



Building Bridges: Annual Report 22–23

Connecting Brent residents
with the organisations that
serve them.

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"In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn't. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better."

Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director

Message from our Chair

This has been a year of growth and consolidation for Healthwatch Brent.

We have started to map patterns in the feedback and information we are getting from less well-heard groups within the borough. This allows us to tailor our recommendations more finely and to undertake more granular information gathering. The more we know, the better placed we are to advocate on your behalfs to local health and care providers.

This year we have worked closely with Romanian and Somali communities in Brent to identify and address access problems, and we have been continuing our scrutiny of GP services. Our overview of mental health provision in the borough, particularly for the young, revealed a number of issues which we have shared with larger organisations working within the sector. We are also funding dedicated community workers and volunteers who are working at grass roots level to improve inclusivity in all our processes.

Our new Strategic Plan will see us push harder, faster, and in concert with local community health groups, to improve outcomes across the borough. If you want to be a part of that conversation, and that conversation, why not join us as a volunteer?



Shyama Perera
Healthwatch Brent Chair

About us

Healthwatch Brent is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

That the people of Brent understand and can access health and social care, and that services are fit and fair for all communities.



Our mission

To understand our communities and their needs, logging and addressing their primary concerns.

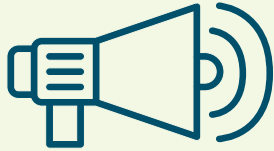


Our values

- We provide an independent voice that amplifies what we hear from our engagement work
- We will be fair, accessible, and accountable
- We will be creative, solutions focused partners – adding value to or leading service improvement
- We will be nimble – fast, flexible and active
- We collaborate and support other groups
- We connect and support communities so they can drive change locally, while we work at borough level
- We will be actively engaged with Brent's wide and diverse communities
- We will empower communities – not data mine, but build sustainable networks, skills and knowledge.
- We keep our finger on the pulse, identify key issues and amplifying them to decision makers
- We will provide a check and balance to ensure services are fit and fair

Year in review

Reaching out



1,097 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

430 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as access to dental care and how to make a complaint.

Making a difference to care

We published

7 reports

reports about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Experiences of accessing a GP in Brent

which highlighted the struggles people face accessing a GP appointment.



Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

20

outstanding volunteers who gave up 420 hours to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2022-23 we received

£128,159

which is 5% than the previous year.

We currently employ

4 staff

who help us carry out our work.

How we've made a difference this year

Spring



Recommendations to local GP practices have helped more residents get an appointment.



Visiting different community groups across Brent meant more people could speak up about their needs.

Summer



Teaming up with Healthwatch England, we called for improvements to accessible information for people with learning disabilities.



Our lectures and events reached hundreds of people every month, raising awareness about health inequalities.

Autumn



Our team visited local mental health in-patient wards and made suggestions to improve care. The service is acting on our recommendations.



Our community cancer event gave people the chance to learn about essential cancer screening and testing.

Winter



We worked with the local Maternity Voices Partnership to highlight long waiting times for antenatal appointments. The service is looking at how this can be improved.



We talked to different communities to understand their experiences of emergency care and shared a list of priorities to help develop the London Ambulance Service.

10 years of improving care

This year marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last ten years, people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. A big thank you to all our Healthwatch Heroes that have stepped up and inspired change. Here are a few of our highlights:

How have we made care better, together?

Access for all

We have been champions for improving access to information for people with learning disabilities, or sensory impairments.



Visiting care homes

From 2018 – 2019, Healthwatch Brent visited a number of care homes to ensure residents were being treated with dignity and respect.



GP access

Local residents tell us that GP access is their biggest concern – so we have pushed to keep it on the agenda.



Vaccine confidence

After we and other organisations called for an urgent response to hospital waiting lists, and better interim communication and support, the NHS set out a recovery plan to address the backlog.



NHS dentistry

We continued to voice public concerns that improvements to NHS dentistry are too slow, leaving thousands of people in pain.





Brent Health Hero



Celebrating a hero in our local community.

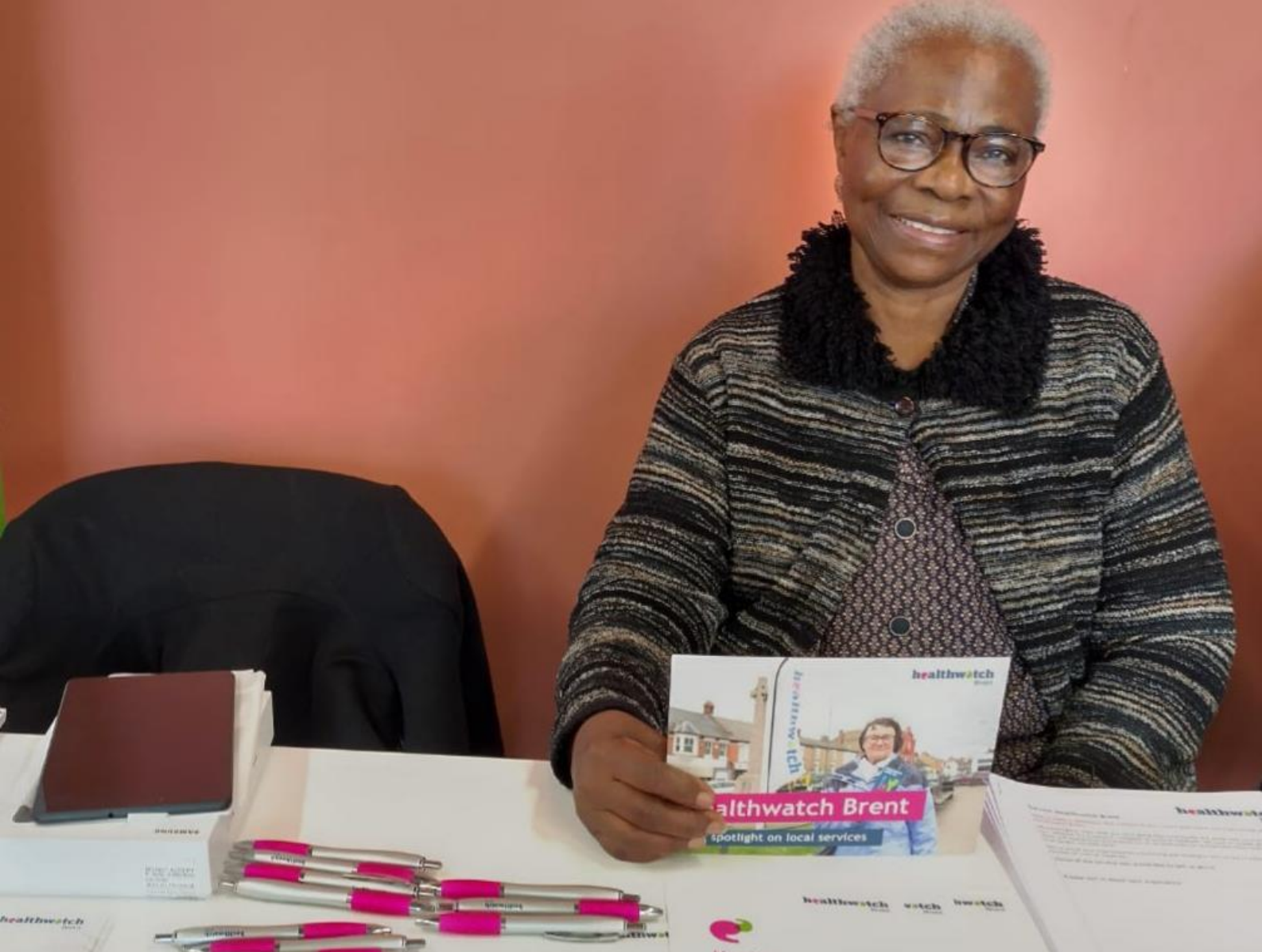
Alfred Samuels is an 11-year survivor of advanced metastatic prostate cancer Stage 4. Alfred has used his experiences as an advanced prostate cancer survivor to improve education and awareness. This ensures men can be diagnosed more quickly and access vital support.

Black men are more likely to get diagnosed with prostate cancer than any other community group. However, there is not enough conversation or visual support about the risk factors or what men should do if they're worried about their prostate health.

By partnering with local health organisations, including Healthwatch Brent, Alfred is helping to put prostate cancer at the top of the agenda. He spoke movingly about his own experience at our community cancer awareness event. He has been a vocal advocate for better services and broader community engagement.

Alfred's work has helped make prostate cancer awareness a key priority for Healthwatch Brent. Rising awareness in the local community means more men can get diagnosed – and treated – sooner. Alfred says he has been very fortunate to have survived especially as cancer is a long and psychologically upsetting process.

"Only through raising my voice to men in the community can we achieve the end goal of an educated and more aware community".



Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Improving mental health in-patient care

Patients will now receive more information about their care plans, better access to complaints and advocacy, and more access to religious/cultural items.

This follows a series of visits to three in-patient wards at Park Royal Mental Health Centre.

Speaking to patients and staff, we wanted to understand more about the experience of living on these wards and the care being received. We also wanted to know whether patients were receiving care that met their individual cultural or religious needs.

Recommendations included...



- Ensuring patients have a copy of their care plan and the opportunity to discuss it with staff.
- Patients and relatives to receive more information about the NHS complaints process and access to Independent Mental Health Advocacy, to ensure they can voice any concerns.
- Appropriate refresher training, for instance in communication skills.
- Better access to religious items, such as prayer mats or religious books, and to religious or spiritual leaders.
- A wider range of meaningful activities.

Response from the service

We're pleased to see a commitment from the service to act on these recommendations, with a number of changes already underway and an action plan in place to ensure that improvements are made. This will mean that patients have more control over their care, and that the service will be better able to meet cultural and religious needs..



"I don't have a care plan, ID card, or bank account and no access to Independent Mental Health Advocacy."

"I don't have a prayer mat, so I just pray using my jumper."

Learning from experiences of antenatal patients

The care received during pregnancy is vital for the wellbeing of pregnant women and their babies. We met with patients at Northwick Park Hospital to understand what's being done well and possible areas for improvement.

The majority of patients gave a positive rating, describing the service as 'good' or 'very good'. Highlights included the amount of information and choice available, and the support received from staff. However, there were also some areas for improvement – in particular, long waiting times. Even patients who were otherwise happy with their care noted that the length of time waiting at the clinic could disrupt their day.

Making a difference for patients

Feedback was shared through the Maternity Voices Partnership, and staff from the service were very receptive to feedback.

The team is now looking at how the waiting times can be reduced, which will make appointments less stressful and disruptive for patients. They are also looking at how to improve communication, so pregnant women know how long they are likely to be waiting.

Planning our next steps

Healthwatch Brent is very keen to continue working closely with the Northwick Park Hospital Maternity Voices Partnership to ensure that we can highlight the views of patients accessing these services and ensure that pregnant women have a good experience of care. Our next step will be to collect feedback from women who have recently given birth or are using postnatal services.

This will allow us to compare the experiences of those using antenatal and postnatal services.



“Waiting times can be quite long at the appointments – always waiting for at least 30 minutes.”

“[There is] no indication of how long you can wait – it can be 75+ minutes.”

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

Services need to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.



Working with local Somali community groups, we have helped put a spotlight on the barriers that some Somali people face when accessing mental health care. Running co-design workshops bringing together members of the community and service providers has helped ensure that services are fully informed about cultural needs. We have also funded additional workshops to help improve knowledge about mental health – and the results will be shared directly with service providers.

Amplifying patient voices to improve care

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.



Last summer, we visited several extended access hubs to ask patients for their feedback. Patients told us how important the hubs were for ensuring that they could see their GP. Working parents explained that the hubs meant they didn't have to miss work or take their children out of school. This feedback helped ensure that the scheme was continued, meaning more patients could benefit from out-of-hours appointments.

Improving access for all: Brent inclusion ambassador

Healthwatch Brent is here for everyone. We are working to improve accessibility and ensure everyone is able to raise their voice.



This year, Healthwatch Brent joined the Inclusion Ambassador programme and recruited an ambassador from the deaf community. They have used their knowledge and experience to help make our service more accessible for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. They have also helped by providing insight on equality, diversity and inclusion for the wider Healthwatch family. We are proud to be making our volunteering team more reflective of the community we serve.



Hearing from all communities

Over the past year we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to underserved communities, to gather their feedback, make sure their voices are heard and encourage services to meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Partnering with Romanian and Somali groups to hear their experiences
- Visiting community centres, food banks, community kitchens and local charities to collect feedback from different communities
- Sharing the feedback directly with local service providers, and creating opportunities for services and communities to come together
- Targeting our engagement work in Brent's most deprived areas.

Exploring barriers to access for Romanian people living in Brent

Last year, Romanian support groups in Brent told us that people they worked with were struggling to access healthcare – but they didn't have the capacity to provide support. By offering a one-off grant for health engagement, and employing a Romanian Community Researcher, we've been able to collect views from more than 60 people.

This feedback will be used to design a co-production project, bringing together Romanian people and service providers to ensure that services are appropriate, and to produce information/resources.



“In our work, we often come across cases of vulnerable Eastern Europeans not registered with a GP, pregnant women not seen by a midwife or knowing about health visiting services, people unable to book a GP appointment, or people refused access to healthcare due to insecure immigration status.”

Extract from Romanian & Eastern European Hub report

Improving vaccine hesitancy programmes

Our work with Pakistani and Bangladeshi people means that future vaccine hesitance information will be more effective, and culturally appropriate.

We were approached by NHS England to collect feedback from these two community groups, focusing on their attitudes towards vaccination and their opinion of messaging used to help encourage uptake. We received a wealth of helpful information, looking at a range of issues including literacy levels, lack of trust in the system and the need for more consistency in communications.

These responses have been shared with NHS England to inform future vaccination campaigns.



“My neighbour is a nurse, who vaccinates, and is overworked and exhausted. This gives me no confidence in the process. I don't feel safe getting jabbed by exhausted staff. The Government are giving money and the system is collapsing.”

Focus group participant



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Offering an advice and information service five days a week
- Running pop-up information stalls in community hotspots
- Producing local resources on key health topics, shared via our website
- Supporting people to access appointments with key primary health care services

Help finding NHS dental care

Difficulty finding a dentist is one of the most common reasons people contact us for support. We often hear stories of people who are suffering with dental pain due to the difficulty of finding a local dentist.

“I really need an appointment with a dentist for advice and further investigation.”

Local resident

We have been able to provide people with up to date information about dental practices that are able to take on new NHS patients. We have also helped patients understand and navigate the dental health system.

“Thanks to you I have been able to register with a dentist”

Local resident

The information we collect is shared regularly with relevant services and commissioners, to ensure that the issue of dental access remains a top priority. We are working with other local Healthwatch organisations to speak up on behalf of local residents who can't access care.

Supporting patients to communicate with their GP practices

Sometimes patients contact us because the relationship between them and their GP practice has broken down. Lack of access can lead to frustration, and sometimes this makes it difficult for patients to communicate effectively.

Using our relationships with the practices, we can support patients to speak to the right people and get a response to their requests. Recognising how busy the GP practices are, we take a measured approach, but also use our contacts to escalate patient requests when it is appropriate. We are also able to signpost patients to more suitable services, helping to take some of the pressure off our local GPs.

In rare cases, patients contact us because they have been placed on the special allocation scheme, which means they have to visit a practice outside the borough. Alongside sharing information about the scheme, we can talk to patients about how they can develop a positive relationship with the GP practice – allowing them to leave the scheme and reregister closer to home.

“Thank you for all your support and assistance with this. Without your intervention, I'd still be waiting for the practice to get back to me.”

Local resident



Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported local people to share their views or raise concerns
- Carried out enter and view visits to local mental health in-patient wards
- Represented Healthwatch Brent at key meetings, to raise the views of our community

Rajvi

I've really enjoyed my time so far volunteering with Healthwatch Brent and learning more about the community and its health needs.

As a Medical Student who's really passionate about Public Health, I can see the impact of Healthwatch within the wider community and the need for more active work.

I had the pleasure of delivering a talk about NHS screening programs to support our fellow volunteers understanding of this topic. It was a great experience and a nice reminder that Health Education is so important and if carried out effectively can help solve a lot of wider health promotion issues. I look forward to future events and getting more involved in other projects too.



Anita

I started volunteering with Healthwatch Brent over a year ago, as someone who signposts members of public with their needs and concerns to relevant service providers. At times, life can be challenging for patients and their carers; I feel a sense of satisfaction in being able to point someone in the right direction. It is an enriching experience to stay connected with the grassroot needs of our communities, so that we can ensure the voice of patients is at the core of developing strategy and individual/community wellbeing.

I have had the opportunity to be a member of the Healthwatch Advisory Group, and this has supported my knowledge and aided my contributions to discussions in working with patients and members of the communities. I am deeply passionate about contributing to the wellbeing of the community and gaining greater insight into how we can develop services and structures.



Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

 www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk/volunteer

 **020 3869 9730**

 info@healthwatchbrent.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure EXAMPLE	
Funding from local authority	£128,159	Expenditure on pay	£104,833
Additional income	£10,922	Non-pay expenditure	£27,395
		Office and management fee	£13,228
Total income	£139,081	Total expenditure	£145,506

Additional income is broken down by:

- **£5,000 funding** received from the London Ambulance Service to support their engagement project
- **£3,000 funding** received NHS England to support a vaccine hesitancy project
- **£2,743 funding** received from CNWL to support their winter access project
- **£179 funding** received from Healthwatch England to support cross-borough working

Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in helping the health and care system understand what is working, spot issues and think about how things can be better in the future.

Services are currently facing unprecedented challenges and tackling the backlog needs to be a key priority for the NHS to ensure everyone gets the care they need. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving them a voice to help shape improvements to services.

We will also continue our work to tackling inequalities that exist and work to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care, regardless whether that is because of where you live, income or race.

Top three priorities for 2023-24

1. Mental health in key communities and geographical hotspots
2. Engaging with Romanian people living in Brent
3. Gathering experiences of key issues including maternity, cancer screening and GP access



Statutory statements

The Advocacy Project, c/o Seeds Hub, Empire Way, Wembley, HA9 0RJ holds the contract for Healthwatch Brent.

Healthwatch Brent uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

The Healthwatch Brent Advisory Group consists of ten members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. They ensure that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. In 2022/23 the Board met four times to make decisions including where to focus our mental health research, and the introduction of maternity and cancer screening as new priorities. . We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities, and use the information gathered from the public to steer our projects and engagement.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services. During 2022/23 we have been available by phone and email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website and share it directly with the community groups we work with.

Responses to recommendations

All providers responded to our requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insight and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area for example we take information to local executive committees, to leadership teams within the hospital trusts, primary care teams, local council and public health, and to the Health & Wellbeing Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision makers in the North West London Integrated Care System, in partnership with other North West London Healthwatch organisations. Finally, we share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter and view

This year, we made three Enter and View visits. We made 24 recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
Park Royal Centre for Mental Health – Pine Ward	Local advocacy provider shared information about lack of complaints from certain demographics, suggesting patients may not have access to advocacy.	Wrote a report with recommendations – the service has followed up with an action plan to improve patient experience and access to information.
Park Royal Centre for Mental Health – Shore Ward		
Park Royal Centre for Mental Health – Pond Ward		

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Brent is represented on the Brent Health and Wellbeing Board by Danni O’Connell, Healthwatch Service Manager. During 2022/23 we have effectively worked with the Health & Wellbeing Board by attending meetings, providing updates on our progress and sharing key priorities. We have played the role of a critical friend, ensuring that residents’ voices are heard by local decision makers.

2022–2023 Outcomes

Project/ activity	Changes made to services
GP access	Increased training for staff, improvements to appointment systems
London Ambulance Service engagement	LAS have stated that the areas of work and improvements LAS is going to introduce over the next five years have been heavily influenced by the voice of the residents that Healthwatch engaged with – including anti-discrimination training.
Antenatal patient experience project	The service is reviewing how to address long waiting times and better communicate with patients
Extended access hubs	We visited several extended access hubs in Brent and helped secure further funding.



Healthwatch Brent

Seeds Hub

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