

#30Chats with men in Carterton



“Things are changing, blokes are talking to each other more now since the pandemic...”

“It’s harder for men to open up because it makes us look weak, and I don’t want to look weak”

February 2023

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Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Oxfordshire would like to thank all the men in Carterton who spoke to us, took the time and shared their views.

1. Executive Summary

Healthwatch Oxfordshire wanted to hear more from working men – who are often seldom heard – about their views on health and care. We decided to focus on **Carterton**, drawing on 'rapid appraisal' methodologies from November 2022 to January 2023, to gain quick insights into local health attitudes and needs. We had conversations with **31 men** in all.

Why men?

Nationally, we know:

- One in five men die before the age of 65
- 75% of premature deaths from coronary heart disease are among men
- 67% of men are overweight
- Men are also less likely than women to adopt a healthy lifestyle, and more likely to smoke and drink alcohol to excess (Men's Health Forum, 2022).

This picture is mirrored in Oxfordshire, where local patterns vary along with factors associated with deprivation. The two leading causes of death among men in 2019–21 were:

- Cancer (24%) and coronary heart disease (9%) (Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2022)
- Local patterns vary and are accentuated with factors associated with deprivation.

We also know that men and especially those of working age are **less likely to follow up physical and mental health concerns, or access health checks and screening or support**. In Oxfordshire for example, only 15% of men access Achieve Oxfordshire's weight loss support, compared to 85% women (Oxfordshire insight healthy weight map 2022).

Many elements of disease and poor health are preventable.

Only 20% of personal health outcomes are related to access to quality health care. 30% of health outcomes are linked to behavioural factors such as diet, physical activity, smoking, and alcohol use. The remaining outcomes are influenced by social, cultural and economic factors, and environmental factors – such as attitudes, economic factors, cost of living, employment, housing, and exposure. These influences are stronger in more deprived areas.

Workplaces, voluntary groups and health and care services that engage effectively with men can help improve their health and wellbeing and reduce premature mortality through tailored action and preventive health measures.

What we did

Our interactions with men involved short but meaningful conversations, prompted by the questions *'What makes it easy and what's hard about looking after your health in Carterton?'* with added opportunity to give insights into using local health services. Our work linked with the Oxfordshire Men's Health Forum initiative in November 2022 *#30Chats in 30 days*.

Who we spoke to

- We spoke to men on the streets going about their daily business - in the market, outside and inside shops, faith settings, at designated 'warm spaces', library and workplaces, and on the industrial estates.
- We found men in a variety of workplace settings, including in fast food, food retail, barbers, vape and betting shops, transport and car businesses.
- We spoke to working men predominantly in manual trades (e.g. vehicle, building, construction and agricultural work), and in retail and public service jobs (e.g. food retail, other shops and local services).

We spoke to 31 men in Carterton during three visits:

- Age: 18-24 (8), 25-49 (6), 50-64 (10), 65-79 (7)
- Ethnicity: 87% White British and 13% other than White British

Key insights

The report highlights what men told us in their own words narrated by theme. Reflecting the views of the 31 men we spoke to, their voices give rich insight into some of attitudes and views men of working age held towards important issues of health and wellbeing.

It gives insights for local groups and services working to reach and communicate with men around their health.

Men told us:

What supports men to look after their health and wellbeing?

- Men told us that it was getting easier to talk about health and wellbeing, particularly for the younger generation.
- Male friends and men in workplaces could be important in giving peer support for men to talk about health.
- Hobbies, and being part of local groups gave opportunity for men to support one another. However, there were less choices for younger men to find groups and activities locally in Carterton aside from sport.
- Local shops and services provided a valuable 'anchoring' role for men in their daily life, providing places to talk and connect.

What makes it hard for men to look after their health and wellbeing?

- Whilst men told us it was getting easier, stereotypes remain. Some men felt pressure to provide, be strong, using words like 'Man up', 'carry on' when talking about health and wellbeing.
- Men faced barriers to health and wellbeing including lack of time, caring responsibilities, cost of living pressures, loneliness and long hours of work. Manual work was seen as physical activity meant men were often tired at the end of the day and wanted to relax.
- A 'health scare' or ill health was a factor that made some men seek support from health professionals or start to make lifestyle changes.
- Men did not always know where to turn for help and support, and were not always aware of local services, NHS Checks etc. and what they offer
- Some men found it hard to speak to health professionals about their health and wellbeing and didn't want to be a 'burden'. Some saw it as a 'waste of time'.
- Clear messaging, language and proactive communication with men was important to them. Men didn't want to feel 'embarrassed', talked down to, or confused by medical language. They wanted to feel encouraged, respected and valued in interactions with health and care services.
- Tailored communication and support to men in ways that they relate to and places they are familiar with would support men in proactively addressing health and wellbeing.

Who this report will be shared with:

We will share this report for reference, insight and planning with local health and care providers, including:

- Oxfordshire Place Based Partnership
- Oxfordshire County Council Public Health
- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board and Health Improvement Board
- Oxfordshire Men's Health and Mental Health Partnerships
- Achieve Oxfordshire, Active Oxfordshire and prevention focused groups
- Carterton Town Council

What we heard reflects some of the things we heard from men in East Oxford in 2018. We will continue to make sure we listen to men about their experiences.

- Local Community Police have invited Healthwatch Oxfordshire to attend a team meeting to support awareness and signposting for men.

A summary version of the report will be left in key locations in Carterton along with signposting information about local support.

2. Background

Healthwatch Oxfordshire hearing from men in Carterton

Healthwatch Oxfordshire, in its focus on hearing seldom heard voices, planned to reach out to working men in Carterton during 2022.

In November, the Oxfordshire Men's Health Forum launched a **#30Chats in 30 days** challenge, offering us a good opportunity to contribute and hear from men. Healthwatch Oxfordshire staff, were able to use 'Making Every Contact Count' (MECC) in conversations and produced a bespoke information leaflet on health support and information available to men.

We visited Carterton three times between November 2022 and January 2023 and spoke to **31 men**. We promoted our presence through social media, posters and linking to the Town Council, local services and networks.

This report gives the views of the men we spoke to in their own words, grouped into themes that arose in conversations. Where only one man commented about a subject, but this was included, this is made clear.

Why Carterton?

We focused on hearing from men in Carterton in West Oxfordshire. Carterton is a fast-growing town, with a population of 15,680 of whom 65.6% are aged 15-64 years (Census 2021). Whilst health in Carterton is generally better than average for England, indications from local health data show deaths from all causes (men and women), and all ages (Standardised Mortality Ratio) - results are statistically worse than the England average.

In addition, 'In 2018-19, the prevalence of diabetes recorded by Broadshires Health Centre in Carterton was below the England average and above the Oxfordshire average' and 'The prevalence of recorded depression was almost double the Oxfordshire average and over double the England average'.

Carterton, with a growing population, slightly lower house prices, and areas of manual and industrial workplaces, as well as retail infrastructure was seen as a place where we might meet 'working men' to share their views on health and wellbeing.

#30chats in30 days

In November 2022 **Oxfordshire Men's Health Partnership** launched **#30chats in 30 days** aimed at starting conversations with men across the county around mental health and wellbeing. This was promoted across social media and other avenues and gained support from a wide range of local groups.



Making Every Contact Count (MECC)

#30Chats in 30 days supported an approach called 'Making Every Contact Count' (MECC), which uses day-to-day interactions to help support changes in lifestyle. It can give you the confidence and skills needed to have conversations about health with friends, family, and colleagues.

A key MECC principle is that people often have the answers themselves, and MECC helps people to find those answers, and to signpost to support. Oxfordshire has a well-established MECC programme.

How we reached men and who we heard from

Healthwatch Oxfordshire drew on 'rapid appraisal' methodologies, to gain quick insights into local health attitudes and needs of men in Carterton.

This involved short but meaningful conversations with men, prompted by the question '*What makes it easy and what's hard about looking after your health in Carterton?*' with added opportunity to give insights into using local health services.

All the men we spoke to were more than happy to chat and share openly, generous in their time, knowing that we were collecting anonymous stories.

We mainly spoke to working men – 31 in all, representing a range of ages and ethnicities – as well as some who were retired:

Age: 18-24 (8), 25-49 (6), 50-64 (10), 65-79 (7)

Ethnicity (self-described): 87% White British and 13% other than White British

We found men to speak to on the streets going about their daily business – in the market, outside and inside shops, faith settings, at designated ‘warm spaces’, library and workplaces, and on the industrial estates. We found men in a variety of workplace settings, including in fast food, food retail, barbers, vape and betting shops, transport and car businesses.

We spoke to working men in manual trades (e.g. vehicle, building, construction and agricultural work), and in retail and public service jobs (e.g. food retail, other shops and local services).

3. What men told us

Men talking about health, mental health and wellbeing

‘It’s starting to get better’

We spoke to men about their views on talking about their health. There seemed to be a generational divide, with older men broadly less open to speaking about their health. However, there seemed to be a consensus that entrenched views and behaviours were gradually shifting, and that it was getting easier for men to discuss sensitive issues. Those who did talk more openly felt this was a positive change.

Men generally don’t talk with one another about their health.... (Man, 75, WB)

I am quite open about my mental health, and am happy to talk, it doesn’t worry me...the stereotype is women talk and men don’t, but I think people should express themselves, shouldn’t bottle it up, you have to if you don’t seek help you don’t get any help...we should all be much more open (Man, 60, WB)

*Things are changing, blokes are talking to each other more now since the pandemic...I do a lot of work in the countryside on farms...with grumpy men in farmyards...now they get off their tractors and come over to talk and say “I’m having a *** ** day”. Older farmers work and work til they drop dead...but in Young Farmers there is a lot more discussion around mental health and talking more so the stigma is diminishing, more people are talking about it now (Man, 60’s WB, agricultural worker)*

'It makes us look weak'

For some, however, mental health remained challenging to discuss, perhaps because of fears that it would be seen as a weakness. Stereotypes that men should be strong, and act as provider were still part of some men's views.

It's still a bit hard for my age to talk about mental health and if you show your feelings it can be seen as a sign of weakness... (Man, 23. WB)

Talking about mental health...it's starting to get better as I remember when I was younger it was 'Man up' and get on with it... (Man, 20's WB)

It's harder for men to open up because it makes us look weak, and I don't want to look weak I don't want to share my problems with my wife...maybe I can bear stress more than my wife....some people can open up to their wives, but I don't...my personal choice, I wouldn't cry or open up....I have to be strong, be the leader... (Man, 20's)

My age group men always feel they should be seen as the bread winner, the rock of the family, and there was everything in between which wouldn't be talked about....(Man, 50's WB)

Looking after your health

Providing first

Often, looking after their health often came second...long hours of work, family, and 'providing' came first.

I work and provide for my family first...I don't do anything to look after myself, I don't exercise or eat healthily, just work and provide (Man, 20's)

Carry on

Looking after mental wellbeing, some men indicated they would just 'carry on' and cope and feared burdening others.

If I've had a bad day, stressed, I just go to bed and wake up the next day. Others would have a drink, but I would rather not drink if I am stressed – just go to sleep and deal with it the next day- if I get pissed and have a hangover the next day it's going to be a whole lot worse (Man, 40's WB)

I do have ups and downs, but just go to bed or watch t.v. to forget about it and carry on...sometimes I briefly chat with my flatmate. Don't want to burden people, so keep it to myself (Man, 40, WB)

Men who did take a more proactive and positive view of looking after their health, often did so following a 'health scare' or period of ill health.

I can be a bit of a 'wuss' I look after myself, as the last 15 years I have paid attention to my health, kept fit, eat healthily, went to GP for x, I keep active and my job is busy, I didn't want to get it any worse, and need attention 2

years on...as I get older...I am now very keen to look after my health and forget my ego, and look after myself (Man, 50's WB)

Just keep working

Work was a significant force, and some men voiced that 'keeping going' was often the best solution if they felt ill.

...if you've got a cold the best thing is to go to work and burn it off... (Man, 50's WB)

Work is everything, I'm not interested in healthy living, I take my cough sweets if I have a cold, and don't worry about my health (Man, 23, WB)

I'm very rarely ill, to be fair even if I am ill I don't go to the doctors, I get annoyed with people who sit at home with a cold it's better to be out and about, 100% keep going, keep working, you feel better....I feel terrible after sitting around at Christmas (Man, 40's WB)

Men seeking help

Getting information and knowing where to go

Men told us about where they would go to find information if they needed support. Overall, men we spoke to did not seem to know about health, care, and wellbeing support on offer in the area, and said they would not know where to turn. Many used the internet, and advertising campaigns as a source of information.

All the information is out there, it's just whether people will read it. (Man, 60, WB)

I get all my information from Google, there's places to go and not to go.... (Man, 40's, WB)

I would go onto Google to ask...once it came up with the result that I had cancer! (Man, 20's)

Walkers Crisps and Comic Relief have a great advert at the moment for Christmas.... "How are you?" "I'm fine""How are you really?" asking that question twice is great "I'm fine"....but actually genuinely asking "are you fine?" (Man, 23, WB)

We asked about knowledge of local services - messaging, understanding and awareness was not always clear for men.

I haven't heard of a NHS Health Check, I'll follow it up, I could have done with knowing that....it would help with worries (Man, 45, WB)

Don't know where I would go if needed help (Man, 40 WB)

Talking Space Plus...I've seen some leaflets but I didn't know it was for mental health... (Man, 50's WB)

I wouldn't know where to go if had concerns. I've got kids, both of us have to work, get up every morning and life is extremely stressful and sometimes I feel like pulling my hair out...when people get really down you think 'Jesus, you have got to be in a really bad way to do that' (suicide) (Man, 40's WB)

Reaching out to health professionals

Men spoke to us about the next step of going to see a health professional and how easy that was. Views varied, some were happy to speak with a GP or health professional, even about personal issues. This was particularly so when men had had experienced a 'health scare' or had emerging and ongoing health issues – they would then seek help and became less concerned about speaking and making lifestyle changes.

Going to the Doctor

"I don't have a problem, I'll go straight to the Doctor and tell him everything, no problem at all" (Man, 42, Turkish)

I've had a stroke and have lots of things wrong with me, so I don't worry now about talking about it all, I get a lot of good support...the only thing is I don't get a dosset box anymore and with my stroke I find it really hard to do my pills.... (Man, 70's WB)

I do go to the doctor have no problem with it, have had health scares and I've got health problems (Man, 50's WB)

Had acid reflux and went to doctor luckily it wasn't a heart attack, but it gave me a scare and I've now joined the gym.... (Man, 38, WB)

Recently I went to the GP for an "embarrassing one" I had haemorrhoids! But I had to be seen, so I was fine with it! (Man, 20's WB)

Others reflected views that men often don't find it easy to ask for help, even if concerned. Some saw it as a 'waste of time' and others indicated that lack of time from work, and being seen as a 'provider' in the family were barriers to seeking help.

"He never goes to the GP, 'What's the point?' he says, 'they never do anything'" (Wife about her husband)

I don't go to the doctor it's a waste of time for me it takes too much time, I work all week... (Man, 23, WB)

Men don't go to the doctors. It's really taking the time to go as you are either so busy or the time slot doesn't work (Man, 50's WB)

I look after my mum and the women first. And I don't go to the Doctor as worried if I went they would find out lots of things wrong (Man, 20's .)

Seeking support for mental health

Most men recognised that people often struggle with mental health and wellbeing, and that this can be difficult to speak about openly. Being a man, with pressures to be seen as coping perhaps made this harder to admit and act on.

Most people battle with mental health in some way or another even if they don't admit it (Man, 50's WB)

Getting people up and getting help is hard, people struggle with the initial steps, and say 'I am a man, I will just sit through it and it will sort itself...'
(Man, 23. WB)

Colleagues don't always take the mental health support, they may have PTSD, we have had suicides, and you always ask 'was there a time they could have gone and sought help?' (Man, 50's WB)

Those who had sought help had found it useful.

I struggle with anxiety and depression so understand what impact it has. I've been to Talking Space they were good with 1:1 but now due to COVID it's only on the phone, and not in person which is much harder, as mental health is an ongoing thing, you can be great for a couple of months. I don't agree that Talking Space only offers six sessions, as it's not a 'Quick fix'.... (Man, 20's WB)

I learnt a lot about how to deal and control and manage my mental health and learnt some good techniques like 'putting your thoughts on trial' where you see what supports the thoughts and what doesn't....it helps you have perspective on things (Man, 20's WB)

Feeling valued - Wanting to be taken seriously and heard

Some men spoke about their interactions with health professionals and services. There was a sense of wanting to be taken seriously and heard, and to feel valued, particularly as it might have taken some effort and courage to approach someone in the first place. Words like 'bother', 'embarrassment' 'belittle' and 'encouragement' indicated some of the sentiments at stake.

You feel like you don't want to bother them (health services). It belittles us sometimes, by having to go to the doctor, sometimes it's embarrassing, and it's hard to talk to other people about health... (Man, 50's WB)

I've had bouts of depression in the past and also with COVID. They said they do consultations over the phone and that was great, and said 'We will come back also in a month's time and check you are ok, and ring you up in so long'.... and they never have, and then you feel like 'well they don't

care....' So stick on the tablets, and basically just look after yourself doing it that way really. I didn't get any lifestyle advice about how to look after my mental health (Man, 50's WB)

The GP response (to weight loss) was 'that's brilliant' they were really encouraging to me, and I've halved the medications I'm on and hope to get off completely soon. I feel so much better, more energy and it has supported me mentally (Man, 50's WB)

Language used by health professionals was also seen as off putting, particularly to those who did not know medical terms or words. Clear and non-patronising communication was key.

I never go to the doctor. You can't understand them they use big words, you haven't got a clue what they are saying, all the words they use (Man, 23, WB)

What supports men's health, mental health and wellbeing?

We asked men to tell us about what they do to support their health, and mental health and wellbeing. Here, answers reflected some of the points of the 'Five Ways to Wellbeing' (Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, and Give). Men had a range of ways in which they looked after their health and wellbeing. However, there did seem to be a generational difference, with retired men in particular being more proactive with hobbies, clubs and social events.

Sharing through doing ... meeting men through hobbies and activities

Men spoke of the importance of hobbies. Older men in particular seemed to have a habit of interesting activities which they had a passion for ... fossils, fishing, models, walking, bird watching, photography, art, games... These activities gave men a chance to come together in shared interests, and be alongside socially.

My hobby gets me out and I meet other people as well, that's nice a common interest.... When doing shared things you can talk about your health it's self-help (Man, 50's, WB)

I get fed up with people saying they are lonely or don't know what to do, get a grip, get out there and do something, I've always been nosy and curious about things, I've always made things, like making things, so I have always been busy....(Man, 75, WB)

I go fishing at some local lakes, and meet up with other men there, and we keep an eye out for one another, share stories and experiences we do talk about health, nothing intrusive, but it's through being with a regular group and doing a shared activity (Man, 70's, WB)

I love being in nature, saw an osprey landing one time on the lake...it's my time, my place, so peaceful, I saw kingfishers and cormorants, I feel so

lucky to see it all around and it's just there for me, it's selfish really (Man, 70's, WB)

I have hobbies which help, martial arts, as well as meeting others down the pub is a release! (Man, 50's WB)

Active, social based hobbies seemed to be more prevalent among older men. Younger men, spoke of sport as important, but those who were not 'sporty' did not have a way of linking up so easily.

Male friends and peer support

Some men found their group of male friends an important support. Men described coming together with old friends, or with peers as providing an opportunity to talk, and share, even if through jokes and insults. Men would 'keep an eye out' for each other.

*A group of lads go every year away biking, but it ended up more and more in the pub and last time I didn't even take my bike. It's not difficult to talk, we spend most of the time talking **** and insulting each other, but certainly no issue talking about things, they're a good bunch (Man, 40's WB)*



A number of the men have various health problems and we talk, and we also notice if someone hasn't been there for a while...so keep an eye out (Man, 75, WB)

Peer support was also seen as valuable in making lifestyle changes.

I've been on a weight loss programme, and it's really positive to do something to help myself...I used an app a friend recommended to do calorie counting, it was very interactive, and I am a creature of habit so

watching and seeing results is good....and getting peer support (Man, 50's WB)

Taking time to really hear how someone was feeling, was also seen as important, especially with the recognition that 'I'm fine' might not always be the real answer.

When men are on their own its different from when they are in a group, they won't share. It's good to ask "I genuinely meant how are you?" and to take time to talk 1:1. ...you can pick up signs of worries like mental health, domestic abuse, or domestic violence (Man, 23, WB)

Value of the workplace

Men also gained huge support from the workplace, and social and personal interactions at work.

We talk about mental health at work and share, openly...so it's a support (Man, 50's WB)

I had a scare and since joined the gym. I've encouraged work colleagues to do the same thing, so rather than go for a glass of wine after work, go to the gym...it helps doing it together and gives the work team incentive and focus, we are all taking up the challenge (Man, 30's WB)

Physical activity

Physical activity was seen as an important influence on mental health by some men who were active.

Exercise is the best and biggest thing for my mental health I've trained my entire life, to keep fit and healthy it's an outlet for my energy and mentally....(Man, WB, 20's)

Martial arts has helped me to feel mentally stronger too, and much more as I wasn't worried about being overweight and have had good support...you feel so much better in yourself when you lose weight, and things become easier all round (Man, 50's WB)

Faith

Some men described how faith was important, both in giving perspective, and refuge from worries, as well as social support

Mental health is not an easy thing to talk about, the only thing that keeps my mental health stable is God and my belief, you can only find peace in something eternal, not in money and material things. The lack of religion now, faith has gone away, and people have more mental health problems (Man, 20's Kurdish)

The church community is such a support (Man, 50's, WB)

Carterton – local groups and community activities

Carterton is a busy, active town, with a wide range of activities and social groups. For older men in particular there was a strong network of local groups, and community-based activities, for example, U3A, Aviation Group, activities linked to the forces and local RAF Brize Norton base.



There is plenty going on in Carterton, so much that I ended up with too many things to do I was busy all the time....the library is good, I used to go walking, there is model club, flying club, cards, art classes, mostly all through U3A which is really active....they keep your interest up and keep you active and seeing people... (Man, 75, WB)

The little bus is fantastic, when I couldn't drive it got me everywhere, driven by volunteers, two runs in a figure of eight around Carterton, it picks you up - it solved my problem, it was ideal (Man, 75, WB)

There's a lot going on in Carterton...even a repair workshop has started up. Involved in West Oxfordshire community transport, British Legion veterans' hub, there's Carterton Carnival....community centre on Shilton Park (Man, 70's WB)

Some younger men seemed less engaged in local activities, or felt they were not so relevant.

'Carterton is a dump, there's nothing going on in Carterton for me (Man, 30's, WB)

The 'anchoring' role of key shops and services in supporting men

We visited a number of community and public service settings, including the very active Library, Town Hall, Local Churches offering Food Bank and Warm Spaces, Community Centres and the Market. We also visited many of the shops and commercial workplaces. It was clear the integral role all of these places play to

men, as 'anchors' from which men can receive support, signposting information and a sense of contact and belonging, which in turn is important for health.



Everyone in the market knows everyone and we keep an eye out for people, the regulars, we all support each other (Man, 60's WB)

The library is a real hub for people, and we get to know people well when they come and go (Library)

Both the vape shop, barbers shops and the betting shops saw themselves as part of the community, and recognised their role in supporting men using their services, and in health prevention.

We chat to customers about their lives and learn about their perspectives (Barber shop)

The shop encourages responsible gambling and knows customers and advises against spending too much we keep an eye out for people....but online you can't do this. We can also signpost them to MOSES (Betting shop)*

It's like being a social worker, you know people and know what to look out for, I have no worries taking people aside and saying "don't you think that's enough now"? We encourage people to gamble safely and responsibly...and we know our clients so can keep an eye out (Betting shop)

Older generation like to come in and chat, numbers have dropped since covid and a few customers have passed (away). We give people support to give up smoking. 9/10 people who have gone to NHS tell us they have failed using nicotine, lozenge and NHS support...if we support them they can give up smoking in two weeks and over a longer time we give support to customers new to vaping, sometimes spend up to an hour talking it through and supporting them with information and advice (Vape shop)

What makes it harder to look after your health and wellbeing?

Men also spoke about some of the challenges and barriers to looking after their health, mental health and wellbeing.

Lack of local opportunities for men to get together

We need more opportunities for men to get together, unless you like football or sport, there doesn't seem to be anything else about.... (Man, 50's WB)

I wish there were more things for younger men, younger lads, to do some sort of hobby and share and get away from the x-box and be with others....I think they are lonely, there is a lot of loneliness really and they don't have the hobbies like we do (Man, 75, WB)

There doesn't seem to be anything about for younger men I've got a friend who suffers with mental health, and he has got no hobbies, and there doesn't seem to be anything for him, he struggles to get out, goes swimming, but there is nothing else... (Man, 50's WB)

Loneliness

Fraud on the internet and phone is having a big impact on people's mental health...a phonecall might be the only person someone has spoken to all week, they are lonely and vulnerable...loneliness is common in older men (Man speaking about interactions through public service work)

Many people come here (Warm Space) for the social interaction, some people are isolated and don't have the social contact (Warm Space)

Lack of time, long hours and hard, physical work

Awareness of the benefits of physical activity was clear, but many working men, in manual, often active jobs were physically tired at the end of a long day

I don't do so much exercise.... After work when I shut up shop I want to chill out and not get all hot and sweaty...just chill out (Man, 20's WB)

When you are working your nuts off you need to relax and have down time, so it ended up just being the pub (Man, 40's WB)



Work is our activity, it's up and down ladders all day (Man, 50's WB)

My work is physical enough to be honest, I'm tired at the end of the day (Man, 40's WB)

Others were unable to be physically active in their jobs, for example taxi drivers.

It's a sedentary job, sitting down all day, heating on, driving, eating badly, not ideal, but there's no time (Man, 30's WB)

Caring and family demands also made it hard to focus on themselves.

I do need to do more activity to be fair, but not enough hours in the day, I used to do cycling and running, but there is not enough time. I've got kids now (Man, 40's WB)

I don't do regular exercise, just running around and biking on Sunday with the kids, I don't have time, I'm always working, basically I spend all my time with my kids...they are my option for keeping fit...the rest of the time is working Monday to Saturday (Man, 40's .)

Other factors

Cost of living

Some spoke about the impact of the cost of living, and the stresses that brought.

The cost of living is hard, need to make ends meet, and get a bit more money (Man, 60's WB)

The cost of living means you can't afford to go to the gym, its £50 a month gym membership (Man, 20's WB)

People want to get away from Covid...they had a lot of time thinking and it can be life changing, the economy has gone really bad, everything is so expensive, all this makes you think about what is important in life (Man, 20's Kurdish)

The cost of living is a worry, everything weighs on you, it's hard (Man, 20's WB)

Gambling

For some, gambling is a hobby and source of social interaction and relaxation. Some men were open about the sometimes fragile boundary between this and problem gambling.

There's lots of problems with men online, behind the scenes during COVID got used to gambling online and never came back to the betting shop....so nowhere to be accountable to... (Man, 20's WB)

'In the shops I have never been as bad as online (gambling)... I'll spend my wages online" (Man, 60's WB)

Keeping fit

Comments from some focused on the lack of choice of leisure activities for their needs.

There is not enough in Carterton for me who want to do weights, its poorly equipped ...dumbbells go up to 30Kg I need much heavier. There is not much choice in Carterton, there is either the meaty body builder club I feel very uncomfortable going there, would never go there...or there is the leisure centre. To get a good gym you have to go into Witney, but what if you can't drive? (Man, 20's WB)

Men 'ego lift' at gyms and can injure themselves if they start and don't know how to lift weights....they see men similar to them in size and try and do the same without training....and get injured (Man, 20's WB)

The choice not to look after your health: motivation, interest and wanting to

Some men, fully aware of the information about healthy lifestyle either chose not to or lacked motivation to act.

I like a drink...whisky... and its "pies over matter"! with me....of course I know about healthy living and who to go to if need ...but I can't be bothered....enjoy life when you can... psoriasis of the liver will probably get me in the end! (Man, 50's WB)

I'm not interested in healthy lifestyles (Man, 20's WB)

What's missing in Carterton?

Comments on some things that men noted could be available in Carterton to support men more included:

Men's sheds are a great place to have conversations, there is one in Fairford but not Carterton (Man, 50's WB)

I don't think there is much support for men in Carterton, like a Well Man clinic where you could go and have a half hour chat or something...would be great (Man, 50's WB)

There is nothing for carers, or for people with dementia or Alzheimer's...it's very lonely, I've not had a break for years (Carer of husband)

There's not really a lot in Carterton, quite bad for me and health, there's not a lot going on (Man, 40's WB).

There's not enough for younger men to bring them together, especially if you don't like football or sport (Man, 50's, WB)

Access to health and care services

We also asked men about their interactions with health and care services. Older men, or those with health conditions were more able to comment on this topic.

Seeing the GP, receptionists and getting appointments

Comments echoed those heard more widely in the county, reflecting good care when you could access it, but some problems in getting appointments.

I am very happy with the treatment and haven't had any problems seeing a GP, and getting good follow up (Man, 75, WB)

A lot of staff have left, doctors have changed, staff have changed, I have no idea who anyone is there now, and the chemist has gone totally to pot...by and large it's almost impossible to get an appointment (Man, 70's WB)

Some surgeries you can't get the time slot to go, especially if you are working, and they won't give you an appointment (Man, 50's WB)

Every time you go you have to fight for what you want, and if you phone them you get a long recorded message about covid, about this and about that, and that highly trained staff will ask you a few questions, that's just a nonsense (Man, 70's WB)

I rang the GP the other day, I was number 32 in the queue ...when I am dead they will ring back...I am still waiting! (Man, 60, WB)

GP takes months....once you see them it's alright. (Man, 50's WB)

Since the pandemic it has become more challenging. It's hard to get to speak to someone at the GP generally...but they will call if concerned personally (Man, 50's WB)

Lack of understanding and communication about the role of receptionists in providing triage was highlighted.

Some receptionists think they are doctors, they keep asking you 'what's wrong with you?' but its personal and its none of their business. I don't want to explain myself to a receptionist, they are not a doctor and they hang up on you and tell you, you're rude if you say its personal...why don't they just take it at that? (Man, 50's WB)

Dentistry

Access to dentistry was also commented on, echoing again, issues identified across the county.

It's impossible to get a dentist, one dentist cancelled all appointments as a dentist down, but still have got private dentists. It's a waste of time and money going for a check-up, but then they sent an email saying I am off their books (Man, 70's WB)

Was quoted £800 for a bad tooth, in the end went to another dentist who were brilliant and told me what was wrong and it only cost £20...no fuss, no nonsense (Man, 70's WB)

As we spoke to 31 men, we also heard comments from individuals about their circumstances and views about health services based on individual experience. These are included as follows:

- **Digital exclusion**
 - *Getting hold of health people if you don't have a phone or internet is rubbish, it's 'internetism' it's ageism! If you haven't got the internet you are at a disadvantage, I've had to help my dad every time otherwise he's lost.*
 - *Older people never had internet and lots never had a telephone, especially in villages, social media is the same problem...and that's where a lot of stuff is, you need things in shops and in buildings to advertise for people to see (Man, 50's WB)*
- **Getting to Oxford for hospital care**
 - *Travelling from Carterton to The John Radcliffe in Oxford is a nightmare, I had to leave at 7.30 for a 9 a.m. appointment, getting through the A40 - traffic jam is bad. Parking is also difficult, ... but I was late for my appointment (Man, 75 WB)*
 - *The bus to Oxford hospital takes hours (Man, 70's WB)*
- **Follow up care at home**

One comment highlighted some of the challenges of living alone, and being elderly, when needing additional support following an operation

It's quite difficult if you live alone, I've had various health problems, and went to hospital but they said they couldn't do the operation as they discovered I had nobody at home to look after me ... it's not possible for anyone to stay and I don't have any close relatives in the area, I've got friends but like me they are old and they wouldn't be capable... I had the op and a friend gave me a lift home. it was meant to be arranged that the district nurse would come to change dressing, but it didn't work out... they arranged a nurse but only once a week, and sometimes it worked sometimes it didn't, which meant I was wearing the same night and day for a week - if they even came..... (Man, 70's, WB)

- **Other health support**

Lack of podiatry was also noted by one.

Another problem is cutting your toenails, I used to go to podiatry in Witney, but they are slowing the service down and in Covid they didn't see us, so I haven't had an appointment for ages, it's difficult, podiatry would be great if I could access a service like that...I am on their list, and they say they will get in touch, but it's been months, and my nails would be six inches long if I hadn't managed to do a bit (Man, 75, WB)

- **Housing expansion**

Some commented on the pressure of a growing population on services.

In Carterton the expansion of housing is a concern, and how they will keep up with support and services for people, I don't know (Man, 70's WB)

Everywhere is getting so big now, I used to live in a village but now it's like a city...you go to the GP and its full of timewasters with coughs and colds, lots of people going for stupid things (Man, 50's WB)



4. Appendix

Background information about men and men's health

National: data on men

- Men and especially men of working age are less likely to follow up physical and mental health concerns, and access health checks and screening or support.
- Nationally, men have a shorter life expectancy than women and are more likely to die from heart disease, be overweight or obese and commit suicide.
- Men are more likely to smoke and to drink alcohol to hazardous levels.
- For example, 67% of men are overweight or obese and yet only 10-20% of those on NHS weight loss programmes are men (Men's Health Forum).

- Workplaces, voluntary groups and health and care services that engage effectively with men can help improve their health and wellbeing and reduce illness and premature mortality.

Oxfordshire: data on men

- The gap in male life expectancy is 11 years between the most prosperous areas in Oxfordshire compared with the most deprived (Oxfordshire JSNA, 2022).
- The three leading causes of death among men in Oxfordshire in 2019–21 were:
 - Cancer: 24% for men
 - Heart disease: 9%

With dementia and Alzheimer's making the third leading cause of death

- The highest rates of **preventable mortality** found in males by district (2018–20) were in Oxford City and West Oxfordshire (JSNA 2022)

(Oxfordshire JSNA, 2022)

- The prevalence of cancer and depression in Oxfordshire in 2020–21 were each above the national average. The average level of anxiety in Oxfordshire has remained above the England average, and mental health referrals continue to increase.
- The Smoking Toolkit Study (July 2021) shows people from manual occupations are significantly more likely to be smokers than those from professional/clerical occupations (20% vs 11.5%). Out of a total of 114,200 people in manual occupations in Oxfordshire, an estimated 22,700 are smokers (JSNA Bitesize- Smoking and Inequalities. 2022). 12.1% of men in Oxfordshire were smokers in 2019.
- 1.5% of males in Oxfordshire are dependent on alcohol compared to 0.5% of females, with higher rates noted in younger males aged 18–34 (Oxfordshire Drugs and Alcohol Needs Assessment 2018–19).
- Of people in Oxfordshire accessing access weight loss support with Achieve Oxfordshire only 15% are men, compared to 85% women using the service 3 out of 10 people in the county do not meet the physical activity guidelines (Oxfordshire insight – healthy weight story map 2022).
- 62.9% of adults over 18 are classified as overweight or obese in West Oxfordshire.

Carterton insights

- Overall health in Carterton is better than average for England with the exception of one Public Health indicator – deaths from all causes (for men

and women), and all ages (Standardised Mortality Ratio) – shows results statistically worse than the England average.

- 'In 2018-19, the prevalence of diabetes recorded by Broadshires Health Centre in Carterton was below the England average and above the Oxfordshire average'.
- 'The prevalence of recorded depression was almost double the Oxfordshire average and over double the England average' (Source: Oxfordshire Insight: Carterton Community profile of Health and Wellbeing evidence, Updated March 2020).

The role of prevention

Many elements of disease and poor health are preventable.

Only 20% of personal health outcomes are related to access to quality health care. 30% of health outcomes are linked to behavioural factors such as diet, physical activity, smoking, and alcohol use.

The remaining 40% outcomes are related to social, cultural and economic factors, and 10% to environmental factors- such as attitudes, economic factors, cost of living, employment, housing, and environmental exposures. These influences are stronger in more deprived areas.

These factors are an important influence on health and local disease patterns and can be mainly avoided through tailored action and preventive health measures. Prevention is at the heart of Oxfordshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2018-23) and a cornerstone of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board's (BOB ICB) emerging strategy and Oxfordshire's place-based focus.

References:

Active Oxfordshire <https://www.activeoxfordshire.org/>

Achieve Oxfordshire <https://www.achieveoxfordshire.org.uk/>

Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) <https://www.bucksoxonberksw.icb.nhs.uk/>

Carterton Town Council <https://www.facebook.com/CartertonTC/>

JSNA Bitesize Health and Wellbeing Facts and Figures, June 2022 Smoking and Inequalities Oxfordshire Insight <https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2022 https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/system/files/documents/JSNA2022_Full_Oct22.pdf

Oxfordshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-23

https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/constitution/oxfordshirejoint_hwbstrategy.pdf

Livewell Oxfordshire with local groups and resources

<https://livewell.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

Men's Health Forum and manifesto <https://www.menshealthforum.org.uk/>

<https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>

Men's Health in Oxford (2018) Report by Healthwatch Oxfordshire and East Oxford United Football Club. <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/report/mens-health-2018/>

MOSES (Multi Operator Self Exclusion Scheme). Launched in 2016 MOSES is a free service for users who want to control their gambling by choosing to self-exclude from multiple land-based bookmakers in Great Britain. Moses is operated by a not-for profit company <https://self-exclusion.co.uk/how-the-scheme-works/>

5 Ways to Wellbeing https://www.health-in-mind.org.uk/resources/5_ways_to_wellbeing



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