



**healthwatch**  
County Durham



We listen to what the people of County Durham have to say about health and social care services.

We act on what we hear, share it with service providers and commissioners and influence changes for the future.

Want to know more?  
Speak to a member of our team on:  
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Or visit:  
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Have your say on health and social care in County Durham

# Over to You

Finding out what is important to you about health and care

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County Durham

## About us

### Healthwatch County Durham



This report has been produced by Healthwatch County Durham. We are an independent organisation whose aim is to help people get the best out of their local health and social care services, whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow. Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience.

As a statutory watchdog, our role is to ensure that local decision makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care so that those who buy (commissioners) and provide our services (NHS Trusts, GPs, the voluntary sector and independent providers) can benefit from what people tell us.

The Healthwatch network consists of 152 Healthwatch organisations across each of the local authority areas in England. It also has a national body called Healthwatch England based in London.

For more information about us and what we do, please see click on this link: [Healthwatch County Durham](#)

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## Summary



During the Covid-19 pandemic, we were not able to get out and about to talk to people face-to-face about the things that were important to them in health and care services. This year, as things got back to normal and it was safer, we attended events around the county to meet up with the public to hear their views.

We attended 14 events from August to December 2022 and 165 people provided feedback to our questionnaire. This report summarises what we heard as well as highlighting some of the things you had concerns about.

At each event we gave people the opportunity to speak to us about any issues they had regarding services they accessed.

<p>We attend <b>14</b> events across the county</p> 	 <p><b>165</b> people shared their views</p>	<p>What did people tell us?</p> <p><b>Mental Health Support</b> was most important to the people we spoke to</p> 
 <p>Lots of people told us that it was difficult to get a face-to-face appointment with their doctor</p> 	<p>Healthwatch has signposted <b>73</b> people to the support they need so far this year (April – Dec 2022)</p> 	

## Introduction

Hearing what people in County Durham think about the health and care services they use is an important part of the work we do here at Healthwatch. We then use that information to decide which topics we are going to investigate further. This becomes part of our workplan for the coming year. When we spoke to people at the 14 events we attended this year, we asked them the following question about the current topics we are researching.

What services do you think are most in need of improvement?

- Mental health
- GP services
- Hospital discharge
- Hospital waiting times
- Visiting care homes
- Dental services

We also asked them why they had made their choice.

We will share this information with the people who provide the services.

## Method

We attended events across County Durham and we captured the views of people of varying ages.



We provided information about what Healthwatch does and how we can help people.

At the events, we talked to people generally about health and care services and, when needed, we also provided specific advice and signposting information.

We also gave the people we spoke to, the opportunity to complete our short questionnaire about our current workplan.

## Where did we go?

- The Summer Fayre at Pioneering Care Partnership in Newton Aycliffe
- The REfuse Café summer drop-in at Chester le Street
- The Fresher Event at Bishop Auckland College
- New College Durham
- A volunteer meeting at Healthwatch
- Two community roadshows at Newton Aycliffe
- General engagement at Staindrop
- Carers rights event in Bishop Auckland
- Carers rights event in Consett
- Carers right event in Seaham
- Carers right event in Chester le Street
- REfuse café winter drop-in at Chester le Street
- Newton Aycliffe Youth Centre



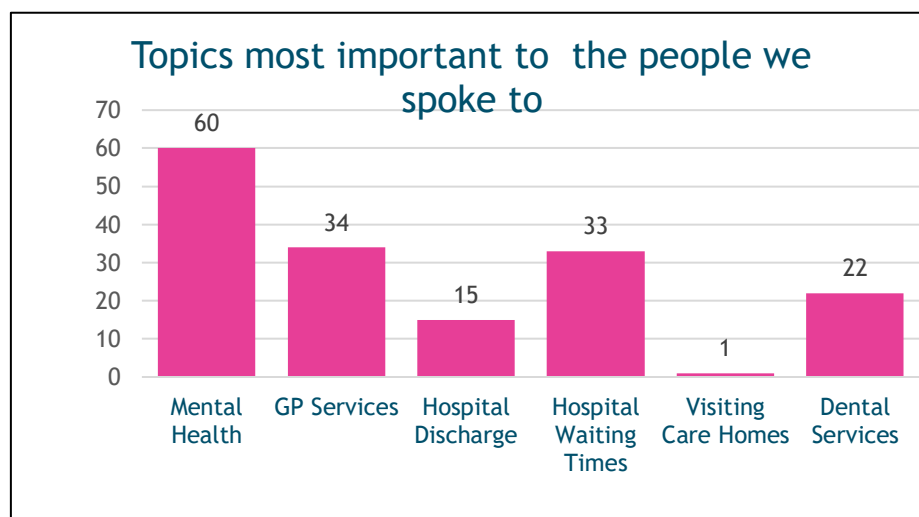
## Demographics

Although we didn't target specific groups, we did take the opportunity during Carers Week to attend some of their events taking place across the county. We also attended events where people would have the opportunity to talk to us and we tried to meet with a range of different age groups. We did not collect demographic data.



## Findings

From the 165 forms completed you can see below the priorities people identified on our existing workplan.



As well as their preferences, we asked them if they could provide reasons for their choice and below are some of the key themes:

- We received the most comments about Mental Health and in particular waiting times for referrals. People told us that more needs to be done to improve the service as in the meantime, people are struggling to cope. Common themes from young people at a Freshers event was that there is a lack of information out there and people don't know where to go to find it.
- We also received several comments on Dental services. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a shortage of dental practices taking on new patients. Dentists are behind in their treatment plans and are not able to see patients for routine check-ups. Some people told us that they have been waiting for over two years to be seen.

**'Mental health is still a difficult subject for a lot of people. Making services easier to access could take away some stigma'**

'Just accessing the GP would be a benefit. The surgeries are empty, but you cannot get face-to-face appointments'

- People are frustrated with GP services and told us it was hard to get an appointment, especially face-to-face.
- A couple of people told us that family members were kept in hospital longer than they need to be before being discharged, which caused distress to the patients and their families.

## Conclusions

- Overall, the findings from all the engagement events show that improvements need to be made to mental health services and to the length of time that clients wait to be seen. From the previous work we have done, we are aware of the issues in accessing the right services and will continue to share this with the mental health groups we attend.
- Through our signposting service we are aware of the frustrations from patients that are not able to be seen by their dentist during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was reiterated during the engagement events. We will continue to share the list of frequently asked questions about NHS dentistry on our website and to signpost people to 111 to help them.
- Patients feel that as we are through the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, they should be able to see a GP face to face. Whilst the number of face-to-face appointments has increased, some people are still not able to access them. We will share this information with the Head of Primary Care Services. We will also continue to monitor GP practice websites and automated telephone messages to ensure the information provided to patients is up to date, relevant, clear and easy to understand.

## Next steps

- We will continue to share our intelligence about mental health issues, at the appropriate meetings we attend.
- As part of our workplan priorities for 2022/23, we will look further into the experiences of people being discharged from hospital and into the experiences of people accessing GP services. We will share our findings with the relevant providers to improve services.
- NHS England provides regular updates to local Healthwatch's and, as access to dental services change, we will use a range of methods eg website, social media, to pass on any important messages.
- We continue to attend events across the county to hear what the public think about health and care services.

## Acknowledgments

Thank you to the organisations who allowed us to attend their events and the people who took the time to share their thoughts.

