

# ‘The Service’

A Mystery Shopper review of the Enhanced  
Access Service across GP Practices in  
Manchester



August 2024

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## 1. Introduction

1.1 This report aims to present key findings, conclusions and recommendations based upon the results of a Mystery Shopper investigation completed by Healthwatch Manchester (HWM).

1.2 This investigation involved contacting each GP Practice in Manchester via telephone to gauge their understanding and awareness of the Enhanced Access Service(EAS).

1.3 Since 1st October 2022, the EAS requires Primary Care Networks(PCN) to provide enhanced access appointments between the hours of 6.30pm to 8pm Mondays to Fridays and between 9am and 5pm on Saturdays. The changes do not mean that every practice has to be open every evening and weekends, instead local arrangements can be made for PCNs to subcontract some or all of their service to other providers or work with others across a larger footprint, which could include a neighbouring PCN<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Background & Rationale

2.1 As the independent health and social care champion for Manchester citizens, HWM is at times the go to organisation when a review of a particular service is required.

2.2 HWM enjoy a collaborative relationship with NHS Greater Manchester(NHS GM). A proposal to plan, develop and conduct two reviews of the EAS was commissioned through HWM by NHS GM in March 2024.

2.3 This would provide a comparison between the current offer of the service and the offer previously determined by HWM on two separate occasions through similar reviews.

2.4 HWM agreed to conduct two investigations into the offer of the EAS via GP Practices in Manchester. These would take the form of:

1. A review of GP Practice websites to check to include the offer of the EAS.
2. A telephone mystery shopper exercise to determine whether the offer of the EAS is being provided.

2.5 This report presents findings from the latter exercise. This required all 83 GP Practices to be contacted via telephone to determine the following:

- Whether the service is being offered
- The quality of information about the service (*see 3.8*)

2.6 The timeframe for this project to be completed was between 1st April - September 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> NHS England(2024). Enhanced Access to General Practice services through the network contract DES - Frequently asked questions. Date Accessed 01/08/2024. [Website link](#)

### 3. Methodology

3.1 Mystery shopper style phone calls were used as the method of investigation. This provided an opportunity for HWM to understand if GP Practice staff were aware of the EAS.

3.2 When planning this mystery shopper exercise, it was decided that standard questions about the EAS would be asked for each GP Practice.

3.3 The procedure used when conducting each phone call was as follows:

1. Phone the practice
2. Explain the scenario
3. If necessary, rephrase the question to provide further clarity

3.4 One 'prompt' question (Question 3) was asked if the practice did not recognise the term 'Enhanced Access Service'. This was decided as the service itself has been rebranded numerous times over recent years, so HWM wanted to give them the best opportunity to respond by providing more clarification.

3.5 Each practice was called and placed on loudspeaker so that the HWM team could all hear the respondent's answer. As this was a mystery shopper exercise, the caller did not identify themselves as HWM, instead we used the following sentence:

*'Hello, I have recently moved to Manchester, and I would like to know if you provide the Enhanced Access Service. If you do, can you tell me how I can use this?'*

3.6 As previously mentioned, if the respondent was unaware what the EAS was, the question was rephrased to:

*'Is there any way I can see my GP outside the normal practice hours?'*

3.7 If the respondent informed HWM that either they did provide this service or if a practice in their PCN did, they were awarded 1-mark.

3.8 The HWM team assessed the answers against our Quality Mark Criteria(QMC). The QMC involves three separate pieces of information about the EAS:

- Hours and days of the week the service is offered i.e. 6:30-8pm Monday to Friday
- The appointment date i.e. same day or pre-booked
- Method of appointment i.e. face to face or virtual

3.9 If the practice mentioned any of the QMC in their answer, they were awarded 1-mark per 'piece of information'.

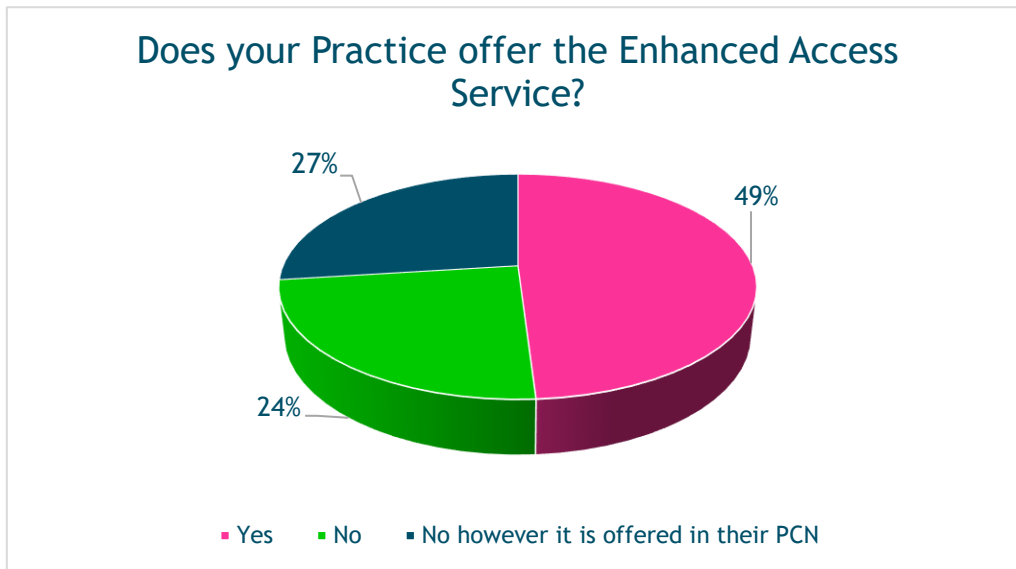
3.10 We also scored the practice against our Prompt Mark Criteria (PMC). This is a 1-mark score which was awarded if the respondent knew what the EAS was, and the phone call was under 3 minutes long (our definition of "promptness").

3.11 Finally, we scored the practice against our Clarity Mark Criteria(CMC). This is also a 1-mark score which is awarded if the caller (HWM) was able to understand the respondent clearly over the phone. Thus, the maximum number of marks a practice could receive was 6 and the lowest was 0.

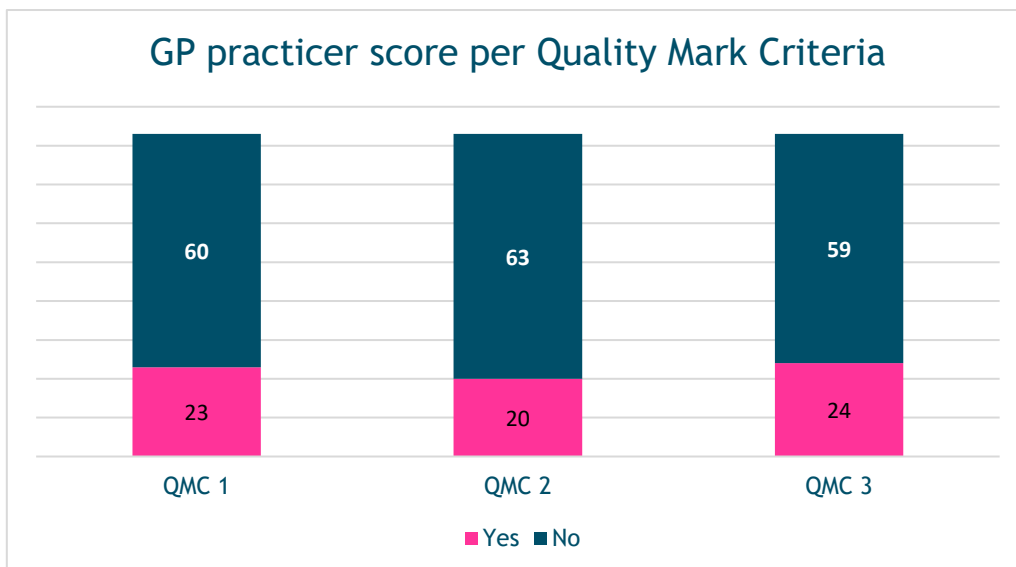
## 4. Key Findings

4.1 After completing our mystery shopper review, we found that 76% of the total number of practices we contacted told us that the practice offered the EAS or another practice in the PCN provided it. The chart below shows that 49% of practices offered the EAS and 27% said it was offered elsewhere in the PCN.

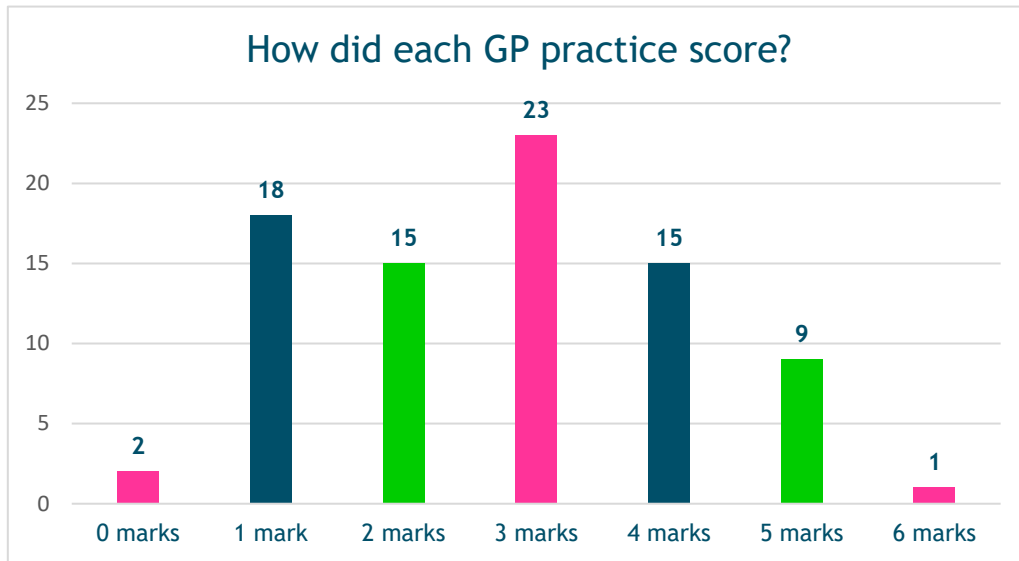
4.2 Moreover, twenty practices told us they did not offer the EAS or any similar service even when asked the prompt question. This is 24% of the total number of practices we contacted.



4.3 Out of the 63 practices who told us they provided the EAS, 61 scored two marks or fewer on the QMC meaning they didn't provide full details about the service (See 3.8 for reference). See table below for a breakdown of



4.4 The average number of marks awarded per practice was 2.7. See table below for full marking results.



## 5. Conclusion

5.1 The majority of GP Practices in Manchester offer the EAS either at their practice or at another practice in their PCN.

5.2 A significant proportion of GP Practices (24%) in Manchester do not offer the EAS.

5.3 Despite a significant proportion (63) of GP Practices providing the EAS, the majority (50) of them failed to fully explain the service to us.

5.4 Furthermore, the quality of information provided regarding the EAS was predominantly poor.

## 6. Recommendations

6.1 Resources need to be invested in training frontline GP Practice staff regarding the offer of the EAS including:

- The contractual obligation to provide the EAS
- Hours and days of the week the EAS is offered i.e. 6:30-8pm Monday to Friday
- The EAS appointment date i.e. the method by which appointments are made
- The nature of EAS appointments i.e. face to face or virtual

6.2 Communication between PCN and GP Practice regarding which GP Practice within a PCN offers the EAS should be improved to ensure frontline staff can instruct callers more accurately and efficiently.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the members of our Citizens Reading Panel for their support in the production of this report.



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