



Building bridges to better mental health

healthwatch
North Yorkshire

Contents

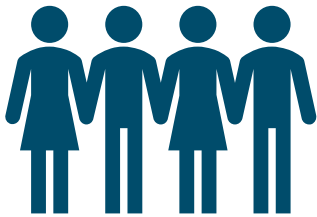
Building bridges to better mental health ..	3
Trauma informed care.....	9
Mental health practitioners	11
Lisa's story	13
Complex emotional needs specialists	14

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Building bridges to better mental health

North Yorkshire



1 in 4 people live with mental health each year in England
(Source: [MIND](#))

Healthwatch North Yorkshire produced [a report](#) in 2023 that gathered opinions from adults throughout the county about mental health support. This was to find out what was offered, what people require from their care, and how they feel about services.

People called for better, more easily accessible, and inclusive services. For those people who live in rural areas, with children, who have served in the armed forces, and who are neurodiverse, they often face greater obstacles to receiving care. Common issues include stigma, inconsistent support, long waiting times, and an overwhelmed mental health crisis service.

People told Healthwatch North Yorkshire they want care to be more focussed on the person, to feel included in decisions made about their care and for access to be easier. The Healthwatch report also recommended improving accessibility, customising services to meet a range of needs, increasing access to psychological therapy, and community organisations and healthcare providers working together more so people don't feel they have to keep repeating their story over and over. People told Healthwatch they don't always feel listened to.

Acting in response to what people told Healthwatch North Yorkshire

After the report and recommendations, the local NHS ([North Yorkshire and York Mental Health Alliance](#)) has introduced complex emotional needs specialists, mental health practitioners in GP practices and provided training for people to use a trauma-informed care approach when helping people.

These people and ways of working offer **prompt, person-focussed support**, which lessens the need for specialised services, relieves the strain on emergency services (such as ambulances and accident & emergency departments), and reduces the number of people who feel forgotten about.



Mental health in numbers



One in six people experience mental health

Anxiety or depression in any given week in England
(Source: [MIND](#)).



245,113 mental health related incidents recorded

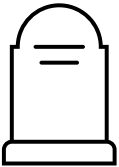
In 2024/25 period, North Yorkshire Police recorded incidents, highlighting **many people needed help for their mental health**. (Source: [North Yorkshire Police](#)).



Link between poverty and mental health

Yorkshire and the Humber is one of the most deprived regions. This contributes to **heightened mental health** challenges and **struggles to afford private care** and support when **faced with long waiting lists**.

(Source: [Yorkshire and Humber Public Health Network](#)).



Suicide rates

North Yorkshire has a higher-than-average suicide rate compared to the national average (Source: [Office for National Statistics](#)).

A commitment to change

The North Yorkshire and York Mental Health Alliance has worked with Healthwatch North Yorkshire and Healthwatch York to hear from people to better understand the challenges they face.

This includes the [North Yorkshire and York community mental health transformation programme](#) which is focused on improving access to mental health services in the community.

The local NHS has committed to designing mental health services with input from the people they support, ensuring care is shaped by those who use it.

By listening to people's feedback (good and bad), the NHS wants to create mental health support that truly works for everyone.



**Community Mental Health
Transformation**
North Yorkshire and York

What people told Healthwatch

We know that mental health affects people. Rurality, poverty, an overwhelmed crisis service, stigma, and a lack of awareness add to an already challenged mental health system.

Healthwatch North Yorkshire's report highlights a need for major changes and improvements. People said:

Support feels short-term and inconsistent: Many people feel the help they receive doesn't meet their individual needs.

Crisis services are overwhelmed: Long waiting times on helplines and A&E (accident & emergency) make it hard to get help in emergencies, often making people feel worse.

Barriers prevent access to care: Poor public transport in rural areas, isolation of people, and a lack of clear information about services make things difficult for people. Appointments during standard hours don't work for everyone, and some people felt dismissed or not taken seriously by professionals when they do try to get support.

Certain groups face extra challenges: People who have served in the armed forces, carers and neurodiverse people, said their unique needs are often overlooked. They face a lack of tailored care and limited awareness by those who support them about their challenges.

Although some people praised staff and community organisations for their efforts, these positive experiences were inconsistent. Many described the mental health system as confusing and unresponsive to their needs.



What people want to change

People shared their experiences of mental health care with Healthwatch, highlighting the need for **more personalised and effective support**.

They want to see **reduced waiting times, expanding non-medication treatment options, and improved transitions from youth to adult support services. Stronger crisis response, trauma-informed training for staff, and better support for carers and families** are also essential.

We need **better-trained staff who understand diverse challenges and greater accessibility**, including **flexible appointments and improved transport**.

Thanks to people's feedback, and working together by local Healthwatch and the NHS, mental health services are improving across North Yorkshire, ensuring more people get the support they need in ways that work for them. We know that there is a long way to go, but this is positive to see.

Healthwatch North Yorkshire highlighted three ways that the NHS are making things better for people living with a mental health problem:

- 1. Trauma informed care (training and approach).**
- 2. Mental health practitioners in GP practices.**
- 3. Complex emotional needs specialists.**



Trauma informed care

Introduction

Many people with mental health challenges have experienced trauma in their lives.

Trauma can deeply affect a person's mental health and well-being, often making it difficult for them to trust healthcare providers or feel safe in medical settings. Without a trauma-informed approach to care, many people are at risk of being re-traumatised, leading to further harm and inadequate support.

Impact of trauma

Around 70% of people receiving mental health services in England have experienced trauma in their lives. (Source: [NHS](#)).

What is trauma informed care?

Trauma-informed care is a way of providing health and care services that recognises how trauma affects people's physical, mental, and emotional health.

Instead of asking, "What's wrong with this person?" trauma-informed care asks, "What does this person need?" This approach focuses on creating safe, respectful, and supportive environments where individuals feel understood and empowered.

In North Yorkshire, this approach has become a cornerstone of the NHS's local [community mental health transformation plan](#). It ensures healthcare services are culturally sensitive, accessible, and put together with people who have lived through trauma. It considers the well-being of staff delivering these services, ensuring they have the support they need to provide compassionate care.

Progress in North Yorkshire



Trauma-informed care professionals were introduced in 2021. They have trained over 1,000 professionals, including NHS staff, North Yorkshire Council staff, and volunteers. With more planned.

This training helps organisations to understand the impact of trauma on people so they can adjust their practices accordingly. For example, North Yorkshire Council has worked closely with these leads to put trauma-informed ways of working into social care and housing.

One of the most exciting developments will be the establishment of North Yorkshire's first mental health hub in Harrogate, which will be launched in 2025. This hub will serve as a model for trauma-informed care, ensuring that every aspect of the service, from staff training to patient interactions, reflects these principles. There are plans to open additional mental health hubs in the county in the coming year(s).

Trauma-informed care leads will be working closely with clinical teams to ensure that the hubs offer a safe and supportive environment. The hubs will also focus on connecting individuals with community resources, and better working together between health services, North Yorkshire Council, and charities like MIND and Healthwatch North Yorkshire.



Mental health practitioners

The role and benefit of mental health practitioners

Mental health practitioners offer immediate support to people right in their GP practice, ensuring timely, tailored care without unnecessary delays.

Instead of waiting for a specialist referral, patients can be seen on the spot—getting the help they need, when they need it. These practitioners listen, assess, and guide people toward the best next steps, whether that's self-help, therapy, medication, or other support services.

By having real conversations, they empower people to take charge of their mental health. Their approach is personal and compassionate, focusing on individual needs and circumstances.

Not only do they provide faster, more effective care, but they also ease the pressure on GPs—making sure people get the right help, sooner rather than later.



Practitioners provided 28,534 patient appointments in 2024, with 60% of these being new referrals.

- **Harrogate & District:** 8,252 people helped (67% new referrals)
- **Hambleton & Richmondshire:** 9,431 people helped (52% new)
- **Scarborough, Whitby & Ryedale:** 11,461 people helped (62% new)
- **York & Selby Vale:** 21,492 people helped (63% new)

Their impact is clear—timely, accessible mental health support when people need it most.

What are referrals and why are they important?

Referrals play a crucial role in connecting people with the right mental health support. They help ensure individuals are matched with trusted, qualified professionals, so they don't have to navigate the process alone. A referral can also mean being directed to a specialist who truly understands a person's needs.

People can be referred by:

- **Themselves** – Many GP practices allow self-referrals.
- **GPs & healthcare professionals** – Doctors, nurses, and social workers can refer patients.
- **Employers** – Counsellors and occupational health services can guide individuals.
- **Family and friends** – While informal, their support can encourage seeking help.

Referrals also ensure timely, appropriate care, making mental health support more accessible.



Mental health practitioners ensure people get the right support when they need it, reducing specialist referrals and easing pressure on GPs, accident & emergency departments and other healthcare teams. By stepping in early, they shorten wait times and prevent people from feeling "stuck" in the system.

As the first point of contact for many, mental health practitioners assess, guide, and connect individuals to the right services. Their work means faster, more compassionate support—turning long periods of waiting into immediate help.

Mental health practitioners are key to North Yorkshire's commitment to better mental health care, making support more accessible and truly making a difference.

“Like turning the lights back on” – Lisa’s story

My journey with mental health

Lisa, a single mum from rural North Yorkshire, had always struggled. As her daughter approached high school, anxiety took over, and she knew she needed help.

It was Lisa’s “excellent GP” who gave her the encouragement over the years that helped Lisa build confidence to self-refer to Sophie, one of the first mental health practitioners.

“Discovering Sophie was life-changing—maybe even lifesaving,”

Lisa had always tried to manage on her own, but Sophie showed her a different way.

“She looked me in the eyes and said, ‘We can sort this out.’ For the first time in years, I felt hope.”

With Sophie’s support, Lisa started seeing a future beyond just getting by. As a mum in her 50s, she thought she was stuck. Lisa now does volunteering work when she feels well enough. Sophie helped Lisa believe in herself again.

“My outlook has completely changed. Even my work coach has noticed!”

Lisa’s journey wasn’t just about her—it transformed her daughter’s life too.

“Sophie didn’t just improve my mental health—she gave me hope for a brighter future. I will always be grateful.”

Complex emotional needs specialists

Introduction

Not everyone fits into traditional mental health services. Complex emotional needs practitioners are here to offer tailored support for people dealing with trauma, emotional struggles, eating disorders, and personality disorders.

What are complex emotional needs?

Some people find it tough to manage emotions, build healthy relationships, or control impulses. This can cause distress—not just for them, but for their families and people around them. In the past, these challenges were often labelled as ‘personality disorders,’ and people didn’t always get the right care, or feel like they are understood.

Now, the NHS is shifting its focus to providing evidence-based, specialist care through services beyond the local doctor at a GP practice, ensuring people get the support they truly need.

Who are complex emotional needs practitioners?

They support people to live with their mental health, help solve problems and offer training. They make sure people get the right support across housing, and emergency response teams.

Their work includes:

- **Community projects** – Launching local mental health hubs (coming 2025) and improving care coordination.
- **Supporting professionals** – Helping teams across different services create flexible, effective care plans.

- **Listening and learning** – Hosting reflective practice groups and developing best-practice guides to improve care.
- **Training & advice** – Offering specialist training, including one called "being with distress," to help professionals confidently support people in crisis.

The impact so far

The NHS is making progress, with dedicated specialists now in Harrogate, Scarborough, and Selby Vale. But gaps remain— areas like Hambleton and Richmondshire still need support.



Even so, their impact is clear. **80% of staff who have attended training feel more confident and better equipped** to help people with complex emotional needs.



"Having complex emotional needs specialists is invaluable. Their guidance helps us with the homeless people we work with."



What next?

The NHS is expanding support

- From 2025, complex emotional needs specialists will be hosting drop-in sessions across the local areas, making it easier for the NHS and community organisations to seek support and get the help they need when helping people.
- By partnering with volunteers and community groups, they're creating opportunities and connecting people to share experiences and help support one another.
- The local NHS has committed to better working together to manage people at risk and offer better care plans that consider all aspects of a person's emotional health.



Healthwatch North Yorkshire is committed to the quality of our information. Every three years we perform an in-depth audit so that we can be certain of this.

[Learn more.](#)



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