

Gender Affirmation survey

Peoples' experiences of using local
health services

About us

Healthwatch Staffordshire is the independent voice of local people, championing quality health and social care and ensuring that the patient voice is heard in Staffordshire.

If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services in your area, we want to hear about your experiences. We are independent and have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We do this in a variety of ways. Our engagement workers spend time in the community to speak with residents about their experiences. We attend local community events and meetings. We also encourage people to feedback their experiences through our website or to contact us on our free phone number. We have a range of volunteers who work with us who share the same commitment to improving local services.

Healthwatch Staffordshire is independent of any other organisation, but we work in partnership with health and social care services and voluntary organisations to signpost residents to appropriate services. We have an active social media presence to promote our work and updates of local services.

We do regular surveys to look at specific areas of interest. These are always instigated by issues raised by the public.

We are passionate and driven to make sure that all people from our local population of Staffordshire have a voice.

Summary

Community engagement during the pandemic was difficult. The lifting of restrictions was greatly welcomed by Healthwatch Staffordshire as we could once again meet face to face with residents.

One of our first engagement events was at Stoke Pride. We were confident that this event would attract people from the Newcastle area and Staffordshire Moorlands as well as other parts of Staffordshire. Combined with the knowledge that many of the health and social care providers cross over between the County and Stoke on Trent, we felt it was a fantastic opportunity not to be missed. Our colleagues from Healthwatch Stoke on Trent were unable to join us so we were able to signpost Stoke residents to their organisation.

Armed with little more than a pop-up banner and boundless enthusiasm two Healthwatch Staffordshire Engagement Officers attended Stoke Pride 2022.



It was at this event that we spoke with a resident of Staffordshire who was experiencing difficulties with aspects of their health care as they were on the waiting list for gender reassignment. This was the starting point for our investigation as it was apparent that other people were having the same negative experiences.

A short survey was designed to gain further insight into peoples' experiences of going through **gender affirmation**. This was distributed via various social media platforms and other public events were planned.

Issues that were raised by residents regarding their gender affirmation journey were:

- Lack of knowledge in Primary Care;
- Long waiting times to be seen by specialist care and the impact this has on individuals' health and wellbeing.

Method

As a result of listening to the public we wanted to hear more about peoples' experiences of being transgender in relation to their health care and their wellbeing and what, if any, small local interventions could be put in place to help.

There is a plethora of research available which shows that people who are transgender suffer social disadvantages and discrimination in a variety of settings. Evidence also suggests that they are more likely to experience discrimination in a healthcare setting (1).

Our findings showed that residents didn't have support whilst waiting for an appointment at one of the seven at Gender Affirmation Clinics in England (2), and there was a lack of knowledge within GP practices which contributed to a poor experience.

No specific data is available in the UK or locally to determine the number of transgender people. (3) We therefore didn't know what response rate we would get locally.

A survey was designed with open questions. This was sent to various key contacts within the LGBTQ+ community and shared within these groups. It was sent to large local employers including, Staffordshire County Council, Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust (MPFT), Support Staffordshire, and Staffordshire Police's LGBTQ group. It was advertised on Healthwatch Staffordshire's website and social media channels. Engagement Officers attended Lichfield Pride and Chase Pride where the survey was completed, and semi structured interviews conducted. We also attended Freshers

Fayres at Newcastle and Stafford colleges, where surveys were completed via a link to a QR code.

The survey was open for 4 months.

A total of 31 people took part in the survey.



Findings

If you have seen a GP about gender affirmation, what was the experience like?

Of the respondents who answered this question and had seen their GP, 4 had had a positive experience, 3 a mixed experience, and for 8 people the experience was negative. Responses included:



Difficult. GP's seem to be more concerned with their own experiences rather than helping you. I even had one GP refuse to prescribe me testosterone despite the shared care plan offered by my GIC because she hadn't done it before and didn't feel comfortable doing so.

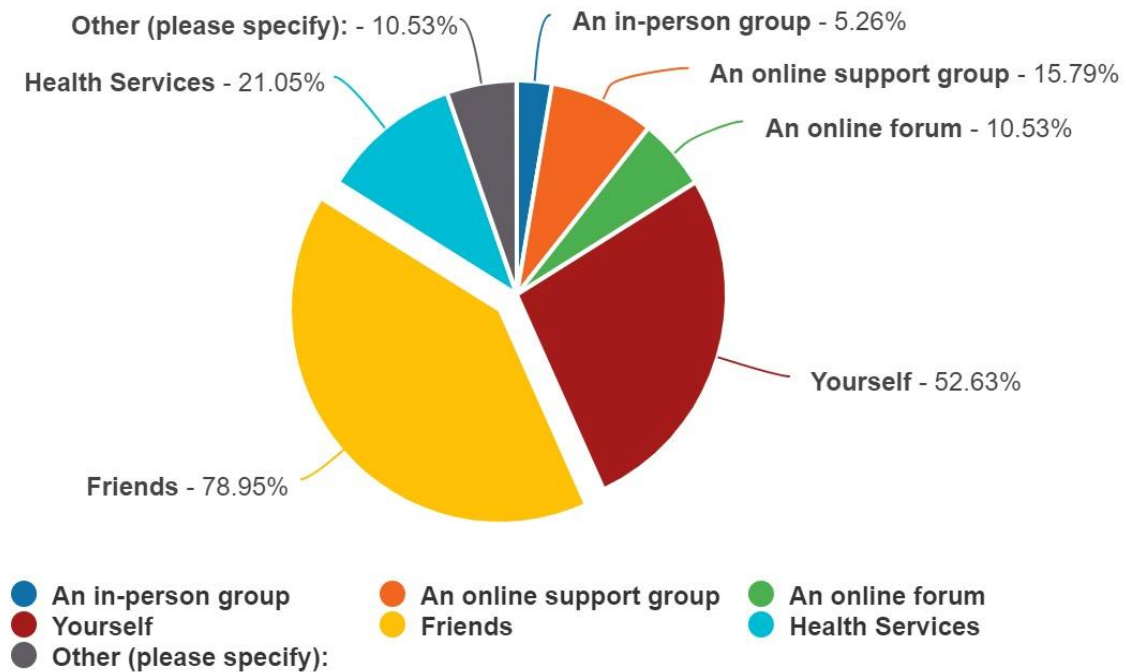
It was good overall and very accepting

GP was extremely help and did everything she could. However nurses and receptionist (not all) were not good, one of them continued to misgender me on several occasions

I found that I had to be completely knowledgeable about all the protocol and such as my GP knew nothing about the process. They were co-operative after checking that I was actually correct.

The GP didn't know what to do, they had to send me away until they found out how to refer me. The surgery also keeps defaulting my prefix to MX instead of Miss.

Are you having any support from the following (please tick all that apply)?



Respondents to the survey gained most of their support from friends, with only 21.05% getting support from recognised Health Services.

The wait times to be seen at Gender Affirmation Clinics is often years. Some of the people surveyed had been waiting since 2018 and had yet to be seen.

‘I feel like I’ve been waiting for ages and I haven’t heard anything back which is effecting me a lot as I can’t get the changes I need to be happy and comfortable in my own body, I feel like I’ve just been forgotten’

Have you been told how long the waiting list is?

Gender Affirmation Clinics did not keep people informed about their waiting times once they had been referred to them. When a specific question had been asked about waiting times half or respondents said they had been told how long the waiting list was, and half had not. However, respondents had been referred to different clinics.

How is being on the waiting list for the Tavistock and Portman, or another GDC, affecting your health and lifestyle?

All respondents that replied gave negative feedback which:

- *‘Detrimental effect on mental and physical health.’*
- *‘...I feel like I’ve just been forgotten’.*
- *‘...Forces people to go private and gets them in debt’*
- *‘Making me anxious due to long wait times.’*
- *‘This has badly affected my mental health and staggered my journey for 3 years,’*
- *‘It has left me with anxiety and depression. I have had little to no support whilst being on this list.’*

What support do you feel that you need, that you are not getting? Amongst the responses were:

- *Respondents felt they wanted more support, and knowledge, from the medical community, which included GPs;*
- *'Support on knowing I can get surgery in the future without people doubting my identity and rights';*
- *Having more support from the NHS so they didn't have to have private treatment;*
- *People mentioned wanting more understanding;*
- *'Clear timescales... to make things go smoother. Significant retraining in being inclusive';*
- *Weight loss support so they can access surgery;*
- *Official support networks for non-binary people, more social and trans groups;*
- *Regular contact with the GIC;*
- *'...Support in accessing general medical care because the fact I'm trans is always written in my notes even when it isn't relevant....';*
- *Therapy.*

Conclusions

The majority of the respondents had seen a GP about their gender identity. The experiences people had was mixed. Some described as excellent, others as poor. The results highlighted a lack of consistency from GP's. The theme that emerged was limited knowledge from doctors and other staff within the practice (receptionists/nurses) around referral to transgender clinics and understanding of treatments.

In addition to mixed experiences from GP's, the respondents describe a negative effect on their mental health and wellbeing whilst waiting for appointments from Gender Dysphoria Clinics. The wait to be seen at such clinics is very long, often years. At a local level we acknowledge that nothing can be done to reduce these wait times, however more local support for individuals who are waiting to be seen is needed. An established process for supporting individuals waiting to be seen would help prevent a deterioration in their wellbeing and mental health.

Recommendations

- **Our first recommendation would be that further research needs be carried out with GP's to gain insight into their experiences of treating patients requiring gender reassignment. Although figures are unavailable on how many people seek advice from GP's on**

gender reassignment it is estimated to be low but increasing. Research is warranted from a GPs perspective.

- Our second recommendation would be the development of a training package to support GP practices. This would need to be developed from people within the transgender community and at a local level. This would bring together their experiences and how best practice can be developed and shared. This training would include resources on where patients can be signposted to for health and wellbeing support whilst waiting for appointments at a Gender Dysphoria Clinic. This leads on to our third recommendation.
- The development of a specific care pathway where patients are given details of resources locally to support them.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to all those who helped developed the questionnaire and disseminated it within your own communities.

Thank you to everyone who took time to complete the survey.

NHS England are currently running a large scale consultation on gender dysphoria on young people. We look forward to the findings.

References

1. Healthcare Experiences of Transgender Adults: An Integrated Mixed Research Literature Review. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6502664/>
2. The 7 specialist Gender Dysphoria Clinics operating in England are located in London, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Northamptonshire, Nottingham, and Exeter. See the NHS Website 'How to find an NHS gender dysphoria clinic' www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/how-to-find-an-nhs-gender-identity-clinic/ and Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust Website 'Gender Identity Clinic' www.nhft.nhs.uk/gic/
3. 'Trans People in the UK' from the Government Equalities Office https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721642/GEO-LGBT-factsheet.pdf

Please note:

We are not experts in health and social care or professional researchers. This is not intended as an academic piece of research. It is a small-scale study into the experiences of transgender people within Staffordshire.