



What you told us

Trends in feedback July to December 2022

Introduction

Healthwatch Northumberland is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We are a listening organisation working across Northumberland, interested in what people like about services and what can be improved.

We act on what people are saying, sharing their views with those who have the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area and record this as 'signposting'.

Feedback

Between July and December 2022, we received feedback from 368 individuals from talking to people at face-to-face engagement events, telephone calls, emails, our website, social media, and other sources. This was much more than the previous six months total of 150 people.

The feedback we have had in the past six months has been around two big issues:

1. Accessing GPs and arranging appointments (29% of all feedback received in July - December)

2. Accessing NHS dentists (20% of all feedback received in July - December)

Together, these two areas have comprised almost half the feedback we received in this period (49%).

The feedback regarding arranging appointments for GPs varied between frustration about having to wait a long time on the telephone to get hold of anyone, to concerns about not getting to see a doctor when the patient asked to see one.

Feedback regarding accessing NHS dentistry has been dominated by the planned closure of Castlegate Dental Practice in Berwick-upon-Tweed which took place in September 2022 but was well trailed in advance.

This caused a lot of disruption and worry for the dental practice's former patients and many of these patients still haven't found another dental practice that will take them on as NHS patients.

We have had feedback from patients who have registered with NHS dentists in the Scottish Borders and The Eyemouth Dental Practice reported that at the time of the announcement their phone was ringing 'a hundred times a day' with patients wanting to register.

Our concern is that people and families who are on low incomes or on benefits may have no dental care as a result of not being able to pay for private treatment, or being able to afford transport costs to the nearest NHS dentists.

A small number of anecdotal reports have come to our attention where some people have resorted to self-dentistry to deal with their dental issues.

We continue to work with NHS England Commissioning and local elected members to find a solution to this seemingly intractable issue. As of the time of writing a second NHS dental practice in Berwick has announced its forthcoming closure at the end of January 2023 which will compound the issue even further.

Trends

Despite this, the trends in comments have been for the proportion of positive sentiments to increase over the half-year and the proportion of negative comments to decrease (see Fig. 1 below).

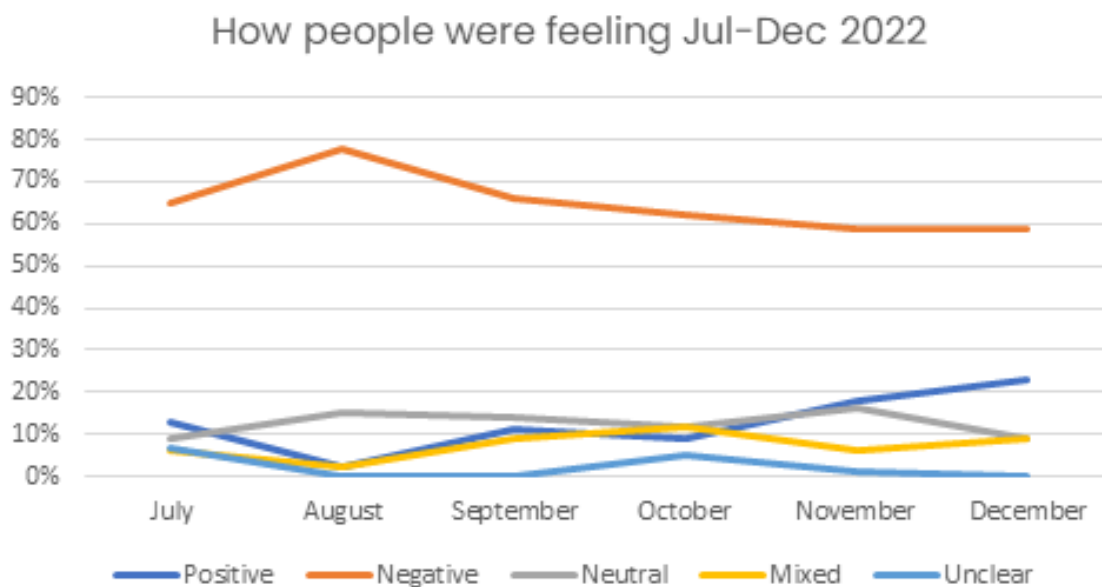


Fig. 1. Trends of proportions of sentiments shared

This would suggest that people were feeling more positive around the provision of health and social care services as the year progressed, despite the consistency of feedback about GP access, and about finding a dentist who is willing to treat patients on the NHS.

Feedback

We heard from a woman whose husband was in hospital for a cancer operation and treatment last year. The medical treatment and care was really good but she feels there was a lack of signposting to support services that help patients with cancer and their families. This was despite a support service being based in the hospital, which she only became aware of by chance. This may be because the ward wasn't a dedicated oncology ward, but she feels it would be useful for hospital staff to be able to signpost people or give out leaflets as the support offered was helpful.

Cramlington and Bedlington resident.

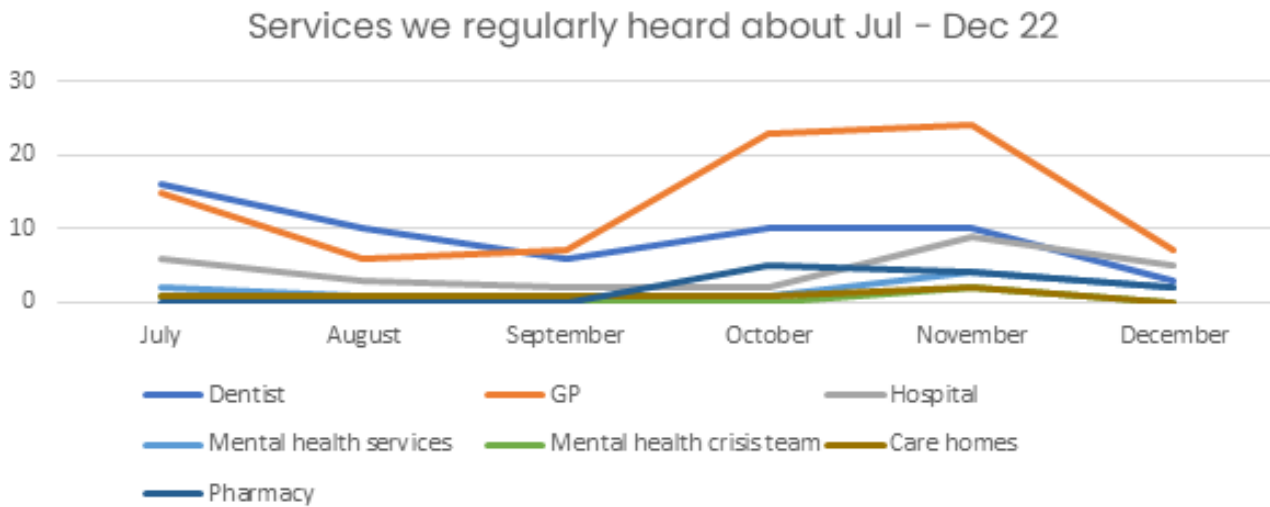


Fig. 2. Trends in contacts we regularly heard about

Over the six-month period we heard regularly about seven services, as shown in Figure 2. These were:

- Dentists
- GP services
- Hospitals (both inpatients and outpatients)
- Mental health services
- Mental Health Crisis Team
- Care homes
- Pharmacies

Of these seven services, GP services featured the most in the feedback we were getting, although the majority of the feedback we received was from single contacts each about a different GP practice.

'Hospital' covered all departments and there were no specific departments that featured strongly in feedback over this period.

Almost all these seven services saw an upsurge in the number of contacts we received in the autumn after a quieter period over the summer months. All services saw a downturn in incidences of feedback in December due to only collecting data for the first three weeks in the month prior to closing for the Christmas holidays.

Geographical spread

We heard regularly from all parts of the county with no locality dominating. The exception was in July when North Northumberland had a spike in respondents' numbers due to the announcement of the impending closure of Castlegate Dental Practice in Berwick-upon-Tweed.

Demographics

Figures 3 to 6 give the demographic breakdown of our respondents over the past six months. Extrapolating from the data it would appear our 'typical' respondent is a white, non-disabled woman in her later years.

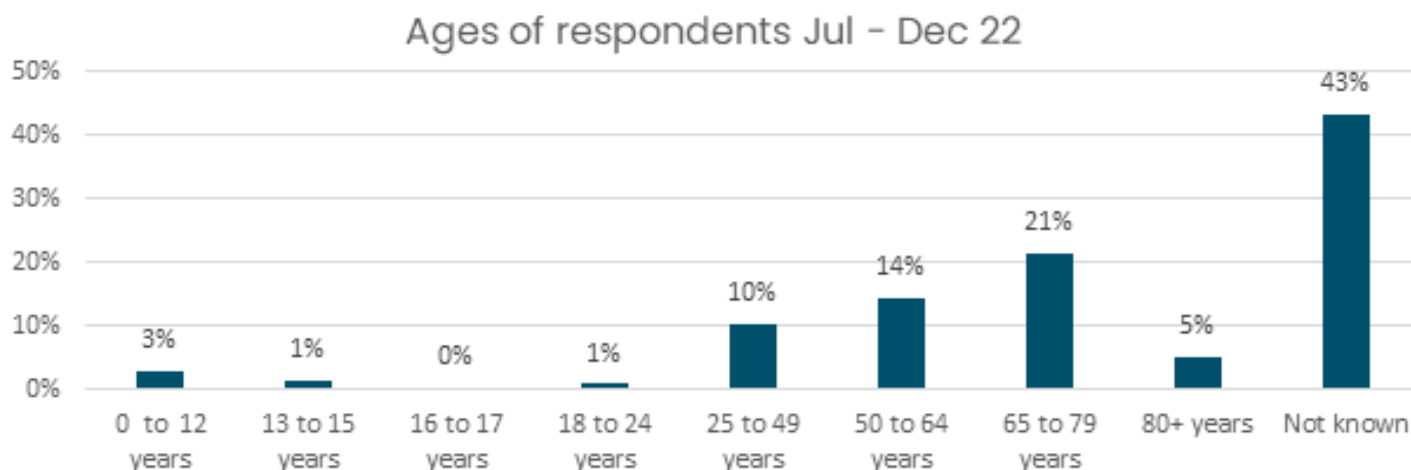


Fig. 3. Breakdown of respondents' ages July - December 2022
(we did hear from one 16-17 year old but the graph has rounded this down to 0%)

Case study

A patient contacted us and told us he gets very anxious when going to medical appointments. He needs support from his wife who is his carer. She helps with dressing/undressing and toileting; he is also unsteady on his feet, walks with crutches, and needs a wheelchair on arrival at the hospital.

He had been refused transport by the Patient Transport Service. We provided him with information on how to contact the appeals service - the appeal was upheld and the patient was able to have transportation to his appointment.

Tynedale resident.

Gender of Respondents Jul - Dec 22

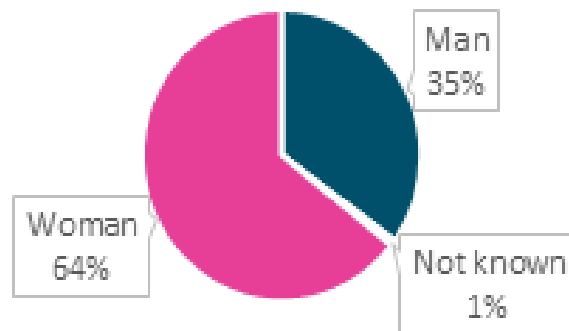


Fig. 4. Breakdown of respondents' gender July - December 2022

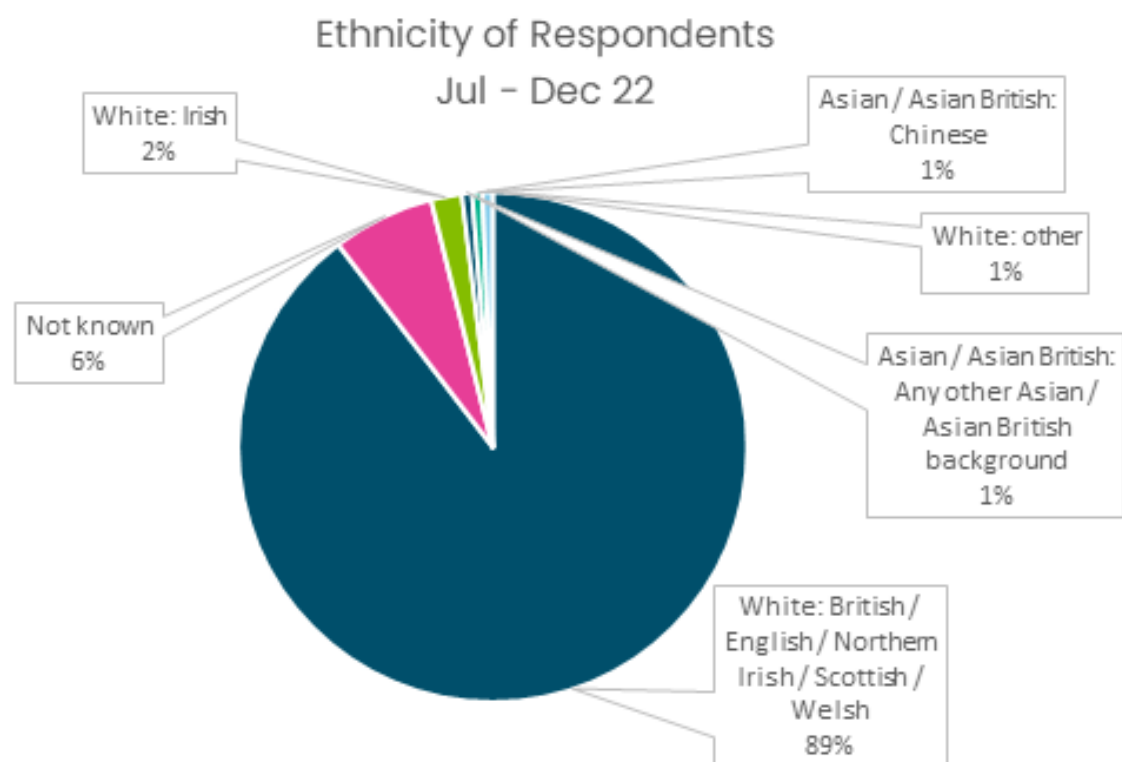


Fig. 5. Breakdown of respondents' ethnicity July - December 22

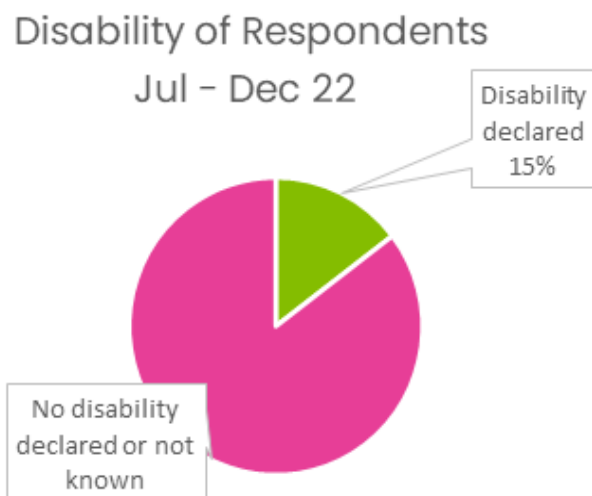


Fig. 6. Proportion of respondents who had a disability July – December 2022

Insights

We are reaching people in all parts of the county, despite the skew to North Northumberland in July, due to the announcement of NHS dentists' closure in Berwick-upon-Tweed.

We are hearing from some groups of people at a higher rate than the county's own demographic distribution e.g. in ethnicity and disabilities. However, we still need to work on reaching a higher proportion of men, of any age, and young people, of all genders, under the age of 25 years old.

Case study

A patient called our Signposting and Information Service and said they were searching for support with their mental health. They had discussed their health with their GP but felt they were no further forward in finding help. We signposted the caller to Qwell, an online mental health resource for adults, and encouraged further contact with the GP practice for support. The caller had not heard of Qwell and was happy to investigate further.

North Northumberland resident.

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