



Healthwatch Insight Report

Quarter 2, July – September 2022

What people across southeast London are telling us
about their experience of services

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Introduction

This South East London (SEL) Healthwatch Quarterly Insight report provides an overview of the key themes identified in relation to community feedback for the period **1st July to 30th September 2022**. This data comes from a range of sources including calls and emails from service users, meetings with groups of service users or advocates, online reviews, and outreach and engagement events.

Local Healthwatch in south east London

Local Healthwatch is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We exist to ensure that people are at the heart of care. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved, and we share their views with those with the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area. We have the power to ensure that the government and those running services hear people's voices. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them. Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people. In south east London there are six independent Healthwatch which are coterminous with the six boroughs. They are Healthwatch Bexley, Healthwatch Bromley, Healthwatch Greenwich, Healthwatch Lewisham and Healthwatch Southwark.

With the passage of the Health and Care Act 2022 and the statutory arrangements to support integration, [South East London ICS \(Integrated Care System\)](#) is required to publish, strategic priorities, a strategy and a five-year forward view. A key part of this is to take an open and inclusive approach to strategy development, involving partners, stakeholders and communities, and utilising local data and insights. To support this process and ensure local insight and voices are central to the strategy, Healthwatch across southeast London continue to report on people's current experiences of the health and care system, compiling current insight across the area and identifying any key gaps to be addressed.

This report will be shared across the ICS and at NHS South east London ICB boards and committees. Healthwatch across SEL have shared these insights with the relevant providers and commissioners, in their boroughs, and have also organised informal meetings with partners to discuss peoples' concerns and identify actions to take forward.

Dentistry

Access

Dentistry was again one of the most common services mentioned during this quarter. In particular, access to dental care has continued to be an issue raised in Q2 2022 by southeast London residents. Lack of access to dentists providing routine NHS-funded dental treatment has led to people being left with no option but to pay for private dentistry, with those unable to afford to go private being left without access to the treatment they need:



"I have been forced to find a private dentist as I was unable to find an NHS one".

"I have had a tooth ache getting progressively worse over the past 2 years. I have attempted periodically during this time to get registered with an NHS dentist to no avail. I have called 6+ dentists in the past week and they have all told me they are not taking on patients. I can no longer chew on the left side on my mouth. NHS 111 tells me it is not an emergency and to get in touch with my local NHS dentist in the next few days. I am at a loss with how to proceed."



For others, access to treatment has involved long waiting times and cancellations:



"I waited over a year for an appointment to remove an impacted wisdom tooth".

"I've been waiting since April and still heard nothing".

"Cancelled my appointment without telling me".



Some service users have reported paying for treatment abroad as dentistry in the UK no longer seemed to be an option for them:



"I went abroad to take out my wisdom teeth...I tried here many times but no luck, so I decided to do it somewhere else cheaper".



Dental Treatment

Again, similar to what we reported in Q1, for the people able to access NHS dental services, they appear largely happy with the services offered. Overall, dentists are providing excellent treatment during appointments and patients are having positive experiences with their treatment. For example, we have been told they feel put at ease and comfortable during dental procedures.



"I can't thank my dentist enough - exceptional service! I'm [a] very nervous person when it comes to dentist appointments as I was traumatised when I was child. He was so friendly, compassionate, professional and skilful. I felt safe in his care and trust him completely! He informed me of every move".

"...They are so friendly and kind".

"Excellent service and level of care".



We hear that staff at dental practices offer detailed information regarding different treatments, and helpful dental advice for patients to implement at home. They have been described as well-mannered, helpful, knowledgeable, and professional. Many patients can access the information and advice they need at their dental surgery.

NHS England have written to Healthwatch to provide and update on the planning and commissioning of NHS dentistry, updating on plans for a Phase 3 following two previously unsuccessful rounds of commissioning. Th plan aims to attract dentists to apply for NHS contracts in defined areas of need.

To explore further the experiences and challenges of communities Healthwatch Southwark has launched a local survey - [Your feedback on NHS Dental Services Access](#).

GP Services

GP services remain one of the most commented upon services, by southeast London residents, during Q2 of 2022.

Access

The most frequent comment comments received was about access to GP services. There were some positive experiences reported, with some people having no difficulty obtaining appointments with their GP and other practice staff:



“Great doctors and medical team. I can always get an appointment or call back when needed”



However, getting an appointment appears to be extremely difficult for many people across southeast London. This is regardless of the method used to obtain an appointment, including trying to book appointments online, on the phone, using apps, and even when physically visiting the GP practice to make an appointment. Some of this feedback is below.



General: “It’s always hard to get an appointment”

Phone: “I’ve made so many calls to try and get through to them on a Monday morning from 8 o’clock”

“Called this morning at 8.50am. All appointments for that day had gone. I was told the first available telephone appt to discuss my blood tests results would be in 11 days!! Primary care is broken.”

Econsult: “I was told to try Econsult but that’s only open between 8am and 12pm” and “I have made it clear in each Econsult form that I work

certain hours and cannot take calls until after a certain time and this is ignored every time... then I have to chase to get another appointment”

Online: “The reason why this place is bad now is because when you have a problem, and you ring up to see a doctor they refer you to the website which doesn’t work and is almost always down”

Apps: “There are no options or appointments available with Dr.IQ”

In person: “I’ve been there at 7.10am to be told the appointments have gone”



The inability to obtain an appointment with a GP has left some people feeling they have no choice but to visit an Urgent Care facility or A&E instead:



“Ended up calling 111, who have logged a complaint (“concern”) about the GP as they couldn’t get through to them, and then directed me to go to A&E instead because they couldn’t get any progress with the GP either”

“I had an issue booking a GP appointment. As a young mum, I had no other option but to go to A&E”

“I had surgery 4 weeks ago and have still not been able to see a GP! I ended being taken to hospital by ambulance. Called GP for a follow up, no appointments!”



Access to face-to-face appointments

People also expressed frustration at the inability to see a doctor for face-to-face appointments. Whilst the move to telephone appointments was understandable at the start of the pandemic and has been welcomed by many, some people are now increasingly frustrated by this way of working.



“My husband and I have been trying for a year to be seen face to face by a doctor for very concerning health issues without success”

"I don't understand why they don't offer face to face appointments anymore. Lockdown was over years ago"

"I haven't seen my doctor in over three years... I've only had phone appointments"



Staff attitudes

The attitudes of staff in GP practices were a theme this quarter with the feedback from people mixed, and with more positive comments received than in Q1:



"I spoke with one of the receptionists today over the phone. She was very helpful. She listened without interrupting and provided me with the best solution for what I called for. Very helpful"

"I've called the practice via the phone and the receptionist was quick and helpful to book me a phone consultation with the doctor and attentive to the situation"



People's negative experiences with GP reception staff, was also shared with us:



"The receptionist was very unsympathetic, abrupt and not interested in helping"

"Extremely rude reception. As a GP surgery worker myself, their attitude is just appalling, I have never seen anything like that"

"Rude reception staff that demand that I wear a mask or miss my appointment but yet they have theirs hanging off of their chin!"

"Truly disappointing and have finally decided to leave this practice as it's significantly impacting my mental health. The receptionist appears to be clueless; no one ever seems to know what they are actually doing and they all contradict each other"



People spoke positively of the care received from the healthcare professionals within GP surgeries, but we also received negative feedback on about interactions with GPs.



“Terrible patient care from reception but good doctors”

“There is no compassion or patient care shown at all. Each time we speak with them, we always hit a brick wall and it's almost like speaking with automated services - impervious and unwilling to be flexible and consider individual circumstance”

“One doctor in particular has been extremely dismissive of my concerns and did not listen to me when I was clearly very anxious about a health issue I was facing. I am going to ask next time that I am given another doctor to speak to as this has been consistently upsetting for me and I dread when I hear him phone me”

“Awful experience with doctor. His communication was awful and he seemed totally unsure what to do...”



People also fed back that the complaints process in some GP practices was not working as it should:



“They disbanded their patient feedback sessions and honestly don't care about your feedback. If you write a formal complaint via their website, the practice manager is supposed to reply to you, but they won't”

“I asked to complain and they said you have to contact xxx - no email address [was given to me]”



Hospitals

People also shared their experiences of hospital services during July to September 2022.

Treatment

There were mixed reviews regarding treatment experienced in hospitals. People living in Bromley commented on high standards of care in hospital, and some Lewisham residents noted that their local hospital was clean and presentable. Across SEL, where positive experiences of treatment at hospitals was fed back this was often linked to clinicians demonstrating good listening skills and answering people's questions.



"...it was an excellent consultation, the doctor I saw was very nice and informative and addressed all my concerns."

"The doctor put me at ease, answered my questions and performed a thorough eye test..."

"...The standard of care was excellent."



Some people expressed concerns about the standard of care, while recognising that hospital staff were stretched:

even



"Appalling care, staff stretched so much that they are not able to look after patients."

"Lack of after care. My grandad was left hours without a doctor coming in to check on him as the doctor had left the site."



Waiting times

Long waiting times were again the key issue raised by people attending hospitals.



"My sister-in-law was left for over 24 hours [in A&E] ..."

"12hrs in A&E. No x-ray or scans for severe abdominal pain. Sent home with pain killers"

“Went to A&E at 6pm on a Sunday, still here waiting to be seen at 1.42am Monday. Suspected appendix pain...It's disgusting how long a sick person has to wait in their supposedly urgent care department. There is nothing urgent about it... I would rather drive to miles away... in the future than attend this place again”

“Do not visit this A&E – 11 hour wait overnight”

“Yesterday, it was 6 hours of waiting to get a doctor to see you...”



Communication

People also shared the difficulties in communication with hospitals. This included hospitals sending important and time-sensitive information through the post leading to a missed appointment, difficulty getting through on the phone, and difficulty navigating websites for information and booking services.



“Thanks to the Royal Mail taking nearly a week to deliver a 1st Class letter from the hospital, I missed an appointment yesterday with the Oncology Consultant who is dealing with my prostate cancer. The hospital is trying to rearrange my appointment ASAP... It's not a great way for a hospital to arrange something this important with such short notice”

“I'm trying to work out the best time to go up for an X-ray (walk in) so there is minimal disruption to my working day. I've tried calling the imaging department 23 times today and the phone just gets cut off. I've also called the switchboard and the guy I spoke to didn't even know what the opening/closing times were”

“I needed to speak to someone in Ultrasound and gave up after 2 days of constant engaged tone”

“Just looked at the [Imaging department] website – extremely poor, almost useless information. I was expecting to find a booking service like they now do for blood tests. Oh no! Not impressed”



Children

People fed back on long waiting times for appointments, poor communication, and inadequate support and care provided by Health Visitors:



“They don't keep in touch. They didn't contact me to cancel an appointment... there is a huge communication gap”

“... the Health Visitor wasn't good; she didn't notice my 2 year old's eye problem”

“My two-year-old has developmental delay. We have been waiting for speech, and 7 language therapy since January. I called them many times, but they say they are short of staff, so we just have to wait”



Mental Health Services

Mental health services

The lack of mental health assessment, liaison, medication, and support in general from the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) was raised by service users in more than one borough across southeast London. People and communities would like to see better provision in this area:



“It would be good to have more mental health care services... I'd like to see more support groups and community centre activities. They should be advertised more too”



People fed back that concerns about their mental health are often raised initially with GPs, and there were mixed experiences of how GPs responded:



“Highly recommend [my GP], they dealt with my mental health issues for years incredibly well with lots of compassion”.

“The doctors don't care about women or mental health.”

“The doctor didn't listen or engage properly with any of my issues as they have no understanding of ADHD...”



Waiting times for appointments and for treatment were fed back as issues people experienced:



“There are obviously very experienced and knowledgeable people working here but sadly the waiting times for treatment, especially for eating disorder treatment are just outrageously too long causing serious damage to people's lives...”

“Placed on a 2 year waiting list with no communication. When finally contacted by someone she was rude and aggressive, shouting on the phone call!”



We received a positive comment on mental health services from a carer.



“My stepson... had lots of support by friendly staff. Despite some difficult times they stuck by him and made sure he was well cared for.”



References

The Healthwatch reports used in creating this quarterly summary are publicly available on our websites and include:

[Microsoft PowerPoint - Q2 PE Bromley Report 2022-2023](#)
([healthwatchbromley.co.uk](#))

[September 2022 Monthly Feedback Report \(general\).pdf](#)
([healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk](#))

[August 2022 Monthly Feedback report \(general\).pdf](#)
([healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk](#))

[July 2022 Feedback Report \(General version\) final.docx \(live.com\)](#)

[Quarterly Insights Report- 1st July - 30 September | Healthwatch Southwark](#)

[PowerPoint Presentation \(healthwatchlewisham.co.uk\)](#)

For further information relating to this report contact Folake Segun, Director SEL Healthwatch - folake@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk .



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