

What we've heard

April to September 2023

Summary of feedback Healthwatch North Tyneside have received from North Tyneside residents over the past 6 months.

October 2023



Our Reach

At Healthwatch North Tyneside, we collect general feedback from local people on their experiences of health and social care services.

From April to September 2023



Planned Future Activity to Reach People

- Our annual survey launched in November 2023 – this is the main way we gather general feedback from people annually.
- We are promoting our online feedback centre with the support of services.
- A number of community engagement events are being planned on a monthly basis to raise awareness of Healthwatch, provide information and gather views and feedback.



Our Research Projects

We are currently working on the following projects:

- Care homes experiences during Covid (funded)
- Adults with Autism – views of support available
- Hospital to home – understanding people’s experiences of leaving hospital and getting care and support in the community
- Covid and flu winter vaccine programmes
- Learning disability (funded)
- Experiences of support from adult social care (funded)
- Community Mental Health Transformation (funded)

We are developing future projects about:

- Dentistry (funded)
- Transport and travel
- Children and young people’s mental health



Key Themes and issues in what people have told us

3.1 General Practice

This is still the most common service people talk to us about. Many people told us they are still **struggling to get GP appointments** that are convenient to them and waiting times to get an appointment continues to be an issue.

'Greater flexibility is needed at weekends and in evenings.'

'I would like to make an appointment while at the surgery but this is not allowed anymore.'

'Third time my appointment has been cancelled...next available appointment is over a month later!'

Some practices only offer 'urgent/same day' appointments, or bookable appointments 3/4 weeks ahead. For many people, their healthcare need isn't urgent but they don't feel it's appropriate to wait several weeks. Where practices offer appointments at different timescales (for example same day, next day, 3/5 days, 3 weeks) patients feel more positive about getting the care they need in a timely way, not taking an urgent appointment from someone in greater need and saving the time required to ring the practice several times to get an appointment.

The way you **contact your practice** remains a real challenge for some. For some, delays answering phones remains a problem.

'Call at 8.30am and it can be 10.30am before you get through on the phone... then you're asked to hold or call back.'

'By the time the phone is answered you could've walked to the surgery to see someone.'

Having a range of ways to contact a practice is important to people – phone, online and face to face. Staff attitudes and not feeling listened to is a concern for a small number of people.



'The doctor was very abrupt and even passively aggressive.'

'Spoke to a receptionist who didn't take the time to listen.'

The majority of people who commented on their overall experience of their GP practice were positive in their feedback and said:

‘I can’t praise the surgery enough.’

‘All the GP’s are thoughtful and helpful.’

‘Efficient and seamless service.’

‘I’m very satisfied with the service and all the staff.’

Those who spoke less favourably told us:

‘You have to jump through hoops to see a doctor... it’s exhausting.’

‘Absolutely not helpful in any way.’

A number of people contacted us about issues registering with a new GP, particularly regarding difficulties getting prescriptions administered by the new practice. The ‘You Said...We Did’ below provides an overview of one person’s story and the support we delivered.

3.2 Medications and prescriptions

Some people are feeling excluded by practices ‘forcing people to order repeat prescriptions online or through the NHS App’. Little consideration seems to have been given to people’s skills/abilities or choice. This is disappointing given the work on digital exclusion in North Tyneside and commitments made to ‘Digital By Choice.’

One person told us about an ongoing problem with GPs prescribing medication that is unavailable due to **stock issues**.

‘None of the local pharmacies have the HRT medication I need in stock and this has happened a few times. I have to get my prescription changed so they can dispense something similar... the pharmacies should let the local GP practices know if they have stock issues.’

Another shared their experience of self-help and the benefits of emphasizing **lifestyle changes** before administering medication where this is beneficial and relevant.

‘The GP was surprised when I told them the statins hadn’t been used and the change in cholesterol was due to dietary changes only. More emphasis needs to be placed upon diet before medication is given.’

People told us about issues with prescription delivery services and delays with dispensing prescriptions at some pharmacies. They also told us about being impacted by changes to services including the closure of Lloyds in Monkseaton Sainsburys.

3.3 Dentistry

The majority of people sharing their feedback about dental services were **negative** about their experiences, with a number of people contacting us for help locating dentists in the area accepting NHS patients.

Some people told us they have been forced to consider **private treatment** when NHS wasn't available, with one person sharing that their treatment 'cost £585 for root canal and I still need more treatment' and another who was unable to pay privately said 'they come up with a long list of fillings, crown, hygienist costs etc. and it amounts to £2,500.'

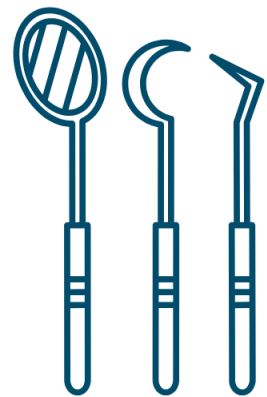
People continue to be '**removed**' from dental practice lists without warning or prior notification. When asked about delays in appointment availability, dental practices continue to refer to 'Covid catch up'

For those fortunate to **get dental care, their overall experience is generally very good.**

'Everything is explained, everything is calm.'

'Very good recall system and reminder texts and emails are sent regularly.'

'Very friendly and supporting, goes above and beyond to help patients.'



3.4 Travel and Transport

We heard from residents who were struggling to access community-based services because of travel issues. Reasons included the impact of bus strikes, changes to bus routes, metro system failures, and the cost of living preventing people from paying for transport (including taxis).

You Said...We Did – A Case Study

A patient contacted us for help obtaining a repeat prescription after their former GP refused to provide medication due to a change in residency. The new surgery required proof of address to complete the registration process which was causing delays with the transition process.

The patient had explored various options including seeking a short supply from a local pharmacy and contacting NHS 111 for further advice but found no resolution, hence contacting Healthwatch.

We intervened, clarifying that the former surgery should continue prescribing during the transition period. As the patient had already reached out and been refused, we spoke with the prescription team on their behalf, who agreed to supply a further prescription on this occasion. This was arranged and ready for collection the same day.

We also spoke with the pharmacy regarding the rejection for a short supply of medication who advised the medication requested was a controlled drug and they are unable to dispense without prescription.

Finally, we provided the patient with guidance to share with the new practice regarding [Registering with your GP: understanding your rights](#) outlining your right to register without proof of address.

3.5 Hospitals including Urgent & Emergency Care settings

People were mostly positive about the overall experience of their hospital stay and the quality of care they received.

'The doctor gave me a full MOT with lots of scans, examinations etc.'
(emergency admission to NSECH)



'I was impressed with the care at NSECH.'

'Staff went out of their way to be helpful at Rake Lane.'

'I was worried when the ambulance said they would be taking me to Cramlington again. I needn't have worried as this time everything was 10 out of 10.'

'They took good care to ensure the medication was gluten-free as she has coeliac disease. Altogether a great service.' (Rake Lane)

Those who had a disappointing experience shared their views about lack of confidentiality in waiting rooms, lengthy waiting times and inadequate care settings.

*‘After waiting to be seen I literally knew every single patients’ history, date of birth and more. Not one person was offered a sighted guide or even assistance to a doorway in the four hours I was there !!!’
(a resident who is blind – RVI Eye Department)*

Residents also told us about **frustrations with communications** from hospitals particularly:

- a) The lack of options to use digital technology to communicate/remind people about appointments etc. Reliance on letters was particularly frustrating during postal strikes or for younger generations and people who are confident with new technology.
- b) Receiving conflicting information.
- c) Not being kept informed about what is happening to a referral whilst waiting for treatment.



People told us about their issues with **travel and transport**, particularly for those travelling from areas in the west of the borough where transport options are limited. Recent changes to public transport makes getting to hospital appointments difficult and costly for some.

‘A taxi from Wallsend to the Freeman hospital cost £25 one way.’

‘Public transport to NSECH is terrible and non existent’.

Waiting times at urgent and emergency care settings continue to be the main topic regarding people’s experiences, with limited access to facilities and transport options at night also being an issue.

One person told us they arrived at A&E in the evening and had to wait in a wheelchair until the early hours of the following morning. Others have said –



‘No facilities are available for food and drink. I only received one drink and a sandwich while waiting.’ (NSECH)

‘My 90 year old mother was left on a trolley in a corridor for 4 hours. The doctor consultation also took place in the corridor. Staff were kind and friendly but the process is appalling.’ (NSECH)

When urgent care settings appear quieter people are still waiting many hours to be seen.

'There were only four other people in the waiting area, but I still waited over 3 hours to be seen' (NSECH)

Knowing which urgent care setting to attend can be confusing with travelling between the Emergency Department at NSECH and urgent care at Rake Lane being an issue when you've made the wrong choice.

'The two hospitals are so far apart and difficult for people without their own transport to go between the two hospitals'

People told us they need to rely on friends and family for support getting to the urgent care settings, particularly at night when public transport options are limited and taxi fares are expensive.

People have been positive about being given appointments at the Urgent Treatment centre and at the Vocare service in Balliol business park but point out travel is a challenge.

3.6 Mental health services

All of the feedback people shared with us regarding their overall experience of mental health services was negative and mostly relates to the CAMHS service regarding excessive waiting lists and not getting the support they wanted or needed.



'CAMHS is so bad that it makes the adult services look good. Even though I had a bad experience with adult services at least they didn't refuse me treatment!!!'

'Despite repeated referrals from the GP CAMHS refused to accept my daughter'

'Seems like all these rejections is a way for them to get their waiting lists down and meet targets'

Several people told us they had to go private to get a diagnosis for their child.

'I have only just after nearly 3 years had a diagnosis for my son of ADHD and Autism. This was done by an outside agency'

'We were discharged from CAMHS twice which meant we had to pursue a diagnosis privately'

The availability of alternative treatment options to medication is also an issue for some.

'The only solution they offered to his ADHD was medication... refused to take this so discharged from CAMHS with no further support'

Parents tell us they are constantly **'fighting'** for support and feel **'frustrated'** that CAMHS won't help.

Feedback about crisis support has been broadly negative. People don't feel either listened to or responded to. (We hear this from carers as well as people needing support themselves). However, some people describe having excellent empathetic support.

3.7 Social Care

We have heard from people unsure where to go to get help if they need it. As well as feedback about care and support providers within the community. This is shared with North Tyneside Council.



3.8 Providing Feedback

We have heard from a small number of people who were struggling with the GP complaints processes since they transferred to the ICB. We raised this with the ICB directly and are working with them on reviewing the GP complaints process.

One person highlighted the difficulty of providing positive feedback to services as well as negative. Options for suggesting improvements or making a complaint are readily available but leaving praise and positive comments is not so easy.



You Said...We Did – A Case Study

We received an email from a patient of a local GP practice asking for our support with getting a shingles vaccination. The patient had contacted their practice and were informed they were not eligible for the vaccination despite meeting the criteria provided by the NHS.

The patient gave us permission to contact their GP surgery and we spoke to the practice on their behalf as the patient did appear to meet all the criteria required. This was investigated by the practice as their system didn't show the patient as being eligible as they would have expected.

The patient contacted us the same day delighted that the surgery had been in contact with an appointment for 3 days later.





healthwatch
North Tyneside

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