



Impacts of changes in cost of living on health and wellbeing

Published: January 2025

Contents

Context and aim	3
What we did	4
Key findings	5
What we heard	8
Conclusions	22
Recommendations	23
Who we heard from	24

Who are Healthwatch East Sussex?

Healthwatch East Sussex (HWES) are the local independent watchdog for health and social care services.

We gather feedback from residents, good, bad and mixed, and make recommendations to change services for the better.

If you have used a health or care service, please tell us about your experience by leaving a review on our [Feedback Centre](#):

If you need support in accessing health and care services, please contact our Information & Signposting service via:

enquiries@healthwatcheastSussex.co.uk or 0333 101 4007

Context and aim

1.1 Background

Since 2021, the costs of goods and services in England have risen at a rate faster than in the recent past, and more quickly than incomes, increasing the amount of money many households need to spend on everyday items.

Increases in the cost of living have meant many people have had to make changes to the way they live to save money, and are less able to afford things than they were previously. For some, this may include key determinants of health such as not adequately heating their homes, eating less well, exercising less regularly and pursuing fewer of the activities they enjoy.

In January 2023, Healthwatch England published data highlighting how increases in the cost of living were leading some people to reduce their use of health and care services, due to direct costs such as prescriptions, medication or treatment, but also indirect costs such as phone, internet or travel.

The evidence highlighted how these changes impacted on both people's physical and mental wellbeing. Such changes may affect health outcomes and widen health inequalities between different groups and communities.

To explore the impacts of changes of the cost of living in East Sussex, Healthwatch East Sussex surveyed local people to find out how they were affected and any changes they had made, including their use of health, care and wellbeing services.

1.2 Our aim

To use a public survey to identify any changes in people's behaviours and wellbeing in response to increases in the cost of living over the last 12 months, and the impacts on their lives.

1.3 Our objectives

1. To identify any changes in people's use of health, care or support services in East Sussex, especially 'paid-for' services.
2. To learn about any impacts on people's physical or mental wellbeing because of changes in the cost of living.
3. To share learning to help decision-makers understand the effects of the cost of living and support them in exploring solutions, opportunities and support mechanisms.

What we did

2.1 Main Survey

Between July and September 2024, our 15-question survey asked East Sussex residents to tell us how cost-of-living changes were affecting them.

We asked about three specific areas:

1. Effects on people's day-to-day lives
2. Changes in people's behaviour or choices
3. Impacts on people's use of health and care services

People were able to complete the survey online, in print or over the phone.

384 people shared their feedback and experiences with us. *All percentages presented in this report are a proportion of this number unless otherwise stated.*

The survey was promoted through our website and social media channels, via local networks, and by partners including East Sussex County Council, NHS Sussex and members of the East Sussex VCSE Alliance.

2.2 Snapshot survey

Alongside our main survey, we also developed a shorter hard-copy version using our core questions, which we used when engaging people face-to-face at public events and locations, including food banks and community networks.

29 people gave us their feedback through this method.

2.3 Limitations

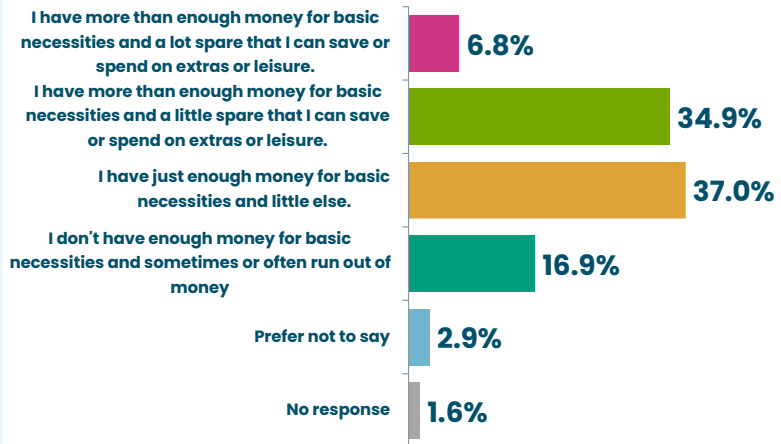
We recognise our survey may be subject to limitations, such as reduced awareness or accessibility for certain groups or communities. We will use our findings to guide how further research to hear their voices about the cost of living may be developed.



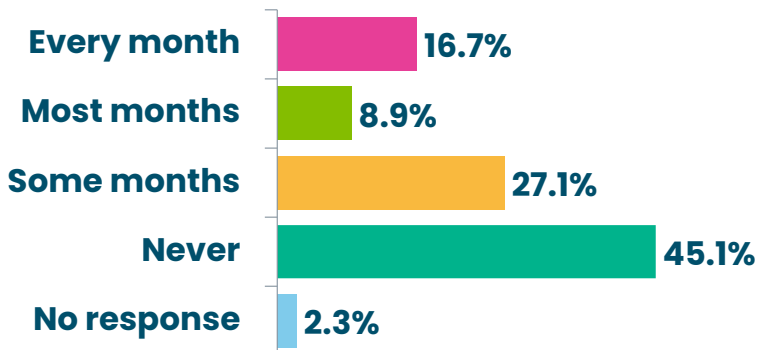
Key Findings

More than half our respondents (53.9%) have a challenging financial situation.

Which of the following describes your current financial situation?



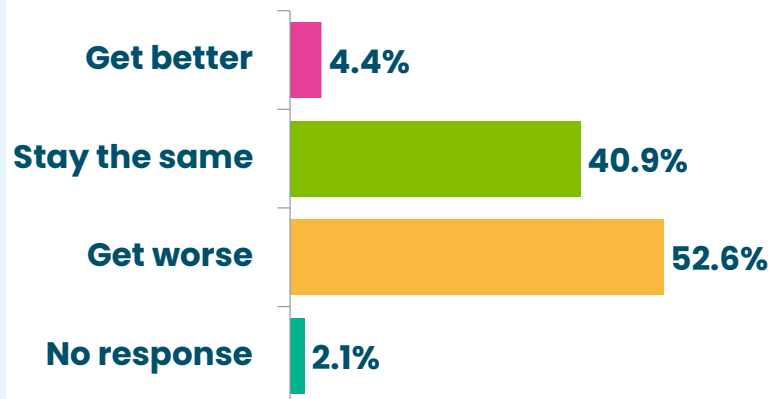
Thinking about your finances over the last 12 months, how often have you struggled to pay at least one of your household bills?



More than half our respondents (52.7%) struggled to pay a household bill in the last 12 months.

More than half our respondents (52.6%) expect their financial situation to get worse over the next 12 months.

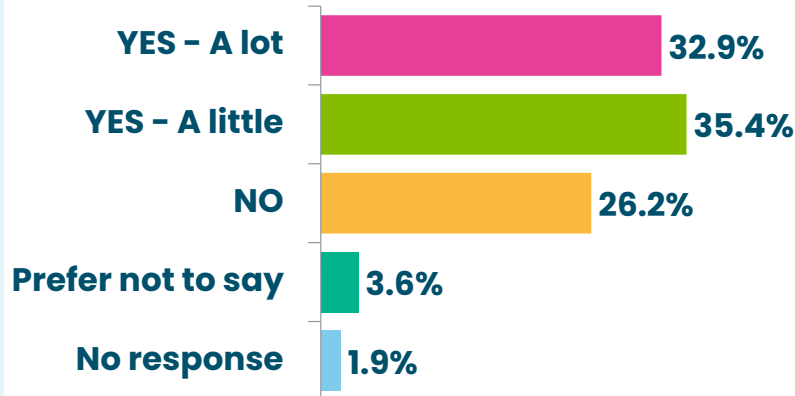
Thinking about your financial situation over the next 12 months, do you expect it to get:



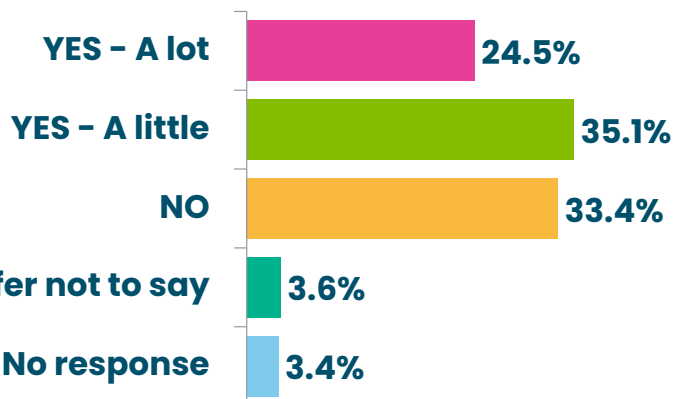
Key Findings

More than two-thirds of our respondents (68.3%) told us their mental health was impacted by cost of living.

Are changes in the cost of living impacting your mental health?
(N=413)



Are changes in the cost of living impacting your physical health?
(N=413)



More than half our respondents (59.6%) told us their physical health was impacted by cost of living.



"There was a time when I felt financially comfortable, but now I check my bank balance pretty much every day and worry that I won't be able to afford normal things like school uniform for my children or to take them out over the holidays. Going out with friends is something I have to save for now and this is the first year in about 20 years that I haven't been able to afford a holiday."



Key findings

3.1 Impacts on day-to-day life

- 69.0% of respondents said their overall quality of life was negatively impacted by cost-of-living increases, including relationships with family and friends; delivery of care or receipt of care; and participation in education, training or work.
- 52.7% struggled to pay at least one household bill in the last 12 months.
- 52.6% expect their financial situation to get worse over the next 12 months.
- 40.4% highlighted impacts on their ability to manage existing health conditions.

3.2 Changes in behaviour due to the cost of living

- 66.7% were cutting down or stopping social/entertainment spending.
- 65.4% were using heating less and not turning it on when they usually would.
- 52.9% were travelling less regularly to see friends or family.
- 45.8% had reduced how much food they buy or eat.
- 33.3% had cut down or stopped physical activities.

3.3 Use of health, care and wellbeing services or resources

- 44.1% were avoiding going to the dentist due to cost.
- 26.2% were not buying products to support self-management of health conditions.
- 21.1% were reducing or stopping support e.g. physiotherapy/counselling.
- 16.5% had not bought over-the-counter products they usually rely on.
- 13.6% had stopped a special diet needed for a condition they have.

3.4 Impacts on physical and mental wellbeing

- 68.3% of respondents said their mental health was impacted by changes in the cost of living, including: increased personal worry about family and friends; anxiety, stress, depression, and in some cases suicidal feelings; social isolation and reduced self-confidence resulting from fewer recreational activities and social interactions.
- 59.6% said their physical health was impacted by changes in the cost of living, including less regular and smaller meals, and greater consumption of processed foods, combined with reduced exercise/recreation leading to weight gain/loss, lethargy and impacts on health conditions; reductions in self-funded self-care such as supplements, medication, and use of health professionals.

3.5 Use of support services

- One-in-four respondents accessed support/advice in the last 12 months.
 - 17.2% accessed mental health support or advice
 - 12.5% used a food bank, community hub or soup kitchen
 - 10.4% sought benefits or financial support
- Statutory, voluntary and some commercial organisations often provided useful support to people in managing their finances and supporting their wider needs.
- Some people's income meant they earned enough to be ineligible for financial or other support, but not enough that each month wasn't a struggle.
- Some people were unclear what support they were entitled to or how to apply.

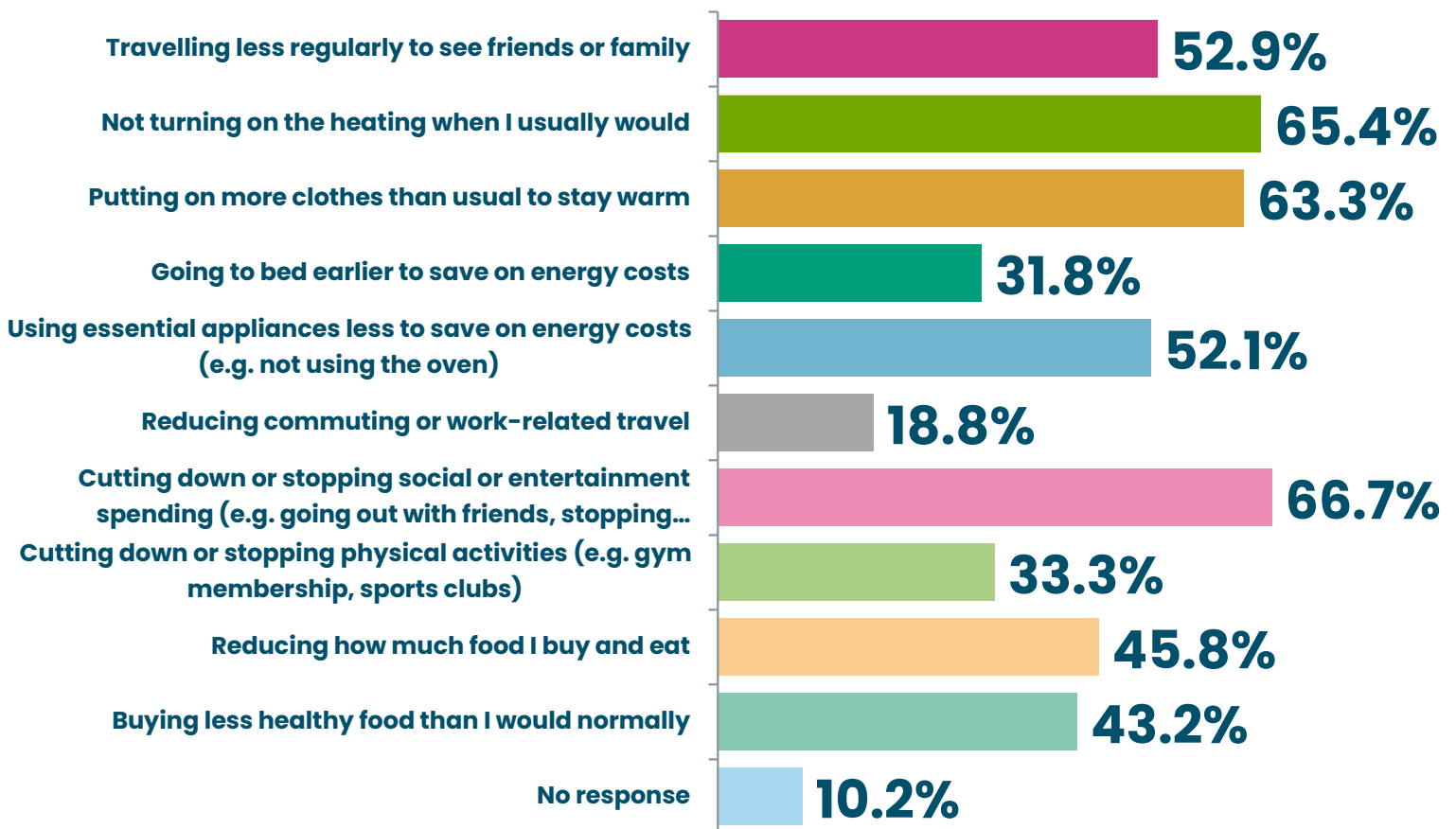
What we heard

4.1 Changes in behaviour due to the cost of living

Increases in the cost of living were identified as impacting on respondents' day-to-day behaviour and decision-making as they sought to reduce living costs.

These may directly and indirectly affect people's wellbeing, especially where the same individuals need to make multiple changes to make financial savings.

Please tell us if you have made any of the following changes in the last 12 months due to the rising cost of living: Please tick all that apply



"No money for childcare means limited access to groups/clubs/activities. Prioritising bills, food and other expenses over self care and exercise. Cost of attending clubs/ classes is out of budget so unable to attend."



What we heard

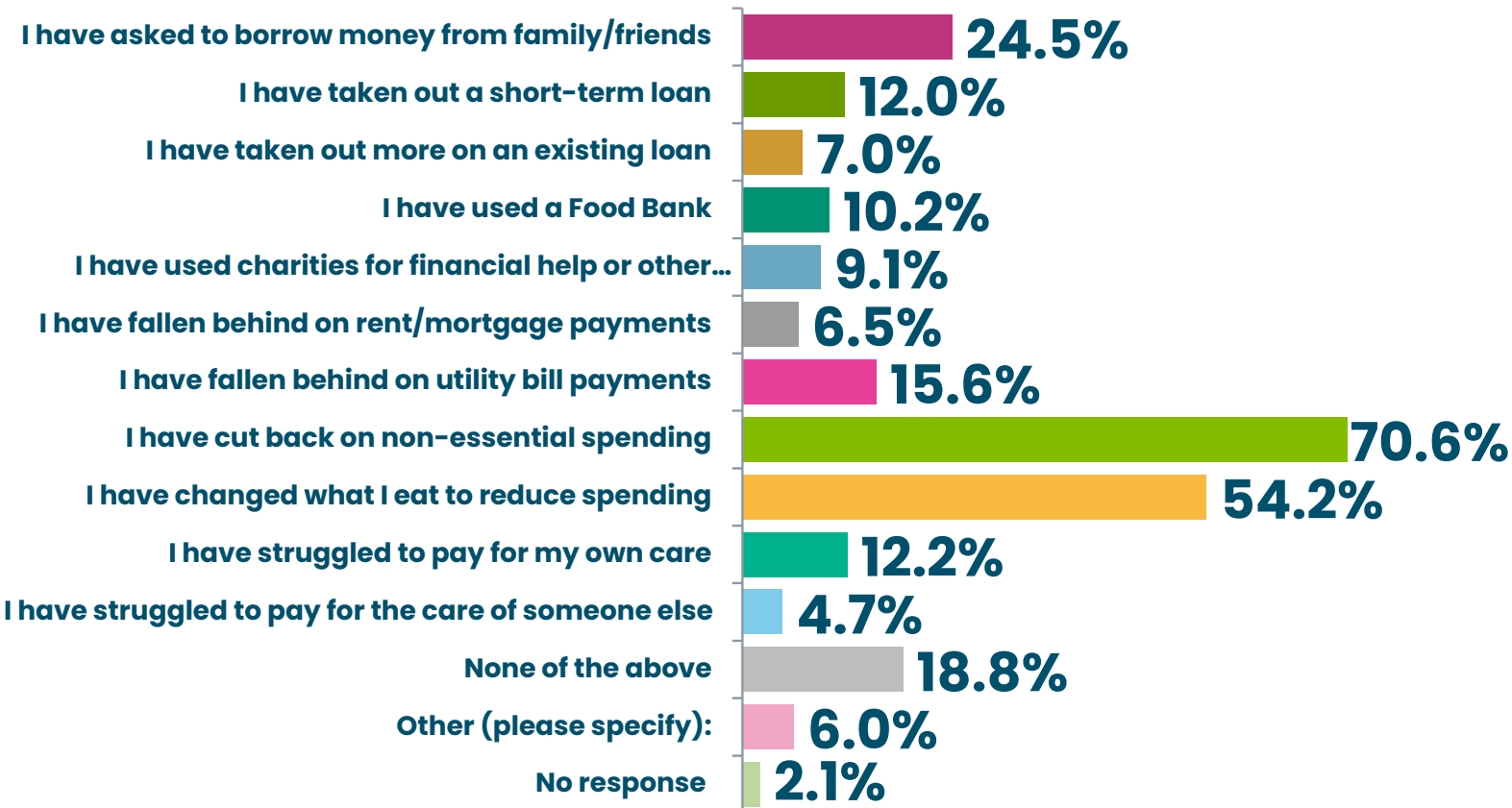
Nearly three-quarters of respondents (70.6%) have cut back on non-essential spending.

More than half our respondents (54.2%) changed what they eat to reduce spending.

Almost a quarter of respondents (24.5%) asked to borrow money from family/friends.

One in ten (10.2%) respondents used a food bank in the last 12 months.

Which of the following statements apply to you when thinking about the last 12 months



"Financial stress has caused additional worry. I have found it hard to tell those close to me that I am not always managing financially, however when I did, I was supported practically, and this has made things much better. I am now in a better situation but that is because I had access to support from my partner, not everyone has this."



What we heard

Respondents told us about changes a range of changes they made to their behaviour in response to increases in living costs, and the effects on their day-to-day lives.

A summary of the common themes identified in respondent's comments are outlined below.

Reduced Social interaction

Two thirds of respondents (66.7%) told us they **were cutting down or stopping social or entertainment spending** such as going out with friends, going to events or activities.

More than half our respondents (52.9%) indicated they were **travelling less regularly to see friends or family** to reduce costs, but there were also non-financial implications, such as people feeling less able to offer or receive support, care for each other or maintain networks with friends and family.

"I socialise less because of the cost of going out so I feel increasingly disconnected from my friends and family."

We heard about the impacts these changes were having on their relationships with others, including how they generated feelings of social isolation and reduced self-confidence.

"My world has dramatically shrank [sic] - I go out less often - reduced friendship circle - my old car sits idle other than for essential shopping journeys."

Recreation and entertainment

People told us that they were **less able to afford holidays or recreational activities**, meaning they were less able to participate in things they enjoyed or to get an escape from their day-to-day pressures or worries.

We heard this affected their morale, mood and confidence, with reduced optimism about the future.

"The quality of my life is reduced due to the rising cost of living. I cannot afford to visit friends and family and can no longer meet friends or family outside my home. The cost of living is increasing my anxiety and depression."

Reduced use of heating and utilities

We heard many respondents (65.4%) were **using their heating less** and not turning it on when they usually would or had done so in the past, and approximately half our respondents (52.1%) told us they were **using essential appliances less** to save on energy costs.

People were also anxious about their ability to use these appliances if weather conditions worsened, especially what would happen once the weather turned colder.

"I'm worried about the cold weather and not putting my heating on."

What we heard

We also heard about the direct and indirect impacts this has, both on people and their living environment, including those with existing health conditions.

“Not affording to put the heating on all the time has made my flat damp. Mould has appeared because I hadn’t opened the window as cold air would get in. I developed chest However, and my lungs collapsed, it has taken 6 months for my chest to clear.”

“I suffer from Fibromyalgia, Osteoarthritis, etc. Heating the house, have frequent warm bath, have appliances as dehumidifier etc. are mandatory. However I can not afford it, so the symptoms increased severely.”

In response, some people (63.3%) were adopting zero cost options such as **putting on more clothes than usual to stay warm** and to avoid needing to switch their heating on, whilst others (31.8%) were **going to bed early to save on energy costs**.

“Instead of putting the heating on I put more clothes on and have a lot of warm soups. I go to bed early with high tog duvet on to keep warm.”

Changes in food intake and diet

Nearly half the people we heard from (45.8%) indicated they had **reduced how much food they buy or eat**.

Some people were eating less, others were changing their diet, and we did hear examples where people were missing meals altogether.

“Have porridge as a meal instead of meat & veg don’t buy treats anymore.”

“Lower energy due to missing meals.”

People told us how their dietary make-up and levels of food intake had been affected, with 43.2% telling us they were **buying less healthy food** than in the past or normally would, due to cost.

We heard how this was impacting on some people’s mental and physical wellbeing, especially those with specific dietary requirements.

“I cannot afford to buy decent quality food, it’s all cheaper food that’s packed with bad ingredients and bad additives, this all affects my mood, health and wellbeing.”

“The cost of food has become such a huge expense that every purchase has to be carefully considered. This can sometimes mean we opt for very cheap freezer meals instead of nutritional fresh food.”

“Struggling to eat a healthy diet and exercise in ways that help my Crohn’s disease.”

What we heard

We also heard how this **negatively affected their ability to manage wider health conditions.**

"I have coeliac disease and will often go without meals or cut part of a meal out due to the cost of gluten free foods."

"Now unable to afford the correct foods to help with my type 2 diabetes."

"Struggled with a dairy. Gluten, wheat and soya free diet - bring back the prescription for allergy sufferers."

We received wider comments about the nature of lower cost food compared to more expensive options and the effects on people's wellbeing, especially their weight.

"I need to lose weight but I can't afford the healthy food options."

"I need to lose weight due to health issues, however, buying nutritional food and snacks is too expensive."

Food-related changes brought about by increased cost of living included:

- Reduced daily consumption of food or people missing meals altogether.
- Fresh fruit, vegetables and other raw ingredients being substituted by cheaper processed foods and ready meals.
- Fewer hot and cooked meals to reduce energy costs.

Impacts on people's health related to cost of living included:

- Unplanned weight loss and feelings of lethargy.
- Weight gain.
- Less energy for exercise and physical activity.
- Dietary choices imposed by increased costs affecting underlying health conditions e.g. Crohn's disease, diabetes, gluten intolerance etc.

Many of those who told us about their dietary changes highlighted self-awareness of the impacts these would have on their energy, weight and wider physical wellbeing, but were often unable to afford their preferred healthier alternatives.

Reductions in physical exercise or recreation

A third of respondents (33.3%) indicated they had **cut down or stopped physical activities** such as gym memberships, participation in sports clubs and other activities which had costs associated. Many were aware of the effects on them.

"I can't afford exercise classes and I'm getting less fit because of it."

"Gym memberships are too expensive, as is swimming so this impacts us physically."

These changes may not only directly impact day-to-day fitness and management of health conditions but also reduce interaction and increase social isolation.

What we heard

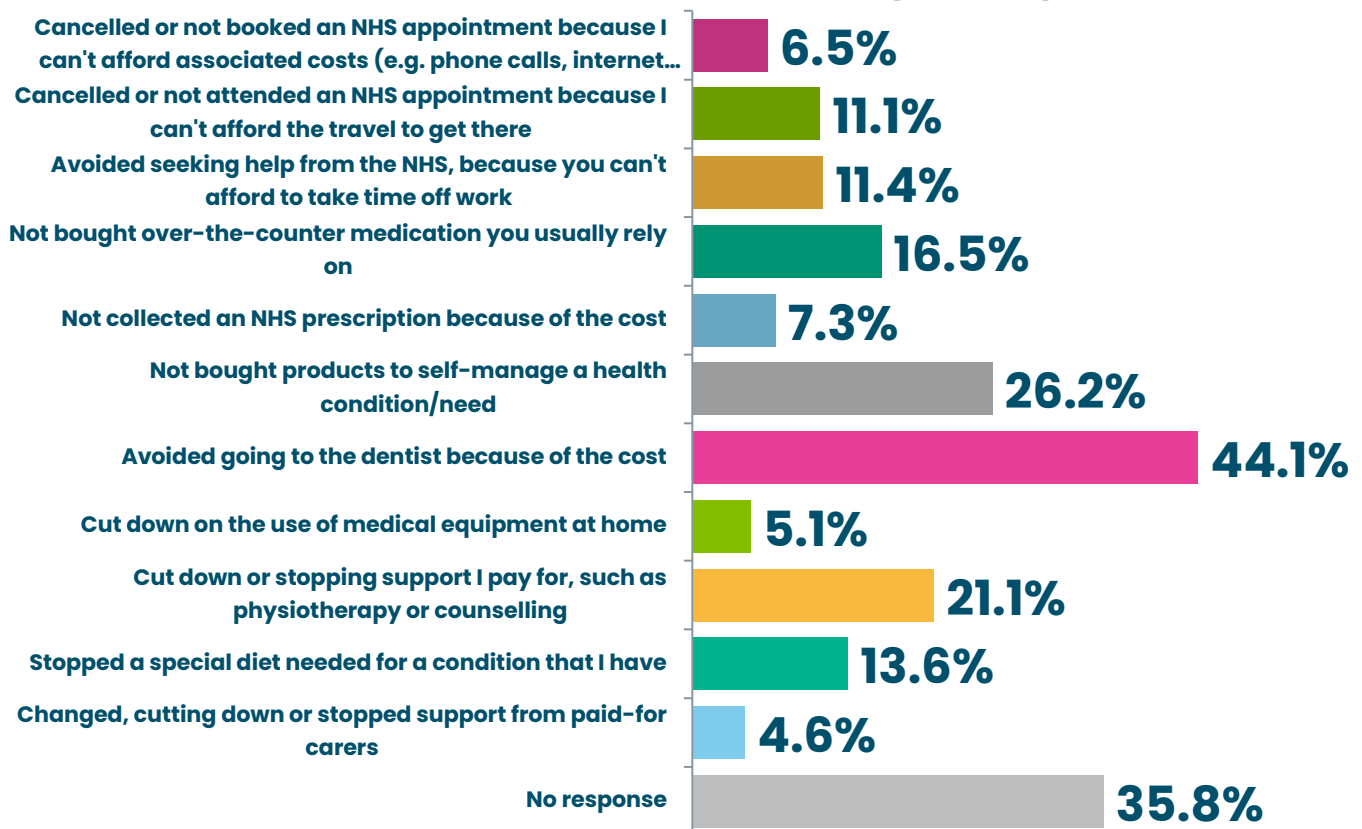
4.2 Use of health, care and wellbeing services or resources

We heard cost-of-living changes affect people's decisions around the health and care services they access, as well as the self-care or paid-for treatments or support they use.

The most common changes people told us they had made were:

- Avoiding going to the dentist due to cost (44.1%)
- Not buying products supporting self-management of a health condition (26.2%)
- Reducing or stopping self-care support e.g. physiotherapy/counselling (21.1%)

Which of the following have you done in the last 12 months due to rising living costs:



"It's been difficult to negotiate re-fills of medication around paydays - sometimes I've needed to share medication with my husband to ensure we've got enough to get us both through to payday, which we definitely don't feel good about!"



What we heard

Dentistry

Nearly half our respondents (44.1%) told us they had **avoided going to the dentist** due to the cost.

We heard appointment and treatment costs put people off seeking check-ups and other preventative care, only making appointments when they have a significant problem.

“Not accessing a dentist unless I am in pain.”

“I’ve needed a filling or some dental work for some years now and I’m dreading it becoming a larger issue.”

Additional challenges include finding dentists accepting new patients on an NHS basis or providing certain treatments through the NHS rather than privately. This may push people to private dental services, but only if they can afford the additional cost.

“No NHS dentist. I was taken off books over Covid.”

“I had to take on additional work to pay for an unexpected dental cost - privately funded root canal as my NHS dentist was unable to do it.”

“Can only get private. For us both a check up is almost £200!”

These factors may combine to worsen oral health outcomes for those on low incomes in the longer term and increase demand for urgent and emergency dental services in the short term.

Self-managing health conditions

More than a quarter of respondents (26.2%) told us the rising cost of living led to them **not buying products that support their ability to self-manage health conditions**.

“Cost of batteries for blood pressure machine are high and one time I didn’t have enough money to buy replacements, so couldn’t use BP machine.”

“Don’t buy over the counter pain relief. Stopped having podiatry for myself and partner. Stopped buying vitamin/iron supplement which I need.”

“Cannot afford supplements like vitamins or fruit.”

Reduced affordability may force people to decrease their use of self-help products, look to statutory services for alternative support more regularly, or go without, which may lead to negative impacts and potentially more costly responses in the longer-term.

What we heard

Reducing or stopping paid-for support

One in five people (21.1%) we heard from told us they had either **reduced or stopped services they had previously purchased** to support them due to the cost.

These included not purchasing supplements and medication and reducing use of osteopaths, chiropractors, physiotherapists and other health professionals. This may place additional pressures on NHS services or worsen people's health outcomes.

Examples included the reduced use of, or barriers to accessing, paid-for health and care services:

"I have avoided paying for Physio due to costs and now on a long NHS waiting list for treatment."

"Don't go to osteopathy for my arthritis anymore because it's an added cost."

"Really need counselling but I cannot justify it."

Other examples included reductions in the use of services (including carers) that support people with managing and completing daily essentials, which may impact their quality of life or ability to live independently.

"Less hours for my cleaner/ home help."

"We have cancelled our evening carers."

"Can no longer afford to have help with housework chores, used to pay someone to Hoover weekly and do any heavier jobs, had a window cleaner (every 2 months)."

Over-the-counter medication and NHS prescriptions

16.5% respondents told us they had **reduced their use of over-the-counter medication or treatments** due to a lack of affordability.

"Needed Gaviscon but couldn't afford it for heartburn. Tried to use warm milk and water instead."

A smaller proportion of respondents (7.3%) indicated that they had **not collected an NHS prescription due to the cost**.

"I have delayed getting prescription due to costs. Money is tight ahead each month with increasing bills."

We also heard about the challenges faced by those on low incomes who do not meet the eligibility criteria for free prescriptions and other NHS services.

"My current benefits cover mostly free dental and prescription costs. My issue is glasses as I have a costly prescription & the NHS voucher is not adequate."

What we heard

Accessing NHS and other health and care appointments

The bulk of the responses citing barriers to accessing healthcare services related to the time and financial costs associated with travel to appointments, especially those out-of-area. These may lead people to delay attendance or go without treatment altogether.

“Couldn't afford to travel for physio at hospital”

“Have had to stop travelling to appointments as I can't afford to travel there.”

“I cannot often afford to travel to appointments that are out of the local area and have had to cancel appointments with specialists in London for example as I could not afford the train fare.”

Issues were also highlighted around travel support schemes which operate on a reimbursement basis and are reliant on people having the funds available to pay upfront and wait for reimbursement to occur.

“There is a need for 'NHS help with health costs' to give in advance for appointments (not only reimburse after for costs incurred).”

What we heard

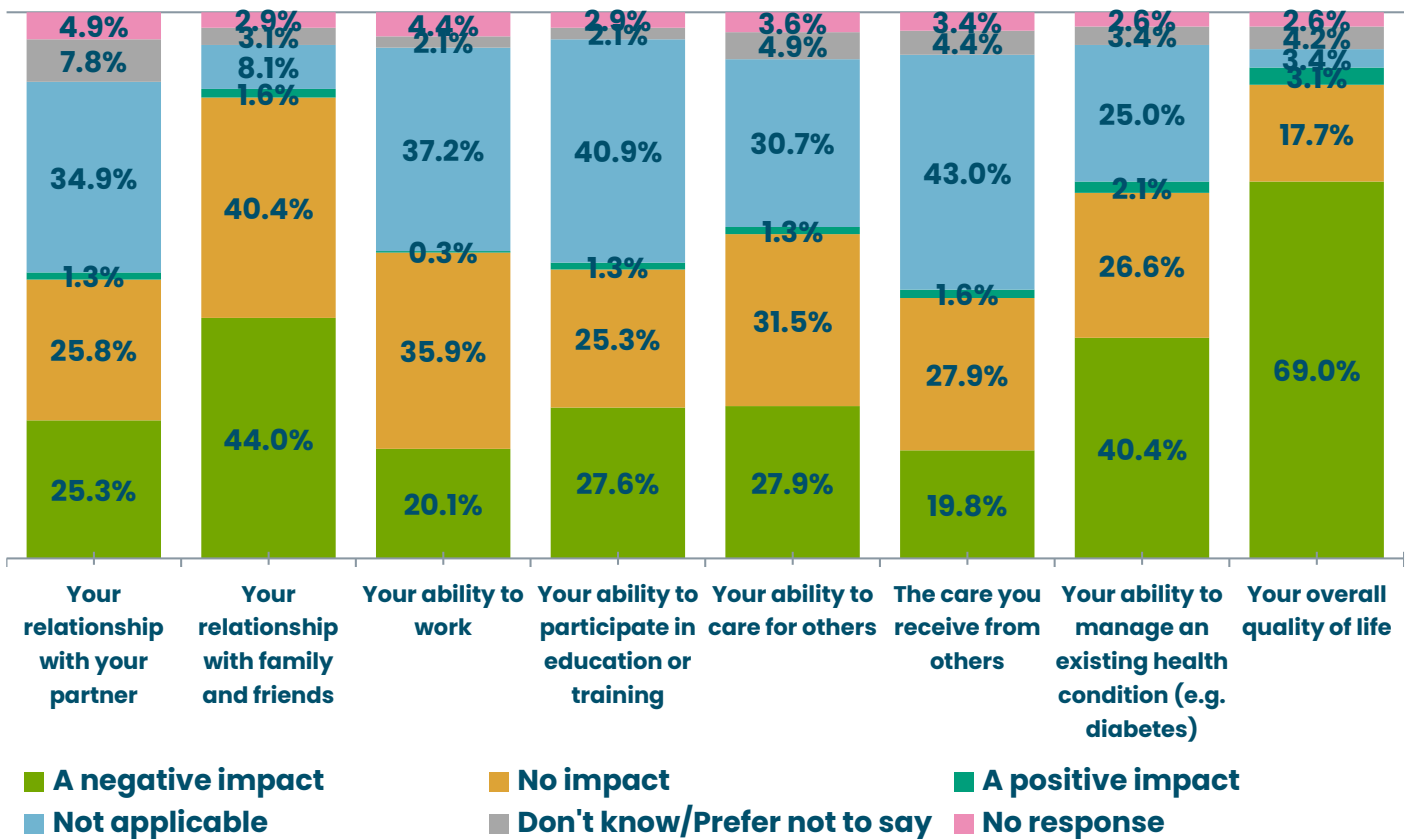
4.3 Impacts of changes in cost of living

More than two-thirds of respondents (69.0%) told us that cost-of-living increases had a negative impact on their overall quality of life.

Approaching half (44.0%) indicated there were negative effects on relationships with their family and friends, and two-fifths (40.4%) highlighted negative impacts on their ability to manage existing health conditions.

Other negative impacts included people’s ability to participate in education or training; their ability to work; and their ability to care for or receive care from others.

How have changes in the cost-of-living impacted on the following areas of your life:



“The daily stress of living in a situation where I have limited/no savings, leads to low mood, motivation, lack of access to opportunities for my child (and myself), in addition to a constant feeling of anxiety. I am unable to plan ahead, make goals or enjoy time off as I have a small daily budget that just about covers the cost of food, rent, council tax, electric, gas and water!”



What we heard

As presented so far, we heard that changes in the cost of living may have a range of impacts on people, households and communities.

Individuals may be affected by a single factor or a combination of multiple factors.

Impacts on physical health

We heard how people's **physical wellbeing** may be directly or indirectly affected by changes in the cost of living.

These included:

- Pain and discomfort for those with arthritis and other joint conditions due to reduced use of heating and hot water.
- Increased incidences of medication for high blood pressure, anxiety and depression, which may be linked to stress.
- People unable to afford replacement glasses, but ineligible for NHS alternatives.
- Increased regularity of colds and respiratory infections attributed to reduced heating, and cost-of-living and mould in properties.
- Individuals not bathing to save on the costs of heating water, leading to psoriasis and other skin related ailments.
- Dental pain and discomfort due to challenges accessing regular preventative and routine care, and support with urgent or emergency dental needs.

Impacts on mental health

Increased anxiety was the most common impact on **mental wellbeing** that people told us about in, both in relation to themselves but also their concerns about their friends, family and wider society.

Comments highlighted people's worries about finances, both now and in the future, but also their concerns about how their loved ones (such as offspring and elderly relatives) may be coping and the challenges of providing them with support due to the pressure they themselves were facing.

We heard some people experienced significant negative impacts on their mental wellbeing due to the combined direct and indirect effects of cost-of-living increases, including suicidal feelings, stress, depression and insomnia.

Positive impacts

Some respondents told us they felt cost of living increases had **positive outcomes** for them, including:

- more walking rather than car or public transport journeys making them feel fitter;
- pursuing voluntary activities to support others
- better diet due to consuming more raw ingredients and less processed food
- improved awareness of cooking meals from scratch

What we heard

4.4 Support for cost-of-living pressures

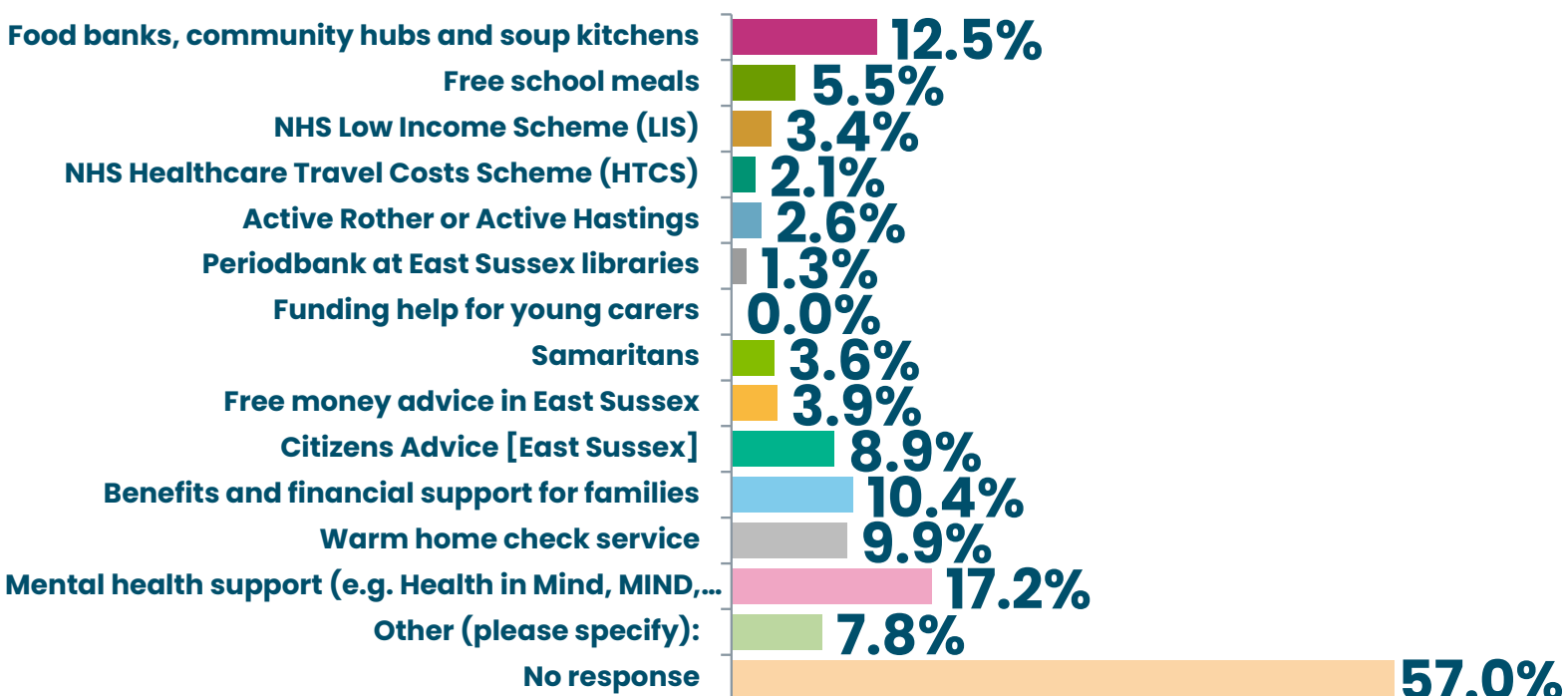
Approximately 4 out of 10 respondents indicated they accessed at least one form of advice or support due to changes in the cost of living in the last 12 months, with some accessing more than one service.

The advice or support accessed most related to mental health services, food banks and community food provision, and advice around benefits and finances. These reflect the issues that respondents told us were commonly affected by cost-of-living changes.

Organisations providing advice and support such as Citizens Advice were utilised, as were those supporting people with emotional needs or in crisis such as Samaritans. Similarly, one in ten respondents had used the Warm Home Check service.

However, engagement with some support schemes is particularly low, such as the Free Money Advice Service, NHS Low Income and Healthcare Travel Costs Schemes, Active Rother/Hastings, and funding help for young carers.

Have you accessed any of the following advice or support due to changes in cost of living in the last 12 months:



What we heard

Positive examples of support and advice

Respondents told us how valuable they found the support offered by local statutory, voluntary and community organisations and initiatives.

These included:

- ESCC financial support and advice website resource in accessing information.
- Warm Home Check Service in supporting reduced energy use and lower bills.
- Citizens Advice, Southdown and East Sussex Floating Support Service in offering advice.
- Food banks, community pantries and community supermarkets in providing food, but also emotional support from volunteers.
- Reduced travel costs through use of the East Sussex Flexibus service.

We also heard that some commercial organisations provided useful help and support to people in managing their day-to-day finances. These included:

- Websites of utility companies, such as energy suppliers, offering information about cost saving and support schemes.
- Employee Assistance Programmes provided by employers.
- Advice websites such as MoneySavingExpert.com.
- Price comparison websites.

Whilst concerns may exist around the robustness and objectivity of information provided by commercial organisations, there may be value in exploring how these could be utilised as part of the information and support offered to people in East Sussex.

Limitations of support and advice

Some people told us that they struggled to access the support and advice on offer or that it didn't always provide a response to their specific needs.

For some, a lack of clarity on where to look and how to get the ball rolling was a barrier. Some respondents also said that they needed help or support in contacting services or making applications and weren't always clear who to access.

"I don't know where to start or what I'm entitled to."

"Financial and benefits guidance to know what benefits to apply for and support to apply."



"Most of the above I have either never heard of or we do not qualify for. The requirements are extremely tight for most of these services. My mum supports four other adults plus herself. So, she's always making too much to qualify for support and it never takes into consideration more abnormal situations. Why are we still using the nuclear family as the measurement for all families?"



What we heard

Some people had accessed information or services but found that whilst they were facing financial hardship, they did not meet the eligibility criteria for support.

"I used the Money Advice Service website but there were not any good options, as we are working and have just about enough to cover everything, although it is a struggle some months."

"We make too much money to access these things as our income is just over the threshold."

"I earn too much to claim any help but too little to properly manage financially. Any more increase in bills will break me."

Factors to consider in the provision of information and support on the cost of living

The feedback received on the use of information and support linked to the cost of living suggest several aspects which it may be valuable to consider moving forwards:

Awareness

Ongoing activity to increase and sustain awareness of the information and support available to assist people in managing changes in their cost of living.

Focus

Differentiating information and pathways for people in reducing their living costs from the provision of crisis support for those in urgent need of help.

Accessibility

Provision of information in a variety of formats (including non-digital) and delivered pro-actively to communities and people on a regular basis.

Support

Improved clarity on where people can access advice or hands-on support to assist them with undertaking specific tasks e.g. signposting, completing applications etc.

Similarly, support for organisations delivering signposting and advice functions, and training and help for staff and volunteers in offering information consistently.



"I work on behalf of other, less secure, less competent older people and I am very concerned about the levels of anxiety, fear and isolation!"



Conclusion

Summary

The feedback shared with us clearly indicate changes in the cost of living have and are impacting on many people's lives in East Sussex and many people facing financial strain are as concerned about the future as they are about the present.

Whilst the effects have been small for some and significant for others, increased costs and slowing incomes have affected many people's quality of life. People told us how they've adapted their lifestyles to reduce non-essential costs by using less heating and electricity, travelling less, changing their diet and doing less of the things they enjoy, such as socialising, exercising and taking holidays.

Most concerningly for Healthwatch, we heard how these factors impact on people's physical and/or mental wellbeing, which may lead to poorer health outcomes, increased health inequalities, and place additional pressures on statutory and voluntary organisations in the short-to-medium term.

We heard anxiety about finances is generally high, affecting household relationships, and leading to concerns about the ability of friends and family to cope. People are worried about the future, and whether pressures may increase rather than ease, especially those on fixed incomes such as pensioners or benefit recipients. These lead some people to feel trapped by their circumstances.

People told us they were aware changes they were making, such as using less heating, eating more processed food, and cancelling gym memberships, would affect their health but often felt they had little choice. In turn, this affected their self-esteem and contributed to feelings of social isolation, in line with reduced travel and other forms of social interaction, such as meeting friends and family less regularly.

We also heard people are reducing their self-management of long-term conditions, buying less medication and using fewer services such as counselling and physiotherapy. Barriers in accessing NHS dentistry and high private dental charges have also created challenges for many in maintaining their oral health.

Whilst many of these issues are complex, multi-faceted and reflect underlying factors such as housing, education and employment, immediate and longer-term responses should be explored to minimise the impacts on individuals and households, and support those most affected. Not doing so may lead the frequency and extent of negative impacts, and pressure on services to increase.

Next steps

We will continue to monitor the feedback we receive from patients and the public so we can better understand how and where their lives are affected by changes in living costs.

We will share our insight with the East Sussex Multi-Agency Financial Inclusion Steering Group, East Sussex Communications and Involvement Group and wider stakeholders, and work with them to explore responses that mitigate and reduce the impacts on people.

Recommendations

We have developed recommendations that respond to our key findings. These focus on achievable actions from local partners, recognising many cost-of-living drivers are linked to national policy and wider economic influences.

Cross-cutting recommendations

1. Local statutory and voluntary organisations to explore opportunities for further exploration of the impacts of the cost of living on different demographic, social and ethnic groups in East Sussex.
2. Raising awareness of cost-of-living support and advice on both a population-wide and targeted basis should be explored, including services 'meeting people where they are'.
3. Local statutory and voluntary organisations to explore opportunities to offer information and practical support to local people in accessing healthy food.

Recommendations for East Sussex County Council

4. Maximise awareness of the [cost-of-living support resources](#) collated by the county council, including through non-digital/web-based means.
5. Ensure that cost-of-living support resources are up-to-date and accurate.

Recommendations for NHS Sussex

6. Maximise awareness of the [NHS Low Income Scheme](#) amongst patients, the public, health professionals and stakeholders to support uptake.
7. Explore how travel support schemes may provide upfront financial support or 'free' travel for those on low incomes, rather than on a reimbursement basis.
8. Raise awareness of annual and pre-paid [prescription options](#) for patients taking multiple medications.
9. Progress initiatives to maximise access to NHS dental appointments in East Sussex.

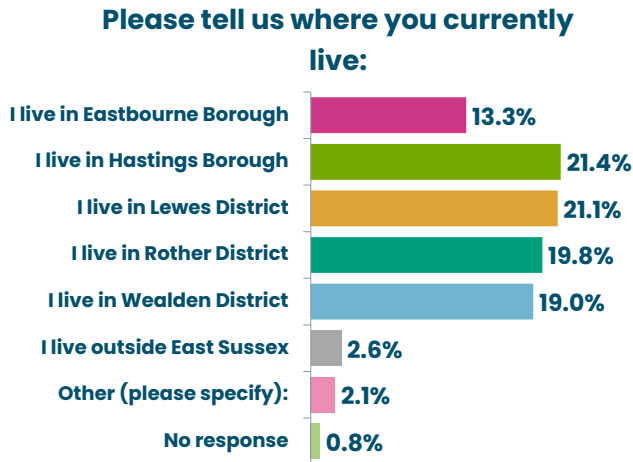
Recommendations for Healthwatch East Sussex

10. Monitor feedback on the cost of living to support understanding of its impact on people's behaviours, use of services and physical and mental wellbeing.
11. Share this report and continue to share other feedback and experiences related to changes in the cost living with local stakeholders.
12. Share insight and reports on the cost of living with Healthwatch England to support national intelligence on this theme.

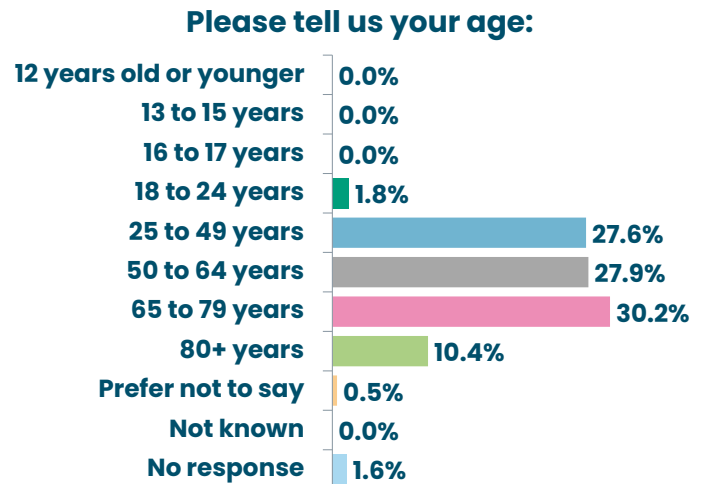
Who we heard from

A breakdown of the 384 respondents to our main survey is provided below:

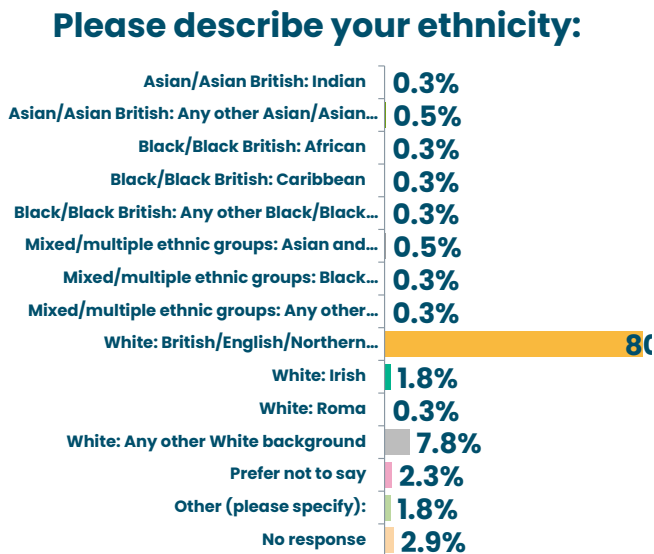
Location



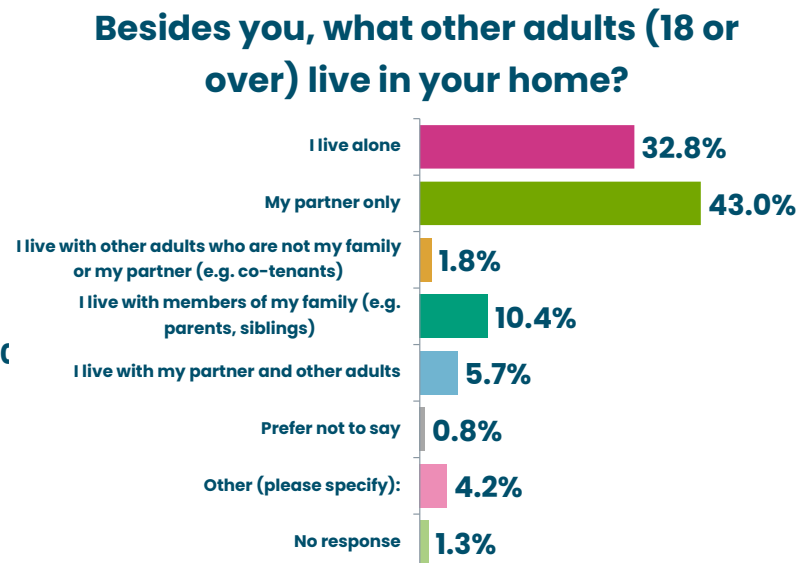
Age



Ethnicity



Household make-up



Gender

76.3% of respondents identified as a woman, 19.0% as a man, 0.8% as non-binary, 0.8% preferred to self-describe, 1.6% preferred not to say and 1.6% did not respond.

Other characteristics

29.4% of respondents indicated they had a disability

53.6% of respondents indicated they have a long-term health condition

19.3% of respondents were carers.



healthwatch
East Sussex

Healthwatch East Sussex
The Old Printworks
Commercial Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN21 3XQ

www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk
t: 0333 101 4007
e: enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk
[@HealthwatchES](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchES)
[Facebook.com/Healthwatcheastsussex](https://www.facebook.com/Healthwatcheastsussex)