

# The value of listening

Healthwatch Dorset  
Annual Report 2023-2024



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**“Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people’s views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities.”**

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



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# Message from our Chair

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**This has been another busy year for Healthwatch Dorset, during which we have established many new partnerships in a changing healthcare landscape to ensure that your voice is heard at the highest level and that your concerns are acted upon.**

Through sharing your experiences of dentistry services with NHS Dorset, NHS England and our local councils, we have helped to improve the provision of information about local dental services with a particular emphasis on better access for vulnerable people.

We have been particularly concerned about the deterioration in the mental health of children and young people in our county. Through engagement with young people facing additional challenges and inequality – such as those who are homeless, refugees, young people who identify as LGBTQ+ and previously looked after children – we were able to identify key aspects of service delivery which need to be improved so they are more responsive. Our findings have informed the current review of young people’s mental health services, and we will continue to hold services to account on your behalf.

In the last year we visited all the Minor Injuries Units, Urgent Care Centres and A&E Departments in Dorset. Subsequently, we shared our insights, based on the testimonies of patients, their families and staff, with NHS Dorset. Our recommendations were well received and have already been acted upon.

As a local Board we have appraised our performance and undertaken training and development sessions. We have continued to grow our volunteer base, contributed to strategic discussions, attended the Healthwatch England annual conference and welcomed their new CEO and Chair to a team away day event in the summer.

We look forward to continuing to engage with you all over the next five years.



**“I am committed to the ideal of a healthcare system which is holistic and preventative in its approach, tackling the root causes of ill health which are often socio-economic in origin. I believe passionately that services can be improved if they reflect and respond to the views and needs of the people who use them, and I am committed to achieving this locally through my work with Healthwatch Dorset.”**

Viv Aird, Chair of Healthwatch Dorset



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# About us

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## Healthwatch Dorset 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

To be the independent consumer voice for people across Dorset, making sure their views and experiences help improve health, social care and wellbeing services.



### Our mission

To support individuals and engage with communities to influence providers and commissioners to improve health, social care and wellbeing services.



### Our values are:

- **Inclusive:** we celebrate and embrace diversity.
- **Ethical:** we act with integrity, transparency and respect.
- **Accountable:** we accept responsibility for our actions.
- **Empowering:** we build understanding, confidence and influence.
- **Collaborative:** we work in partnership to maximise the impact of all we do.



# Year in review

## Reaching out:

**1,566 people**

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

**444 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost of living crisis.



## Making a difference to care:

We published

**2 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**Improving patient access to urgent and emergency care in Dorset**

which identified ways to improve understanding and access to emergency care.



## Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

**48 outstanding volunteers**

who gave up **80 days** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authorities. In 2023-24 we received

**£201,928**




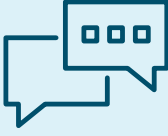


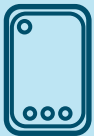

We currently employ

**2 full-time and 2 part-time staff**

who help us carry out our work.



# How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>Our volunteers visited Minor Injuries Units and A&amp;Es across Dorset to talk to patients, their families and staff, and find out more about urgent care.</p>	 <p>We visited youth groups, schools, colleges and voluntary sector organisations to talk to young people across Dorset about mental health.</p>
Summer	 <p>The NHS announced changes to their contract with dentists, after our data showed widening inequalities.</p>	 <p>Our staff and volunteers engaged with local people at summer fairs, shows and events across Dorset.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We published a report and made six recommendations to improve patient access to urgent and emergency care in Dorset.</p>	 <p>Our report, <i>Your Mind, Your Say</i>, provided insights from young people to inform the NHS Dorset review of young people's mental health services.</p>
Winter	 <p>We published blogs with Weymouth College staff and students to raise awareness of mental health for Time to Talk Day.</p>	 <p>We highlighted the impact of the soaring cost of living on healthcare.</p>

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# Your voice heard at a wider level

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**We ensure the experiences of people in Dorset influence decisions made about services at Dorset Integrated Care System (ICS) level.**

This year we've worked to achieve:



**Working with local Food Banks.** Our Engagement Officer, Lucy, wrote [a blog](#) about her visits to Food Banks in Dorset. She met staff and volunteers to get a better understanding of how the Food Banks are run and how people are referred there for support. We gained insight about the impact of food poverty on people's health and wellbeing and learned about issues the clients have with health and social care services.

**Working with the local system.** We carried out a survey gathering anonymised feedback on our service from NHS and Council commissioners, health and care service providers, voluntary sector and regional teams at NHSE and Care Quality Commission. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive with some learning about how we can extend our reach and improve our communications. "The stories you tell change minds, and behaviour."



**Working with Bournemouth University.** This year our volunteers supported an [Aspire](#) photo exhibition [Life through my lens](#). This research project looked at obesity and unemployment as linked problems that harm our health, happiness and lifespan. These issues have worsened with the current cost of living crisis. Researchers talked to participants using photography as a way for them to share their experiences and have a voice.

**Working with the voluntary sector.** We supported our colleagues at local learning disability support groups, parent carer groups and advocacy organisations, to raise the profile of people's views on day centre services in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole. As a result of our joint work and the consultation response, Council plans were changed to keep [four day centres open](#).





## 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 patient access to urgent and emergency care in Dorset

We published our findings about local people's experience of urgent care services. Thanks to this insight, NHS Dorset has updated online information, improved NHS 111 signposting and simplified their process so that people can better understand what to expect from different urgent care settings.

## 63%

of people said if there was an App or website showing urgent care waiting times they would use it and it would influence their decision on which healthcare setting to attend.



## What did you tell us about urgent care?

- If people had known to call NHS 111 first, it would have saved them a journey to the wrong service.
- There's a lack of communication between Minor Injuries Units, patients and NHS 111.
- People don't know enough about Minor Injuries Units (MIUs) and Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs), so they prefer to visit Accident and Emergency (A&E).
- Information materials about urgent care services are inconsistent, outdated and unclear; this contributes to an underuse of urgent care services in rural areas.
- Staff had seen an increase in patients visiting MIUs and UTCs who require primary care rather than urgent or emergency care, due to lack of GP and dentist appointments.

## What difference did this make?

NHS Dorset created an action plan to meet all our recommendations:

- The Stay Well Dorset website and NHS 111 signposting service have been updated to provide more accurate geographical information about urgent care in Dorset.
- NHS Dorset has set up a reference group as part of their urgent care redesign work to ensure front-line staff are part of future service development.
- NHS Dorset are progressing work to increase direct booking capacity from NHS 111 into general practice which will enable MIU/UTC capacity to be used more appropriately.
- The local NHS system are developing a public communication campaign based on our recommendations as part of wider admission and attendance prevention work.



**"The knowledge and experience of Healthwatch has supported us to gather hugely valuable evidence directly from people using our services."**

James Spriggs, Transformation Project Manager at Dorset HealthCare

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# Young people's views of mental health services in Dorset

**We visited local organisations and youth groups across Bournemouth, Christchurch, Poole and Dorset, to speak directly with young people who don't always have a strong voice.**

This included young people who have experienced trauma, young refugees, young people outside of mainstream school, young LGBTQ+ people, young offenders and previously looked after children.

## What change do young people want to see?

- Shorter waiting times, so that they are seen before they get to crisis point.
- Easy access to help, in comfortable non-clinical settings.
- Better continuity of care, follow up after treatment and to be treated as an individual.
- The opportunity to do some sort of activity while talking to their support worker, because not everyone is comfortable talking face-to-face.



**"I never felt that I was listened to or heard. If they were more understanding of young people and listened more then it'd be better."**

Robbie, interviewed by Healthwatch Dorset

## What difference did this make?

Our report informed the local NHS plan, *Making Mental Health services better for young people in Dorset*. The plan addresses several issues highlighted in our research and outlines how the local system will tackle the issues young people face.



**"This report perfectly illustrates the need to improve mental health services for young people living in Dorset and especially for young people who experience more challenges getting the type of help they need."**

Elaine Hurl, Head of Children & Young People, Mental Health at NHS Dorset

We would like to thank all the young people who spoke to us and the organisations who supported this project: The International Care Network, Separated Child Foundation, Future Roots, Weymouth College, Dorchester Learning Centre, Dorset Mind, and the Space Youth Project.

Read our full report: [\*\*\*Your Mind, Your Say: Young people's views of mental health services in Dorset\*\*\*](#)

# Three ways we have made a difference in 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

**It's important for services to see the bigger picture. Hearing personal experiences and the impact of ill-health on people's lives provides them with a better understanding of the problems.**

Gladys and her daughter-in-law Fiona **shared their story** with us to raise awareness of deconditioning syndrome and the support needed to help vulnerable people regain mobility and independence. In April 2023, 96-year-old Gladys had a devastating fall at home and following surgery she spent months in hospital recovering. Her experience was featured by Healthwatch England and The Guardian newspaper.



## Getting services to involve the public

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

We are helping to develop a new NHS Dorset website that will share a suite of tools and learning about different ways to involve the public in health and care services. This new resource brings together creative ways of having community conversations with clear local examples and contact details. Our Young Listeners project will be featured as an example of supporting young people to carry out peer-to-peer research and help encourage services to involve the public.



## Improving care over time

**Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.**

In 2020 we visited youth groups and local organisations to gather mental health feedback and seek the views of young people who don't always have a strong voice. Unfortunately, the review of children and young people's mental health services was put on hold due to COVID-19. This year we've been able to revisit this project and inform the restart review of young people's mental health services.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



# 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 the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard and services meet their needs.**

**This year we have reached different communities by:**

- Engaging with young people who have experienced trauma, young refugees, young people outside of mainstream school, young LGBTQ+ people, young offenders and previously looked after children.
- Working with people experiencing homelessness and the people who support them.
- Visiting local Food Banks to support them and promote Healthwatch Dorset to their clients.

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# Engaging with people experiencing homelessness

**In 2024 we've been speaking to people experiencing homelessness, people who are vulnerably housed and the people and groups who support them.**

We wanted to find out more about the barriers and challenges that people who live in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole face when trying to access health and social care services. We visited organisations and groups over a ten-week period and chatted to people in their surroundings where they feel comfortable and safe.

## What did people tell us?

- People are still being refused access to GP services because they do not have a fixed address or ID.
- Mobility issues are another barrier when trying to access services. We spoke to people with infected leg ulcers who are unable to walk to health or care settings.
- People told us they were not given pain relief in hospital if they were on prescribed Methadone. They felt forced to discharge themselves because they were in so much pain.

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## Access to dentistry

**NHS Dentistry is the top issue people contact us about, mostly because they are trying to find a dentist taking on new NHS patients or for urgent care.**



**"I am 24 weeks pregnant and have bleeding gums. I am being told of the importance of looking after my teeth during pregnancy but cannot find any dentists locally taking NHS patients."**

Mum-to-be interviewed by Healthwatch Dorset

We share feedback about dentistry with NHS Dorset and NHS England South West. Our insights have informed commissioning, including a child-friendly dental pilot practice and an additional 100 urgent care appointments a week for people who do not have a regular dentist.

We have also influenced the focus for local initiatives:

- Flexible and rapid commissioning – focusing on looked after children and commissioning additional capacity in areas of deprivation.
- Working with the Anglo-European Chiropractic University College to develop the oral health institute.
- Addressing the backlog of community/special care dentistry in secondary care settings.
- Oral health education in schools and communities.



## 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, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.**

**This year we've helped people by:**

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust.
- Helping people access the services they need.
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost of living crisis.

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## Sharing information about local services

**We send out a monthly eNewsletter with updates, information about local services and opportunities for you to share your stories and influence services.**

In December 2023, we shared advice and information about keeping warm and well over winter. We included blogs about local Food Banks, warm spaces, mental health support, urgent care access over the holidays and support for people experiencing homelessness.

We also ran a special newsletter for Carers Rights Day last year, helping people to understand their rights as a carer and sharing information about local support that's available, events, training opportunities and resources for young carers.

**Sign up** to receive our monthly eNewsletter.



**"Thank you for the Healthwatch Dorset eNewsletter; really helpful information and resources for carers – keep up the good work."**

Feedback received by Healthwatch Dorset

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## Improving access to information

**The number one issue people contact us about is accessing NHS dentistry.**

Over 200 people contacted us for advice and information on dental services last year. People told us that practices were not taking on new NHS patients, some no longer see NHS patients or have waiting lists of over two years and the impact of delayed treatment has resulted in people living in pain and dental conditions worsening.



**"I have several loose teeth, very worried, painful and feeling really self-conscious."**

To help raise awareness of the local issues we share your stories with commissioners and providers. By working with NHS Dorset, we have been able to influence the design of their **online information**, adding frequently asked questions and answers to their website, based on the queries we hear from local people.

We continue to advocate for better access and up-to-date, clear information on NHS dentistry.



**"Thanks for all your help, I persevered, kept calling my old dentist and they've now agreed to see me next month. I'm hoping that they can take out this painful tooth, I'm so relieved."**

Sue, Weymouth



# 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 community events to promote Healthwatch Dorset and gather local feedback.
- Took part in the first Big Help Out to promote and support volunteering nationally.
- Visited urgent care sites to collect data and speak to patients, their families and staff.
- Shared their views and suggestions to develop health and social care public messaging.
- Carried out Patient Led Assessments of local hospitals to help them improve.





“Volunteering at Bournemouth University’s photo exhibition on behalf of Healthwatch Dorset was a truly profound experience. Witnessing the life-changing events depicted in those images was incredibly moving and showed the transformative impact the project had on the people involved, with one individual describing it as a ‘rebirth’ of their life.

“Engaging with the local community to share these impactful stories and discuss their perspectives on health and wellbeing felt immensely rewarding.”

**Venerly first joined us as a volunteer Young Listener and she is now a student at Bournemouth University.**



Venerly –  
Healthwatch Dorset



“I found the Minor Injuries project fascinating. Patients were receptive to the survey and it was great to get a deeper insight from the front-line staff as well.

“Overall, I learnt a lot myself as to which service should be used for any health or accident condition. Hardly anyone realised that the Emergency Department was only for life saving conditions or accidents.

“I really enjoyed this project volunteering for Healthwatch Dorset.”

**Chris has volunteered with us for over five years and carried out visits this year for our urgent care project.**



Chris –  
Healthwatch Dorset

## Do you feel inspired?



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

 [healthwatchdorset.co.uk/contact-us](https://healthwatchdorset.co.uk/contact-us)

 0300 111 0102

 [enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@healthwatchdorset.co.uk)



# Finance and future priorities

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

## Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from BCP Council and Dorset Council	£201,928	Expenditure on pay	£113,093
Additional income	£8,662	Non-pay expenditure	£28,618
		Office and management fees	£68,600
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£210,590</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£210,311</b>

## Additional income

Additional income is broken down by:

Purpose of funding	Amount
Funding received from NHS Dorset for work on a project carrying out independent interviews for the ICB assurance process.	£3,200
Bursary funding from Healthwatch England to attend their conference.	£462
Funding carried forward from 2022–23 financial year for dentistry project.	£5,000

## Next steps

**Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.**

We will also work together with partners in our local Integrated Care System to help develop a culture within the NHS and care system where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

**Our top three priorities for the next year are:**

1. Integrated Neighbourhood Teams – working with communities to deliver more joined up preventative care at a neighbourhood level.
2. Virtual Wards – gathering feedback on people’s experience of receiving hospital care in their home.
3. Gathering feedback on pharmacies.



**“I am pleased that Evolving Communities has retained the Healthwatch Dorset contract following a competitive tender process. The organisation has a good track record of supporting residents across a range of important health and social care issues, and I look forward to helping them build on this success and supporting the ongoing development of this service.”**

Jon Price, Executive Director Adult Social Care and Housing at Dorset Council



# Statutory statements

**Healthwatch Dorset, The Bridge, Chaseside,  
Bournemouth, BH7 7BX.**

**Healthwatch Dorset is hosted by Evolving Communities CIC,  
a community interest company limited by guarantee and  
registered in England and Wales with company number  
08464602. The registered office is at Unit 2, Hampton Park West,  
Melksham, SN12 6LH.**

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

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## The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch Board consists of eight members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as our work programme and they carried out equality impact assessments.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

### **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 can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form 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 and we will publish it on our website.

### **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 insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority areas, for example, we take information to the Integrated Care Board, Integrated Care Partnership, Health & Wellbeing Boards, System Quality Group and Health Scrutiny Committees.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

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## Enter and View

This year, we made 13 of Enter and View visits. We made six recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Locations	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Blandford Minor Injuries Unit</li><li>2. Bournemouth Urgent Treatment Centre</li><li>3. Bournemouth Emergency Department</li><li>4. Bridport Minor Injuries Unit</li><li>5. Dorchester Out of Hours Service</li><li>6. Dorchester Emergency Department</li><li>7. Poole Urgent Treatment Centre</li><li>8. Poole Emergency Department</li><li>9. Shaftesbury Minor Injuries Unit</li><li>10. Sherborne Minor Injuries Unit</li><li>11. Swanage Minor Injuries Unit</li><li>12. Weymouth Urgent Treatment Centre</li><li>13. Wimborne Minor Injuries Unit</li></ol>	All these visits were part of our Urgent Care project.	We wrote a report with recommendations for change and improvement and the system is following up on these.

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## Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Dorset is represented on the Dorset Health & Wellbeing Board by Margaret Guy, Board Vice Chair and on the BCP Health & Wellbeing Board by Louise Bate, Healthwatch Dorset Manager. During 2023/24 our representatives has effectively carried out these roles by attending meetings and development sessions and sharing Healthwatch Dorset data and reports.

Healthwatch Dorset is represented on the Dorset Integrated Care Partnership and the Dorset Integrated Care Board by Louise Bate and on the System Quality Group by Margaret Guy.

## 2023–2024 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Children & Young People’s mental health	We made seven recommendations, and they are being used to underpin system work to make mental health services better for young people in Dorset.
Urgent & Emergency Care	<p>The Stay Well Dorset website and NHS 111 signposting service have both been updated to provide more accurate geographical information about UTCs and MIUs in Dorset.</p> <p>NHS Dorset set up an engagement/reference group as part of their urgent care redesign work to ensure front-line staff are part of future service development.</p> <p>NHS Dorset is progressing work to increase direct booking capacity from NHS 111 into general practice which will enable MIUs/UTCs capacity to be used more appropriately.</p> <p>The NHS Dorset communications team and the system wide communications network are developing a campaign as part of wider admission and attendance prevention work.</p>
NHS Dentistry and oral health	<p>By working with NHS Dorset, we’ve been able to influence the focus for local initiatives including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introducing Flexible and Rapid commissioning – focusing on looked after children and commissioning additional capacity in areas of deprivation.</li> <li>• Working with the AECC University College to develop the oral health institute.</li> <li>• Addressing the backlog of community/special care dentistry in secondary care settings.</li> <li>• Providing oral health education in schools and communities.</li> </ul>

# healthwatch

Dorset

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