



What you told us

Trends in feedback July to December 2023

Introduction

Healthwatch Northumberland is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We are a listening organisation working across Northumberland, interested in what people like about services and what can be improved.

We act on what people are saying, sharing their views with those who have the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area and record this as 'signposting'.

Feedback

Between July and December 2023, we received detailed feedback from 422 individuals from talking to people at face-to-face events, telephone calls, emails, our website, social media, and other sources. This is significantly more than the previous six months (where we heard from 226 individuals between January and June 2023). Between July and December 2023, we signposted 59 people to different organisations for further support. This is down slightly from the 61 people we signposted between January and June 2023. Our social media content had a reach of 77,000 and over 7000 engagements, and our website had 16,000 views.

The feedback we have had in the past six months has mainly been around four services.

1. GP services: 30% of all feedback received in July to December 2023 was to do with GP services. Accessing GPs and arranging appointments were the main issues being raised, with concerns about the quality of care being provided another common theme. However, approximately one in five comments we received about GP services were positive.

2. Pharmacies: 14% of all feedback received was to do with pharmacies, with over half of the comments being positive feedback about Allendale Pharmacy. This was in response to our online campaign in the autumn urging people to tell us about their pharmacy. The biggest concern, featuring in one in five comments, was around receiving incomplete prescriptions and supply issues at pharmacies.

3. Hospitals (unspecified department): Just over 10% of all feedback received in July to December 2023 was about hospitals in general. Just under half of this feedback was positive about the quality of care and the 'brilliant staff'. The biggest concerns raised were about access, with a roughly equal split between long waiting lists and the distance patients needed to travel to attend appointments. These two issues combined featured in one in five negative feedback comments.

4. Dentists: Dentists made up 7% of the overall feedback we received. Unsurprisingly, getting an appointment with an NHS dentist was the predominant concern, with approximately three quarters of the feedback we received being about this issue. Unlike the feedback on the previous three categories, the sentiments expressed were overwhelmingly negative, with less than one in 25 of the comments we received about dentists being positive.

These four categories made up almost two thirds (over 61%) of the feedback we received in July to December 2023.

Over a quarter of the feedback responses we received for GP services were about three GP practices. We will contact these three practices individually to discuss the themes that have come out of the feedback we have received about them.

Geographical spread

We heard regularly from all parts of the county with Ashington and Blyth having the most responses, as shown in Fig. 1, below. The 10% of responses that were from Northumberland (unspecified) came via Healthwatch England which only gives geographical data down to Local Authority level rather than postcode. We are working with Healthwatch England to have a more precise location given than Northumberland, particularly as we are getting increasing amounts of feedback this way. (Feedback via Healthwatch England has doubled from 5% of all feedback received in January to June 2023 to 10% of all feedback received in July to December 2023.)

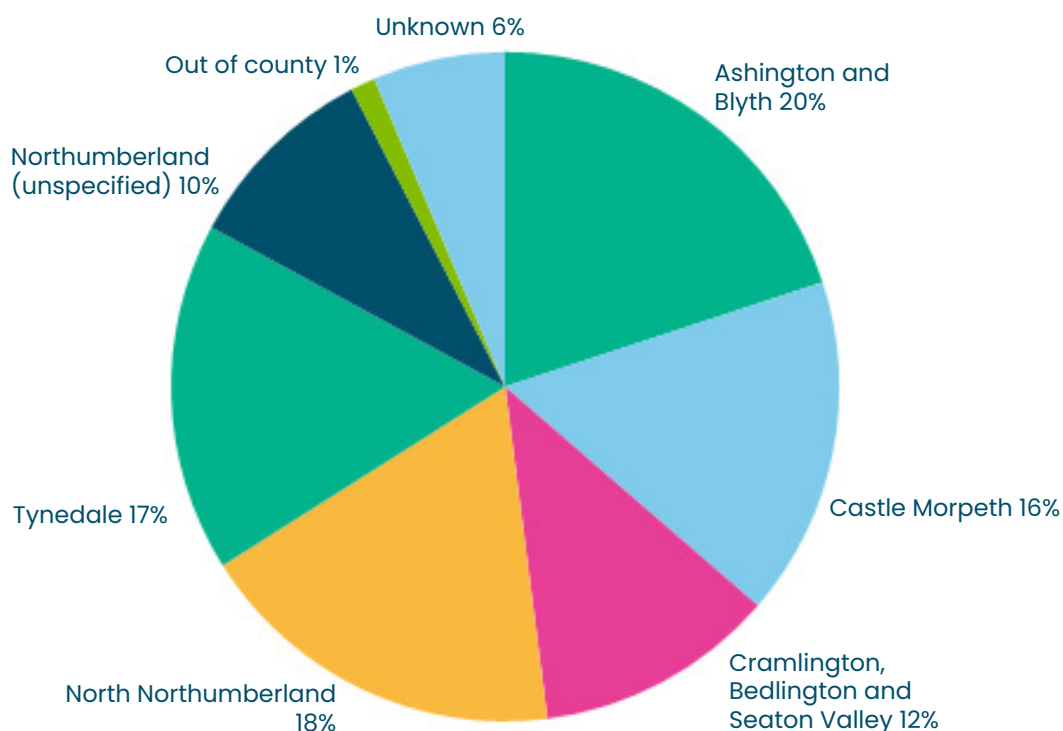


Fig. 1. Where we heard from people across the county

All five Local Area Committees (LACs) had GP services as their top issue, except in Tynedale, where pharmacy was top. However, in Tynedale half the number of responses for pharmacy were praise for Allendale Pharmacy so the difference between the number of responses for pharmacy and GP services is not so marked.

	Percentage of responses for each LAC
Ashington and Blyth	
GP services	29%
Hospitals	17%
Pharmacies	13%
North Northumberland	
GP services	43%
Pharmacies	16%
Hospitals	12%
Tynedale	
Pharmacies	44%
GP services	17%
Hospitals	6%
Castle Morpeth	
GP services	42%
Dentists (non-hospital)	15%
Hospitals (unspecified department)	11%
Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley	
GP services	33%
Pharmacies	12%
Dentists (non-hospital)	7%
Hospitals	7%
Northumberland (unspecified)	
GP services	55%
Hospitals	13%
Dentists	10%
Unknown	
Ambulance services	22%
GP services	13%
Mental health services	9%

Table 1. Services we heard about most by LAC

Signposting and Information Service

A member of the public contacted us querying the prescription charge fine. They were concerned that they recently got a prescription for free that they should have paid for. They were unaware of this at time, as they had previously received prescriptions free of charge. They were now worried that they may be fined.

We signposted them to the NHS Business Services Authority website for further information. This states that they will be contacted by letter if there is reason to think they should have paid for the prescription and if they don't respond to this, they would then get a fine.

Ashington and Blyth resident

Trends

In the six-month period of July to December 2023 the percentage of positive comments has been trending down slightly, whereas the percentage of negative comments is down nearly ten percentage points - see Fig. 2. The dotted lines show the trends. The spike in positive sentiments expressed in October is down to the large number of positive feedback we received about Allendale Pharmacy in response to our 'tell us about your community pharmacy' campaign in the autumn.

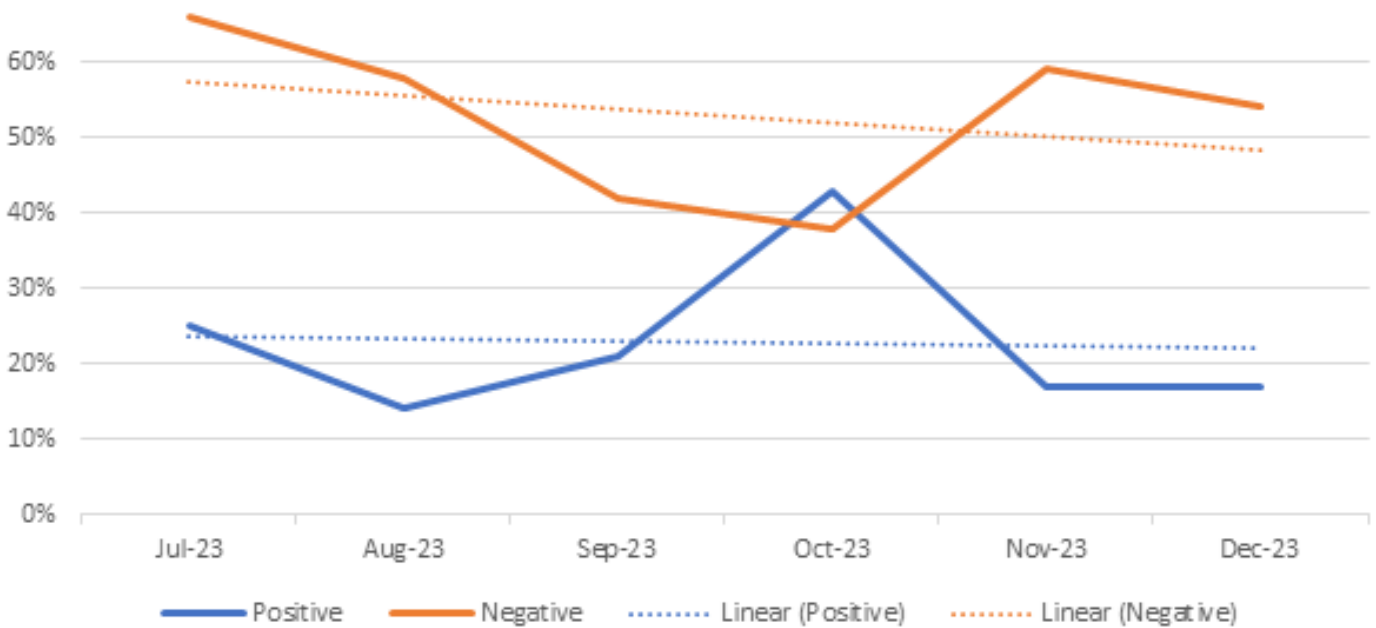


Fig. 2. How people were feeling July to December 2023

The drop in proportion of negatives sentiments is a continuation of the trend in the last two six-monthly reports, and viewing the 18-month period since we started the six-monthly reports the trend is a lot more marked, as shown in Fig 3.

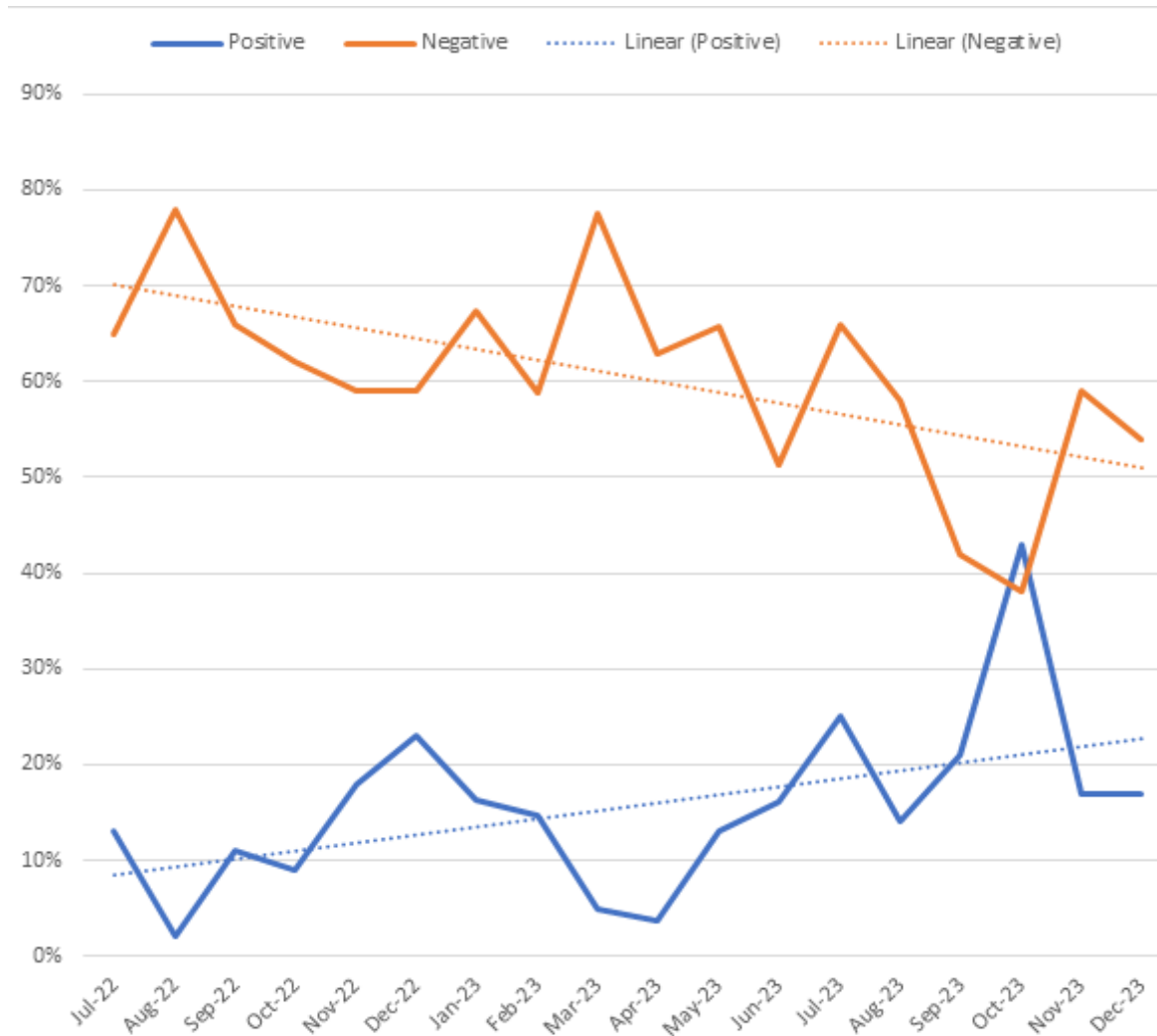


Fig. 3. How people were feeling July 2022 to December 2023

Despite all the doom and gloom in the media about pressures on services, these trends would imply that patients in Northumberland are feeling happier about the services they are receiving than a year and a half ago.

Demographics

Figs. 4 to 6 give the demographic breakdown of our respondents over the past six months with the first graph, Fig. 4, showing the distribution of ages and sex across the county. Overall, 66% of the respondents were female, 24% were male and for the remaining 10% the sex was unknown. Less than 0.5% preferred not to say. (Due to rounding these figures total more than 100%).

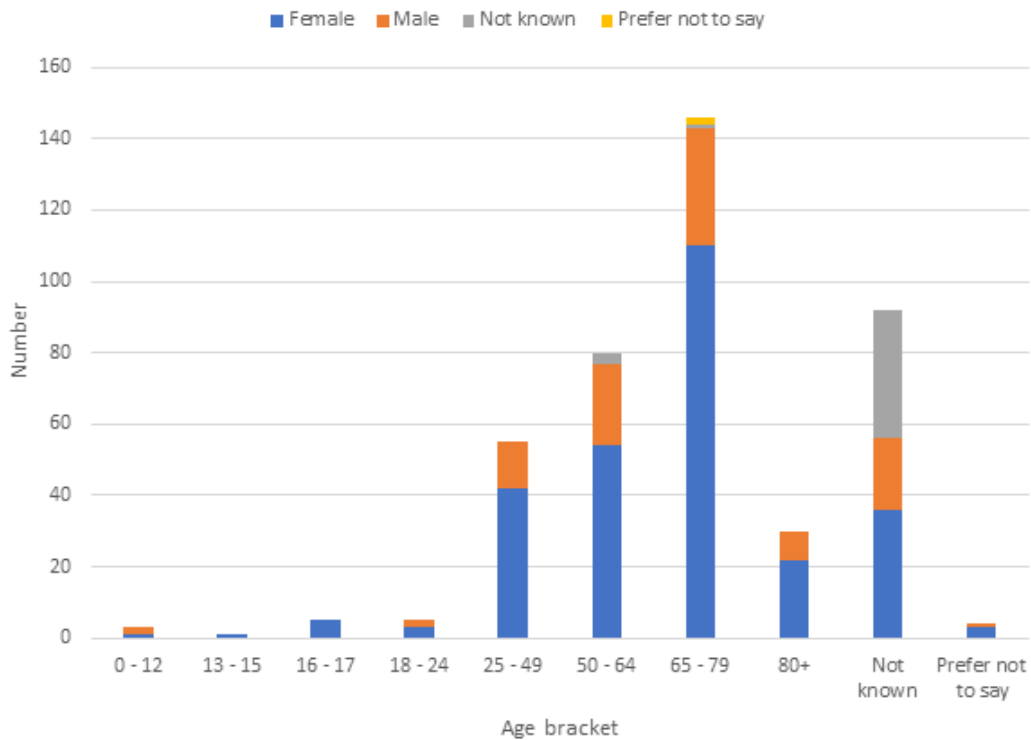


Fig. 4. Age distribution by sex, July to December 2023 (n=421)

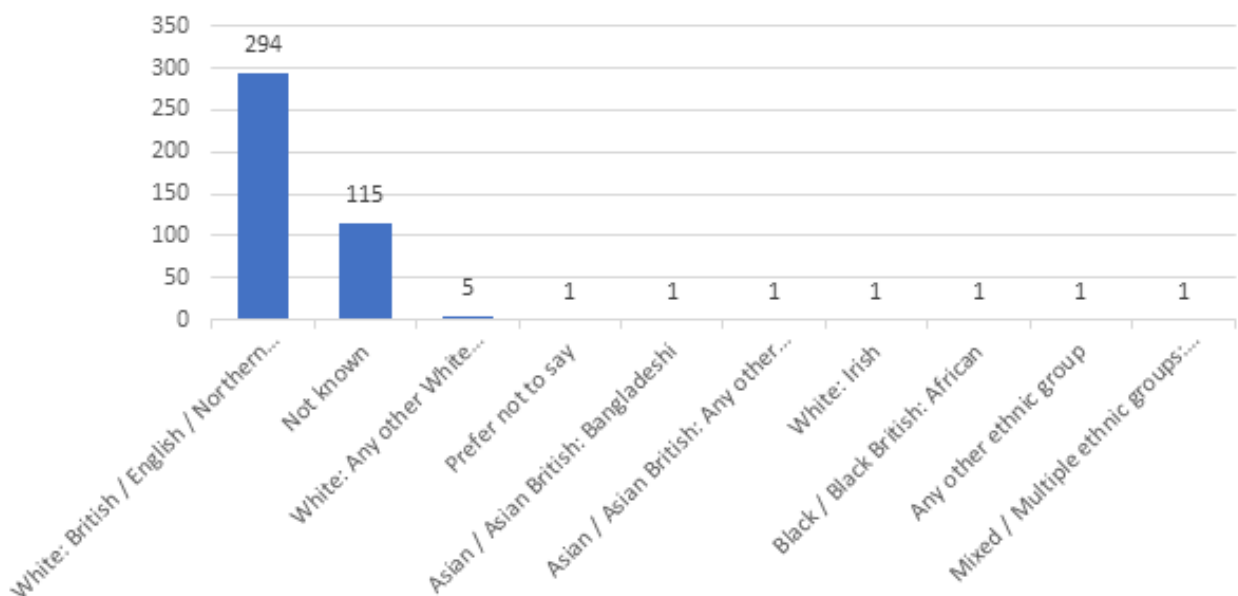


Fig. 5. Ethnicity of respondents, July to December 2023 (n=421)

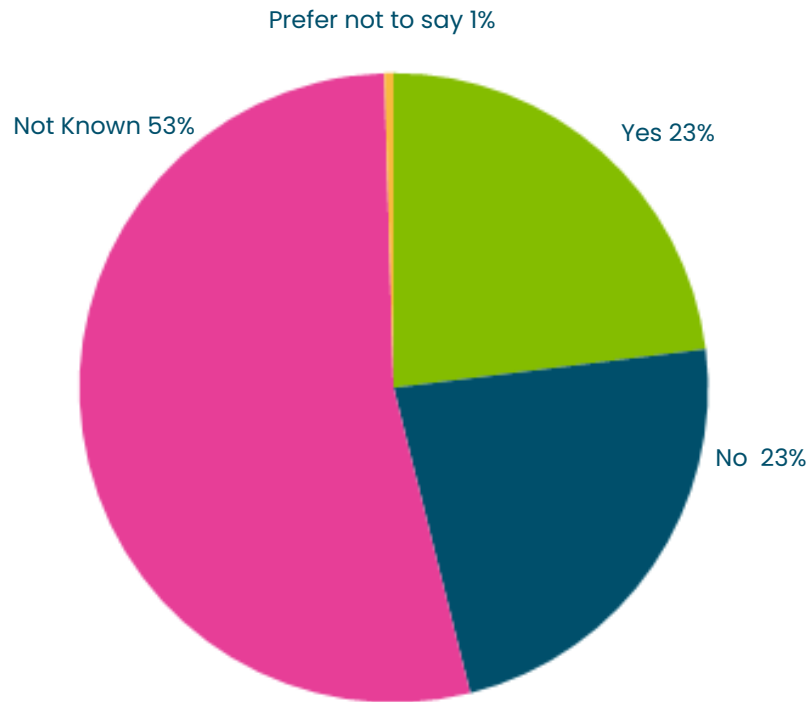


Fig. 6. Do you consider yourself to have a disability?
July to December 2023 (n=421)

We heard proportionately from a lot more disabled people in the period July to December 2023 than in the previous six-months. (January to June 2023: Yes 9%, No 35%, Not known 56%, Prefer not to say 0%).

Insights

We are hearing from all parts of the county roughly equally, although we are hearing from Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley LAC slightly less frequently than the rest of the LACs.

People's perception of service appears to continue to improve judging from the trends in positive and negative comments.

The proportion of feedback we have received from Healthwatch England has doubled to now make up 10% of all the feedback we receive. We are in discussion with Healthwatch England about getting more specific location details of the respondents other than 'Northumberland'.

People with disabilities make up a much greater proportion of the respondents than previously. We are hearing from people with disabilities at a higher rate than the county's own demographic distribution.

Where we could do better is increase our reach with men of all ages, young people under the age of 25 years old of all genders, and ethnical diverse people of all ages and genders.

Actions

We will:

- Continue to press Healthwatch England for more detail on where people responding are from.
- Review the feedback we have had about the three practices highlighted in this report over 18 months to identify the themes of what patients are saying and then will discuss this with the practices.
- The Healthwatch Northumberland Chair will write to Allendale Pharmacy to let them know how well their customers value its services.

Signposting and Information Service

A caller was confused about how to access audiology services since moving to Northumberland recently. They needed new batteries for hearing aids and had called the main audiology services number based at The Freeman Hospital. They were told they needed a GP referral, but the GP surgery had told them they didn't and that they should contact the service directly. We suspected the GP had presumed the patient was already registered with audiology services in this area, but we offered to call audiology services to clarify procedure.

Audiology told us the patient would need a GP referral to get on the system the first time, that they would be invited for a review appointment initially, and then be able to contact the service directly after that. The caller was very grateful for the clarification and said they would go back to the GP with the information.

Tynedale resident

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