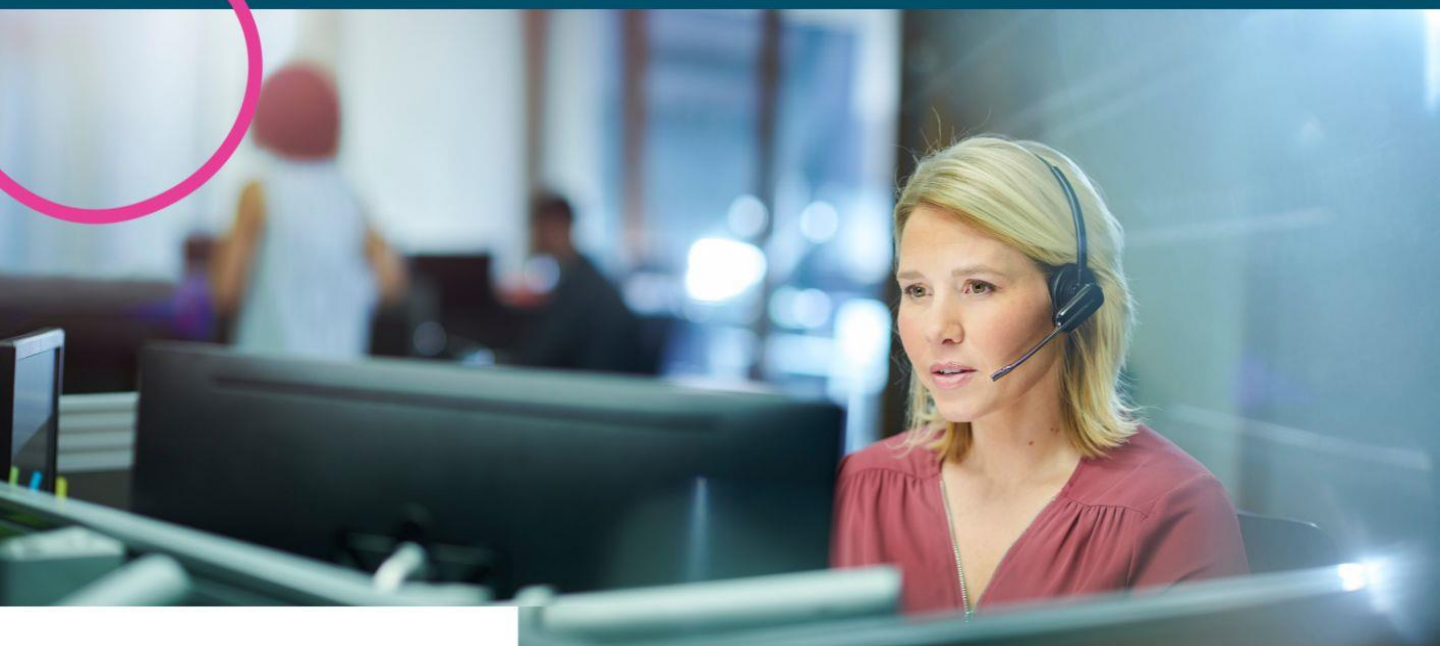




NHS 111

Patient Experience Report

March 2024



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Introduction

Healthwatch Walsall is the independent, voice of the public, for health and social care services in Walsall. We gather feedback from the public about their experiences of accessing and using health and social care services in Walsall and use that feedback to work with the service commissioners and providers to look at how services can be improved to meet the needs of the community.

On this occasion we carried out a project that looked at people's experiences of using the NHS 111 service since the change of provider from West Midlands Ambulance Service (WMAS) to DHU. We wanted to explore how using NHS 111 related to providing assistance for service users. We also wanted to look at whether the advice given by NHS 111 was impacting on attendance at the Urgent and Emergency Care Centre.

What we did

We conducted a detailed enquiry into the NHS 111 service, posing a range of questions to get a better understanding from a service user point of view. Our questions encompassed diverse aspects, such as, clarity regarding when to access the service and frequency of accessing. We looked at the different ways people accessed NHS 111, (phone or online) and assessment of waiting times upon contact. Furthermore, we explored communication to capture insights.

We collected feedback from service users by visiting different places around Walsall to speak to people who had accessed NHS 111. We engaged with the community at various events and locations to ensure we gathered feedback from diverse perspectives. We developed a survey which was available both online and hard copy. Our survey was shared through the Healthwatch Walsall website, through social media and with organisations for sharing.

There were 99 responses to the survey in total. A demographic breakdown of participants can be found on page 9.

Key Findings

Our questions are presented with answers given in percentages. Our findings have been broken down into the following themes;

- Contacting and Communication with NHS 111
- Frequency of use
- Waiting times
- Patient outcomes and referrals
- Patient rating

Contacting and Communication with NHS 111

How did you hear about NHS 111? (Participants were able to choose all options that were relevant to them.) Below is what people told us.

Media (TV, radio, newspaper, advertisements, online) – **30%**

Posters / leaflets – **23%**

Health service telephone message – **33%**

Word of mouth friend / relative – **25%**

Told to contact by Healthcare provider (e.g. GP) – **42%**

Other – **4%**

Were you clear about when to use NHS 111?

Yes – **91%**

No **9%**

Who did you contact NHS 111 for?

Myself – **46%** Partner – **20%**

Child – **27%** Relative – **5%**

Other / someone else – **2%**

How did you contact NHS 111?

By telephone – **79%**

Website – **10%**

Both (telephone and website) – **9%**

Other – **1%**

How easy did you find it to speak to NHS 111 service?

Very easy – **46%**

Easy – **31%**

Neither easy or difficult – **9%** Difficult – **12%**

Very difficult – **1%**

If you answered difficult, please tell us why?

Long waiting times – **54%**

Call not answered or disconnected – **25%**

Lengthy telephone answer message – **14%**

Too many questions – **9%**

Communication issues – **5%**

Other – **5%**

Did you have any communication issues with the NHS 111 service operator?

Yes – **30%**

No – **66%**

Somewhat – **4%**

Were you able to express your medical concern/issue?

Yes – **84%**

No – **13%**

Somewhat – **3%**

Did you feel that you were listened to?

Yes – **74%**

No – **20%**

Somewhat – **6%**

Results

Although a significant number (**66%**) of participants expressed ease in contacting and communicating with NHS 111, telling us *“they were kind, efficient and knew what to do”* and *“very professional, understanding and actioned what was needed”*, a notable proportion of comments highlighted areas where their experience fell short, particularly in relation to communication and the need for communication between NHS 111 and the services that they refer to such as the Urgent Treatment Centre and the Hospital. Someone shared the following comment with us *“I was told there would be an appointment at the Urgent Treatment Centre, but there was nothing of the sort, 24 hours later I am still in pain with no resolution”*

Issues also emerged around unanswered calls, occasional disconnections and poor communication from staff, with participants telling us things like *“my details were not transferred to the hospital or any of my call information so had to wait longer and repeat everything I had said on the phone already.”* *“Too many pointless questions, and then questions they should ask, they don’t.”* *“Staff are very rude”*.

We also received a small number of comments around the wrong advice given and misdiagnosis, *“I had sepsis and the operator told me to take Buscopan, I could have died”* and *“give me the wrong info every time I call”*.

Frequency of use

How many times have you used NHS 111 in the past 12 months?

Once – **47%** 2 to 5 times – **41%** 6 to 12 times – **9%** 13 times or more – **2%**

Results

When looking into the frequency of visits, analysis showed that one person who had used NHS 111 13 times in the last 12 months had a long-term health condition. Similarly, one third of patients using the service 6 to 12 times in the last 12 months reported having either a long-term health condition or a disability.

Waiting Times

How long did you have to wait before being connected to an NHS 111 call centre professional?

0 to 5 minutes – **36%** 6 to 15 minutes – **43%** 16 to 30 minutes – **14%** More than 30 minutes – **6%**

After your first contact with NHS 111, how long did you wait to get a call back from a medical professional?

0 to 3 hours – **38%**

3 to 6 hours – **44%**

12 to 24 hours – **14%**

Longer than 24 hours – **1%**

Did not happen – **5%**

Results

When participants were asked what did not work well, long waiting times were the most frequent theme, with **54%** of people choosing waiting times as a reason for finding talking to NHS 111 difficult. We were told waiting times are *“very poor, patients could be waiting all night.”* and that there are long waiting times for call backs, with another participant saying, *“Walsall out of hours are very poor to respond... and patients could be waiting all night.”*

Again, when asking participants how NHS 111 could be improved, the highest number of comments were around improving waiting times. Comments largely echoed those in response to what did not go well. With comments highlighting the need for prompt call backs from medical staff, and the need for improved communication between services that NHS 111 refer to such as the Urgent Treatment Centre and the Hospital. One person told us they had received a call back from a doctor who then called an ambulance and they felt that it would have been better to have the *“ambulance sent straightaway, not waiting for a call back from doctor for hours.”*



Despite only 17% of people saying that they had received a call back arranged in the previous question, 94 people answered the question above.

5% said that a call back did not happen, but it is not clear whether this was because nobody called them back when expected or because a call back was not required.

Patient Outcomes and Referrals

We asked, what was the outcome of your contact with NHS 111?

Transferred to 999 ambulance service – **35%**

Ambulance arranged to take to hospital – **21%**

Told to attend Emergency Care Department (A&E) self-transport – **25%**

Told to attend Urgent Treatment Centre at hospital – **11%**

Told would get GP/Nurse telephone call back – **17%**

Told to contact own GP – **4%**

NHS 111 arranged a GP appointment at my GP practice – **4%**

Other – **6%**



6% of people said that they had a different outcome. Most of the comments fitted in with the previous options, including attending hospital but one person was advised to contact an optician and another to contact a pharmacist.

Results

We found the majority of callers were transferred to 999 ambulance service, followed by patients being told to self-transport to A&E.

Patient Rating

We asked the participants from your experience (s), how would you rate the NHS 111 service?

Very good – **44%**

Good – **38%**

Mixed – **9%**

Poor – **4%**

Very poor – **5%**

Results

Despite a high number of negative comments around poor communication and waiting times, **44%** of participants reported finding NHS 111 service to be very good and **38%** rating the service as good. This suggests that a majority of users are satisfied with their experience, offering a positive perspective on the service.

Conclusion

The number of people who took part in the survey was relatively low, but the findings provide a snapshot of the experiences of those individuals. The overall feedback on people's experiences of using NHS 111 to access services was generally positive.

People found out about NHS 111 from a variety of sources including medical professionals and media campaigns as well as through word of mouth.

Although most people were waiting a relatively short time for their calls to be answered, there was a large amount of feedback from people that their experiences could be improved by reducing waiting times. The 13% of people who said they had found it difficult to speak to NHS 111 were asked for the reason why and the highest number of responses was for long waiting times.

It may also be that this refers to the time they waited for call back from a medical professional as these waits were longer on the whole with the highest percentage of people waiting for 3-6 hours for a call back.

Around a third of people were referred to ambulance services by NHS 111. Others had a call back from a medical professional or were advised to contact their own GP. Where people were referred to either the Hospital or Urgent Treatment Centre, there were some comments that appointments were not made or information about their call was not handed over to the other service.

There were some comments about the questions that were asked by NHS 111, with some feeling that the wrong questions were asked by call operators. For some people this may mean a misdiagnosis and one person said that they had sepsis but were misdiagnosed over the phone.

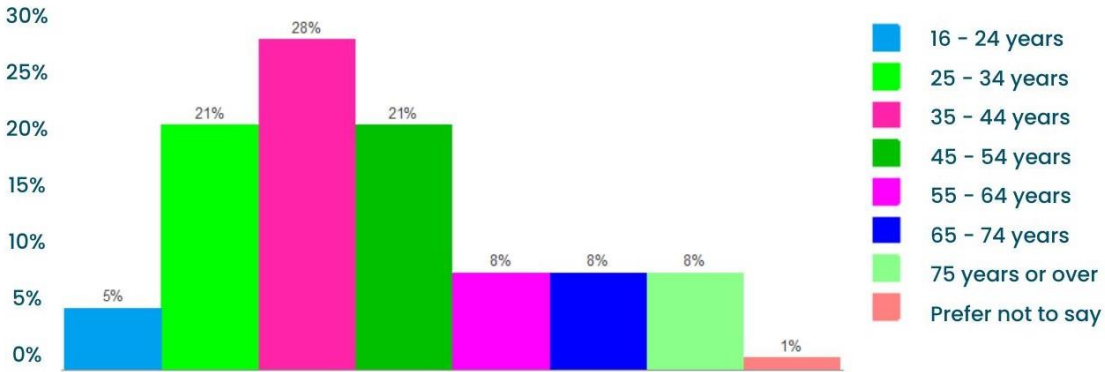
However, people who took part in the survey were generally happy with the service and did not offer comments on areas for improvement.

Recommendations

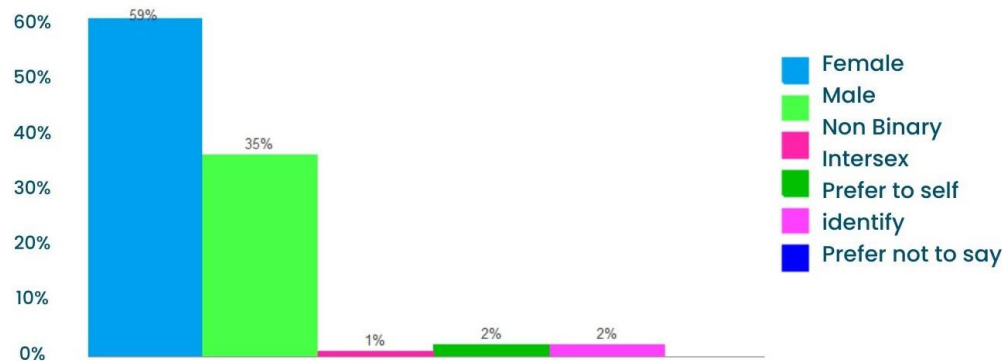
- As the greatest number of comments were made in relation to the waiting times to either get through to NHS 111 or to receive a call back from a medical professional, it is recommended that waiting times are reviewed for both call answering and call backs and a plan for improvements for made for both.
- Where people were referred to other services, such as A&E or Urgent Care, it was commented that information was not always passed on to the service, leaving people waiting for long periods of time or having to repeat what they had already told NHS 111. Therefore, it is recommended that where people are referred to another service, information is communicated to the service that they are to attend and where possible appointments made for them to reduce waiting times.
- There were some comments about the number and types of questions that are asked by call operators with some people feeling that the questions asked were not the right ones to ensure that correct information and diagnosis is given. It is recommended that there should be public facing information available on what questions are asked and the reasons for those questions to ensure that there is a greater understanding from the public.

Demographics

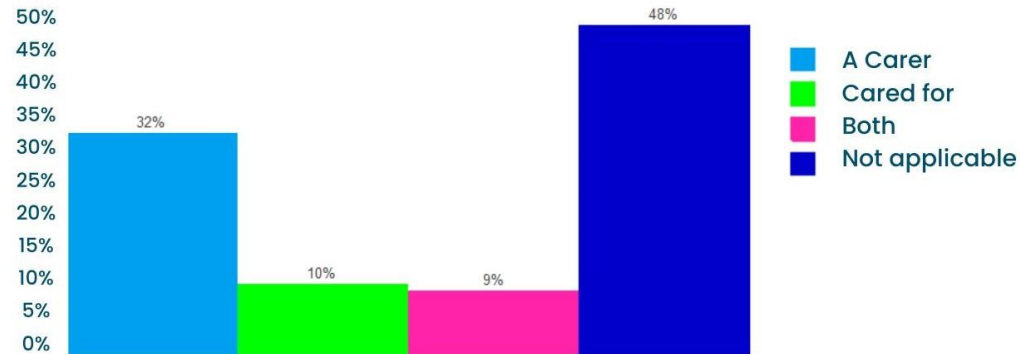
What is your age group?



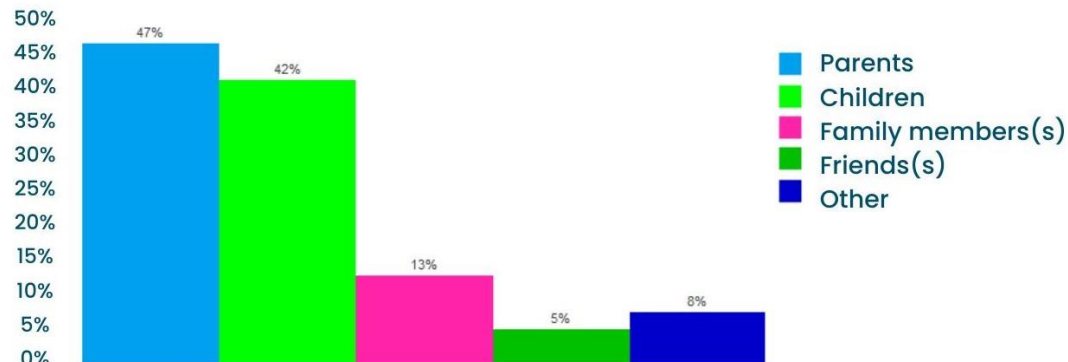
What gender / sex are you?



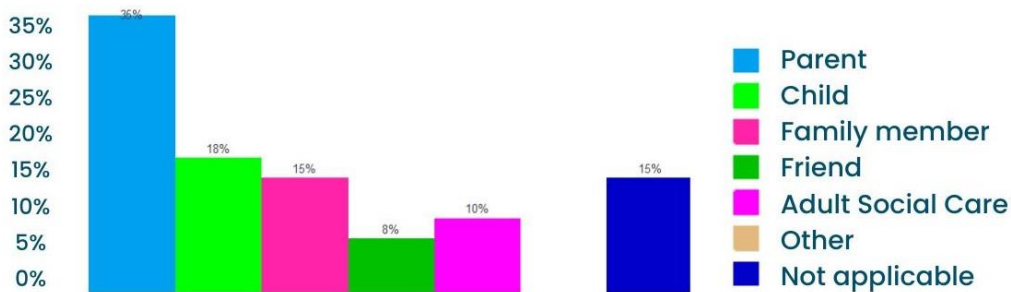
Are you?...



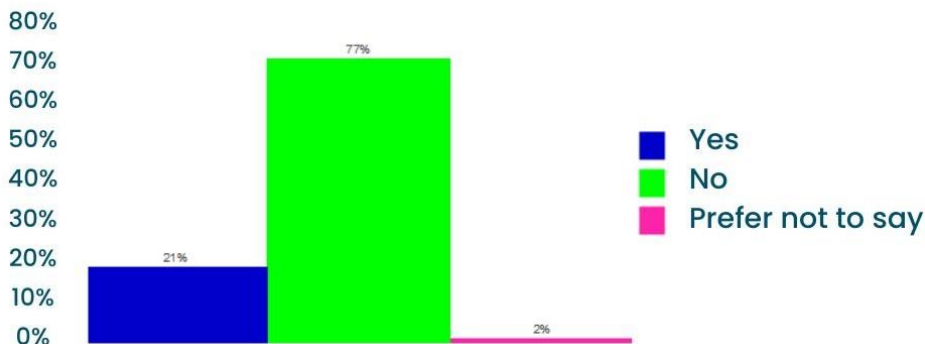
Who do you provide care for?



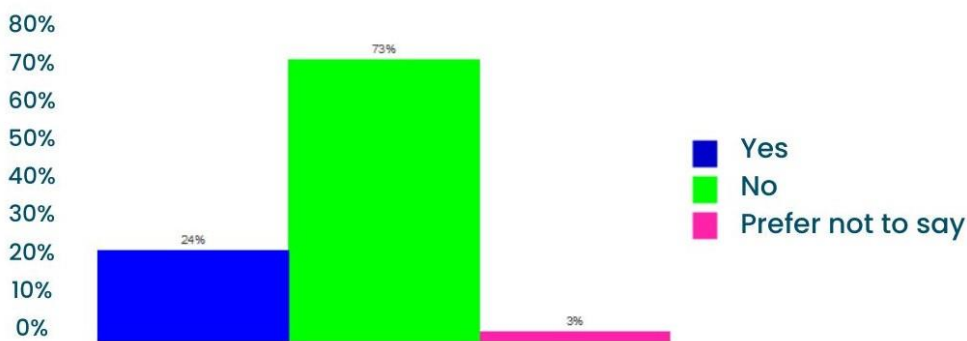
If care is provided for you, is it provided by?...



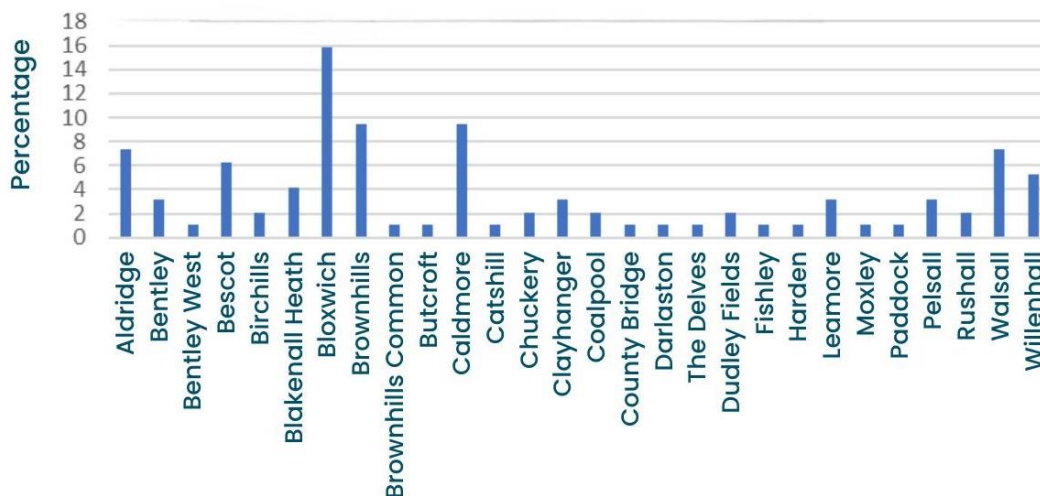
Do you consider yourself to have a disability?



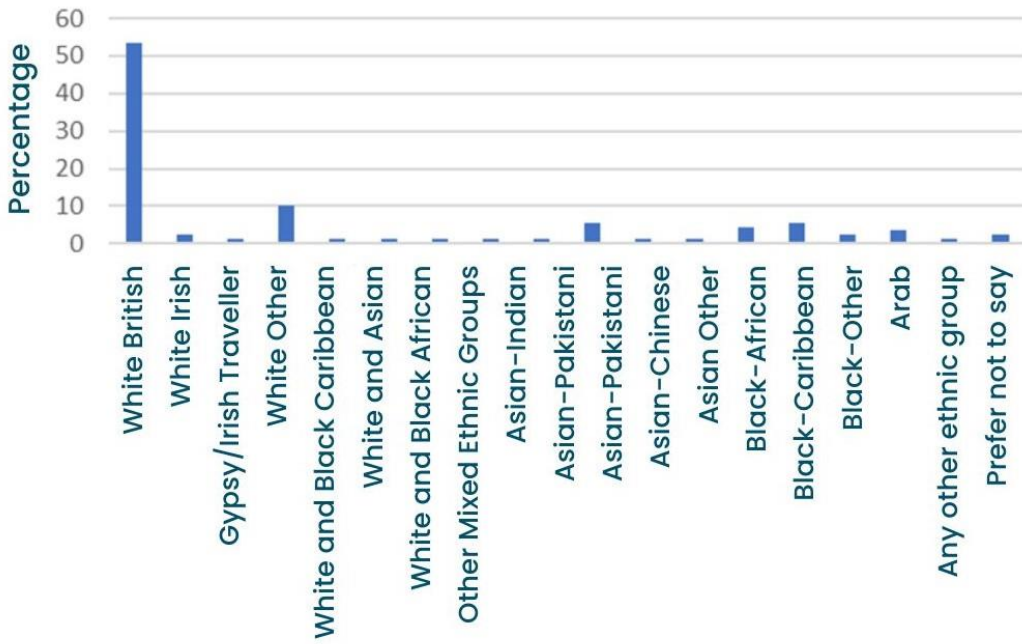
Do you have a long-term condition?



Locality



What is your Ethnic Background



Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Walsall would like to thank all the participants who took the time to complete the survey and for talking to the Healthwatch Team.



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