing Care & Your GP Practice](#)

From 1st October 2022, Primary Care Network (PCN)s will be required to provide increased provision of primary care services (enhanced access arrangements) between the hours of **6.30pm and 8.00pm Mondays to Fridays** and between **9.00am and 5.00pm on weekends**.

We worked with Bolton GP Federation to find out what people in Bolton thought about these new arrangements, which will contribute to the improvement of people being able to access GP practices and health professionals.

\*The CCG ceased to exist at the end of June 2022 and its functions were taken over by NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care.

# Summary of Findings

- ✚ We received 363 responses to the survey. It is important to note that not all respondents answered all the questions. The number of responses to individual questions are quoted in the main body of this report.
- ✚ The majority of respondents were women. Respondents came from all postcode areas of Bolton with the highest response from the BL5 postcode. Respondents were mainly White British and from the 25-64 age group. Respondents also had long -term conditions, with asthma, COPD or a respiratory condition being the most common (from the 201 respondents who answered this question). Hypertension and musculoskeletal conditions also scored highly.
- ✚ The majority of respondents were familiar with the service that allows people to see a GP or other clinician outside normal practice hours. The majority of respondents also said they knew how to access this service.
- ✚ Respondents preferences for seeing a primary care clinician outside of normal practice hours, was Saturdays and Sundays 9.00am to 12.00pm, followed by weekdays 6.30pm to 7.30pm.
- ✚ Respondents felt the best way to share information about the enhanced access service was on GP practice websites and social media. A range of other choices were also stated as well as printed material to accommodate people who do not use the internet.
- ✚ The preferred location to attend an appointment with a primary care clinician, was within people's own neighbourhoods and near to their GP surgery. Respondents did offer many other suggestions.
- ✚ When asked about travelling distance, the majority of respondents said they would be willing to travel between 1-2 miles to see a primary care clinician. A small minority said they were not willing to travel.
- ✚ Respondents offered many comments when asked to say anything else about the enhanced access arrangements. Many commented about current difficulties in getting access to their GP, booking appointments, concerns about availability of staff, location and parking facilities. Some comments were positive, particularly ones giving people who struggle to attend appointments during the working week the choice of more flexibility.

# Methodology

We co-produced a simple survey with Bolton GP Federation (see appendix). The survey ran from 7<sup>th</sup> July 2022 to the end of August 2022. The survey was promoted on our social media channels, our newsletter, our website and via community engagement sessions.

The survey was also shared with groups in paper format to enable people to participate in the survey who did not have access to digital means. We also encouraged people to take part by telephone if they wished to.

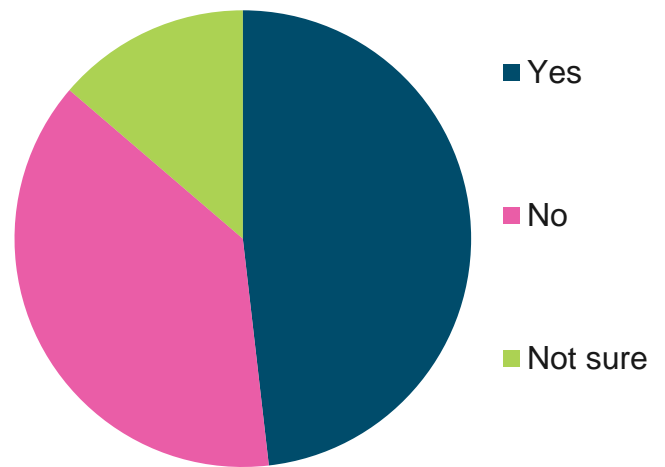
Number of people who responded to the survey:



# What People Told Us

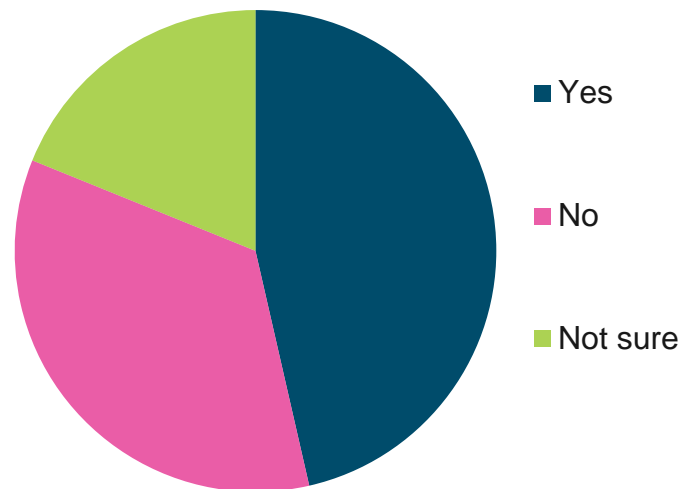
**Are you familiar with the service that allows you to see a GP or other clinician outside normal practice hours (extended primary care service)?**

N=357



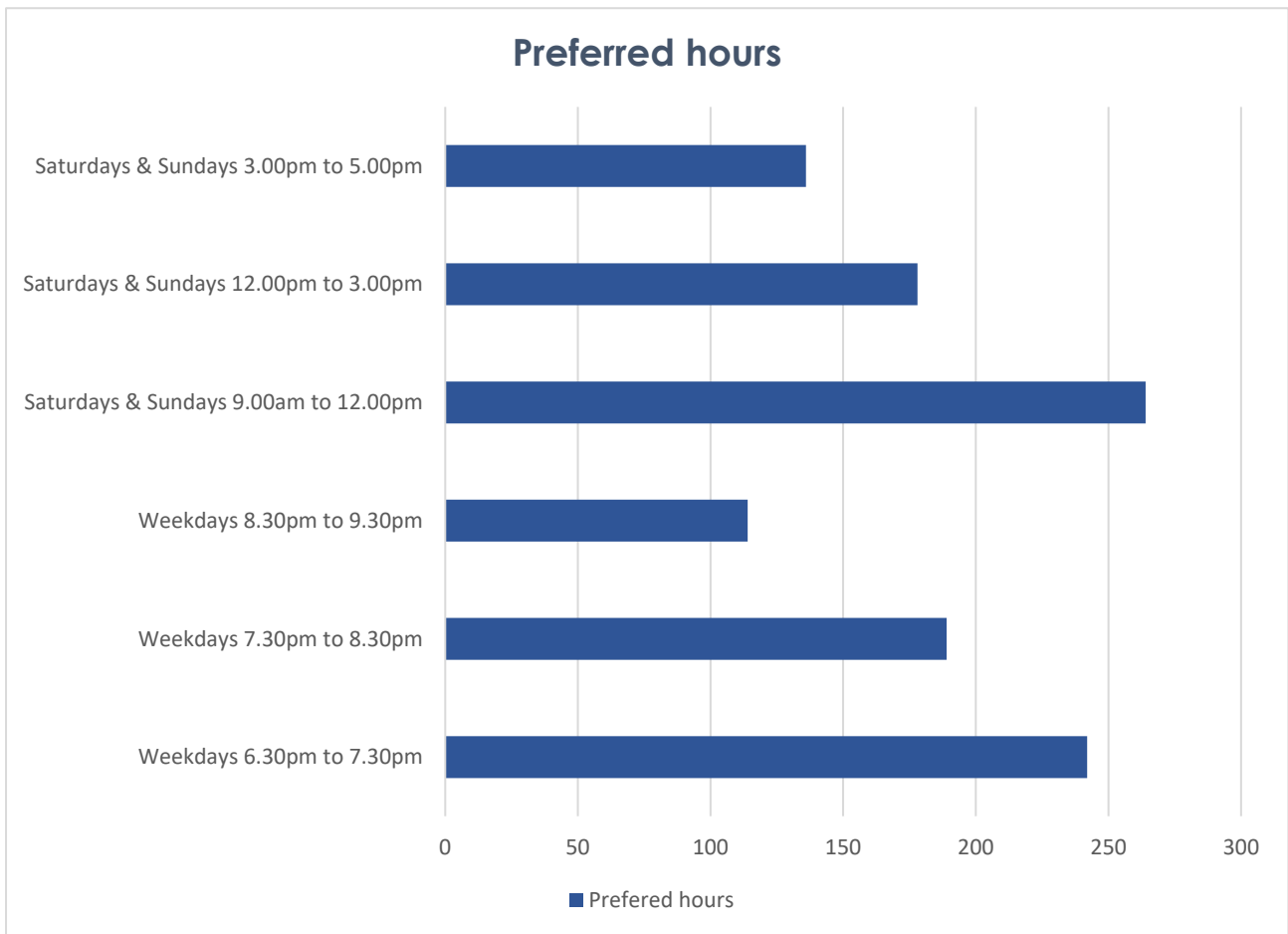
**If yes, do you know how to access this service?**

N=265



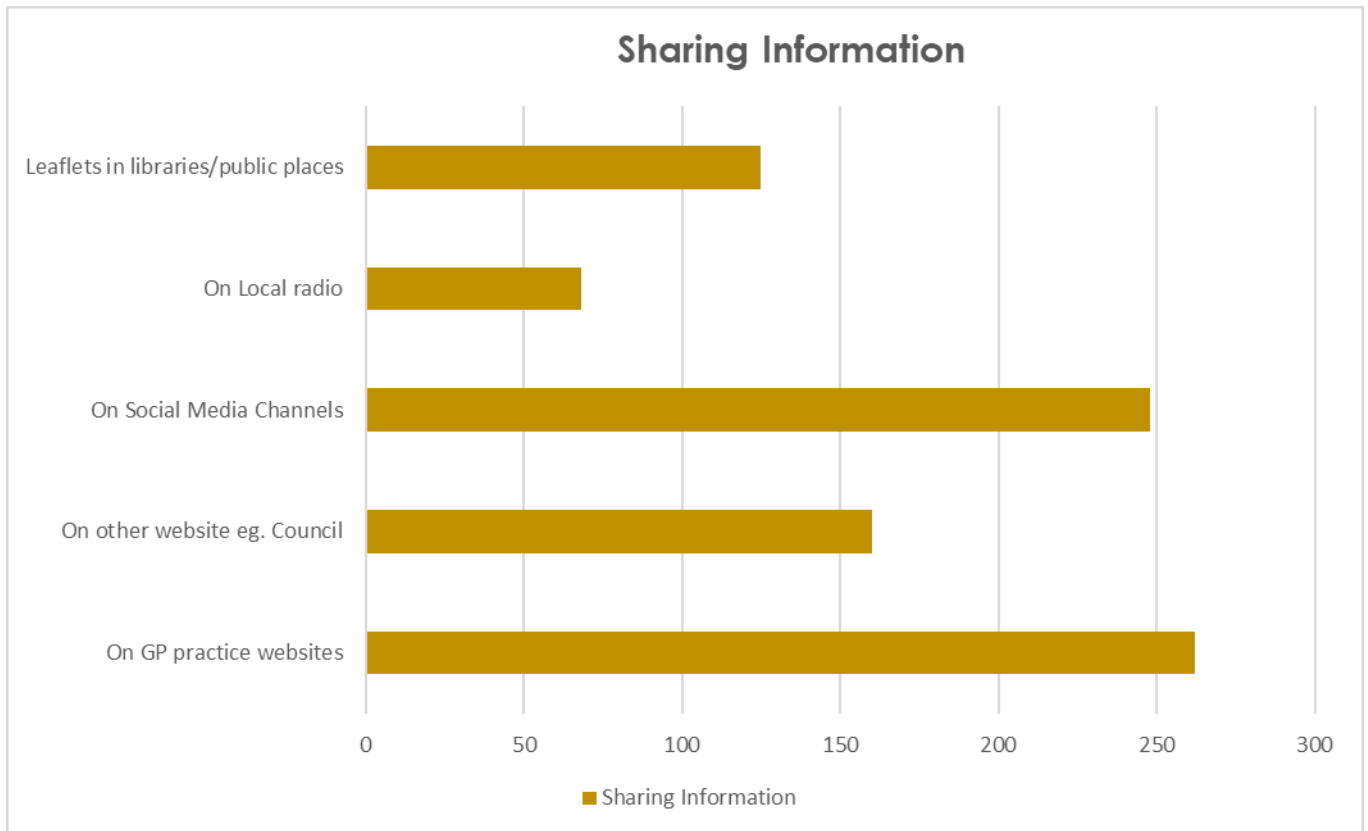
**If you wanted to see a primary care clinician (eg. a GP or nurse), outside of normal practice hours, what times would be most convenient for you?**

N=352



## What do you feel is the best way of sharing information about the enhanced access service with the public?

N=358



### Other Suggestions to share information:

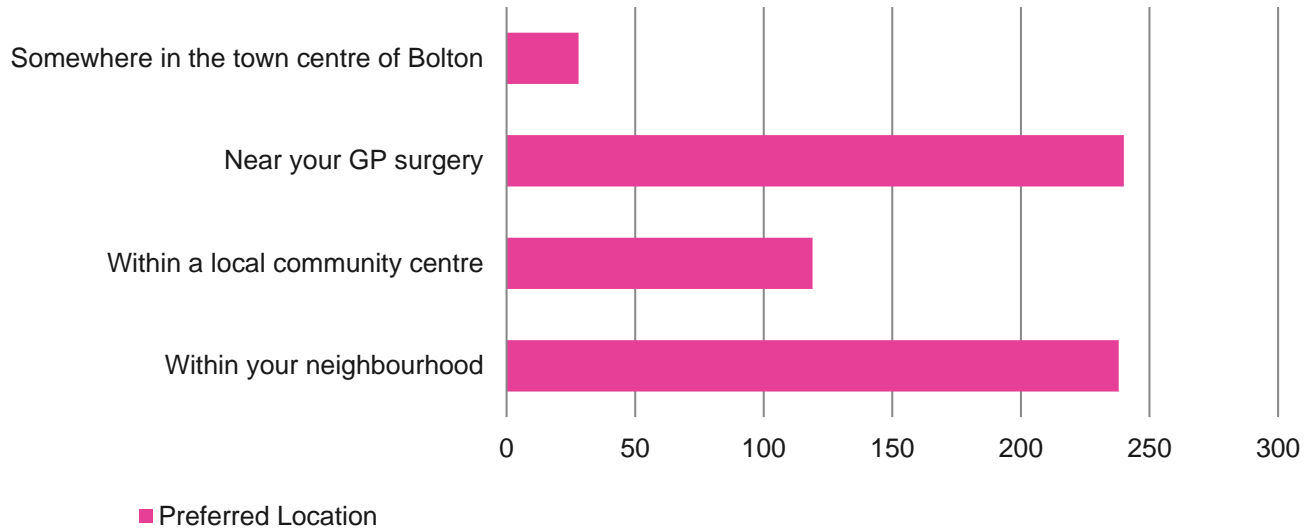
- ✚ Posters at supermarkets/shops
- ✚ Texts and letters to patients
- ✚ By SMS or text
- ✚ Local newspapers
- ✚ Local area news on TV
- ✚ On prescriptions
- ✚ Letters from doctors
- ✚ Via Patient Participation Groups
- ✚ Through Healthwatch
- ✚ Message via NHS or My GP apps

- ✚ Pharmacies
- ✚ Community notice boards
- ✚ Post – letter to those without internet access
- ✚ Posters in GP surgeries
- ✚ On Local hospital websites



## Where would be your preferred location to attend an appointment?

N=355

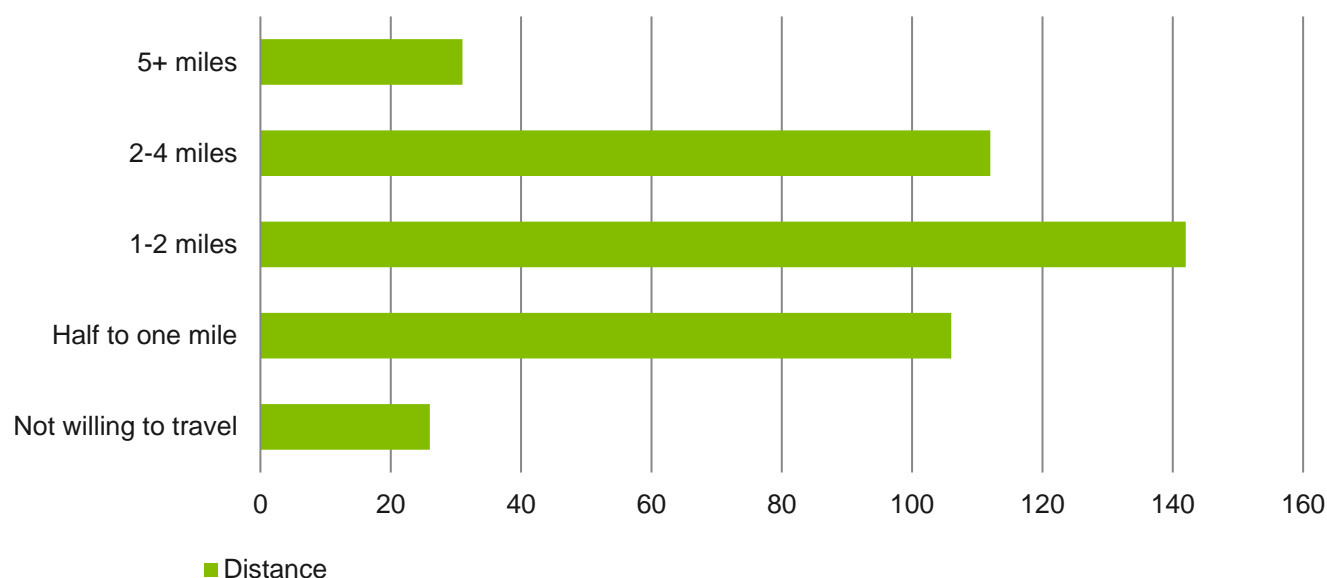


### Preferred Location – other suggestions:

- ✚ Town centres
- ✚ Local health centres
- ✚ NHS site, Minerva Rd, Farnworth
- ✚ Home visit
- ✚ In my GP but not travel to practice partner (stay in Blackrod)
- ✚ Winifred Kettle centre
- ✚ At a venue with ample electric wheelchair access
- ✚ Somewhere with free parking outside or very close by
- ✚ Somewhere that allows privacy and confidentiality
- ✚ Neighbourhood would be best but would travel anywhere if that meant I could see a GP when needed
- ✚ Not Bolton town centre

## How far would you be willing to travel to an appointment to see a primary care clinician outside normal GP hours?

N=353



### Other Comments

Respondents were asked to feedback anything else they wanted to say about enhanced access arrangements. 103 comments were recorded, and these have been split into the following themes:

#### Accessibility

- Concerns that older people are not receiving the care they need due to the digitalisation of services
- Make online booking and registration for online booking easier. Instead of having to collect and return a hand-written form to the practice to register for online services.
- I work shifts and have difficulty getting pre-booked appointments because of this

#### Appointments

- Return to face to face appointments
- Helpful if can book appointments electronically
- Make it easier to get appointments
- Some older people have no internet access, makes electronic appointments difficult
- Consider telephone/video appointments between 7.00am and 9.00am
- Need more face to face appointments

- Need to be able to pre-book appointments again
- Enhanced access should include bank holidays and weekends
- Concerned about shortage of GPs
- Concerns that people are still struggling to see a GP and long waits
- Need more appointments available within existing times and home visits
- There need to be more GP appointments in the day as people need to see a GP. GPs need to do home visits to elderly and vulnerable
- Need more appointments available on same day
- Need appointments to be on time and not have to wait for an hour in the waiting room
- Could a mobile doctor be available for pensioners not able to travel?
- Home visits for house-bound, young babies and children should be essential
- Getting appointments is very difficult, and having to constantly ring when you are unwell is ridiculous to be told no appointments.
- Access to a local GP for extended hours and more appointments is vital to the local community and to reduce the pressure on secondary care. I have managed several emergency departments (ED) and much of the presentation could be managed by a GP, either at that time or if they had seen a GP earlier. One lady attended ED for a simple UTI after phoning her GP practice 180 times
- The NHS is not a 9-5 job and all patients should have access to a GP outside office hours. Lack of service is clogging up Accident & Emergency. Should include access to pharmacy teams, this would help with medication enquiries and discrepancies with medication when patients are discharged from hospital.
- My husband has serious health issues and struggles to see a GP or get any support from his surgery
- Late night and weekend services are essential, this is the new normal and patients would not need to attend A & E
- Current access to out of hours GP is appalling. I have had several poor experiences regarding emergencies for my 2 year old daughter and have had to wait hours for calls only to be told to go to A & E who are then over-run. I have never had an issue on weekdays with the GP seeing my daughter, usually on the same day at short notice. The current service really lets surgeries down
- I want to be seen by my own GP and nurse, not by someone who doesn't know me
- Some people may be attending A & E as they are not registered with a GP

### Convenience

- Good for working people
- Services should be offered in small communities, not everyone can travel

### Location & Transport

- Need reliable public transport
- Need to be accessible by public transport especially for people who are disabled
- More funding needed to upgrade and refurbish current building for local GP
- There needs to be adequate parking facilities at these locations for both staff and patients
- Need disabled parking available
- Consideration needed for people with mobility issues, the elderly and young parents
- Many people would like to see Westhoughton Town Hall utilised for health and similar services
- Please take account of people's mobility issues
- With the price of petrol having gone up, it's not feasible to expect people to travel far.
- We need a big increase in surrounding areas of Bolton, the smaller towns like Westhoughton have too many patients for only two doctors

- Happy to travel to access GP services, it would be ideal to see a GP outside hours of 9-5pm
- Being able to access a GP in the evenings and weekends will make my life so much easier. Sometimes I live with ailments for 6 months due to working 9.00am-5.00pm Monday to Friday
- I am more bothered about the distance of the location than the location. Travelling to Waters Meeting from Westhoughton is too far. A community centre or other public building would be fine so long as there is privacy and it's clean
- If unwell - travel could be difficult

### Communication

- Need to see person face to face to explain things comprehensively
- Important that GPs promote the service to patients so patients can attend evenings and weekends
- The system of having to telephone the GP at 8am to get an appointment is just not working and not fit for purpose
- Some current phone systems are constantly busy, you cannot get in a queue or you are cut off. No provision to leave a message

### Staffing

- Staff shouldn't work over 40 hours per week
- Surgeries should have staff to deal with urgent/emergency appointments
- Should be member of pharmacy team in surgeries
- Introduce Pharmacy First scheme
- Where will the staff come from to staff weekend and evening appointments? There is already a shortage.
- Take into account staff cannot work excessive hours - they have a life too.

### Education

- Inform the public about alternative options to GP - pharmacies, district nurses, physio. Bring in self-referral to physio services

### Other comments

- One person commented that GPs are abusing the system and not seeing so many patients in a day whilst nurses are working to pre-pandemic levels
- Waiting over 3 weeks for a sick note is not acceptable

### Comments about specific GP surgeries/buildings

- Blackrod & Peter House (Unsworth Group) - some services are only available at Peter House at Westhoughton, which is 4.5 miles away from Blackrod with no direct bus service. So not all patients can get to Peter House.
- Winifred Kettle is under-used and half empty so could be used to benefit the community out of hours. There needs to be some creative thinking around primary care to ease the pressure off Accident & Emergency

## **Final comments**

This project has illustrated people's feelings about accessing their GP, highlighting their current frustrations and their thoughts about how access can be improved by the enhanced access offer.

Since the pandemic, primary care and health and care services in general, have suffered enormous pressures to cope with current patients, and have also dealt with a backlog. Patients are still reporting issues with accessing their GP, experiencing long wait times on the telephone and not getting timely appointments or the type of appointment they wish to have such as face to face.

The enhanced care offer will hopefully help to relieve some of these pressures and make care more easily accessible to patients.

Whilst overall people welcome any improvements to accessing primary care (and it is hope that the enhanced care offer will help with this), people are sceptical about whether this can be adequately delivered due to the pressures in the system, staff shortages and increased pressures on existing staff.

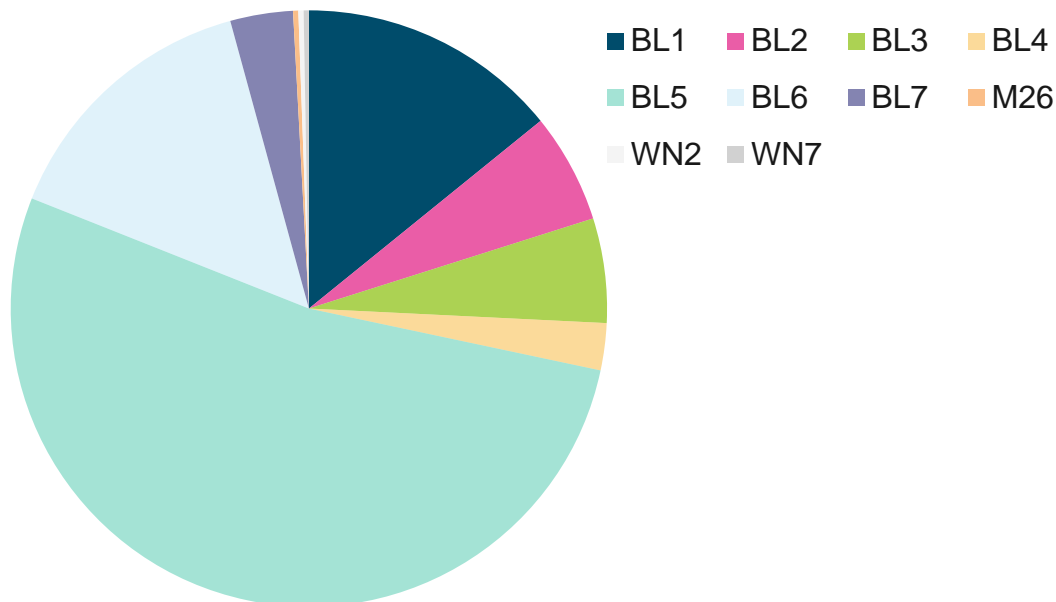
## Recommendations

### The following recommendations are based on the findings in this report:

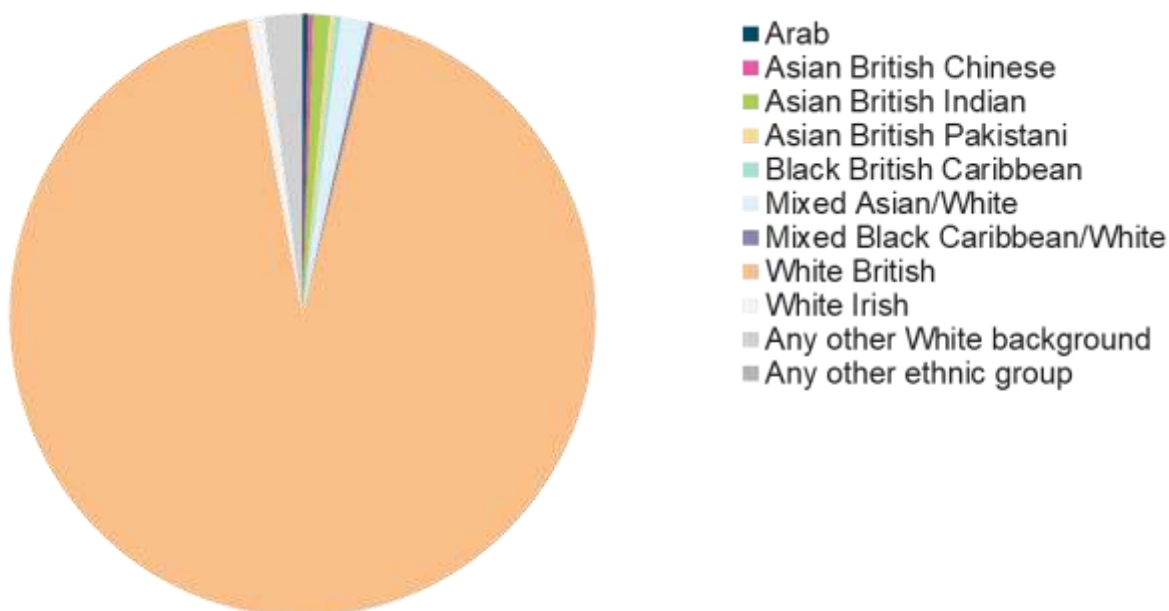
1. Primary Care Networks (PCNs) should ensure that GP websites contain up to date information about the enhanced care offer once this has been decided. The PCNs should also consider other ways of promoting the service and not rely on purely digital formats.
2. PCNs should consider that the enhanced care offer reflects the preferences of their patients, for example; respondents to this survey indicated their preference to be weekdays between 6.30pm and 7.30pm and weekends – Saturday and Sundays between 9.00am and 12.00pm
3. When choosing the location for the enhanced care offer, PCNs should carefully consider ensuring enhanced care sites are situated within people's neighbourhoods and/or close to their existing GP surgery.
4. Locations should also ensure they have adequate parking facilities including provision for people who are disabled, and are located on a reliable public transport route. Depending on the location for the enhanced care offer, PCNs should consider that people do not wish to travel more than two miles from their home.
5. The enhanced care offer should alleviate some of these problems by ensuring that everyone is able to access a GP or health clinician when they need it. People are still reporting that they are sometimes struggling to access their current GP and to get timely appointments that suit them. People also express their concern that some people are choosing to attend Accident & Emergency because of difficulties accessing a GP.
6. The enhanced care offer should ensure there is sufficient staffing to cope with demand from patients.

# Demographic Information

**Postcode N=358**

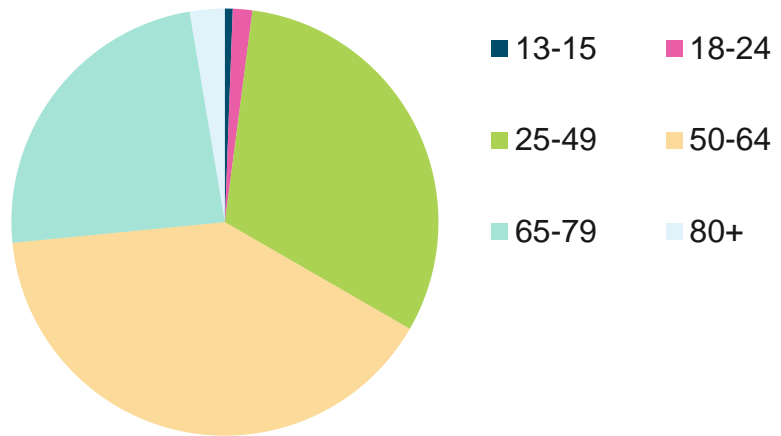


**Ethnic Background N=336**



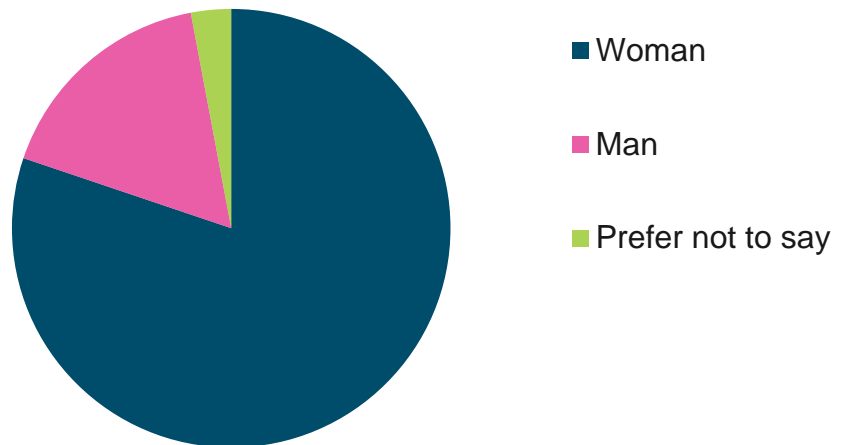
## Age

N=336



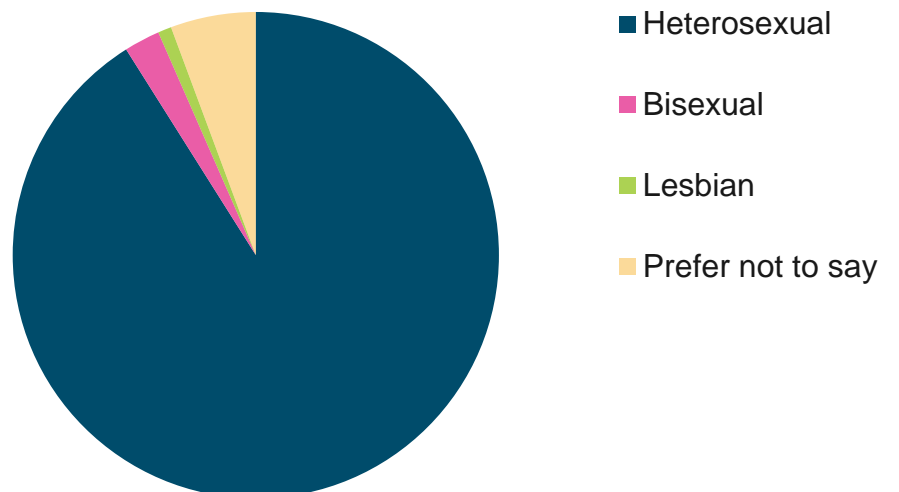
## Gender Identity

N=340



## Sexual Orientation

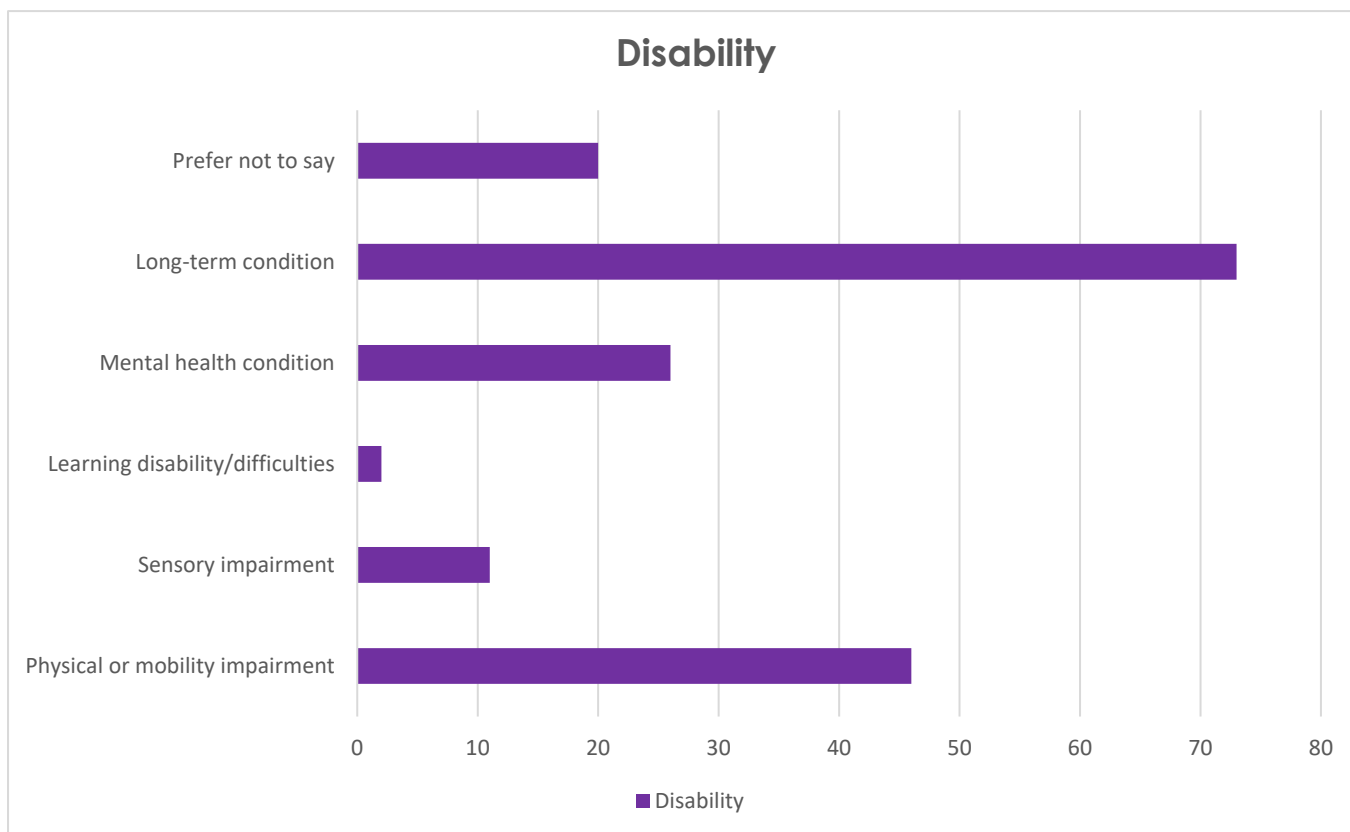
N=335





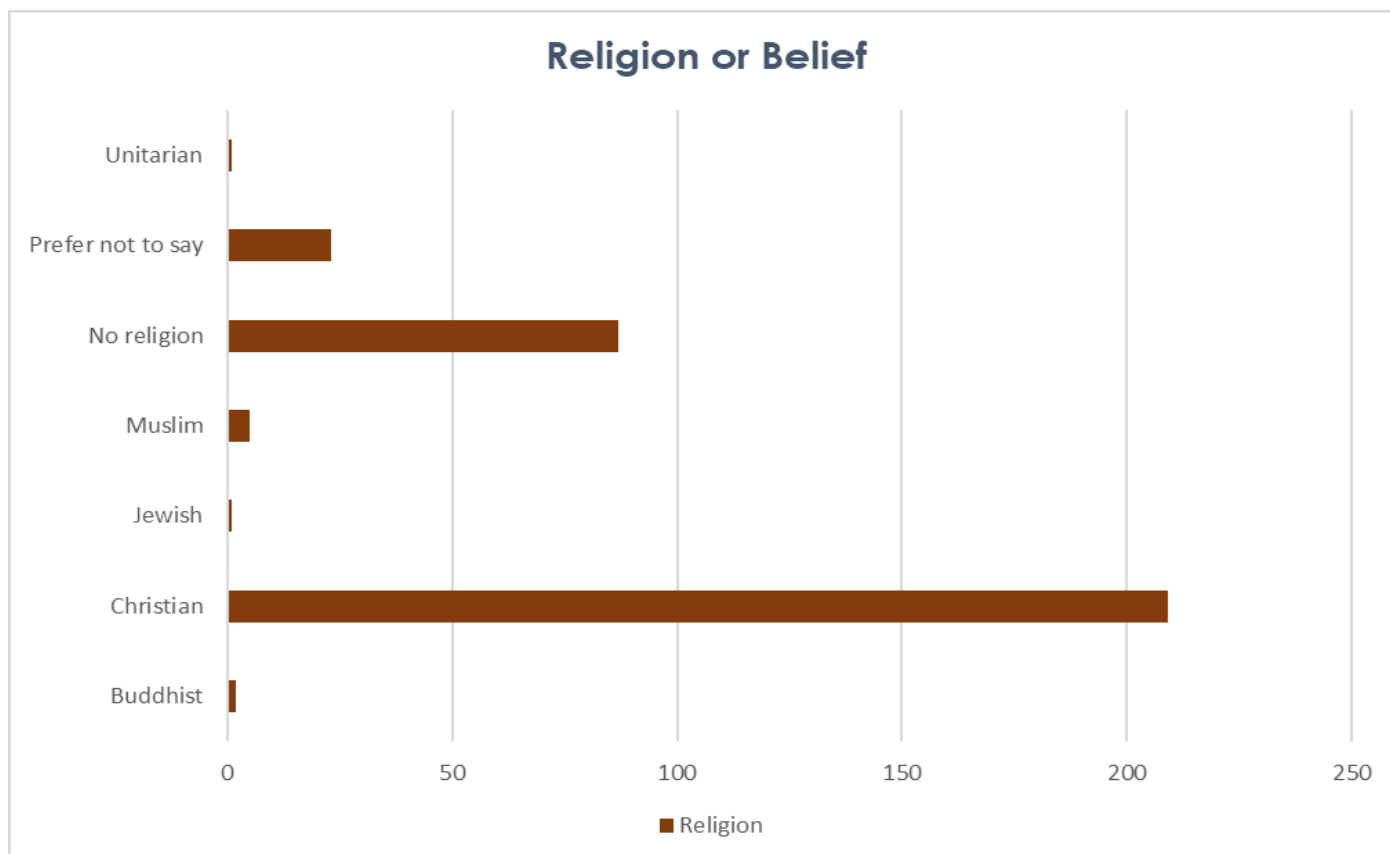
## Disability

N=146



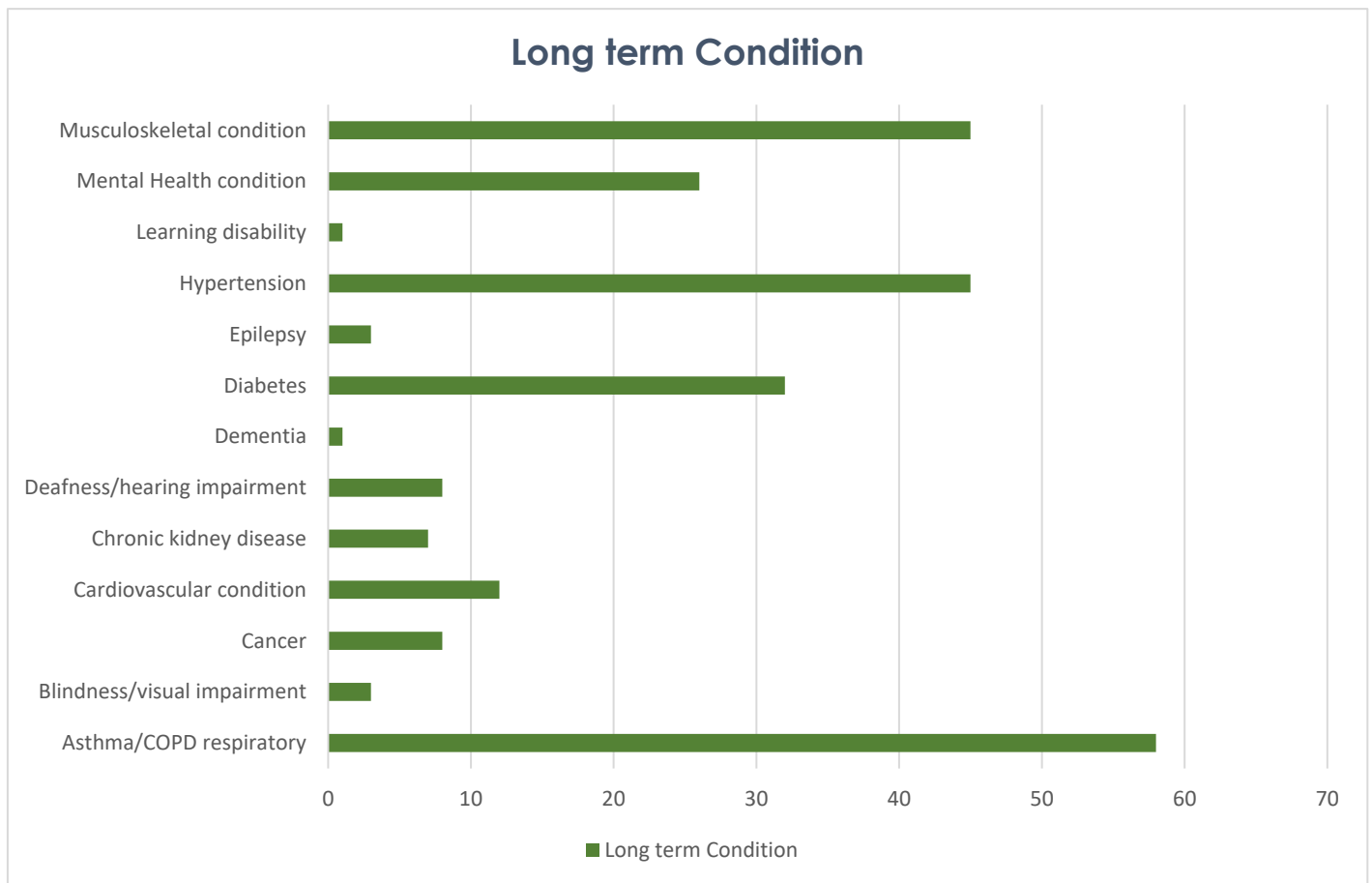
## Religion or Belief

N=333



## Long Term Condition

N=201



## Carers

57 people who identified as a carer also responded to the survey

## Appendix – Survey Questions

1. **Please tell us your postcode (first 3 character)**
  2. **Are you familiar with the service that allows you to see a GP or other clinician outside normal practice hours (extended primary care service)?**
  3. **If yes, do you know how to access this service?**
  4. **If you wanted to see a primary care clinician (eg. a GP or nurse), outside of normal practice hours, what times would be most convenient for you? (Please tick all that apply)**
    - Weekdays 6.30pm to 7.30pm
    - Weekdays 7.30pm to 8.30pm
    - Weekdays 8.30pm to 9.30pm
    - Saturdays and Sundays 9.00am to 12.00pm
    - Saturdays and Sundays 12.00pm to 3.00pm
    - Saturdays and Sundays 3.00pm to 5.00pm
  5. **What do you feel is the best way of sharing information about the enhanced access service with the public?**
    - GP Practice website
    - Other websites eg. Local Council/Community Groups
    - On Social Media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram)
    - On local radio
    - Leaflets in local libraries/public places
    - Other please state:
  6. **Where would be your preferred location to attend an appointment?**
    - Within your neighbourhood
    - Within your local community centre
    - Near your GP surgery
    - Somewhere in the town centre of Bolton
    - Other – please state:
  7. **How far would you be willing to travel to attend an appointment with a primary care clinician outside normal GP hours?**
    - Not willing to travel
-

Half to one mile

One to two miles

Two to four miles

5+ miles

8. **Do you wish to tell us anything else?**

## **Acknowledgements**

Our thanks go to members of the public who have given their time to share their views. As ever, this work could not be done without them. Thanks to the Bolton GP Federation for working with us on this important piece of work.

## Improving access to Primary Care – response from Bolton GP Federation to recommendations:

1. Primary Care Networks (PCNs), should ensure that GP websites contain up to date information about the enhanced care offer once this has been decided. The PCNs should also consider other ways of promoting the service and not rely on purely digital formats.

**The GP Federation are actively supporting practices and PCN's with a comms strategy for promoting the service. This includes website updates, information leaflets for display within the practices, press release and via the practice individual patient participation groups. We are currently exploring the option to provide practices with an accessibility button for their websites (where they don't already have one), for people with sensory and access impairments.**

2. PCNs should consider that the enhanced care offer reflects the preferences of their patients, for example; respondents to this survey indicated their preference to be weekdays between 6.30pm and 7.30pm and weekends – Saturday and Sundays between 9.00am and 12.00pm

**Session timings have been aligned to patients' preference and contractual requirements.**

**Monday – Friday 6.30-9.30pm**

**Saturdays & Sundays 9am – 5pm**

3. When choosing the location for the enhanced care offer, PCNs should carefully consider ensuring enhanced care sites are situated within people's neighbourhoods and/or close to their existing GP surgery.

**Seven sites have been identified within each Primary Care Network (PCN) area, ensuring that patients have minimal travel time. The sites are:**

**Farnworth & Kearsley PCN - Farnworth Health Centre, Frederick Street**

**Halliwell, Waters Meeting & Lever Chambers PCN - Halliwell Surgery, Lindfield Drive**

**Central PCN - Deane Medical Centre, 155 Dean Road**

**Westhoughton PCN - Peter House Surgery, Captain Lees Road**

**Brightmet & Little Lever PCN - Tonge Fold Health Centre, Hilton Street**

**Rumworth PCN - Southbrook Surgery, Southbrook Grove**

**Chorley Roads PCN - Heaton Medical Centre, 2 Lucy Street**

4. Locations should also ensure they have adequate parking facilities including provision for people who are disabled, and are located on a reliable public transport route. Depending on the location for the enhanced care offer, PCNs should consider that people do not wish to travel more than two miles from their home.

**Each site was assessed to ensure good access including, parking and transport links prior to any agreements being signed.**

5. The enhanced care offer should alleviate some of these problems by ensuring that everyone is able to access a GP or health clinician when they need it. People are still reporting that they are sometimes struggling to access their current GP and to get timely appointments that suit them. People also express their concern that some people are choosing to attend Accident & Emergency because of difficulties accessing a GP.

**The new Enhanced Access Service will provide an estimated extra 150 hours per week of capacity and access to a wide range of clinicians.**

6. The enhanced care offer should ensure there is sufficient staffing to cope with demand from patients.

**Staffing and rotas are planned well in advance of sessions. The organisation holds an extensive staff bank providing service contingency.**



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