



# Digital Appointment Check-In

April to June 2023

Your  
**healthwatch**  
Leeds

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# Summary

Between April and June 2023, we asked 209 people in Leeds about their experience of booking and attending healthcare appointments face-to-face, over the telephone or online.

Most responses (162) were about booking and attending GP practice appointments. The responses cover experiences from 46 different GP practices in Leeds.

The **key message** was that a large number of people told us they find it very difficult to get an appointment with a GP practice:



**“It’s okay once you have the appointment, just getting the appointment is the hard part.”**

**“Nothing worries me once the appointment is booked.”**

People told us that the availability of GP services across Leeds is inconsistent and that they felt fortunate if they had a good experience booking an appointment:



**“I think I am lucky to have this GP. Friends and colleagues often have problems getting an appointment with their GP.”**

People told us that difficulty accessing GP services makes them feel worse when they are already unwell:



**“This system is not user-friendly (PATCHS) and when you don’t feel well it’s the last thing you feel like doing.”**



**“Contacted the practice only to be told ‘we are experiencing a high level of calls, queue capacity is full, try again later’. This is not what you want to hear when either you or your loved one is unwell.”**

### **When we asked about people’s experiences booking appointments, we were told:**

- Some telephone, face-to-face and online booking systems have issues with long wait times, poor availability of appointments and not providing a choice of face-to-face or telephone appointments.
- Some people told us that online booking systems such as PATCHS are not user-friendly, and people do not feel that their GP practice has communicated how to use online booking systems.

- That there is a real variance in getting appointments. We were told that it is hard for some people to get appointments when they need them, whether that be a same-day appointment for an acute condition, or to schedule an advance appointment for a check-up.
- Appointments being released at 08:00 makes it difficult for people who work 9 to 5, carers and those who are not able to be awake at this time due to age or disability, to get an appointment.

### **When we asked about people’s experiences in appointments, we were told:**

- Seeing the same GP or healthcare professional across multiple appointments improves people’s experience of care.
- Telephone appointments have the potential to be efficient and effective but are often unsuccessful as they are inappropriate for the type of care a person needs (for example, if they need to have a physical examination).

- Some people told us that appointments were short, they felt rushed and they had inadequate time to fully discuss their needs.
- Overall, people were very happy with the medical / clinical practice staff, GPs and other healthcare professionals that they encountered, saying that they were kind, understanding, friendly and compassionate, even when they were visibly under pressure to deliver a service.

### **When we looked at the ages of those who responded, we could see that:**

- Young people aged 18 to 24 years told us that they wished that technical issues with online booking systems such as PATCHS were resolved as they enjoy the convenience of online booking systems.

- Adults aged 25 to 49 years told us that they struggled with only being able to arrange appointments at 08:00, as they were working at this time. Other respondents in this age group said that they had caring responsibilities and an 08:00 booking time was not suitable for them either.
- Respondents aged 50 to 79 years told us that they were asked to use online booking systems, but many do not have an email address or a compatible device. They also told us that they wished there was a priority booking system, as they are more likely to be vulnerable to multiple ongoing health conditions.

Throughout this survey many respondents told us about the difficulties they face trying to access and receive care when they have a disability or long-term condition, they do not speak English as their first language, they are a carer, or they are not digitally literate.

## Recommendations

### Communication

- Communicate and test when making changes or implementing new systems. Healthwatch Leeds will offer to help practices with this.
- GP practices need to **send information to their patients that clearly tells them how they can book appointments**. The information should specifically **include instructions for PATCHS**, as well as **FAQs for the frequent issues** that people experience.
- GP practices need to communicate to patients about how they should get in touch if they are experiencing issues using **online booking systems such as PATCHS**.

### Providing options and being accessible

- GP practices need to **provide support for people who are not confident or able to use digital booking systems** such as PATCHS and should be aware that **not everyone has internet access** or internet-capable devices.

- GP practices should **always have a non-digital means of booking appointments**, e.g. over the telephone or in person.
- For all booking methods, people should be **offered a choice of face-to-face or telephone appointments** to ensure their needs can be appropriately addressed. Similarly, people should be able to communicate with the practice **if they need an urgent appointment** for acute problems or to book an **appointment in advance**.
- GP practices should find out whether patients **need a language or BSL interpreter**, and if so, whether they would like an **interpreter to be provided** or would prefer to be **accompanied by a family member**. It should not always be assumed or expected that a family member will be available to attend.

### Testing booking methods

- All GP practices should **test their online booking systems** to check they are **accessible and user-friendly**. Practices could use their Patient Participation Groups (PPG) for this and ensure that this includes people with additional communication needs.

- Online booking systems such as PATCHS should be improved to be **flexible for carers** who may need to **book and manage appointments for multiple members** of their family.

### Appointment availability

- GP practices should implement the **08.00, 11.00 and 14.00** appointment booking window structure, to ensure that **appointments are still available later in the day**. This will accommodate those who cannot be available at 08.00 to book. This would also reduce wait times for telephone bookings.

### Consistency in best practice

- Some GP practices provide **excellent, person-centred care and service** to people with **disabilities, language barriers**, people supported by **carers**, and people who are **LGBT+**. This best practice needs to be **consistent across all GP services** so that all patients are supported with **reasonable adjustments** that allow them to have positive appointment experiences.

These recommendations recognise the excellent care that many GP practice staff and healthcare professionals are providing to people in Leeds despite the huge pressures the system is under. **An overarching recommendation for GP services is for them to be better resourced so that wait times, booking issues and rushed appointment experiences will be improved.**

# Full Report

## Why we did it

As part of our engagement work, we regularly reach out and check in with people in Leeds to allow them to share their views, and offer them information and feedback updates about health and care-related topics.

## What we did

Between April and June 2023, we checked in to understand people's experiences of booking and attending appointments face-to-face, over the telephone and online with health and care providers. We designed a short survey which was promoted on social media, and we visited 11 community groups and 3 events. In total, we had 209 responses.

We hope this information will be used to improve and plan for future health and care across Leeds.

Below are the groups we visited:

- Beety Din over 55s BAME women's group
- WISE – Café
- LGBT+ Social Space Café
- Association of Blind Asians (ABA) Luncheon Club
- Hamara health and wellbeing event
- Feel Good Factor social group
- Bramley Elderly Action
- Space Curry Club
- Meanwood Valley Farm
- MAECare
- Burmantofts Senior Action
- MHA
- AutistiCon event
- Fire Station Fun Day event

## Reach

We spoke to 209 different people. Each question was optional, so there are not 209 responses to every question.

Age group	Number of respondents
17 years and under	4
18 to 24 years	5
25 to 49 years	45
50 to 64 years	34
65 to 79 years	58
80 plus years	31
<b>Total respondents for this question</b>	<b>177</b>

Most respondents told us about their experiences with GP appointments, but there were also a small number of responses about booking other types of appointments.

Type of appointment	Number of respondents
GP Surgery	162
Hospital	16
Dental Care	9
Community Care	3
Other e.g. Living Care, vaccination	3
<b>Total respondents for this question</b>	<b>193</b>

Respondents gave us insight into 46 different GP practices in Leeds<sup>1</sup>:

Name of surgery, department or healthcare setting attended	Number of respondents	Name of surgery, department or healthcare setting attended	Number of respondents
Aire Valley Medical Centre	2	Chapel Oak Medical Centre	1
Alwoodley Medical Centre	4	Chapel Town Medical Centre	3
Arbury Medical Centre	1	Church Street Medical Centre	1
Arthington Medical Centre	1	City View Medical Centre	2
Ashfield Medical Centre	3	Collingham Medical Centre	4
Ashton View Medical Centre	1	Cottingley Medical Centre	1
Beeston Hill Medical Centre	7	Craven Road Medical Centre	1
Beeston Village Medical Centre	2	Crossley Street Surgery	5
Bellbrooke Medical Centre	8	Swarcliffe Dentist Medical Centre	1
Bramley Dentist	1	East Leeds Medical Centre	1
Bridge Street Medical Centre	1	East Park Medical Centre	2
Burley Park Medical Centre	2	Foundry Lane Medical Centre	1
Burmantofts Medical Centre	2	Fountain Medical Centre	5
Capsers Medical Centre	2	Garden Surgery Medical Centre	2

<sup>1</sup> This is approximately half of the number of GP practices in Leeds.

Name of surgery, department or healthcare setting attended	Number of respondents
Genix Garforth Medical Centre	2
Glen Lea Medical Centre	2
Harehills Corner Surgery	2
Hemsworth Grange Medical Centre	1
Highfield Medical Centre	1
Hillfoot Medical Centre	1
Hunslet Medical Centre	1
Ireland Wood Medical Centre	2
Kingswood Medical Centre	1
Kirkstall Medical Centre	1
Leeds City Medical Centre	5
Leeds Student Medical Practice	2
Lingwell Croft Medical Centre	2
Living Care	1
Lofthouse Medical Centre	1
Manor Park Medical Centre	3

Name of surgery, department or healthcare setting attended	Number of respondents
Manston Crossgates Medical Centre	1
Meanwood Medical Centre	6
Middleton Medical Centre	2
Can't remember	2
<b>Total respondents for this question</b>	<b>179</b>

157 respondents said they were booking an appointment for themselves, and 52 said they were booking an appointment for someone else. When we asked the reasons for booking the appointment on behalf of someone else, respondents told us that:

- They are booking for a child who is under 18 years old.
- They are booking for a child, parent, family member or friend that they care for, who may have a disability or long-term condition which stops them from booking for themselves.
- They are booking for a family member who does not have digital access.
- They are booking for a family member who has a language barrier that prohibits them from being able to book for themselves.

Here is the breakdown of the ages of respondents who are booking for themselves, or others:

Age group	Booking for self	Booking for someone else
17 years and under	3	1
18 to 24 years	24	5
25 to 49 years	26	19
50 to 65 years	26	8
65 to 79 years	53	5
80 plus years	2	10
<b>Total respondents for this question</b>	<b>182</b>	

Here is an overview of the ethnicity of the respondents:

Ethnic group	Number of respondents
Bangladeshi	4
Caribbean	1
Indian	9
Pakistani	13
White and Black Caribbean	4
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British	139
White European	1
White Irish	1
<b>Total respondents for this question</b>	<b>172</b>

Out of 190 of the respondents who answered the question, 80 said they were given an option of whether they wanted to book a face-to-face or telephone appointment, and 110 told us that they were not asked which appointment type they would like.

Of those who answered the question:

- 115 respondents made their appointment via the telephone.
- 34 respondents made their appointment face-to-face.
- 24 respondents made their appointment via online booking systems (e.g. PATCHS)
- 17 respondents made their appointment in other ways, e.g. by email, responding to a letter invitation, or a phone call from the service themselves.
- For this question, respondents told us the successful method they used of booking an appointment. In some cases, people had tried to use the online booking system unsuccessfully and then ended up using the telephone or face-to-face.

We compared the age range of the respondents and the method they used to book the appointment:

Age group	Method of booking		
	Telephone	Face-to-face	Online
17 years and under	3	2	1
18 to 24 years	2	2	2
25 to 49 years	24	14	5
50 to 65 years	21	2	5
65 to 79 years	32	7	10
80 plus years	19	5	2

We also compared the method used to book the appointment and if they were asked what appointment type they would like:

Method of booking appointment	Were they given the choice of appointment type?	
	Yes	No
Telephone	46	69
Face-to-face	15	19

7 respondents who booked their appointments online said that there were both in-person and telephone appointments available for booking. 17 respondents said that they were not offered both types of appointments when booking online.

# Findings

**We asked “Please tell us about your experience of booking the appointment. What worked and what didn’t work so well?”**

## What worked well

### Telephone

- Respondents told us that booking appointments over the telephone was easy and effective in cases where they have long-lasting relationships with the reception staff, as they have been going to the same practice for years and the reception staff are responsive to their needs.

- Some respondents told us they had great experiences with the telephone booking line, with short wait times and availability of appointments which made it easy to get a same-day appointment.



**“Took about ten mins to get through at a specific time in the morning but then was easy.”**



**“I know that if I ring up, they’ll say that I can ‘come straight down.’ The receptionists are very helpful.”**

**“Told them I wanted face-to-face, [it was] brilliant, no problems.”**





**“Always very good. Can ring anytime.”**

### Face-to-face

- In the same way as with telephone booking, respondents told us they had a positive experience of booking appointments face-to-face where they have long-lasting relationships with the reception team who they have seen for years at the same practice.



**“Been with the service all my life and have nothing to complain about.”**

### Online

- Some respondents who told us that they booked online said that the booking process was easy and convenient, with good appointment availability. However, they wished they had been told by their practice that the system had been updated.



**“I had to book online the next day, it was a new online system and I had not been aware it had changed.”**

### Other

- Some respondents told us that they like that appointments are arranged by the service, and then a letter is sent to them, as it makes the process easy for them.



**“Received a link from LTHT asked to confirm, deny or re-book. Quite easy.”**

**“I got a letter for an appointment at LGI. This was convenient because it meant I didn’t have to spend time booking it.”**

- There were many respondents across all booking types who commented that reception staff were helpful and friendly.



**“They looked after me, did a brilliant job.”**

**“I am treated well and respected and with a lot of dignity.”**

## What didn’t work so well

### Telephone

- Respondents told us that they attempted to book an appointment by telephone but then needed to go into the practice the next day, as the telephone was unsuccessful. This could have been because they waited in a long queue for the telephone and the practice ran out of appointments, or that telephones were not connecting to a receptionist, even during practice opening hours.



**“It’s difficult to call. It’s packed at 08:00. Easier face-to-face.”**

**“I make my appointments face-to-face because getting through on the phone has been impossible in the last 6 months.”**

- Many respondents told us that when they booked their appointment on the telephone, the queue was very long.



**“If I try to book on the phone it has taken up to an hour and a half to get through.”**

**“You join a queue of about 16 to 20 people. I can’t understand why things aren’t back to normal.”**

- Respondents told us that it was tricky for them to be available to call the practice at 08:00, due to a range of reasons such as work commitments, disability or lifestyle. Some practices open up appointments at 11:00 and 14:00, but this wasn’t found to be reliable as there may be no appointments left later in the day.



**“Very good for me but for people with disabilities and elderly people, to call at 08:00 no later = no appointment.”**



**“Can only access [at] 08:00, 11:00 or 14:00. By the time you get to 14:00 slot no appointments [are] available until 08:00 the next day.”**

- Some respondents told us that when they called to book an appointment, they were instead given a window of time for a telephone call back from a GP, e.g. a call back between 17:00 and 19:00. However, the GP that rang them called before or after the window, and they missed the call, or it delayed their day.



**“They ended up calling 40 minutes late, so I was late to work which was inconvenient.”**

- Respondents told us that they were frustrated that telephone queue messages said that COVID was the reason that there were limited appointments available and long wait times.

### Face-to-face

- Respondents told us that they had negative experiences of being given appointments far away from where they live, with their mobility not considered. Respondents also said that the financial costs of transport to a faraway location were not considered when being given these appointments. Respondents told us that this happens due to being referred around different services across Leeds or West Yorkshire, and then the service loses sight of where the patient lives.



**“I can’t travel to the appointment so won’t be going.”**

### Online

- Respondents told us that they wished that their GP practice had communicated information about how to use new online booking systems (PATCHS).



**“Our surgery makes changes, such as a new online booking system (changed from a similar online booking system) without patients being informed - so you only find out when you try to book an appointment.”**

- In the same way, respondents told us that they wished Leeds Teaching Hospital Trust had informed them about the new Patient Hub system.



**“It would have been helpful if LTHT had communicated that the patient hub was being introduced and explained that this is a new way to book appointments.”**

- Respondents told us they found PATCHS difficult to navigate on their own and would experience tech issues. Respondents would often attempt to use it unsuccessfully and then need to telephone or go into their practice in person.



**“Recently I have been locked out [of PATCHS] so will need to go to the surgery to be reset, I don’t know how to reset it on my phone”.**

- A respondent who cares for multiple family members told us about their negative experience with PATCHS.



**“I’m concerned re PATCHS new system - I have had to register as my mum with my email address as she doesn’t have an email, then couldn’t register my dad as it said email already used, so added him as someone she cares for, but now can’t register myself as I still only have that one email address - this is a big flaw in the system, I’m going to have to unregister them to register myself!”**

## Other

- For both face-to-face and telephone appointment booking, respondents said they were unhelpfully offered appointments for weeks away when they were experiencing acute, immediate problems.



**“Got an appointment but not until next month. Losing weight so going to try to get an earlier appointment.”**

- In the same way, respondents who needed to book an appointment for a few weeks' time were often told the only appointments available were same day.
- For both face-to-face and telephone booking of appointments, respondents told us that they did not like being asked by reception staff to tell them details about their health.



**“The receptionists ask you personal questions; I don't like this; I tell them it's confidential.”**



**“The receptionists can be very aggressive on the phone. Why should they ask you about your medical needs, that's personal to you?”**

- Respondents told us that some practices/services send letters with set appointment dates and that it is difficult to get this time changed.



**“My husband was sent a link from patient hub to confirm appointments. The time they'd given wasn't suitable so had to cancel and wait for another appointment. He would have appreciated a call and felt like an alien.”**

- A respondent with caring responsibilities told us about their difficulty of managing their family's appointments.



**“I get texts re myself, my son, my mother and my father but most are not addressed by name, so I don't know who they are to!”**

## We asked, "How was your telephone or face-to-face appointment, what did you like and dislike about it?"

### What went well

#### Telephone

- Respondents told us that when telephone appointments were appropriate to their particular need, they found them positive as they would be short and efficient and would save them the need to travel to a practice.



"Efficient and appointment on the same day."

#### Face-to-face

- Some respondents told us that they felt nervous about attending their appointment, and they found that the practice staff and the GP went above and beyond to offer support and make them feel comfortable.



"I was terrified, the practice staff were brilliant and even offered coffee."

"Appointment was daunting because of the type of appointment. Doctor distracted me, explained options, GP communicated well, [it was a] very accessible and good appointment."

- Some respondents told us that their GP was supportive with booking interpreters.
- A respondent told us about a mostly positive experience of care with a GP when their parent needed support with deafness.



"It was difficult as I was asked to come and interpret but had to leave the room as my dad needed a private examination [and] neither one of us felt comfortable with me being there. It would have been better to have an interpreter for this reason. The doctor was nice and understanding and removed his mask so my dad could attempt to lipread."

#### Both

- Many respondents told us that in both appointment types, they had positive experiences with GPs/healthcare professionals who were great at communicating, gave them enough time, understood their needs and discussed treatment options with them.



"The GP understood my care wants and that I would not want a prescription because it is addictive."

- Respondents told us that they valued having appointments with the same GP/healthcare professional, as they felt better understood and more comfortable.



"Good service from the doctor - been with same GP for 31 years."

"I am happy that I get to see the same GP each time."

### What didn't work so well

#### Telephone

- Some respondents told us they needed to be examined so the telephone appointment was not useful.



"Difficult to diagnose an ear infection over the phone."



**“I was given a phone appointment for a chest problem which makes no sense since they can’t examine me with a stethoscope over the phone.”**

- Respondents told us that they did not feel as comfortable talking about their health over the phone, and that they would have preferred person-to-person connection.



**“I’m more comfortable talking face-to-face.”**

- Respondents told us that telephone appointments felt more rushed than their experiences face-to-face, and that they could not fully discuss their needs.



**“I believe all medical appointments should be face-to-face, that way it is not rushed.”**

- A respondent who does not speak English as their first language told us that a telephone appointment is much more difficult for them to understand.



**“I don’t like telephone appointments as English is not my first language so sometimes, I don’t understand and can’t explain; I find face-to-face easier as I can read their body language and show them exactly where the problem is when in person.”**

#### **Face-to-face**

- Respondents told us that some healthcare sites have waiting rooms across multiple floors, and these can be confusing to navigate. They also highlighted that there are accessibility issues with waiting rooms on higher floors.



**“We went to one of the entrances and ended up having to walk through the entire building to get to the other side where she was meant to be. My mum has mobility problems so it would have been useful to know that the entrance on the other side of the building would have been closer. We also ended up being 8 minutes late to the appointment because it took so long to walk my mum through the building.”**

- Respondents told us they had negative experiences of long waits in reception, there is nothing to do whilst waiting and this leads to people being frustrated.



**“Ages to wait. Woman sat in front had been there over an hour started crying.”**

- One respondent said their appointment was cancelled after they had already arrived at the practice.



- Many respondents said they could visibly see the stress on staff at the practice, and that there was a shortage of staff.



**“I understand [why] it is the way it is, it’s the shortage of staff and GPs.”**

**“The nurses that looked after me ran off their feet.”**

#### **Both**

- Respondents who had both appointment types told us they were concerned that their GP practice may change staff, and this could lead to a more negative experience for them as they like the current staff.



**“It seems they [GP] might be leaving the site to a new site. This concerns me.”**

## We asked, “Is there anything else that you would like to share about health and care?”

### What’s working well:

- Some respondents told us they have experienced positive, personalised care, in which they have been involved in decisions about their care.



**“The clinician was kind and caring, explained in detail the condition and treatment.”**

- Respondents told us that the staff they encounter in services, although they are obviously under pressure with shortages, are helpful and friendly. Respondents told us that they do not blame the staff for appointment issues, but the wider system.



**“Don’t blame the doctor for problems getting an appointment, it is the situation.”**



**“My surgery is doing a great job under pressure.”**

### What’s not working so well:

- Respondents who currently have a positive experience with their GP practice expressed concern about future service changes that could make their experience negative.



**“Oakwood is possibly merging into a group of practices, and I’m concerned it won’t be as person-centred.”**

- Respondents told us that they sometimes did not feel that test results or diagnosis information was communicated to them sensitively.



**“At St James’, the young doctor was unkind to me and so blunt about my risk of going fully blind with no compassion in his tone.”**

**“What needs improving is the way test results are given. They had phoned me to tell me that I had cancer, I would expect to be called in rather than this way to communicate.”**

- Respondents told us that they think that communication between different services is poor and that it would be better if information was shared between clinicians so that they did not need to repeat themselves at each appointment with a new service.
- Respondents expressed concern with the digitalisation of appointments as they have older family members and friends who will not be able to easily access appointments that are reliant on having an email address, smartphone or computer.



**“Without me, my mum wouldn’t be able to access services. Services too heavily rely on telephone booking or people’s ability to use online booking. This isn’t for everyone and is not accessible.”**

- A respondent told us they had a negative experience with their GP practice as they continually did not have the COVID vaccine in stock, and they were being told to attend a different practice which they could not access as they could not travel.



**“It is a worrying situation as my surgery is currently out of stock of covid jabs and can’t get the vaccine at present.”**

- Respondents told us they were unhappy about not having the choice for reasonable adjustments for their appointments.



**“I have on record due to my history that I need to see a female doctor and for my appointment, I saw a male doctor which really didn’t help. I never get the choice of which doctor I want to see.”**

- Respondents told us about specific services they access which they recommend, e.g. the Community Wellbeing offer of chair exercise in Morley.

# Themes by demographics

## Age

### Those who were 17 years and under told us:

- They found telephone appointments convenient and effective when they are appropriate for health conditions which can be discussed on the phone.



**“Very straightforward and easy.”**

- One respondent told us they did not find their telephone appointment effective, as during the appointment it became clear they needed to be seen face-to-face.



**“Telephone appointments are often unnecessary and face-to-face is the eventual outcome.”**

### Those who were 18 to 24 years told us:

- Respondents told us that they wanted to book appointments on the telephone, but they felt they had to go into a practice face-to-face to increase their chances of getting an appointment.



**“Tried calling but ended up having to go into the practice.”**

- Respondents told us that the care and treatment they received were good, but the wait times for booking and for appointment arrival were not.



**“Treatment is good but waiting times aren’t.”**

- Respondents told us they wish that the online booking system was more reliable as they would like to use it.



**“I wish they would have an easy online way to book an appointment as the waiting times before you can get through to a receptionist/nurse can be very long.”**

### Those who were aged 25 to 49 years told us:

- Respondents told us that they like to know the name of the GP or healthcare professional that they are seeing in the appointment.



**“I never know the names of the doctors I am supposed to be seeing.”**

- Respondents told us that they appreciate it when they can see the same GP or nurse each time they visit so that they do not need to re-explain their health history and receive consistent care.



**“Never see the same doctor, inconsistent care, focusing on different things, different levels of experience.”**

- Respondents in this group gave a lot of feedback about the difficulty of last-minute same-day appointments when they have limited availability as they are working age. The queue for booking both on the phone and in person means that a lot of time is taken up.



**“My availability [is limited] as I work full-time so it’s difficult to get a suitable time.”**

**“Difficult to accommodate with my availability.”**

**“Because I work full-time, I can’t call up at the start of the day to make an appointment.”**

- Respondents told us that the fact that, to book an appointment with most practices, you need to either ring or attend in person at 08:00 is tricky to balance with commitments such as being a carer.
- Some respondents told us that they preferred telephone appointments as they could fit in better with working, but that with some practices the chance of getting an appointment was much higher if you went in person to book and to attend.



**“I could book a telephone appointment as it was easier for me due to work commitments.”**

- Respondents told us that they did not like that GPs would tell them they could only address one problem in an appointment, and that they would have to come again if they needed to talk about something else.



**“I was only asked to talk about one problem although we had a couple of things to discuss.”**

- Respondents in this group who had tried using online systems to book told us that they often couldn’t use the system and would end up having to phone up or go in.
- A respondent told us that they felt uncomfortable having to be an interpreter for their deaf parent at an appointment.



**“They used me as an interpreter which my mum was comfortable with, but I wasn’t as I didn’t want to see my elderly mother topless for her breast screening.”**



## Those aged 50 to 64 years told us:

- Respondents in this group told us that they attempted to use the online booking system, but they could not use it successfully and would then need to ring up.



**“I had to resort to the phone because I couldn’t get through on PATCHS.”**

- Respondents in this group told us that they had received a letter or a text from the practice telling them to book an appointment online, but they did not have an email address or smartphone.



**“I got a letter with link to book online, I don’t have an email address or a smartphone, so I knew I couldn’t do it this way.”**

- Respondents in this group told us that appointments were often too short for them to fully discuss ongoing health issues and that GPs seemed like they were rushed.



**“Very rushed – [they] couldn’t get me out of there quick enough – I was not being listened to.”**

## Those aged 65 to 79 years told us:

- Respondents in this group told us that they like to see the same GP as they understand their overall health. They also told us they like that reception staff recognise them when booking.



**“I have been going to this surgery for 17 years. Good service, communication and nice staff and reception.”**

- Respondents in this group told us that they would like a priority booking system where those who are vulnerable or managing long-term conditions have a more prioritised way of booking appointments.



**“I feel like the doctor should take into account different health conditions when giving appointments because I don’t feel like they are given to those who need it.”**

## Those 80 years and older told us:

- Respondents in this group told us that they like it when the service arranges an appointment time and then sends them the relevant information, rather than them having to initiate the booking.



**“Seacroft sends a letter out every 3 to 4 months for an appointment to manage my macular eye problem. This is useful as a retired person as it saves me the fuss of booking and I can always make it.”**

- A respondent in this group told us that they were unhappy that their appointment letters were not sent in large print, as they needed to use a letter reader.



**“I have never been asked about my communication needs. I have a machine that reads letters for me. Only my bank sends me large print but not healthcare services. I didn’t know large-print hospital letters were an option.”**

## Ethnicity

Respondents who identified themselves as Indian told us:

- They had good experiences with GP care when they saw the same healthcare professional each time and when the surgery was easily accessible to them on foot.



**“Fortunately, we live near the surgery, so our option is to walk down to the surgery to request an appointment face-to-face.”**

- A respondent told us that they had a great experience because the surgery would book an interpreter for their home visits if they knew an English-speaking family member wouldn't be available.
- A respondent told us that they can speak and understand English, but the staff at their GP surgery struggle to understand their accent.



**“Had an appointment, the doctor did not understand my accent.”**

- Respondents told us it can be difficult that the surgery has no Indian members of staff, and so language can be a barrier for their family member when booking or attending appointments.



**“Language is difficult, husband understands a little, [but there is] no Indian member of staff to help.”**

- Respondents who identified themselves as Pakistani told us that the staff they encounter at GP practices are lovely and helpful, but they wish they were multilingual. A respondent told us that they think there should be a multilingual language line for booking appointments.



**“We need a language line or multi [or] bilingual staff.”**

## Transgender

Two respondents identified as transgender and told us about their experiences:

- One respondent told us that they feel frustrated with primary care services as when they try to book appointments, they are always offered gender specialist services, despite needing a regular check-up unrelated to their gender.



**“GPs won't treat trans people. [They] just say ‘you're trans, you need to see a gender specialist’ - yeah, not for a viral infection pal!”**

- Another respondent told us that they are misgendered at their appointments and that they have found the process of changing their gender number unnecessarily lengthy. They told us that they had been navigating this process themselves and would not know where to ask for help finding information.

## Disability and Long-Term Conditions

Respondents who identified that they had a disability or long-term conditions told us that:

- They prefer in-person, longer appointments as they need the extra time for their disability or long-term condition to be considered and understood.



**“You feel better talking face-to-face and they can check you.”**

- Respondents told us that they are regularly asked to book a follow-up appointment for 6 to 10 weeks' time, but the system for booking appointments only lets you see same-day or next-day appointments.
- A respondent told us that they help their husband with a hearing condition to make and attend appointments.



**“I have to book my husband's appointments because he has hearing issues and there is no other option for us. Sometimes this is not appropriate because my husband may not want me involved with medical things, he wants [them] kept confidential.”**

- Respondents told us they think that there needs to be a priority appointment booking system for those who are vulnerable with disabilities and long-term conditions.



**“The GP doesn’t even prioritise vulnerable people struggling to book an appointment, not given a choice on time, [they] overlap with other health appointments.”**

- Respondents told us that sitting in reception rooms for long waits can be very uncomfortable given their disability or long-term condition.
- One respondent told us that due to their long-term mental health conditions, they wanted to bring their partner into their appointment, but this was not allowed to happen.



**“[They] let partner come into the surgery with me but won’t let him come into the appointment and it doesn’t help my dyslexia or anxiety.”**

## Carers

Respondents with caring responsibilities for a family member or friend told us that:

- Telephone, face-to-face and online methods for booking services are not accessible to those they care for, so they have no option to book for themselves and have to rely on a carer.



**“The booking process is not accessible to my mum who is deaf, so I had to help her.”**

**“Without me, my mum wouldn’t be able to access services.”**

**“Elderly relative unable to get through by phone or use internet.”**

**“Mother is over 80 does not speak English and has no knowledge of using online services and apps etc.”**

- Carers told us that they liked it when they were included in the appointment, being able to ask questions and support with care plans.



**“This was so much better as we could both be involved in the appointment and ask questions.”**

- Carers told us about the added complexity of arranging appointments for their loved ones, as they needed to be free themselves to accompany them to the appointment.



**“Difficult to accommodate with my availability.”**

- Some carers told us they had positive experiences with excellent GPs.



**“It went very well; I know as I have to accompany my wife to all of her appointments due to her memory problems. There was nothing to dislike, we saw an excellent doctor who was very thorough and caring.”**

**“The surgery is very good, always have to go [with mum] for her to understand complex information.”**

# Next steps/ Acknowledgements

The findings from this check-in will feed into the Same Day Response Care Delivery Board, Primary Care Delivery Board, as well as health and care planning groups.

Healthwatch Leeds has communicated the outcomes of this report to the Leeds Integrated Care Board and the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board. Healthwatch Leeds has also sent letters to individual practices detailing feedback from this survey, as well as contacted Primary Care Network Practice managers.

We would like to thank all the organisations who provided us with access to their communities and groups and everyone who completed a survey.

If you are experiencing difficulties with GP access, please call us on 0113 898 0035, email [info@healthwatchleeds.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchleeds.co.uk) or text 07717 309 843 for information and advice.

This report was written by Meg Polese, graduate student and Parveen Ayub, Community Project Worker.





**Committed  
to quality**

We were awarded a committed to quality marque from Healthwatch England. To obtain this we did an in depth audit which will be reviewed.

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