



Repeat prescriptions

Community check-in

June to July 2024



healthwatch
Leeds

Feedback and Sign-up Form

Tell us about your experience in Health and Care service

What is the service that you would like to tell us about?
For example: Doctor, Dentist, Nurse, Care home, or any other

What is the name/location of the service at Leeds?
If this is a hospital ward/department tell us which one.

What would you like to say about this service?
What happened and when?

- If only, please share your experiences or thoughts on the following topics:
- online services
 - waiting for a referral, diagnosis or treatment
 - accessing GP or mental health services
 - impact of service closure, staff shortages, or funding cuts

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If you need this report in another format, please contact Healthwatch Leeds.

Examples of other formats are large print, a plain text document, easy read, audio or other languages including British Sign Language.

Community check-in

What is a community check-in?



A check-in is a way we hear from people and communities in Leeds about their experiences of health, care and what matters to them.

How we listen to feedback



We listen to feedback by visiting community groups, sharing an online survey and speaking with health, care and community staff.

Foucs area



For each check-in we focus on a topic that people have told us is affecting them. We also listen to other health and care experiences which can inform future check-ins.

Impact



We bring community voices to health and care descision-makers to improve services.

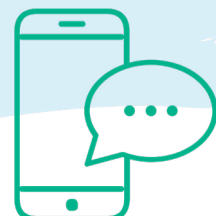
What happens next



We will let people know what has happened as a result of their feedback.

Get involved in future check-ins

Get in touch to find out more about the different ways you can share your feedback or invite us to your community groups.

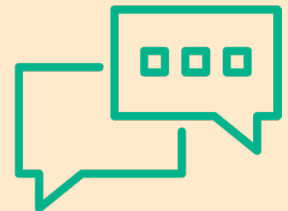


Our focus for this check-in

We have been hearing that the way some people can order repeat prescriptions has changed. The NHS has been encouraging people to use the NHS app nationally. We wanted to find out about people's experiences of ordering repeat prescriptions in Leeds.



We targeted particular communities who we know are more likely to experience barriers both in accessing services and using digital technology. These are: older people, disabled people¹, people from minority ethnic communities, and those living in areas with high numbers of low-income households². We visited community and support groups and used a survey that could be completed either on paper or online.



Although we have included quotes from people in this report, it should be noted that they may not all be factually accurate.



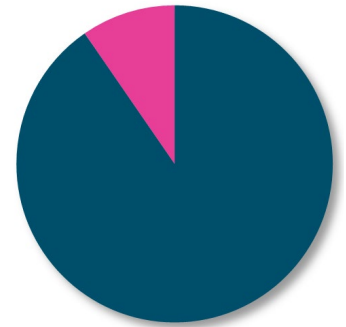
Who we heard from

Overview



Survey vs Group Session Participation

- 310 people shared their views by survey
- 33 shared their views in a group discussion



Prescription ordering



- 248 (80%) told us about ordering their own prescription
- 45 (15%) told us about ordering a prescription for someone they help care for
- 17 (5%) told us about someone ordering a prescription on their behalf

Who the prescription was ordered for



76% were aged 50+



28% were from a minority ethnic community



35% were living in areas with a high number of low-income households*



33% had a physical disability or mobility impairment



11% had a sensory impairment



7% had a learning disability or difficulty



21% had a mental health condition



10% were neurodiverse

*Armley, Beeston and Holbeck, Burmantofts & Richmond Hill, Gipton & Harehills, Killingbeck & Seacroft, Little London and Woodhouse, Middleton Park

Key findings

1. Our survey told us that although 49% of respondents ordered their repeat prescription online, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, those living in areas of low income and older people were much less likely to order their prescription this way.

2. People were most likely to report positive experiences of ordering their prescriptions via electronic repeat dispensing, ordering online and via a pharmacy.

3. Feedback about ordering online was split between those who found it convenient, easy and efficient and those who faced barriers.

4. There was variation in how different GPs and pharmacies communicated to patients about options for ordering repeat prescriptions and any changes that are made.

5. Some people reported that options for ordering a repeat prescription didn't always meet their needs, resulting in increased dependence on others to help them.

6. Owning a digital device doesn't always mean that someone is confident to order their prescription online.

7. Confidence in ordering a repeat prescription online was significantly lower amongst older people, those from minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, sensory impairments and long-term health conditions. Having more than one of these characteristics correlated with decreasing digital confidence.

Key recommendations

1. GP surgeries to ensure they are implementing the Accessible Information Standard and considering the impact of digital exclusion when considering options for patients on how they order repeat prescriptions. This should include different offline methods such as by phone and in person.

2. GP surgeries and pharmacies should raise awareness of electronic repeat dispensing amongst patients.

3. GP surgeries and NHS England should make sure that easily accessible support and information around using their digital platforms and the NHS app is both available, and promoted to patients.

4. GP surgeries and pharmacies should provide clear consistent messaging about different ways people can order their repeat prescriptions, and when changes are made to the different options.

5. Explore and develop ways for people to be kept updated about the status of a prescription (e.g. by text notification) such as when it is ready to collect or will be delivered.

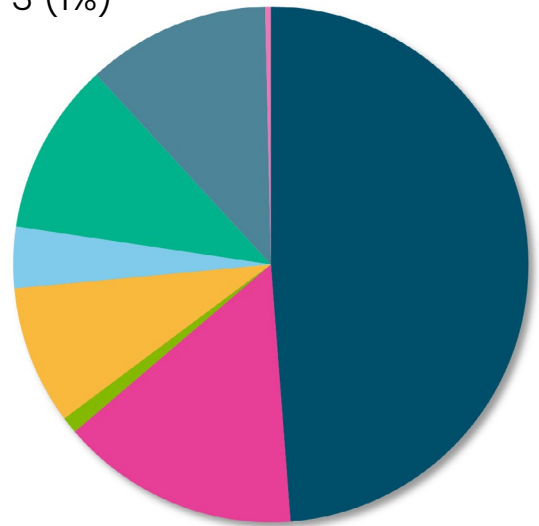
6. GP surgeries and pharmacies should make people aware that they can streamline prescription ordering dates.

7. We recommend that Leeds Health and Care Partnership review the 'Repeat prescription process mapping and compliance checklist', in light of the above recommendations with the aim of improving patient experience.

Findings

How people tried to order their most recent repeat prescription

- Online (e.g. via NHS app, PATCHES or Systemonline) 140 (49%)
- In person at your GP surgery using your paper slip 43 (15%)
- Post to your GP surgery using paper slip 3 (1%)
- Phoning the GP surgery 25 (9%)
- Emailing the GP surgery 11 (4%)
- Through a pharmacy 31 (11%)
- Electronic repeat dispensing 33 (11%)
- Other 1 (0%)

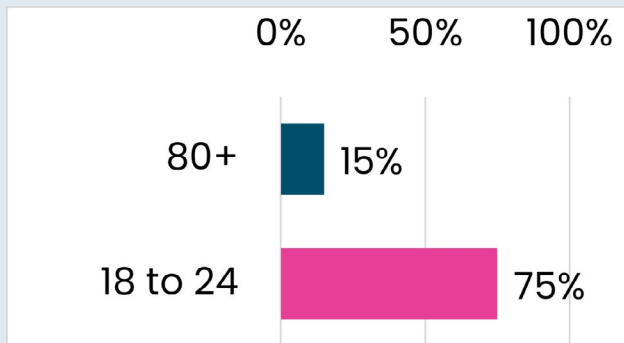


49%



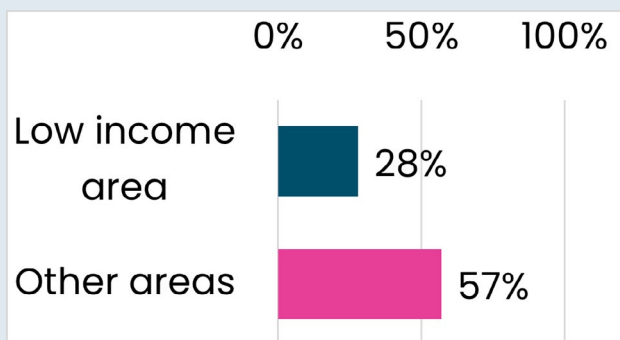
of people ordered their prescription online, however this number was much lower for:

People age 80+



Only 15% of people aged 80+ ordered their prescription online compared to 75% people aged 18-24. The older the person ordering the prescription, the less likely they were to order online.

Low income areas*

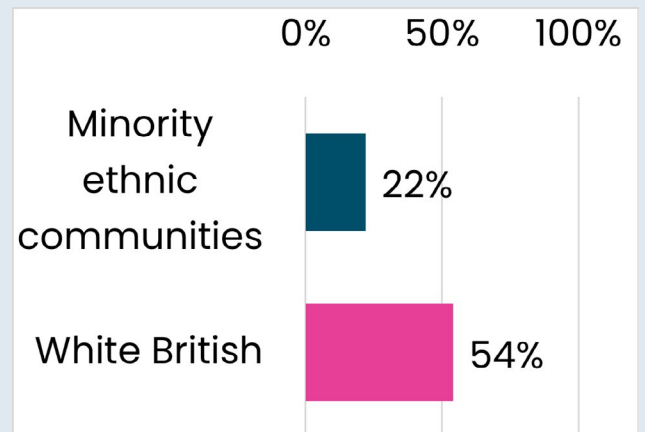


28% of people living in low income areas said they ordered their prescription online compared to 57% people living in other areas.

*Armley, Beeston and Holbeck, Burmantofts & Richmond Hill, Gipton & Harehills, Killingbeck & Seacroft, Little London and Woodhouse, Middleton Park.



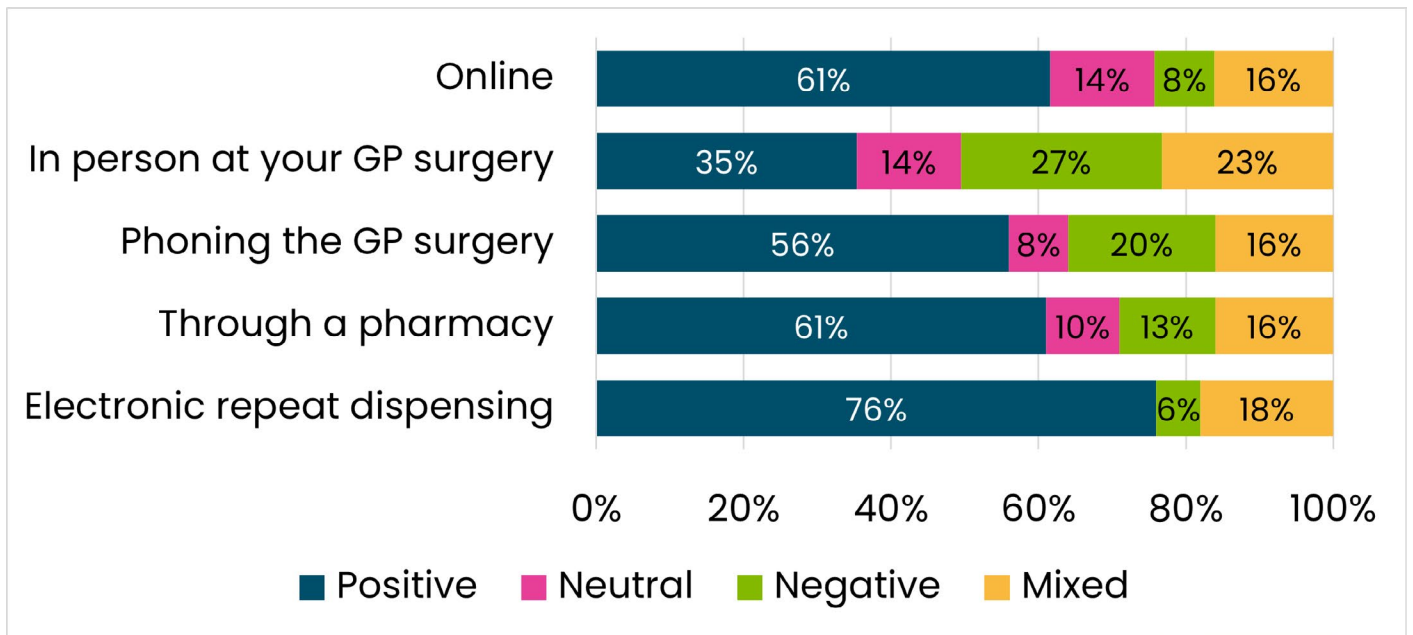
Minority ethnic communities



22% of people from minority ethnic communities said they ordered their prescription online compared to 54% White British.

All of these groups were more reliant on the other methods of ordering their repeat prescriptions, or having to find someone else to order it for them.

People’s feedback about different methods of ordering their prescription



People were most likely to report a positive experience of ordering their prescription via electronic repeat dispensing. Ordering online or through a pharmacy also resulted in higher-than-average positive experiences.

Ordering in person at the GP surgery, followed by phoning the surgery were most likely to result in a negative experience. It should be noted however that many of the negative experiences didn’t just relate to the process of ordering the prescription, but also to other aspects such as supply issues, delays, and collection or delivery of the prescription from the pharmacy.

One of the themes that came up across all the different methods was a need for better understanding of all the different options for ordering.

“It’s hard to know HOW to actually order them. You are never given information and often get told off for ringing, but when you register or have medication prescribed, they don’t tell you how to manage repeats.”

Electronic repeat dispensing

Electronic repeat dispensing is where a person's GP signs a series of repeat prescriptions to go to their pharmacy in one go, so there's no need to order them each time. It can save time for patients and the GP practices.

"My GP took the hassle off me. It is great. My GP sends the repeat prescription down for me, it is very good and I don't have to do it anymore. I used to have to phone up."



"I get an automatic text from the pharmacy when its ready to collect."

Ordering online

Feedback about ordering via website or app was split between those who found it convenient, easy and efficient and those who faced barriers.

"Brilliant service. Saves me a trip to the doctors to drop off the prescription. I just do it online and pick up tablets at pharmacy."



"Easy. simple. All my medications are listed, and I can choose to order what I need when I need it."

Common barriers were:

- Lack of digital understanding and access.

“Older Asian people find online difficult.”



“I make little use of apps and don’t feel much confidence about using them. I can’t be the only person who feels that way. There are some people who do not have IT / mobile phones, a minority now maybe, but for someone in that position this emphasis on apps is excluding.”

- Language barriers making online forms difficult.



“For someone that doesn’t speak English there’s a lot of jargon to get through. There’s a lot of barriers because my son can’t read or write, or for someone who doesn’t speak or read English.”

- Not knowing where to get support to use online services.

“My parents are not used to using technology... and for the first time, they needed my help. Once I showed my parents how to place the order, they are able to do it themselves, but I worry that not everyone has someone available to show them how to place an online order.”



- People losing independence by having to rely on others to order online for them.



“I think this is discriminatory as not everyone can use and has access to digital technology. My parents can’t use online services. My father has had a stroke, and my mother has mobility problems with her hands.”

“I’m not as confident using digital devices and the thought of having to rely on someone else to help me do this when I am independent leaves a bad taste in my mouth.”



Other barriers mentioned were:

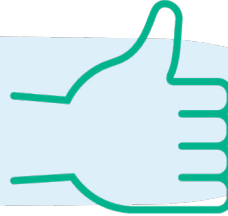
- Confusion around GP surgeries having different online systems to do different things (e.g. book appointments, order medication).
- Making changes to prescription orders.

There was also specific feedback about different online platforms:

NHS App

Feedback was mixed about the NHS App. A lot of people found it quick, easy and straightforward. Others struggled with particular aspects of it, and not knowing where to go to get support.

"It's so much easier ordering from the app, makes it clear when I need to order again."



"The NHS app is usually a smooth experience, but the GP needs to review and update annually, and if they don't you cannot order."

"It can often take a week after submitting the request to hear anything about it. Sometimes you don't even hear that it has been approved and just turn up at the pharmacy hoping that it has."



"I struggle to remember repeat prescriptions are via a menu button rather than via a visible list. I have tried the surgery reception for IT help, but they say they 'don't know' and there is no go to NHS IT Helpdesk."



PATCHES

patches

“The transition to PATCHES was not easy. It was tricky to register to use and also tricky to register as a carer for someone if you are personally registered too.”



“I couldn’t make the request when I had time. I had to take time out of a working day to do it.”

“It asks lots of difficult questions and I don’t know how to respond.”



“Sometimes, it’s necessary to include a question and there isn’t any way to do it.”

Systmonline

systmonline
BOOK REQUEST REGISTER

“Straightforward, quick and convenient.”



“The username is hard to remember with numbers that don’t have any relevance to my life. If I can’t remember I have to make a new account every time. It’s more complicated than it has to be.”

Ordering via pharmacy, including by pharmacies' own apps



Feedback about pharmacies was mainly positive, with people appreciating the help they were given to order their prescriptions and request any changes. People who were unable to collect their medications were also grateful for the free delivery offered by many pharmacies.

"I can just order online, and it gets delivered to my door. No back and forth between the GP and pharmacy. Sends me reminders as well so I don't forget"

"No problems at all. Get through to the pharmacy quicker than the GP"

There was some feedback relating to the closure of some pharmacies, reduction in services offered or the introduction of charging for some services such as delivery.

"The pharmacy has stopped ordering on behalf of patients, I ring up [the GP] and they said they won't do it over phone. Very worried about the elderly"

"Used to be easy but it can be tricky when pharmacies close down."

"Pharmacy now charging for delivery. This must make things very difficult for some people."



Ordering in person or by phone at GP surgery



Feedback about ordering via GP surgeries was variable.



“As I have had a stroke, they are willing to fill in the forms for me. But it depends who is on reception. Some are good but others make me feel stupid.”

“Receptionist really good. Just ring the surgery and then I go and pick up mine and my mum’s prescription from the pharmacy.”



“I can’t ring in because you can never get through.”



Changes to repeat prescription ordering

80 (28%) people said their GP surgery had recently changed the way they could order their repeat prescription. Most changes involved a move to online ordering via an online platform or app. Just over a quarter of these (23 people) told us that when things were changed, they were no longer able to order their prescription in a way that wasn't online.

"Sudden changes to repeat prescriptions are unfair to people who cannot use a computer."

Communication of changes

Some people reported that their GP surgeries and pharmacies had been proactive in communicating the changes and options.

"The GP Practice is hoping to increase the use of PATCHES and APP and have offered training to patients"



"My pharmacy gave me a choice on how I wanted to place my order and gave me information about how to do it online if I wanted. I can do it online which is convenient for me and I'm glad I was told how I can order online."

Other people had found out about the changes by chance.

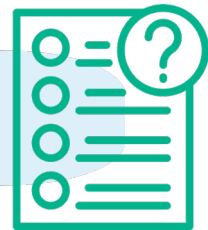
"Went in in person and placed the order and that's when they told me I should be using the latest app."

"When you ring up, they say, 'Sorry you have to use this app'."

“My parents didn’t actually know about the change until they asked the pharmacy why they forgot to add the repeats slip for the past two prescriptions. The pharmacy then told them that they stopped doing printed slips, and they can only order online from now on.”

In many cases people reported mixed messages, causing confusion amongst patients. We heard several cases of different patients from the same surgery reporting different arrangements; some saying that they were only able to order online and others reporting they still had the option to order by phone and/or in person.

“We keep getting told we need to order by app and then told by slip.”



Some people reported blanket rules which didn’t take into account people’s individual situations.

“GP surgery said only people over 80 can order it in person or by phone. I’m 76 but I don’t have a tablet or phone so have to order it on my laptop online.”



“They do it for me (mental health) over phone but not my husband (physical health).”

Others described having to insist on alternative options remaining available.

“My mother-in-law (Aged 94) has a phone, but she doesn’t know how to use it to do stuff online. She was made to feel that she was being difficult, and that the GP surgery had to make an exception for her because she couldn’t do it online.”

No option given to order prescriptions by phone

Several people described no longer being given the option to order prescriptions by phone, resulting in them having to go in person to the GP surgery if they are unable to order online. This was difficult for some people.

“When in pain, I can’t get out to place the order.”

“My husband has to go to the surgery to put slip in. This is difficult because he works full time, it would be better if he could do it over the phone like he used to.”

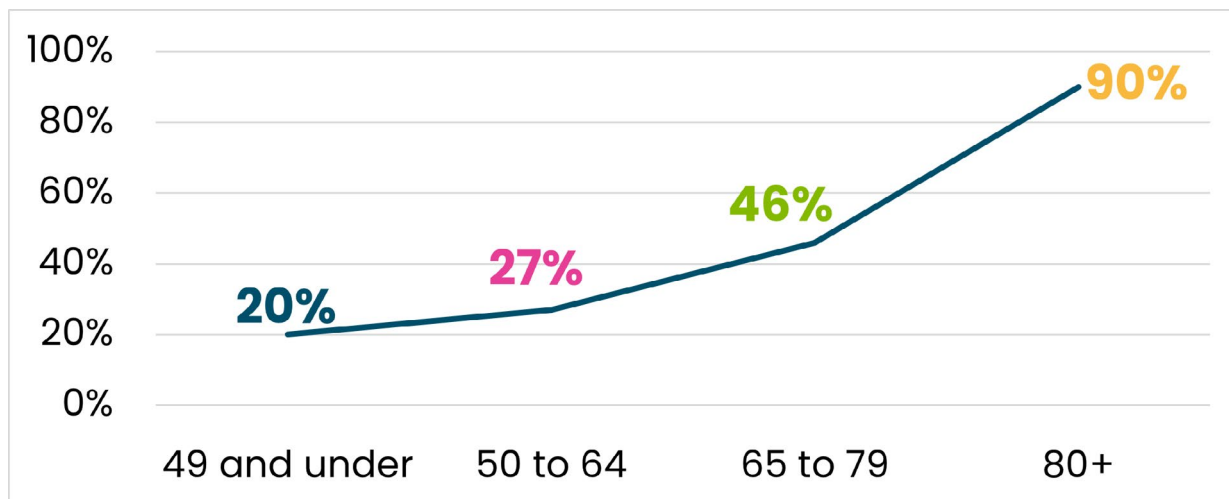


Confidence in ordering prescriptions online

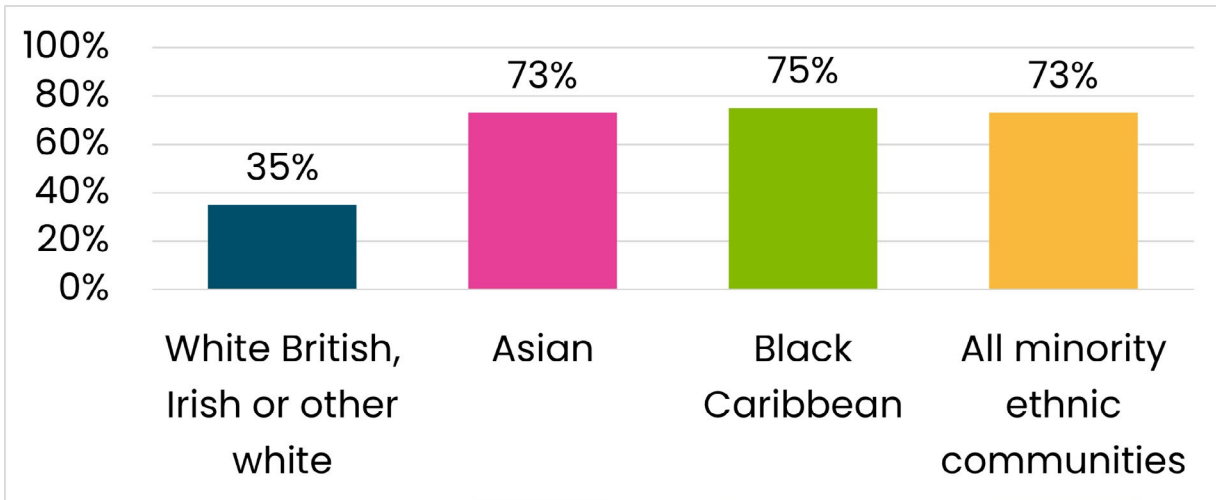
Although 82% respondents told us that the person they were ordering a prescription for owned a digital device, only 58% were reported to be 'somewhat confident' or 'very confident' in ordering a prescription through an app or website. This shows that owning a digital device isn't always an indicator that someone is confident to perform online tasks.

Confidence in ordering a repeat prescription online was significantly lower amongst older people, those from minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities, sensory impairments and long-term health conditions. This is shown by the following charts.

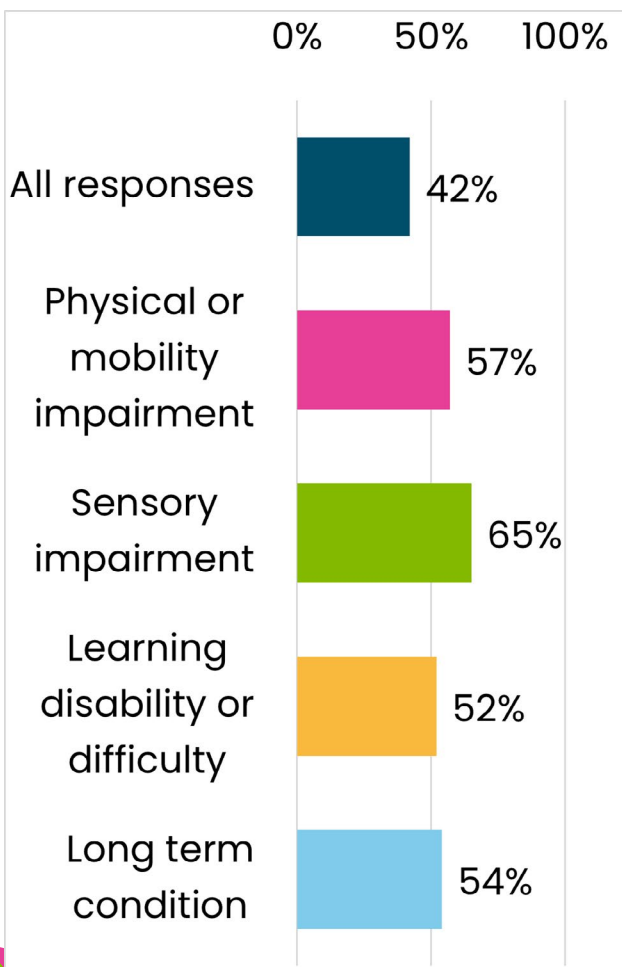
Digital confidence by age: People reporting they were 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all' to order a prescription online



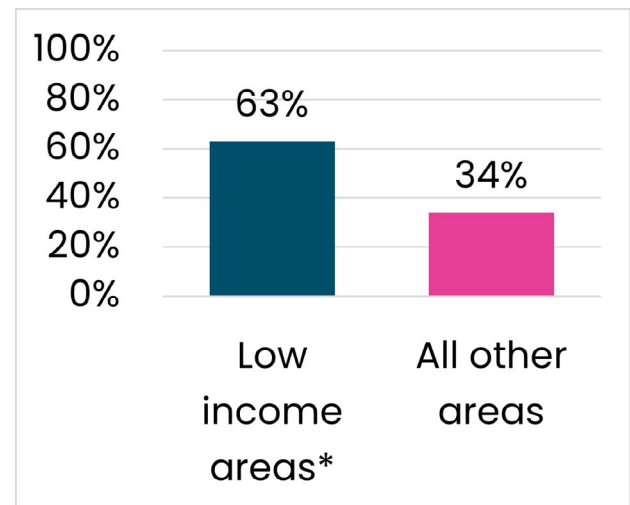
Digital confidence by ethnicity: People reporting they were 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all' to order a prescription online



Digital confidence by health condition or disability: People reporting they were 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all' to order a prescription online.



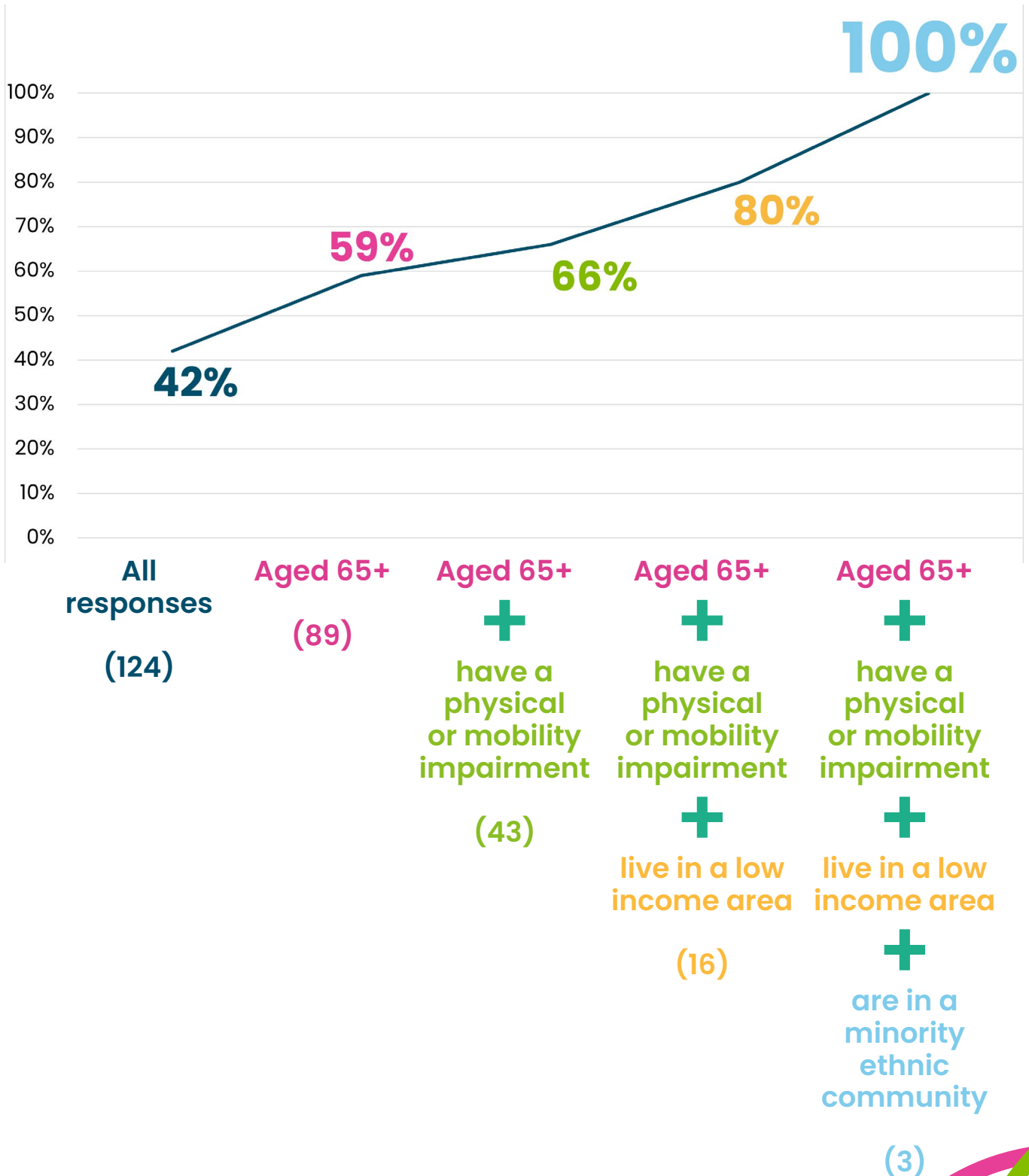
Digital confidence by area: People reporting they were 'not very confident' or 'not confident at all' to order a prescription online.



*Armley, Beeston and Holbeck, Burmantofts & Richmond Hill, Gipton & Harehills, Killingbeck & Seacroft, Little London and Woodhouse, Middleton Park]

Having more than one of these characteristics correlates with decreasing digital confidence as shown by the infographic below.

Digital confidence by multiple characteristics: People reporting they were ‘not very confident’ or ‘not confident at all’ to order a prescription online.



What would make it easier for you to order a repeat prescription?

Below are the most common themes that came up when we asked people this question.



Phone ordering

“Making clear to people that they can still order by phone if they want to”

“If surgeries had a dedicated prescription phone number or phone was actually answered.”



Order tracking

“To be able to see the date I sent in repeat, the date doctor accepted it and the date the pharmacist approved it for delivery/pick up so you know when to accept your prescription.”



Paper ordering

“Let people still have the option to order on paper, stop leaving people behind.”



Automatic renewals

“The online form makes it easier to order, however it is frustrating having to do this every month. As it’s a repeat prescription for a chronic condition is it not possible for it to be automatically renewed?”



Keeping people informed

“For there to be information out there that the change was happening so my parents wouldn’t be so stressed about what was going on, and for help to be available to show people how.”



Delivery coordination

“Two separate deliveries are at different times of the month. Would be good if I got everything together.”



Tutorials and IT support

“Have tutorials about the NHS app”

“There needs to be help offered in surgery for those who are not IT literate”

Thank you

Thanks to the following groups and all the people who spoke to us at:

- Holbeck Together
- Richmond Hill Elderly Action
- LS14 Trust
- Health for All
- Samangal Lunch Club – older Sikh men and women’s lunch club
- Association of Blind Asians carers group
- Beetey Din – over 55s BAME womens group
- Different Strokes
- Community Wellbeing Hub BAME older people’s support groups
- Hawksworth Older People’s Support
- Hamara Healthy Living Centre

And all the people we spoke to at these events:

- The Old Fire Station Open Day (Gipton)
- Being Social Information Event (for people with learning difficulties)
- Autisticon (Autism information event)

And finally, thank you to all our lovely volunteers who helped us with the check-ins:

Janet, Helin, Denise, Dianne, Oliver, John, Dorcas, Angie, Phillip, Matty, Jane

References:

1. Age UK (2024), Offline and Overlooked. <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/offline-and-overlooked-report.pdf>
2. University of Liverpool (2024), A minimum digital living standard for households with children. <https://mdls.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/MDLS-final-report-v1.11-1.pdf>

Appendix 1: Other themes from the check in

As well as telling us about their experiences of repeat prescriptions, people told us about their other experiences of health and care. Below is a summary of the main themes.

- Booking GP appointments is still difficult for many people who reported being on hold for a long time on the phone and by the time it was answered there were no appointments left.
- Reliance on third sector groups to provide support and reduce social isolation.

“I go out to groups four times a week, don’t know what I would do without it”

“Without them it’s like a prison in the house.”

- Impact of third sector support funding cuts to social and support groups meaning that there are less places for people to access for support with their health and wellbeing.
- Online continues to be a barrier, particularly for older people who may have smart phones for calls but don’t know how to use them to access online services. They often rely on children/grandchildren for help with technology but not everyone has someone who can help them.
- Difficulty finding NHS dental places is still an issue for many – particularly whole families struggling to register, with some practices accepting children but not adults. People told us they were unable to travel outside of local area because of costs.
- Some older people depend on their children for support, but they are often busy with full time jobs and children of their own so don’t have much time to help out.
- Cost of transport to appointments other side of the city to specialist screening clinics.

- Transport is important for older people to be independent and get out. Feedback around the importance of the Access bus and the long distance between bus stops impacts on people being able to use the buses.
- Cost of home care or third sector support to do meant that people are going without, relying on family or trying to find a volunteer for support. This is not always reliable, or sufficient.
- People, particularly those with long term conditions gave feedback about seeing a different doctor in their GP practice for each appointment and said they would prefer to see a regular family doctor. They found it frustrating to have to keep repeating things to different people.
- Long waiting lists for Autism and ADHD assessments and lack of support for people with ADHD and parents of children with ADHD.
- Lack of preventative children’s social support and respite

“They wait until parents are at breaking point before they step in”.




**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.


Your **healthwatch** Leeds

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