

Living with a disability in Blackpool

Experiences from local residents

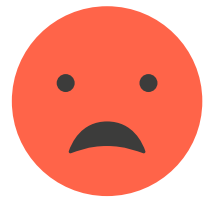


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About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Blackpool is your local health and social care champion. We make sure decision makers and National Health Service (NHS) leaders hear your experiences and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice. We want the people of Blackpool to stay well and get the best out of our health and care services locally.



Our vision:

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission:

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.

Our values are:

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

Introduction

According to the 2021 Census, 35,459 of the Blackpool population reported having an impairment, highlighting the need for excellent access across services. Healthwatch Blackpool heard experiences from our local residents directly through our enquiry function, and from the Poverty Truth network, that some disabled residents were facing accessibility issues. Examples of this included a lack of reasonable adjustments within service provision, limited access to wheelchair-friendly transport options such as taxis, and difficulties in attending essential health screenings, such as mammograms, forcing people to travel unreasonable distances outside of area. This feedback outlined the need for a deeper understanding into the issues faced by people living with disabilities in Blackpool.

To address these concerns, Healthwatch Blackpool collaborated with Blackpool Transport, Trading Standards and Licensing, and services within Blackpool Council, including Integrated Transport and Community and Environmental Services, to gain a greater understanding of local perspectives. This project engaged with individuals with a range of disabilities, including physical, mental, neurodiversity or learning disability (LD), to identify experiences with community activities, healthcare services and public transport, while also discussing access to health and care more broadly.

Healthwatch Blackpool consulted with individuals with disabilities, parents/carers, and relevant organisations to co-produce a survey, designed to capture real life experiences. This survey was distributed across multiple social media platforms, during face-to-face engagement sessions, and through focus groups and one-to-one conversations. Additionally, Blackpool Transport supported engagement efforts by displaying the survey on digital screens across their buses and trams, maximising visibility and participation.

To further assess transport accessibility, Healthwatch Blackpool carried out a mystery shopping exercise, which enabled individuals with disabilities to assess the accessibility of local buses, trams, taxis and the Rideability service. By working closely with key stakeholders and listening to the voices of those with lived experience, Healthwatch Blackpool ensured that residents felt empowered to share their experience whilst supporting increased inclusivity across Blackpool.

Methodology



A mixed method approach, underpinned by a theory of change, has been used by Healthwatch Blackpool, aiming to capture accurate and informed community insights relating to disability and transport within Blackpool. Incorporating both quantitative and qualitative data collated from focus groups, interviews, community events, a survey, social media and a mystery shopper exercise, we aimed to investigate resident experiences relating to community health and care, community activities and local transport accessibility for people with a range of additional needs. This aimed to identify gaps and barriers in service provision for all additional needs and disabilities, such as physical, mental, neurodiverse and learning difficulties. We wanted to explore possible improvements for enhanced accessibility, and investigate how the community and social care providers can better support individuals with disabilities in maintaining their health and wellbeing. Working alongside partners from Blackpool Council and Blackpool Transport, we focused on transport accessibility in the local area and aimed to celebrate successes.

Using a range of methods, we engaged with a total of 207 residents and worked with a further 9 local residents through our mystery shopping exercise. We spoke with 131 people via survey responses and 76 people via focus groups and face to face interviews. Paid advertisements were also utilised through our social media channels to further capture the insights of local residents and target key demographics.

Theory of change

When commencing with this project, we established a theory of change, incorporating the resident experience that had been fed back to us through regular engagements, community feedback and other local organisations such as the Poverty Truth. This helped us map the wider issues faced, as well as allowing us to create workstreams relating to this.

131 
survey responses



Have a Disability? We Need Your Voice!

Help improve **community health care** and **transport services** in Blackpool by sharing your experiences.

Take our survey and make a difference! →

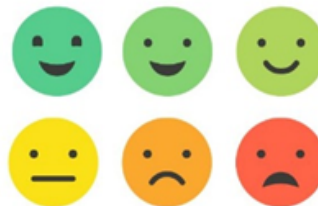
The public voice
for health and social care
Need this survey in a different format?
Contact us 0300 32 32 100



www.healthwatchblackpool.co.uk

Have a Disability? We Need Your Voice!

Help improve **community health care** and **transport services** in Blackpool by sharing your experiences.




@ Empowerment Charity

Survey

As part of our preliminary work, we developed a draft survey, informed by local health themes and our community insights. This initial survey was then circulated across key local stakeholders such as Blackpool Council, residents with lived and living experience, as well as Trading and Licensing. We visited multiple organisations and community groups to consult on our survey and amended this where needed. An easy-read survey and additional documents were also created during this process. In total, we collected 131 responses, covering a range of both qualitative and quantitative data, all of which was anonymous. Posters featuring the survey contact details, a project overview, and a QR code to access the survey directly on smart phones or other devices were distributed to key stakeholders, GP waiting rooms, pharmacies and community centres.

Focus Groups

We conducted a total of 14 focus groups and face to face interviews, speaking with a total of 76 individuals, all with differing additional needs of differing severities. This method enabled us to expand upon emerging survey themes and explore our objectives in more detail. This allowed us to identify gaps in community activities and decision-making processes for disabled individuals, investigating the barriers individuals with disabilities encounter with local transport options whilst also identifying barriers to community health and care services. Focus groups were conducted in local resident led community groups, charities, day care centres as well as many other locations across Blackpool. The use of open-ended questioning allowed individuals to explore topics in their own words, and interaction between other members of the focus group generated additional insights.



Mystery shopping

To evaluate the accessibility of local transportation services for individuals with disabilities in Blackpool, Healthwatch Blackpool employed a mystery shopping methodology. Participants were recruited during a prior consultation phase, targeting individuals who regularly utilise public and specialised transport. Interested participants were invited to act as mystery shoppers.

14
focus groups

These mystery shoppers undertook journeys using local buses, trams, taxis, and the Rideability service. Immediately following each journey, participants completed a short survey designed to capture their experiences and assess accessibility features. The survey included questions regarding physical access, staff assistance, information provision, and overall user experience.

As a gesture of appreciation for their participation and contribution to the study, mystery shoppers received Love2shop vouchers. This incentive acknowledged the contribution made by participants that carried out the mystery shopping exercise.

Limitations

Theories of Change (ToC) may overly simplify complex issues, neglecting to consider the broader context, relying on assumptions that may not be valid, and potentially devolving into a compliance exercise, rather than functioning as a tool for learning and improvement. Furthermore, ToC's can become rigid and inflexible, thereby hindering the ability to adapt to changing circumstances or evolving evidence. In attempt to mitigate this, consultation and evaluation was continually embedded into our way of working.



In addition, surveys and focus groups have various limitations. While we aimed to gather comprehensive qualitative insights regarding the experiences of local residents, responses cannot be fully representative of the population in Blackpool, nor the full range of additional needs in the local area. It is important to note that not all respondents answered every question on the online survey, which may cause some totals to be inconsistent with the overall sample size.

Mystery Shopping produced both qualitative and quantitative feedback on a range of local transport services. As we only recruited 9 individuals, this is not representative of a range of disabilities and may only highlight more individualised experiences.

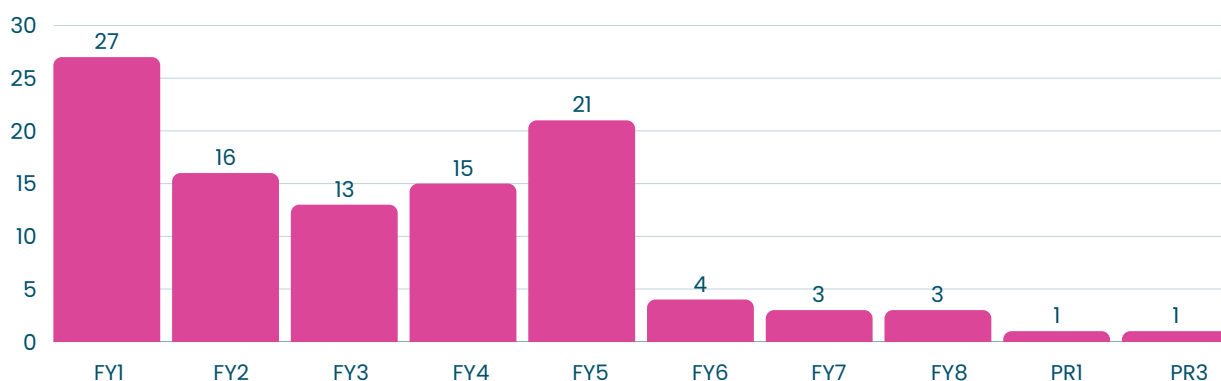
Thank you

Healthwatch Blackpool expresses sincere gratitude to all who contributed to this project. The valuable insights shared by community members through surveys, focus groups, and the mystery shopping exercise have been instrumental in shaping our work.

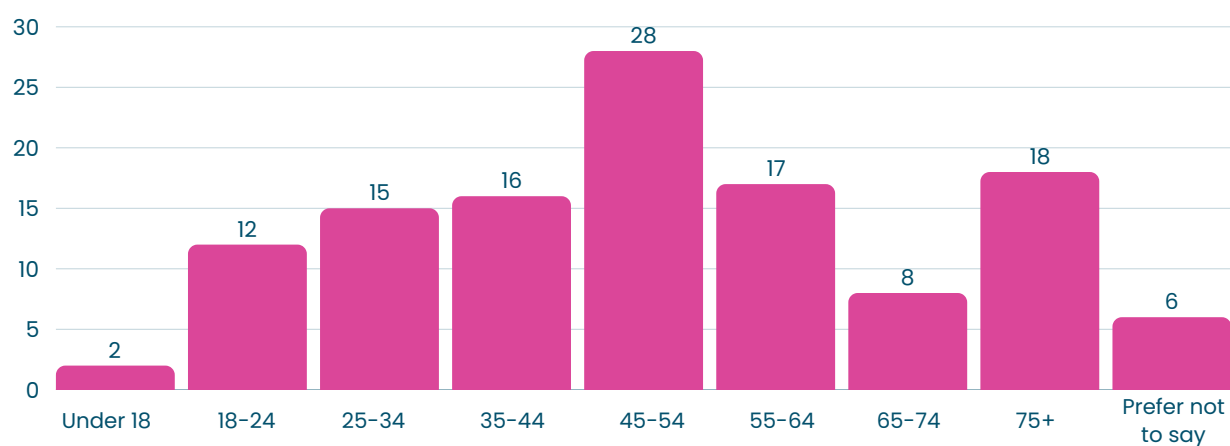
We also extend our thanks to the local organisations that generously welcomed us into their activities and forums, and to Blackpool Transport and Rideability for their support in promoting the project and helping to facilitate the mystery shopper exercise.

Demographics

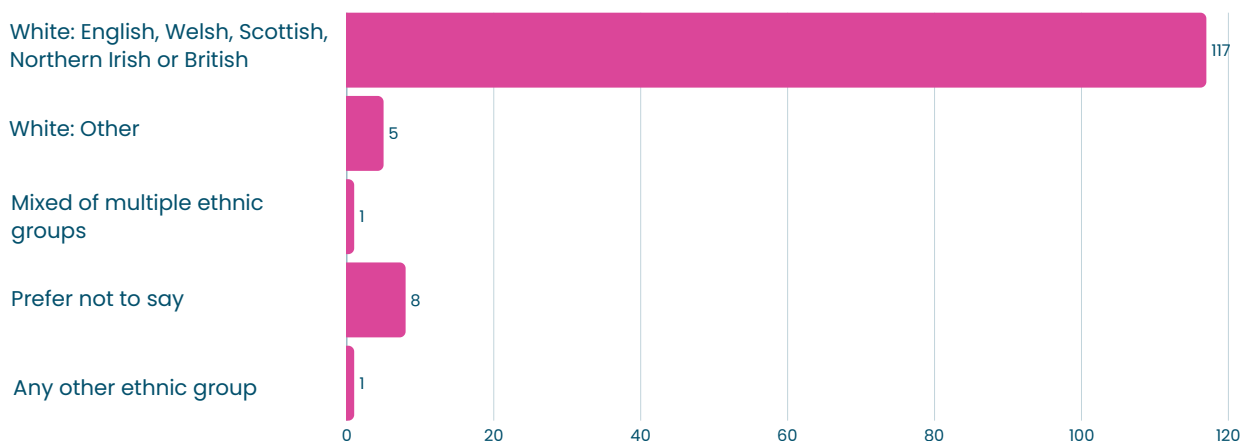
What is the first half of your postcode?



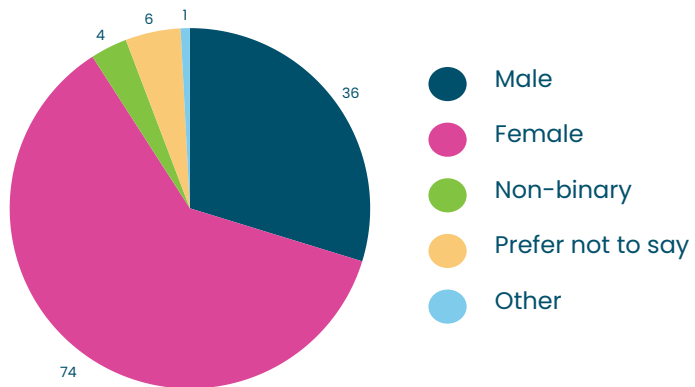
How old are you?



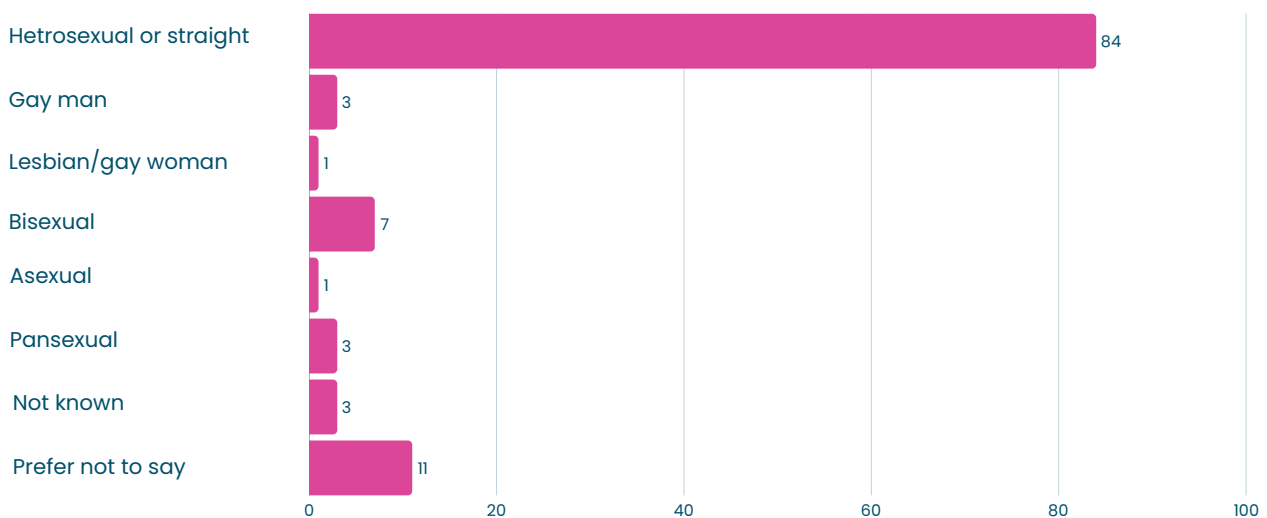
What is your ethnicity?



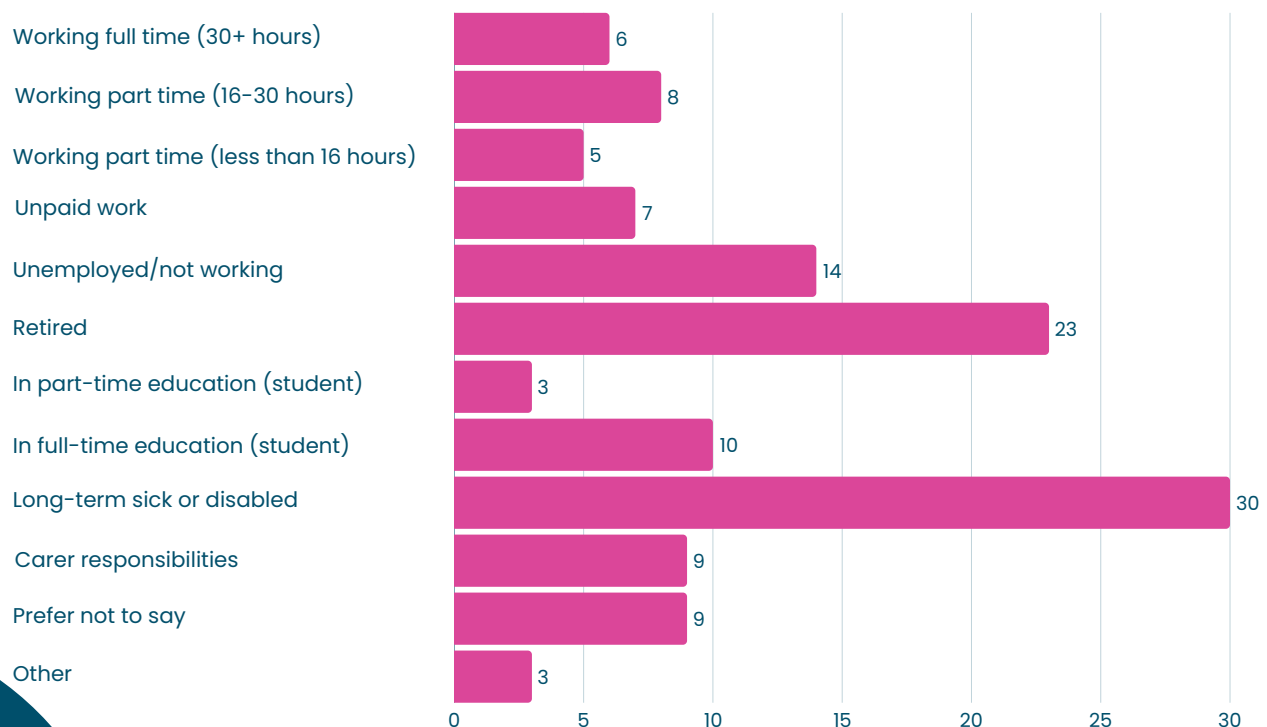
What gender do you identify as?



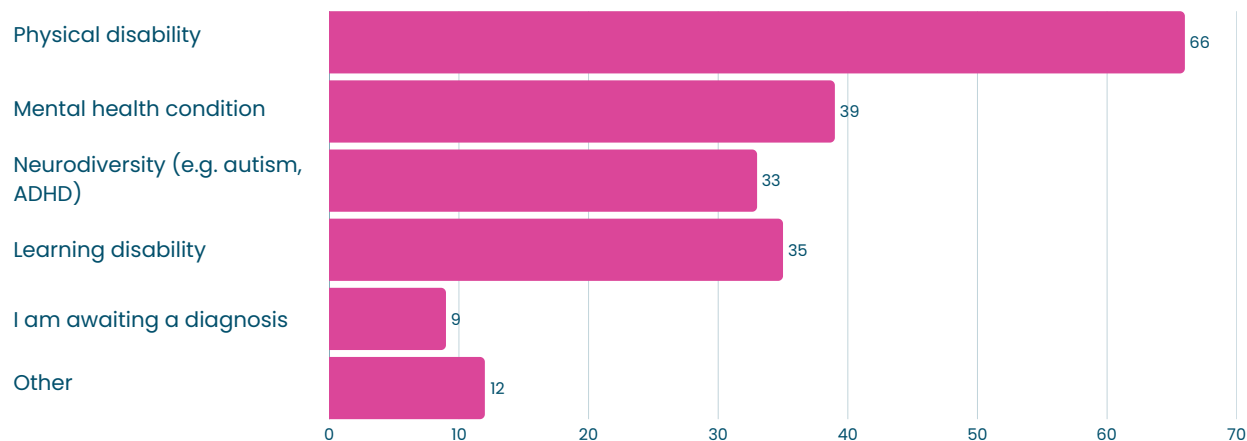
How would you describe your sexual orientation?



What is your employment status?

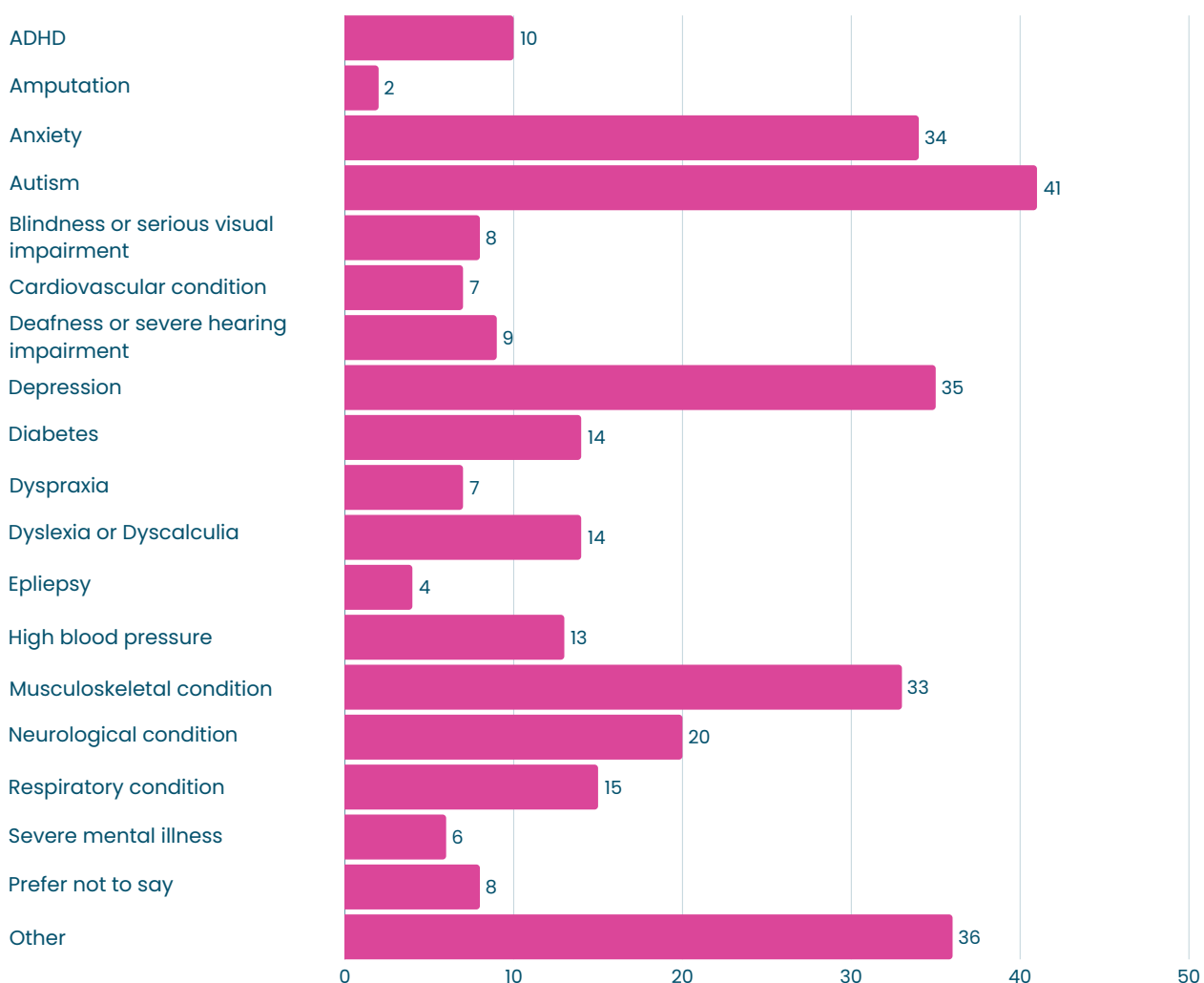


What disability do you have? (Please select all that apply)



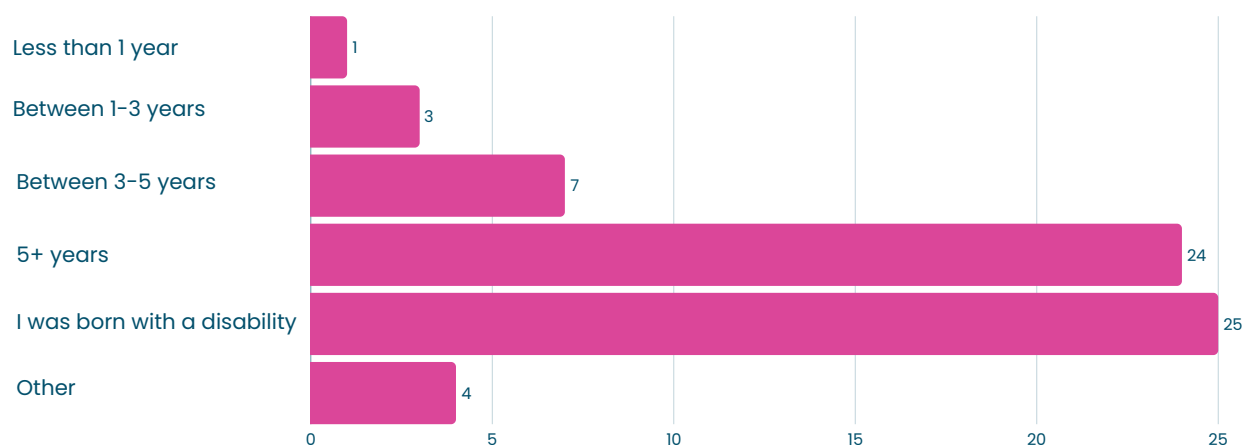
'Other' comments included "cancer diagnosis", "chronic heart disease", "old age", "dementia" and "I am deaf and partially blind."

Which of the following long-term conditions or disabilities do you have?



'Other' comments included: "tourettes," "schizophrenia", "long covid," "borderline personality disorder," "systemic sclerosis" and "bronchiectasis."

How long have you been living with this disability/disabilities? (Please select all that apply)



Community health and care

Highlights



What is working well?

- Health and care support
- Pharmacies
- Specialist services



What are the barriers?

- Accessibility
- Communication
- Physical and mobility challenges
- Care and support
- Medication



Access and experiences

- Transportation
- Satisfaction
- Communication
- Reasonable Adjustments



Improvements

- Health care accessibility
- Service improvements
- Enhanced communication
- Public transport



What is working well?

47% shared positive experiences with community health and care services, identifying key strengths, particularly praising occupational health for their support with home modifications and mobility aids. Local pharmacies were also highlighted for their efficiency, as were appointment booking systems. Additionally, specialist services such as frailty teams, stroke support, and cancer care received positive feedback. However, 30% of individuals stated that “nothing” is working well with community health and care services. It was evidenced that challenges remain, particularly regarding accessibility, digital exclusion and a lack of consistent service provision.

“Occupational health were very good – had a good experience – They made my house more accessible for me – put steps and rails at the front door and grab rails throughout the house. Got a grant for a wet room.”

“Occupational health sorted me a seat that went into the bath.”

“Good availability of appointments.”

“Local pharmacy is working really well – They are fantastic, I can put a prescription order in the day before and get it the next day. Good that you can speak to someone without having to make an appointment. Very friendly.”

47%

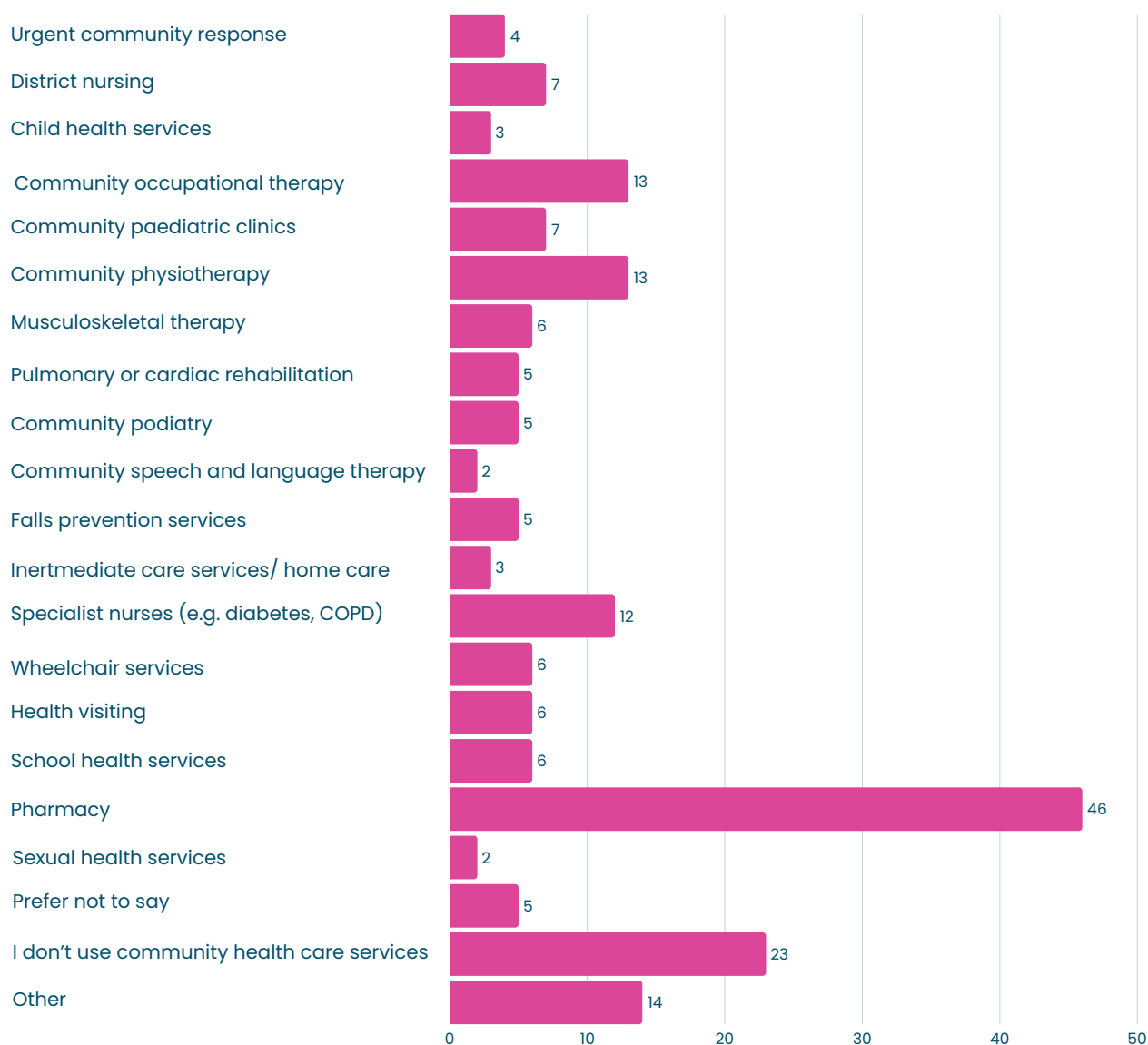
shared positive experiences.

“Dedicated Frailty team nurse with home visits. Holistic stroke team approach, with home visits and strong links to Stroke Association at accessible venues. GP based telephone support from Diabetic nurse and Pharmacist. MSK advice at Whitegate Drive Health Centre. Lymphodema service from Trinity. MRI and CT scans available at community sites, not hospital. Chemist chosen for accessible premises and longer opening times.”

“The apps are very good for telling me I have an appointment sometimes months ahead. With people with very complex conditions the reminders the day before help me remember when I’ve got appointments coming.”

Access and experiences

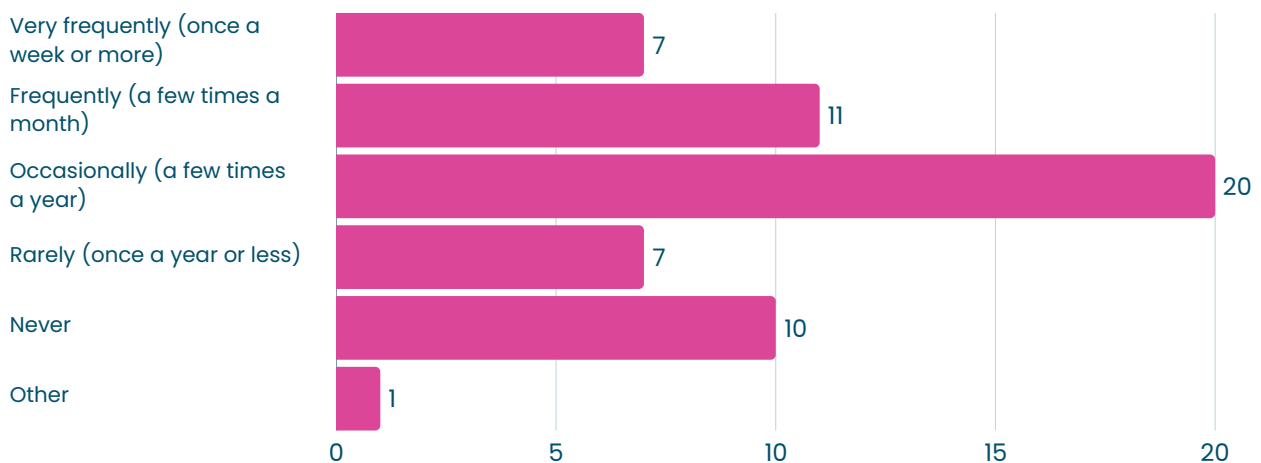
What type of community health and care do you use?



'Other' comments included "health and wellbeing team", "talking therapies" and "I am still waiting a long time for any official help, carer or otherwise."



How often do you access community health and care services in Blackpool?



Of the respondents traveling to health and care services, 36% rely on family members or carers for transportation. Public transport is widely used, with 20% traveling by bus and 11% using taxis. Additionally, 16% use their own vehicles, and 15% walk to their appointments.

80% of respondents found that their travel distance to health and care services were within a reasonable distance, highlighting that accessibility is manageable for most people. However, 14% felt that distance to these services were far, presenting challenges. A further 6% found it difficult due to unreliable public transport, long travel times, and financial barriers such as expensive bus fares.



Many people rely on personal or family transport, with some indicating that they would struggle without a car. Others noted that while their usual journeys were manageable, referrals to further locations or specific healthcare providers were difficult. The responses suggest that while most found travel distances reasonable, improvements in public transport reliability and affordability could enhance access for those facing difficulties.



"Was referred to Pain management in Preston – but this is too far – I've got fibro."

"Difficulty with distance."

"No I'm in Anchorsholme Cleveleys and the buses are very unreliable."

"Within walking distance."

"I have to get the bus to the hospital."

"I have no problems."

"My pharmacy is across the road."

"Support workers have to drive them to appointments that aren't within walking distance."

"Yes mostly though I did have to travel to Preston hospital a couple of times this year."

"Yes only round the corner."

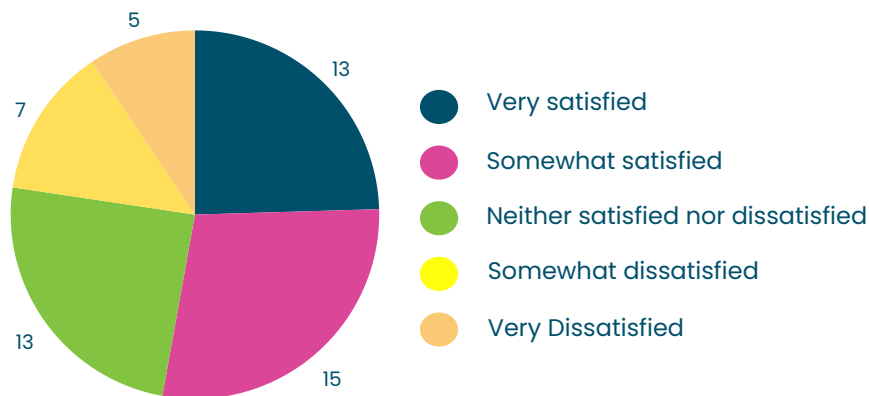
"Sometimes, however I have been referred to further afield before and it can be difficult to get to the appointments."

"As a driver, yes. I would find it very difficult if I didn't drive."

"Yes but expensive paying bus fares if parent car not available as working."



How satisfied are you with your access to community health and care services?



23% of respondents identified waiting times as a challenge when accessing community health and care services. A further 23% shared negative experiences, referencing a lack of professional support, medication delays, and systematic issues. Accessibility was a key concern for 20% of individuals due to limited signposting, a lack of disabled parking, restricted lift access, and non-wheelchair friendly sites.

23%
of residents
discussed waiting
times.



"Just a struggle getting an appointment on the day or for future dates with GP and Pediatrics appointments taking ages. Struggle is day to day and if waiting 1 to 2 years for an appointment means trauma and anxiety waiting, especially for diagnosis."

"Waiting times are long, I am judged by services for my disabilities."

"I have children with autism and the wait list for appointments is ridiculous. We don't get the support we need and left struggling."

"I had a cardiac arrest, all the staff looked after me and saved my life."

"Access to lifts as they are always broken at the Victoria hospital. Spaces for wheelchairs if you are admitted as inpatient."

"I have a support worker twice a week that helps me communicate and sorts out my health appointments through a British sign language interpreter."

"Sites are well placed throughout the town, but not enough parking, especially disabled spaces. Some sites are older, with corridors, waiting areas and clinic offices not designed for wheelchair users accompanied by carers."





"Everything is a fight to access. Social Services in Blackpool are as much use as a chocolate fireguard. Most people I know just don't bother anymore."

"I have been seeing my GP for over a year to ask for a referral to local community services that support my condition. I have been referred from one person to the next without any support or any hope of getting support for my condition."

"Waiting lists."

"Now there's a bus from Bispham to the hospital which is very good."

"Long waiting to get the support. Not able to contact teams directly in between appointments if needed. But some teams were very accommodating."

"It just sometimes takes a while to get things sorted, waiting times etc."

"It's getting the service started i.e. waiting for a referral, then waiting for assessment once that has been done it's ok."



Individuals highlighted a variety of communication methods received by community health and care services. Many individuals received communication through text messages (18%) and letters (18%). Others were contacted via telephone call (14%) and email (13%). However, 20% of participants disclosed that they do not receive communication from services, presenting a wide gap in communication with community health and care services.

Some individuals stated issues around withheld numbers, difficulty answering calls at work, and a lack of voicemail messages. Some individuals stated that individuals with disabilities struggle with phone communication and prefer face-face interactions. As well as this, some reported that communication is often directed at carers or parents rather than the individual themselves.

"I get an appointment via text and then if I don't respond I get a letter."

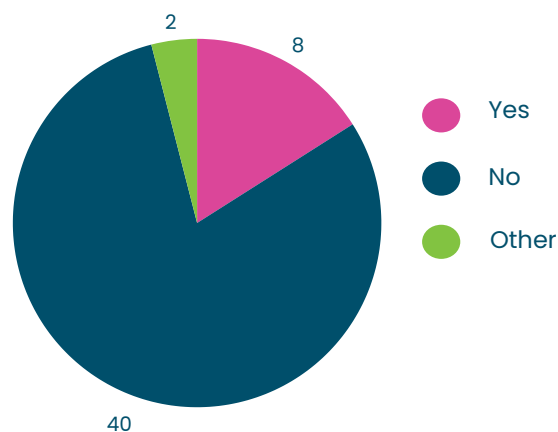
"You should be able to phone up and get a prescription. You have to travel to the doctor to put a prescription in. We are supposed to be advancing but for me that is a step backwards."

"Patches – works fine – Knowing a bit about computers I'm ok."

"Patches doesn't help people that don't do computers."

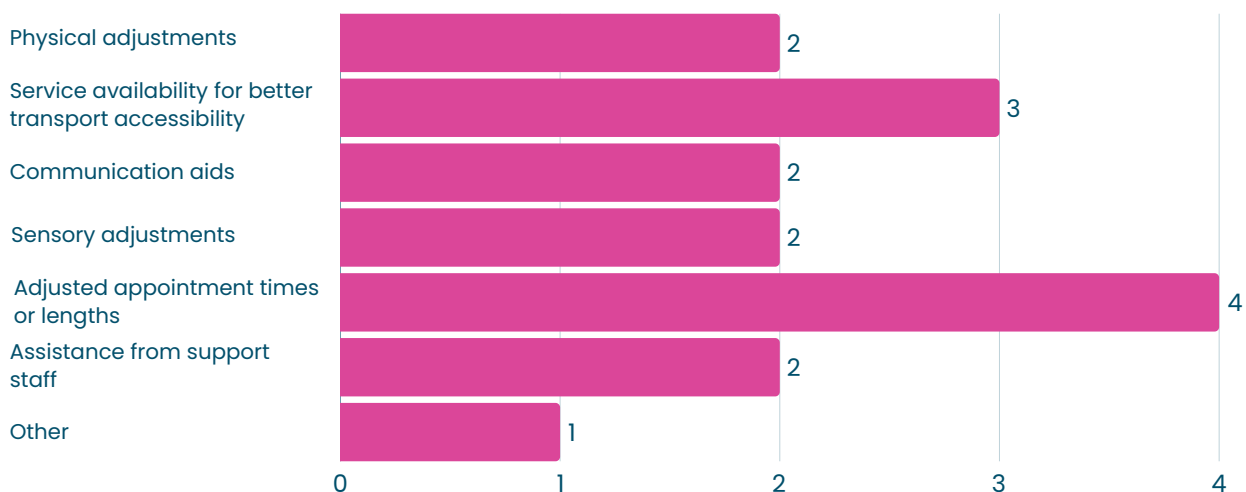
"Usually texts but sometimes emails. Phone calls tend to come on withheld numbers so most people don't answer."

In the last twelve months, have you requested any reasonable adjustments to help when accessing community health and care services in Blackpool?



'Other' comments included "I mainly email and it's easy to access that way" and "speech and swallow outreached and came to my place of work a couple of times instead of me traveling somewhere and it taking most of my working day out as I can't drive anymore."

What type of reasonable adjustments have you requested? (Please select all that apply)



The majority of individuals requesting reasonable adjustments reported that their needs were met, often within a reasonable timeframe. However, some respondents faced challenges, particularly when adjustments were not made for those with physical difficulties in answering phone calls. Issues included a lack of alternative communication methods, inaccessible facilities, and difficulties with parking for individuals with disabilities.

"Yes and in a reasonable timeframe."

"No - they say they don't get my requests or have no space for me to wait anywhere else."

"Mum helps with communication from the doctors."

"Yes they arrange an ambulance."

"Didn't find out about access to work in all my 40 years of working."

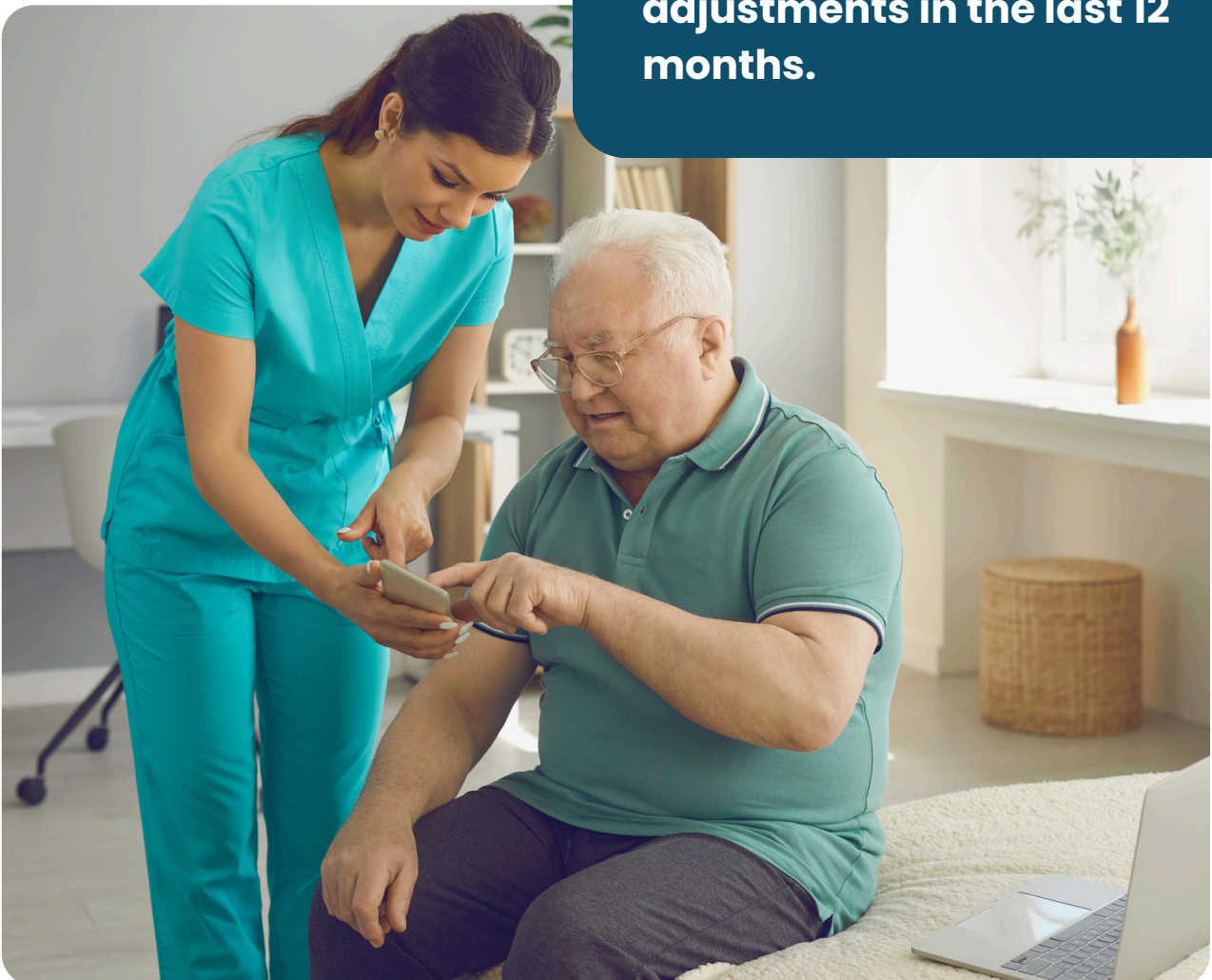


"No I told the person when a telephone appointment was made that I'd prefer a face to face appointment with the gynaecology consultant as I struggle to physically answer the phone but he said there weren't any available. I'd waited over a year for this appointment with Dr at Victoria hospital and I obviously missed it because I couldn't answer the phone. I told the pharmacy that I couldn't get in because of the step but nothing been changed. Parking at Preston hospital despite registering blue card we still got penalty because they didn't check properly."



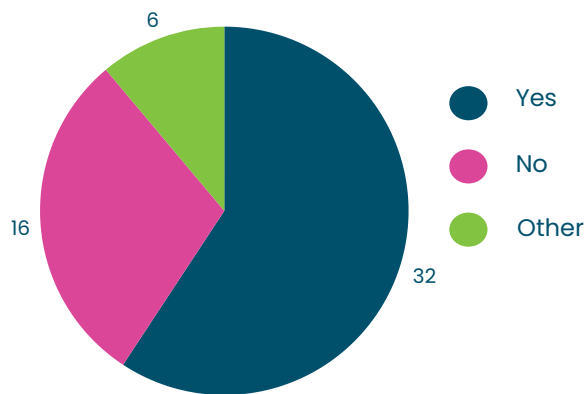
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individuals haven't requested any reasonable adjustments in the last 12 months.



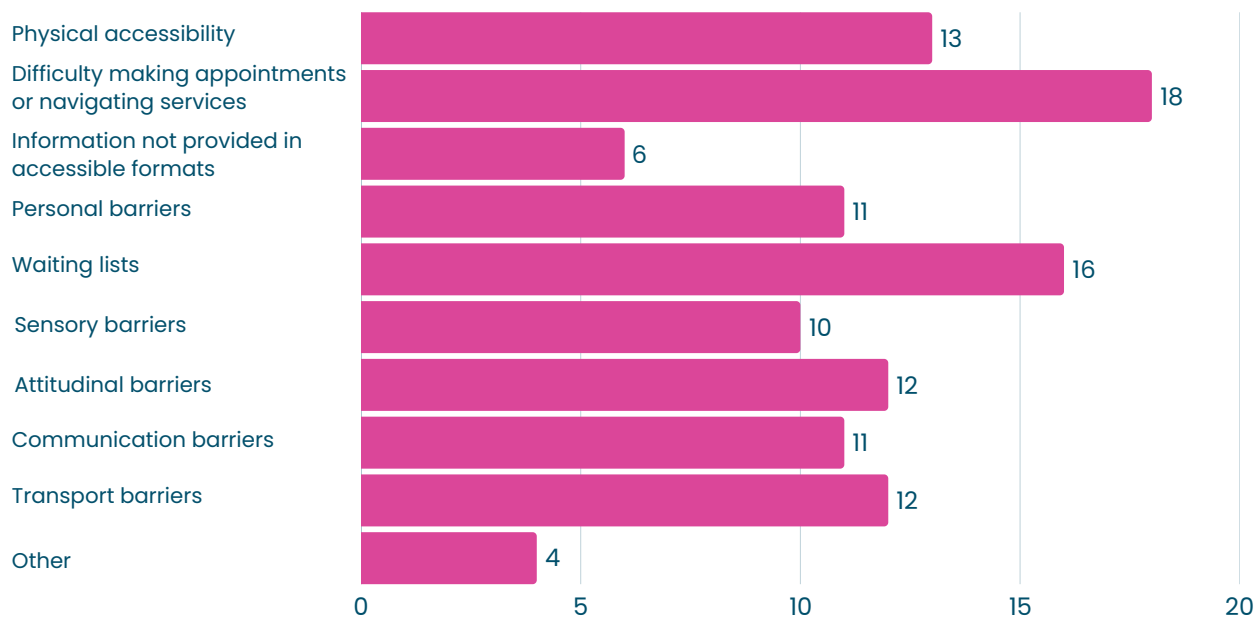
What are the barriers to accessing community health and care services?

Have you experienced any barriers when accessing community health and care services in Blackpool?



'Other' comments included "direct Payments was very hard to access", "getting public transport if wife is working. Didn't know where to get off bus" and "often services are offered online and I have to chase up to access them in a format appropriate for a blind person."

What barriers have you encountered when accessing community health and care services in Blackpool? (Please select all that apply)



'Other' comments included "distance walking, dangerous roads", "pharmacies not receiving prescriptions sent by GP", "staffing issues" and "bus route changes."

Many individuals reported significant barriers when accessing community health and care services. Respondents faced difficulties related to accessibility, including transport issues, long waiting times, and inconsistent communication. While some reported positive experiences with carers and services, others highlighted concerns over the lack of wheel-chair friendly facilities, unreliable services and insufficient support and coordination.



Accessibility

20% of individuals highlighted issues with accessibility to community health and care services, specifically related to long waiting lists, delayed appointments, and difficulty transitioning from services.



"Long waits for vaccines – they transferred him into a small room like a cupboard for his vaccine – it wasn't good what so ever and if he had a wheelchair, it wouldn't of been able to fit."

"Carpark full or spaces not near enough to the department required. My home to the walk-in center is 2 bus journeys so not appropriate for me."

"I struggle with depression and anxiety and there can be days where I do not feel capable of going anywhere."

"Alright. I don't go that often. When I go it's for my anti-inflammatory tablets every other month. They do keep you waiting a bit. There's 3 or 4 of them and once there was a queue right down to the door."

"We've only really had problems with waiting lists, and long waits due to staffing issues."

"I was too young to go for respite care at my local hospice."

"It's good when you get in. It's just the arrogant swine on reception that tell you it's a long waiting list."



Communication

Communication difficulties were mentioned by 18% of respondents, such as difficulties in understanding medical terminology, and challenges communicating via the phone, specifically for individuals with disabilities or neurodiverse. Others were happy with communication with services and found staff to be patient.



"Communication barriers – we have to ask for medical professionals to simplify what they are saying."

"Some speak directly to the support worker and not the individual."

"We have to ask quite often for the medical professional to simplify what are saying and usually they do when asked."

"Fantastic. Customer service really good. They know I have autism and they are really patient with me."

"A lot of health services don't accommodate the anxiety that accompanies my struggles with autism, phone calls are often impractical for me as I struggle to communicate over the phone."

"Health staff struggle to understand me on the phone so get annoyed at me."

"Being deaf."

"It is hard to get in touch with the specialist or mental help team."

"Often services are offered online and I have to chase up to access them in a format appropriate for a blind person."



Physical and mobility challenges

15% highlighted challenges in relation to transport and building access (e.g. lack of disabled parking spaces, insufficient wheelchair access).



"Disabled parking - spaces aren't big enough to fit car in and get wheelchair out."

"On the bus the amount of people ignorant to those of us with disabilities who sit in the accessible seats and refuse to move."

"Prams don't move for you and you can't get on at all."

"There are not enough disabled parking spaces at healthcare settings. Also having to wait in big waiting rooms can be overwhelming and feel like too much because of the noise."

"Car park full or spaces not near enough to the department required. My home to the walk in center is 2 bus journeys so not appropriate for me . The walk in center were using a digital tablet self-registration system on arrival (last time I went) which was not appropriate for me as the counter was to high , the tablet looked dirty and possibly a risk of spreading infection. Receptionist had to register my arrival."

"Hospital lights are uncomfortable. Steps, doors unavailable for access to pharmacies. Pharmacies often haven't got a suitable private space to accommodate wheelchair users. Rooms at doctors or hospitals aren't suitable for wheelchair users. Roadworks, cars obstructing pavements to attend facilities. No local wheelchair services. Nearest Preston. Difficult getting taxis to accommodate wheelchairs. Some buses badly designed for wheelchairs. General ignorance of people's needs."



Care and Support

15% of individuals highlighted both positive and negative experiences in relation to care support, including difficulties in accessing support from social workers and health care professionals. Others stated positive experiences with carers and district nurses.



"I struggle to ask for help and I don't know what to ask for. My son has the same issues."

"I attend a walking group through the surgery which suddenly stopped and I could not get a response from the Health Care person who led it. I would like a regular access to a walking group for visually impaired people."

"Carers are good and uplifting they come around 7 and at night and take me out to the bathroom wash and clean me and make sure I'm alright and carers are really friendly."

"It's quite difficult because I'm trying to access physiotherapy and my GP is coming across a lot of roadblocks. It's for my bronchiectasis. They can't find a service to come out and do the urgent physiotherapy. My carer does it some days but I need physio - they come and clear it."

"District nurse once a month injection in prostate. District nurse are very good. They come around and take blood pressure and make sure I've got no sores. Occupational therapy are alright, they phone and ask if I need anything. I'm a very proud man so I like to do things by myself. Health and wellbeing team are brilliant. They do everything and I mean everything. If you want a meal then are there. If you need any stuff they are there within a week."



Medication

8% of individuals voiced difficulties accessing medications such as delays with prescriptions, and a lack of understanding, while others were happy with their pharmacy provision.



"I tried 4 pharmacies near me and none of them were receiving my prescriptions sent over by GPs. Had two mental health breakdowns and in the end had to complain to the GP surgery manager and ask her for paper prescriptions. My last prescriptions had to complain again and GPs would not prescribe inhalers the nurse prescribed so the hospital chest clinic had to prescribe it for me. Also had issues getting hold of 75mg pregabalin and had to complain again. I had to go to urgent care unit at Blackpool Victoria as ran out of pregabalin because the GP only prescribed 7 tablets so had to ask the GP pharmacist to prescribe the full 56."

"The pharmacy phone me and I get my medication with my carer. Sometimes the medication is wrong and then I have to take it back and it's stressful."

"Pharmacy is difficult because the meds that I'm on are very expensive so normally we go outside of NICE guidelines so I have to come to an agreement with the pharmacy. I use injections scarcely but there are people who use them every day. The pharmacy aren't understanding and just tell me they can't afford it."



What improvements need to be made to community health and care services?

Residents shared their insight on how community health and care services in Blackpool can be more accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities. Key themes that emerged from their feedback include, the need for better accessibility, clearer communication, improved systems, greater support, and improved public transport.

Accessibility

24% of residents shared accessibility with services as the main improvement. They noted that health care and community buildings need to be physically accessible. They highlighted that buildings need to be disability-friendly and offer more disabled parking. One individual highlighted the need for services to include those with disabilities in the design of the building.



“Accessible buildings for those with mobility issues, thought to be put into service areas for people who have sensory issues .. bright lights constant buzzers or alarms banging doors.”

“Being able to access podiatrist. I can't get access and they say my feet aren't bad enough.”

“To have less stairs to climb or have a lift I can use due to fibromyalgia.”

“More work on people being considerate and taking up accessible seating with dogs or shopping.”

“There needs to be dedicated access for parents and young adults with learning disabilities. Main stream care provision and access doesn't work. There is a lack of thought and foresight, unsure if this is due to a lack of funding. You see a lot of funding wasted.”





"Make all buildings suitable for wheelchairs and disabled people as they are supposed to be."

"Walk each site with a wheelchair user. Employ a Service Designer to document each user pathway, to highlight pain points and dead ends."

"More disabled parking."

"Automatic doors should be standard to improve accessibility."

"Let real disabled people look at the accessibility instead of others deciding what's acceptable and accessible for us. Council's enforcement of making all buildings suitable for wheelchairs and disabled people like they are supposed to be. In all areas transport ,buildings, healthcare. Have discussions with the actual disabled community. Accessibility isn't a choice for us it's a need and supposed to be a right."

"Have a sloped curb on EVERY pavement."



Systematic

22% of residents highlighted systematic improvements such as reduced waiting lists for NHS services, availability of appointments, improvements for children living with disabilities and expansion of services beyond Blackpool, into local communities.



"Quicker appointments."

"The time it takes - improve the waiting lists. Overall good experience."

"The waiting list should be reduced, even on the phones are a nightmare."

"Shorter wait times, customer service isn't great. It's not bad but it's not good."

"More health checks. I have an under active thyroid and this could have been picked up earlier."

"Even though the child I care for is looked after the waiting lists are very long. Looked after children are already at a disposition if they have not been seen by professionals. When parents don't engage the child's symptoms and struggles are not seen. Opportunities for early intervention are missed, age cut offs because of waiting lists like Blenheim. I know their wait is quicker than most although those children's struggles are being observed and being seen by health care professionals. Also referrals can be done in a timely manner."

"Timing of appointments could be arranged mainly for the disabled i.e. 11-noon then 3-4pm."

"Firstly extend support to wider than Blackpool and link in more with surrounding areas. Provide more schools that cater for the grey area of children whose needs are not being met in mainstream. Support parents on the journey rather than judging and forcing them through unnecessary hoops."

"Less waiting times for paediatric appointments. Have experienced a 2 1/2 years wait!! Child 14...last seen at age 11!! A flag (eg. this person is autistic and may need help speaking or having procedures) on records of who a care provider is speaking with before the appointment. Had experience of child not speaking and parent speaks for them and the NHS care states please let your daughter speak! (daughter struggling as autistic) Fed up of saying 'My child is autistic and sometimes can't speak to a stranger' maybe the approach should be, 'Would you like your mum to tell me if you are struggling?' because they have already noted the problem."



Communication

20% of individuals highlighted the need for better communication from services. Residents emphasised the importance of clearer signposting, better coordination between GPs and hospitals, the use of accessible language, better use of digital platforms, and adopt a more patient-centred approach.



"Better communication between patient and GPs and GPs and services. There's a big drop – the chest physio they didn't tell me there wasn't anyone and I've been waiting for 6 weeks. Maybe hubs where people can access locally, like community health hubs. Where you can ring up and say I need a wheelchair and they can come and pick it up."

"Maybe communicating through schools and doctors, if this does not already happen."

"Some could be more understanding – some take forever to get to the point – complicated wording – hard to understand."

"A list of thing in the local area that are there to help."

"Better communication between the doctors and the hospital."

"Clear guidance."

"Services need to listen more."

"They need to listen to their patients."

"More access to email or text across all departments."

"Email or app access to contact specialists and mental health teams."

"They need to actually help people, not just offer services on paper."

"There is no consistency—I've filled out countless forms over 20 years, but nothing ever changes."

"Pharmacy – being more human. Accepting people don't choose to have their conditions. Other times where meds run out and I'd either have to search pharmacists so maybe a link up between pharmacies. Lads I know have ADHD and they struggle with getting their meds."

"Knowing where to go for the best help – We often find out by word of mouth and hearsay – you can't wait the rest of your life waiting to find out about a service."



Public Transport

16% of residents emphasised the need for better public transport in Blackpool. They shared that introducing more modes of transport and a free transport service when attending appointments or community groups would be highly beneficial. Others emphasised the need for extended routes for better transport links to all health care and community services. One individual shared that transport staff should have more of an understanding of hidden disabilities, specifically in young people.



“For people to be more understanding that younger people may look fine but they can be disabled too, as I get a lot of grief for example for sitting in the disabled area of the bus.”

“Have people on buses to help.”

“More modes of transport and/or access to a free transport service to go to appointments and go to community hubs and groups.”

“Routes extended south to north to allow one bus to all health services.”

“The bus service is horrendous, I can’t get a single bus from Cleveleys to the hospital which is ridiculous and when I do get the bus, they’re always infrequent and late, meaning I have to set off even earlier for appointments.”

“Let disabled people on with mobility scooters.”



Community activities

Highlights



Types of groups

- Sports and physical activities
- Art and theatre
- Social
- Health and wellbeing
- Some do not participate in any

What is working well?



- Social benefits
- Physical benefits
- Variety of activities

Barriers



- Lack of signposting from social workers/ PA's
- Lack of general advertising
- Accessibility
- Personal barriers e.g. mental health, stigma, support from carers

What is missing?

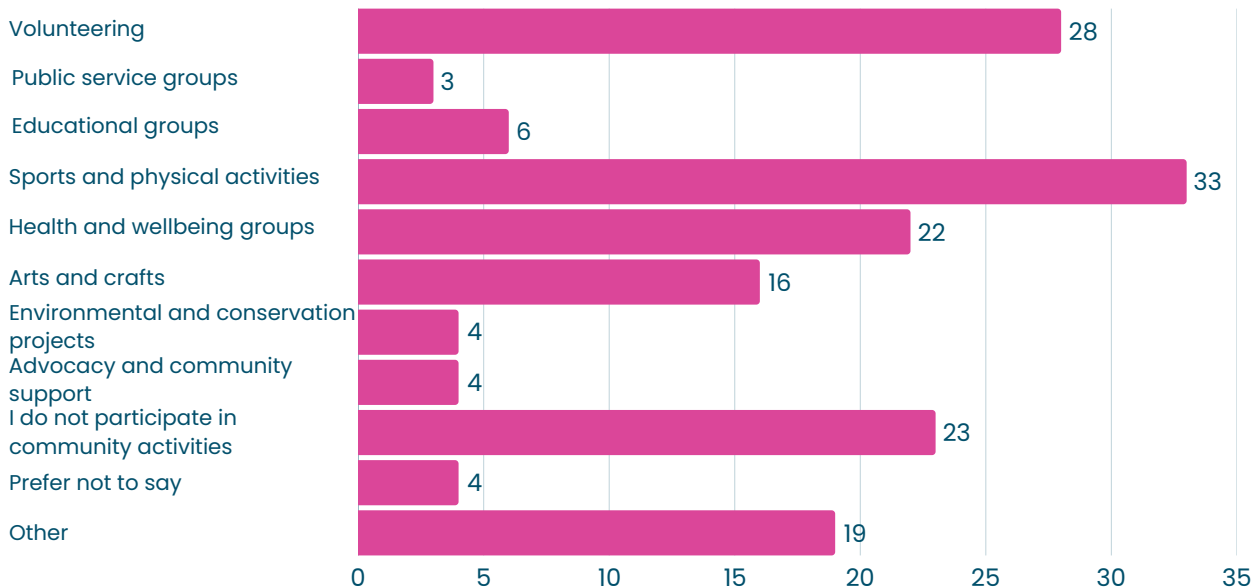


- More physical/ sport options
- Activities for neurodiverse, visually impaired and deaf individuals.
- Signposting



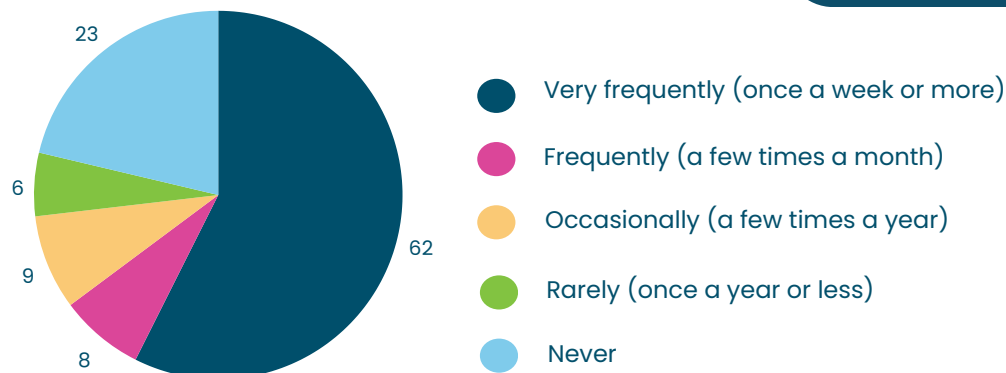
Community activities

What community activities are you involved in? (Please select all that apply)



'Other' comments included "ambulance service patient and Public Panel volunteer", "church", "dementia groups", "walking clubs", "NHS quality improvement and "gardening"

How often do you participate in community activities in Blackpool? (e.g. community groups, volunteering, sports)



62

residents regularly take part in community activities

Within focus groups, the majority of individuals shared that they attend community activities involving sport or physical activity, with 38% of participants citing these activities.



"I do swimming twice a week and I go for walks with my carers. Feel good factory at Moor Park doing exercises in chairs."

"Cherry Tree Gardens community groups – really good but I only know this one. We do chair yoga and pilates."

"I go to together we can do – bowling on a Monday at Thornton YMCA and Thursday at Stanley park."

"I go to Warren manor – I enjoy it. We do sports and activities to keep us as active as we can."



20% shared that they attend groups related to art and theatre, including singing, crafts, shows at the theatre and theatre groups such as 'Tramshed'.



"Shows at the opera house."

"Sometimes we go to the theatre hall."

"Tramshed is like family really – and I like drama. I'm a drama freak! I love drama. I had issues in college doing drama because they didn't believe in me, but at Tramshed they believe in me."



Finally, 15% shared that they attend groups specifically aimed at socialising.



"I go to Sam's place to socialise and make new friends."

"This group has a lot of people that have mobility issues, that makes me feel connected."



What is working well?

When asked what is working well, 65% of people said the best thing about community activities was the social aspect. Individuals shared feelings of acceptance, safety, and belonging, particularly among those with shared experiences like autism or chronic pain. Activities provided opportunities for genuine connection, friendship, and reduced social isolation, offering a sense of purpose and routine. The supportive and non-judgmental environments allow individuals to be themselves, fostering a sense of community.



"You can just be yourself – there's no stigma. You don't have to be a certain way and it's inclusive. I've made some really good friends. It makes you realise there's people like you and sometimes people worse off than you, puts things into perspective."

"Feel safe, you're not judged, get to have a laugh being around people that are like me makes me feel comfortable. People like me that are also autistic its nice to be around people like me. Similar interests."

"Making new friends."

"The chronic pain support group called Blackpool Smile are fantastic. They are warm, welcoming, understanding and it becomes like a big family taking care of each other. I would highly recommend Blackpool Smile to anyone with a long term health condition."



"Getting out of the house."

"Same place that she knows where to go, same routines, meet up with friends."

"It breaks social isolation and gives you purpose."



14% of individuals felt that a positive was the range of activities available in Blackpool for people living with disabilities and health conditions.

"There's a lot going on, there's always something going on. A lot of it is free which is a massive thing in Blackpool due to the social deprivation we're suffering from."

"The activities – the staff are nice, love everything. Bingo, singer, good for socialising and making friends."

"The Grange offers lots of activities suitable for myself. Also Grow Blackpool are based there in the community garden."

"There are a lot of things for them to do, he goes 5 days a week to activities."

A further 10% of individuals shared that the physical benefit of attending community sports facilities and activities was working well in Blackpool. Activities like sports, exercise classes, and gym sessions contributed to improved fitness and rehabilitation, as well as providing respite for caregivers.

"Feel Good Factory at Moor Park leisure centre keeps me more fit than I was a few years ago."

"Multisports, Zumba and mixing in the community. It keeps her fit and healthy."

"Respite for parents and chance to engage in favourite sport."

"Does help– look forward to the football – going to start going to the gym and boxing."

"Physical activities help in my rehabilitation from the accident."

A small number of individuals shared that accessibility of groups is working well, and the support of staff members at community activities is seen as a positive.

"Regular groups, I know where it is and what it is. It is within walking distance– very accessible."

"There's ramps to all."

"It's outdoor and very accessible with a mobility scooter."

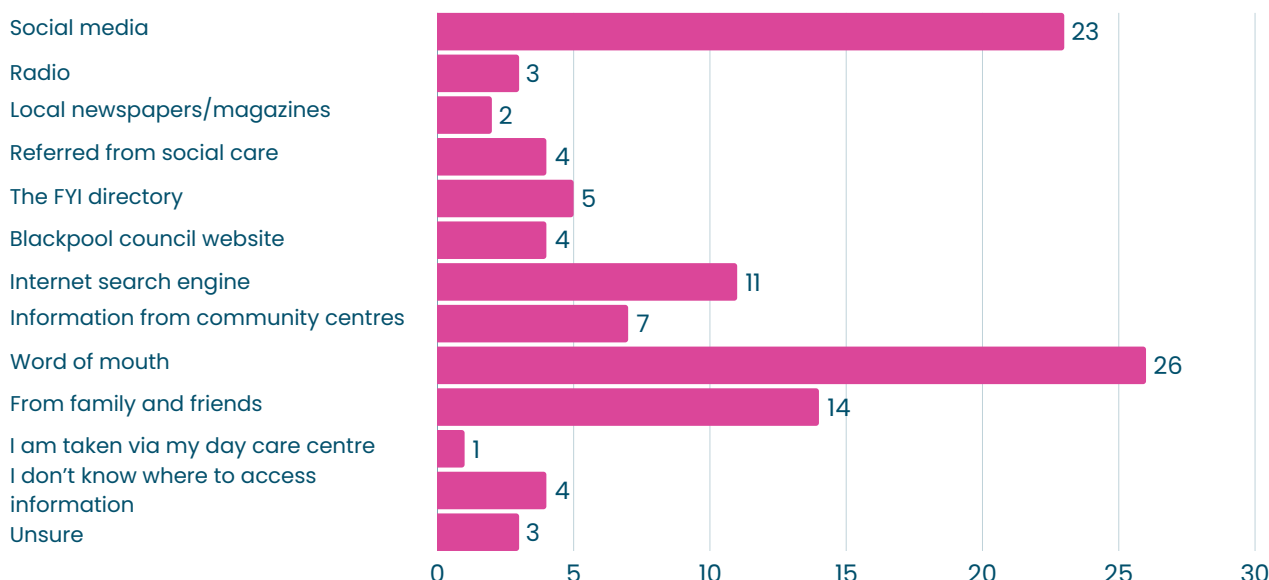
"Football stadium accessibility."

"Having the right staff, people who understand learning difficulties."

"1:1 support from key worker."

Awareness of community activities

Where do you find information about local community activities? (Please select all that apply)



78% stated that they have not been signposted to any activities by a social worker/ personal assistant, with some stating that this would be beneficial.

"No, I wouldn't want to attend anything else at the moment. I do have friends I sometimes see out of college."

"I have a social worker that barely even sees me and it's a family social worker."

"I would benefit from it. However there's a stigma to it."

22% stated that they had been signposted by a social worker, with examples of how social workers/ personal assistants have done this, and some physically taking individuals to social activities.

"Yes initially."

"Yes I am taken."

"Support worker tells what's going on. Give leaflets."

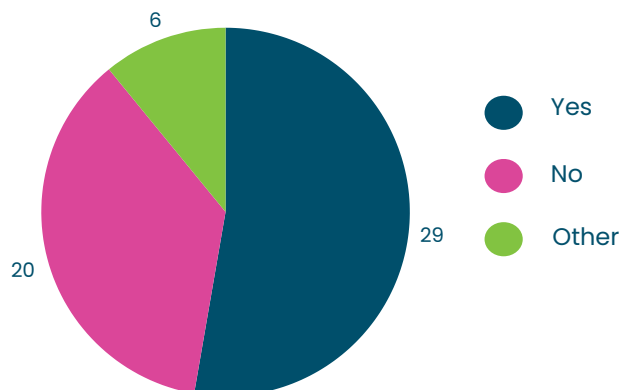
"My personal assistant brings me places."

26

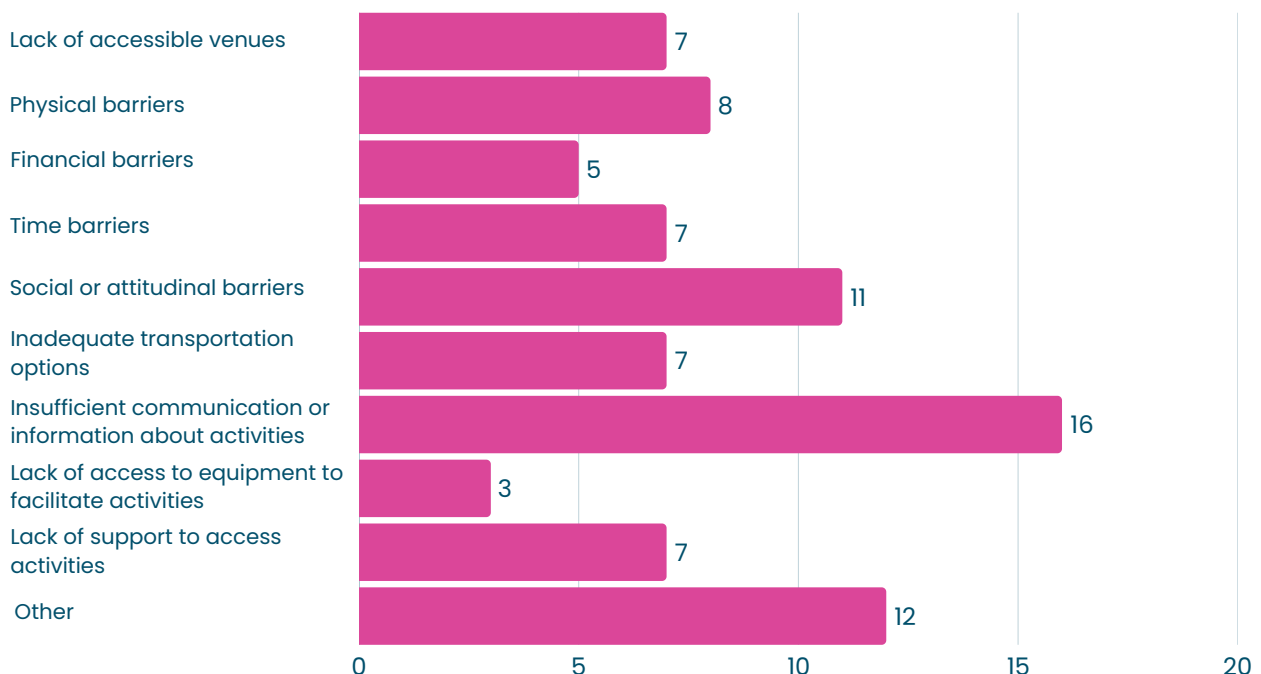
residents are aware of community activities through word of mouth

What are the barriers to accessing community activities?

Do you face any barriers to participating in community activities?



What are the main barriers faced when trying to participate in community activities? (Please select all that apply)



'Other' comments included "communication barriers and sensory barriers at times", "dementia", "fatigue", "personally no, but my children do".

'Other' main barriers faced included "my hearing impairment", "mental health", "need better ways to get funding" and "in chronic daily pain everyday or no motivation going out".

The biggest barrier experienced in relation to community activities was awareness, highlighted by 40% of respondents. Many were simply unaware of available programs or lacked information about their locations and accessibility. Respondents reported relying on 'word-of-mouth' communication about activities, and some respondents felt there is a need for a centralised, comprehensive resource listing local community activities to overcome this barrier.



"Having to search them, I didn't know where they were. A lot was word of mouth. Also my physical health - I had an unpredictable condition."

"I don't know where any of them are. I'd access them if I knew where they were. I can get to them my daughter takes me."

"Information on places. Somewhere that lists places that's easy to read without having to click loads of things."

"I found out about the gardening group from the leader - word of mouth."



A further 35% of respondents experienced accessibility issues when trying to attend community activities, sharing that this is a significant barrier. Some individuals shared that physical accessibility was a barrier, with difficulties accessing groups and activities in Blackpool due to lack of space or access to building such as ramps and lifts. Other accessibility barriers included financial barriers, lack of transport and timings of groups. In particular it was felt that groups do not cater for those living with disabilities who also work during the day.



"Transport getting to the groups aren't easily accessible - getting to and from the groups are difficult due to the timings."

"Activities for disability groups are often during the day, the assumption seems to be if you have a disability you don't work."

"Some groups aren't free and they can be expensive."

"Not enough space for wheelchair users."

"For visual impairment unless you do not work you are not included."





"Again, disability and limited mobility is not catered for by groups offering community activities. Buildings have step ramps or steps which are difficult for me to climb but the building owners such as Church Groups say they cannot afford to fit rails for disabled people. Blackpool Council operate a Ring and Ride Service for mobility impaired people but users have to pay quite a lot for the service which is only available for a few hours a day during the daytime and has to be booked in advance. It is virtually useless. Pubs in Blackpool still have upstairs rooms for activities but have no lifts for disabled people. Theatres in Blackpool still have no reliable lifts for disabled people."



Other barriers were shared, including personal barriers such as mental health, lack of staff to help support access to community activities, and stigma.



"It's me really, I don't like big groups. I've tried going in the Methodist church in Layton and they do knitting but I don't have the courage to go."

"I suffer with nerves. The group has grown slowly. I used to go to an autism group for people like myself but because of COVID it closed down."

"Dependant on support at the time and who's available to go with them. Some don't have the support."

"More volunteers to help community groups."

"I feel judged because of my age (37) people look at me and think "oh she can't have a disability". I became a hermit because I didn't want to go shopping in case I was seen. I daren't go out. There is a stigma."

"The way some places name things – sometimes it needs to be subtle."



What community activities are missing in Blackpool?

25% of individuals felt that there could be more physical activities and sports related options for people living with disabilities in Blackpool. Individuals mentioned things such as more dance classes, team sports and improved facilities. In particular, issues were raised in finding suitable keep-fit classes, the financial burden of paid disability sports activities, and the need for specialised equipment and trained staff to facilitate inclusive participation in gym activities.

“It is very difficult to find a keep fit class for anyone who is mobility impaired and disabled. Losing weight is recommended for hypertension but there is no provision for disabled and mobility impaired in Blackpool.”

“Disability sports activities that are free – everything requires a payment.”

“Sports equipment for disabled people. More adaptable equipment needed/more opportunities to use them via specialised trained staff. The Blackpool sports centre has a climbing wall but they don't appear to have specialised harnesses or staff for disabled people to access it.”

A further 20% shared that support for certain disabilities were missing in Blackpool. In particular, it was raised that there were limited community activities for people who are autistic and those who are visually impaired or deaf.

“I'd like to see more things for autistic people. My brother doesn't get out – he needs to socialise more.”

“More groups for hidden disabilities.”

“Activities that support people who have limited spoons. Separately, the same for those who are neurodiverse with low to zero support needs. It is important that they do not require a commitment to attend each week due to having bad days. Both conditions are socially isolating and impact on mental health.”



"I feel there isn't much around for low support needs autistic women. I'd love a group just for us, that involved maybe arts and crafts etc."

"As I am deaf there isn't a lot of activities for deaf."

"I would like regular access to a walking group for visually impaired people."

"There isn't support out there for those with sight or hearing issues."

"A group specifically for Parkinsons. I've only been diagnosed a year so I don't know anything. A support group with other people would be good."

17% of individuals felt that groups that were easily accessible were what was missing in Blackpool. Individuals mentioned improvements needed to be made to the size of groups, location, time offered and transport to and from activities.

"More locations."

"Smaller sessions."

"Activities to be split over different days to limit overcrowding."

"Besides a better transport service for us disabled? Loads but too many to list here."

"Some of the activities sound brilliant but how do you get there?"



A small number of individuals felt there was limited availability of disability-specific groups and activities for young people. Participants stressed the importance of creating safe, inclusive environments that support not only those with diagnosed disabilities but also those awaiting diagnosis or with low-level needs.



"A safe provision of activities for young adults. A safe and caring environment."

"Child is high functioning so is in the middle of needing help or not. She doesn't come under the severe end of autism for example but needs help and seen as capable as high functioning, until she gets overloaded and then needs support."

"There needs to be more centres for people with disabilities. Especially for young people."



Transport

Highlights



What is working well?

- Some staff are helpful and patient
- Some feel transport is accessible
- NoW cards are beneficial



Impact on access to healthcare

- Hospital transport is difficult to access
- Limited bus routes and the lack of wheelchair spaces can impact access to healthcare appointments
- Availability of taxis



Barriers

- Buses and trams are sometimes not accessible
- Some staff are unhelpful and unsupportive
- There can be overcrowding on buses/trams
- Lack of available wheelchair taxis
- Cost of taxis is expensive

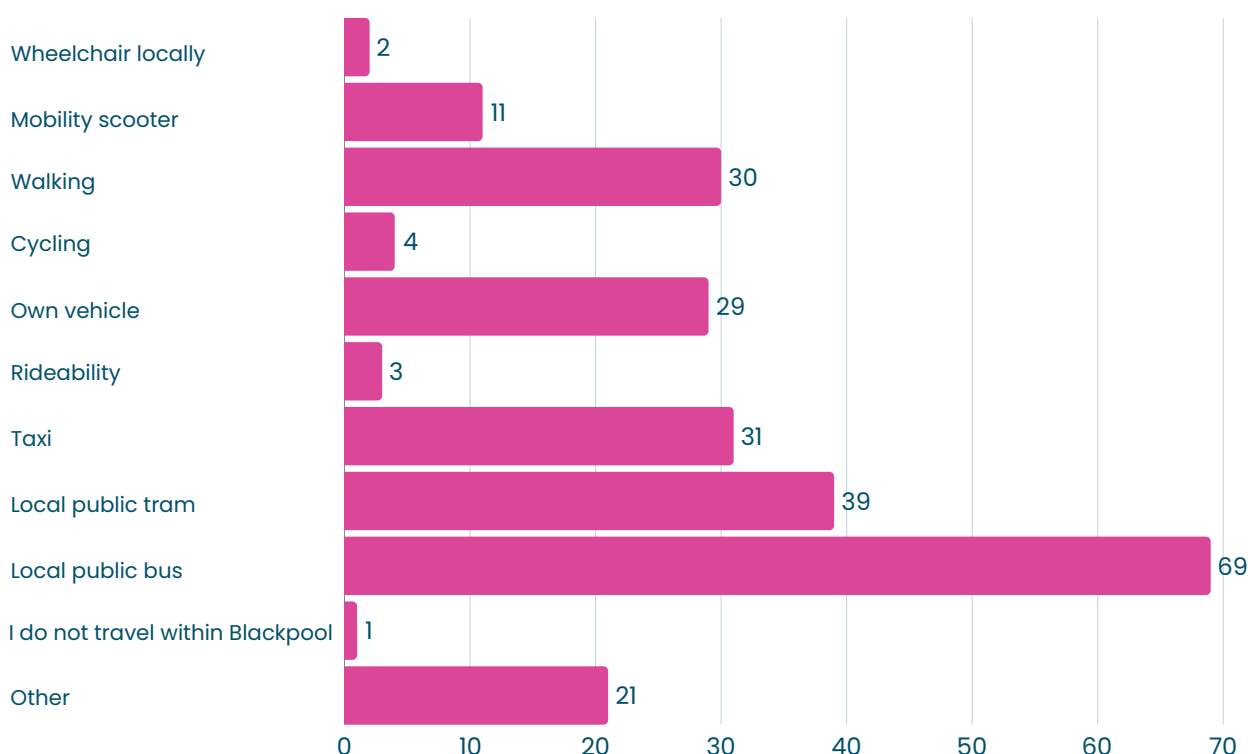
What is missing?

- Improvements to accessibility features
- Increased awareness and training for transport staff
- Accessible information



Transport

*What modes of transportation do you typically use to get around Blackpool?
(Please select all that apply)*



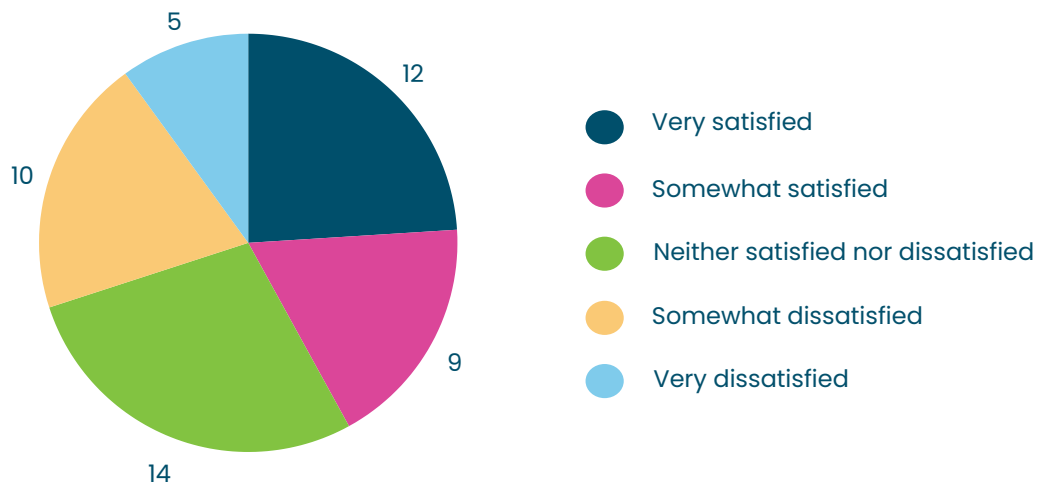
Other included "lift with parents", "carer's car", "Warren Manor bus."

Within focus groups, the most commonly reported mode of transportation used was the bus, cited within 33% of responses. 20% shared that they use taxis, 16% use trams and 15% use Rideability to get around Blackpool and the surrounding areas. A small number shared that they most commonly walk, use the train or use their mobility scooters as their main mode of transport.

69

**residents use local
public buses to get
around Blackpool**

How satisfied are you with the accessibility of local transport in Blackpool?



When individuals were asked to provide further comments regarding their satisfaction with transport in Blackpool, 46% provided further comments relating to the accessibility of buses. Many shared further issues around the physical accessibility of buses such as the use of ramps and size of the aisles, as well as time restrictions of the NoW card.

14

residents felt neither
satisfied nor dissatisfied
with local transport access



"The few times I've used a bus I had to wait a long time for them to sort ramps for me - I felt a liability. The trams I find very good, they are very helpful and it's easy to get on and off. If it wasn't for the trams I'd be a recluse."

"Not really feel safe on the bus. Want my independence but this also needs to be safe."

"The Blackpool transport double decker buses are different to manoeuvre on. The aisle is too narrow with rails impeding getting on/off the bus. The single deck buses are better. Rails are put in stupid places. Getting on/off buses is precarious as there's places where the road is the same height as the pavement.... Market Street Blackpool. This means even though the bus lowers the ramp, it is at a ridiculously steep angle pretty sure it's a health and safety issue. Now card can't be used before 9.30am and after 9.30 pm . Disabled people obviously must be tucked up in bed with a hot chocolate after those times. If that's not discrimination what is?!"

"When I have used public transport in the past with my mobility scooter, I was told I couldn't get on one bus and was asked if I could get out and fold it."

A further 23% shared that dissatisfaction with public transport was related to changes to bus routes. Participants reported having to take multiple buses to reach destinations previously accessible by a single route, and highlighted a need for more frequent buses during peak times with extended services.



"Bus routes have all changed. Confusing to SEND as they had a certain bus. Have to get two buses or more to get to a venue."

"More buses at busy times would be good. More routes to different places or extended services."

"The new bus changes have not made bus travel any easier and it's now more confusing."

"The routes are not to my requirements."

"There are areas across the Fylde that are difficult to access from Blackpool."



Finally, 19% of individuals shared positive experiences of using buses.



"Access on buses are good and most of bus drivers do wait for me to be seated before commencing with the journey . This is essential for me . I try not to travel at school time's due to lack of seats and noise."

"Brilliant with wheelchairs – driver helps with the ramp."

"Great with a free bus pass."

"There are excellent public transport routes in Blackpool."



What is working well?

38% of individuals praised transportation staff in Blackpool, emphasising their helpfulness and patience towards individuals with disabilities. Bus drivers, taxi drivers and tram conductors were consistently praised for their willingness to assist with accessibility needs, provide guidance and address issues promptly.



"The staff are good. They lower the ramp so I can get on."

"Local taxi drivers are helpful, will take you to entrances of buildings, help with shopping etc. When I have experienced refusals with my Guide Dog the taxi firm I have used along with taxi licensing have quickly dealt with it."

"Most bus drivers are helpful if you are not sure which bus stop you need to use, will tell you if the bus is on diversion etc."

"I've always found tram/bus conductors patient and courteous."

"I have found that the transport drivers can be understanding, patient and helpful with people with disabilities."



A further 35% shared positive experiences regarding the accessibility of public transport in Blackpool. Specifically, the implementation of floor-level trams and lowering buses were praised for making journeys easier for individuals with disabilities, when boarding and disembarking. Additionally, the availability of dedicated front-access seating and the inclusion of features such as ramps and braille on trams and buses contributed to a more inclusive and user-friendly experience.



"The trams are now at floor level and buses will lower for ease on and off. People tend to leave the front access seats empty available for disabilities."

"Ramps and braille."

"The ramps for buses are great. Platforms at trams to help with wheelchair access."



A small number of individuals shared the positive impacts of having a NoW card, and felt that this was working well for individuals with disabilities. Individuals expressed the benefits of travelling freely and affordably, emphasising how it alleviates financial strain.



“Got a NoW card bus pass so can use it whenever.”

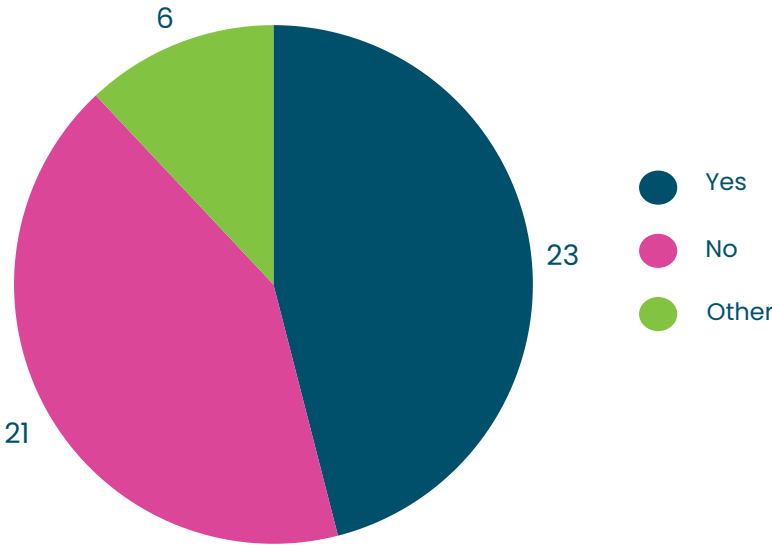
“Getting a free bus pass as this helps with saving disability benefits for rent etc.”

“NoW card is fantastic. I can use to get home from work and only pay a small top up on way to work. this is much appreciated.”



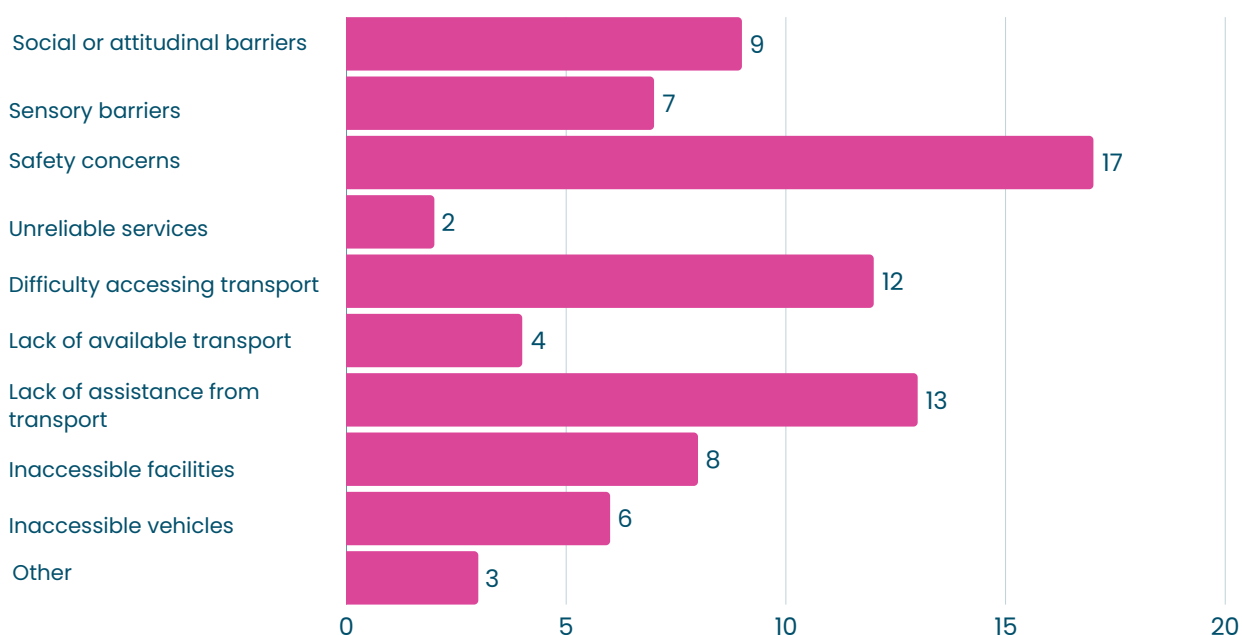
What are the barriers to accessing transport?

Have you experienced any barriers when accessing local transport in Blackpool?



‘Other’ comments included “Not personally because I have support. Online timetables are completely inaccessible to me.”, “Buses over crowded and accessible seats not available” and “Changes to routes.”

What barriers do you face when using local transport in Blackpool? (Please select all that apply)



Bus and Trams

When asked what barriers individuals had experienced when using the bus, 54% of comments highlighted issues with accessibility. For some, the physical accessibility of the buses, such as the position of bars or the steps, pose challenges for individuals. For others, restrictions on bus timetables and NoW cards impact individuals access to community activities and socialising. Comments were also made by individuals who have a visual impairment, stating that audio announcements are at times either not on, or too quiet for them to hear. This significantly impacts not only their ability to navigate public transport, but also their confidence doing so.



"There is a cluster of people who don't fall into the mainstream bracket of transport or the disability bracket of transport and we have to pay. Mine are classed as difficulties or disabilities."

"Can get on but struggle getting off because of position of the bars – do they have people trying before buying?"

"The number 3 and number 12 in Kincraig – they don't let people with disability passes on the bus before half 9 – the bus is due at 9.32. Bus leaves before this time and refuses me being able to get on – I then have to wait an hour for the next bus. The bus driver told me 'I make the rules'."

"I have to leave my aiming higher sessions an hour earlier because of bus times. I used to have 2 hours. This is my access into the community."





"I am finding quite a few instances on a number of different bus services who are not having the audio announcements on. Some who do have it on have it far too quiet for it to be heard. This is something that people who are sight impaired depend on for independence and confidence in getting around. It has been an ongoing issue for a number of years and is very frustrating that it still is. Or the screen suddenly goes dark for some reason or there's too many or too long adverts clogging up the next stop announcement screen that has them in a list. My point is that it should not happen. It always works on the trams."

"NoW passes – in some areas you can get a companion pass – I have to pay for my carer. On the NoW site you can see a section where it says some areas offer a companion pass. Lancashire don't – why don't they offer this in all areas?"



Inconsistent treatment by bus staff was reported by 24% of respondents, who cited a lack of understanding regarding both visible and hidden disabilities. This included failures to provide necessary support and enforce priority seating, highlighting a critical need for enhanced disability awareness training.



"Yes I have a view. I use the bus a lot. I have a hip problem but not all the drivers lower the bus down, which makes it harder to get off the bus when they can clearly see I use a walking stick."

"They don't always realise my facial expressions are because I'm nervous and anxious and this isn't always recognised by drivers."

"Bus drivers often seem ignorant of the fact that I am wearing noise cancelling headphones or sometimes ear defenders due to my sensitivity to sound, they will try to talk to me and in some cases appear irritated due to me not being able to hear them. Also, I feel as though Blackpool Transport does not do enough to visibly and audibly indicate stops especially on bus routes, which can make navigating quite daunting for people like myself especially if it's a new route or it's dark out due to the winter season."







“Difficult to use buses in a wheelchair – people won’t move for a person in a wheelchair. Drivers don’t ask people to move. ‘They were there first’ attitude.”

“I had one where the driver was lovely – there was already a wheelchair on and he said just jump on and he sorted it. Another one, there was a buggy on the bus and the lady said I’ll put the pram down and the bus driver said you were on first they can wait. It was winter, raining wasn’t a bus for another hour.”

“Sometimes the bus driver has gone too fast and I have a walker. I have to hold on for dear life. Some of them don’t lower the bus- when you have shopping to lift. Sometimes they don’t wait for me to sit down before driving off. I think they need more training in supporting people with disabilities.”



A small number of individuals felt that overcrowding on buses was a significant barrier for those with disabilities. This causes issues for those with both physical and hidden disabilities and particularly for those who require guide dog assistance.



“The buses are so crowded and you can hardly breathe – it’s so hot in the summer. They need more air con in the buses.”

“When the buses and trams are really busy, I can struggle to always find space to get on and off. The conductors could be a bit more firm. Can be too overcrowded.”

“I like the bus but when it’s busy I get socially anxious.”

“Buses can be overcrowded at peak times especially during term time. As a guide dog user, I feel unsafe as people stand up, push each other, fall over etc. I have no choice what time I travel as I have to be at work on time.”

“Not being able to get a wheelchair on the trams due to overcrowding.”



Taxis

Taxi users consistently raised the issue of wheelchair taxi availability, citing frequent difficulties in securing suitable transport. They reported having to contact multiple companies, especially on weekends, due to a shortage of wheelchair-accessible taxis or being sent vehicles that did not meet their needs.

"Trying to book a wheelchair taxi in advance."

"Would have to ring several firms especially Friday/Saturday."

"Using disabled taxis for able bodied."

"We took a taxi to Alder Hey. We had to pre-book it and they kept sending taxis with no clamp like bombers. They kept saying they can strap him in but without the clamp it isn't safe."

"There isn't enough wheelchair taxis and this limits access."

In addition, the cost of taxis create a significant financial barrier for disabled individuals, at times forcing them to choose between transport and physically demanding alternatives. Some noted how this can have a further impact on their access to vital healthcare services.

"Couple who have to come to hospital 3 times a week who are disabled. They undertake the half hour walk as taxi is 30 pounds per week."

"At A and E a patient was quoted 30 pounds taxi home. In some distress as could not pay. Later seen catching bus. Was disabled and bus stop to her house is 15 mins walk."

"We have to use a taxi to get him there and we have to save money to get there."

"I paid for a taxi to go 1 and half miles and it was £21 there and back just to get to Specsavers. I won't be able to access things if it continues at those prices."

Hospital transport

A small number of comments referenced challenges accessing hospital transport. Many individuals questioned the efficiency of patient transport services in Blackpool due to experiences of long waits, a perceived lack of coordination and difficulties communicating with the service.



"Outpatient waits for transport can be all day for a 20 minute appointment. Patients who are waiting see their neighbours collected but cannot join them. There seems to be no co-ordination of the patient transport service. One driver admitted their numbers were 13 down on usual that day due to illness etc among drivers."

"The bus forgets to pick them up, hospital hasn't booked it or they're waiting a long time."

"It is hard to get through to hospital transport."



Does transport impact access to health services?

37% of individuals shared that bus routes and their frequency impact access to healthcare in Blackpool. Experiences of unpredictable bus schedules, lack of direct bus routes to medical appointments and inconvenient transfer times were shared by those who spoke to us.



"Yes my nearest doctors is momentarily too far me not to use the transport if it's raining, if it's raining hard I can't use my mobility scooter, so would otherwise depend on using the bus service from round the corner to near my doctors, but with such a bad, no, terribly diabolical timetable many of us can't tell, even those without learning disabilities, it's impossible to fathom them out now."

"Yes, buses are not always reliable/punctual. Health care services might be in another town so if it is not a familiar destination you rely on other people to take you to appointments."

"My doctor's isn't on a bus route. I have to set off half an hour earlier and if the weather's really bad I'll get a taxi."

"It's 2 buses from Bispham to BVH and the connection times are useless."



30% of individuals shared that transport does not impact their access to healthcare, with positive comments regarding buses in-particular.



"Not for me. Buses to medical centres and hospital are available."

"No. The number 5's all go to the hospital."

"No, I'm able to get to the doctors. It's a bit small to get in and they change rooms to make it more accessible so I can't complain."



15% felt the accessibility of transport services further impacts their ability to access health and care services. Individuals shared experiences of limited wheelchair spaces on public transport and difficulties securing taxis. Furthermore, inadequate lighting and poor road conditions around hospitals, combined with long internal distances within the facilities, created additional obstacles for those with mobility issues.



"Yes because if you need to get to an appointment you would struggle to get a taxi. Also only one or two wheelchair spaces first come first served."

"Those stuck in wheelchairs can't access everything."



A small number of individuals indicated they would face challenges accessing health and care services, if they did not have personal transportation or support from family members/carers to attend appointments.



"I don't know how I'd get there if I didn't have my sister."

"Other means of transport is difficult when not with carer, they act as a help and support aid."

"Yes. NHS provision in the Community is made at venues not easily accessible on public transport and the NHS itself fails to consider in the design of buildings the needs of mobility impaired patients. Bus stops around Blackpool Victoria hospital are situated in dark places after lighting up time for road traffic and drivers drive very quickly on the roads making it very difficult and dangerous for mobility impaired and disabled patients on Whinney Heys Road. There should be more lighting around the bus stops which access A and E and traffic calming measures to slow down drivers who just drive too fast. For a mobility impaired patient, the journey from the hospital main entrance bus stops to A and E is easily half a mile down long corridors. There is a bus stop closer to A and E but it is on a very busy road which is poorly lit after dark and involves a thirty degrees slope to the A and E entrance which has no rail and also is a road for crossing ambulances."

"If we didn't have a car I would find it extremely difficult to attend appointments in Blackpool."

"I suppose if you did not drive, getting to appointments with a child that presents the way mine does would be almost impossible especially keeping time. As a parent of a neurodivergent child, outside triggers are something you simply have no control over. More outreach appts would be beneficial/effective where professionals come to the home/or flexible meeting place."



Suggestions to improve transport services?

The majority of individuals (43%) felt that improvements needed to be made to the accessibility of transport services as a priority. Some individuals felt that physical improvements were required, for example allowing mobility scooters on trams, ensuring priority seating is enforced, increasing space on buses for mobility aids and improving bus stop seating. Others felt there needed to be improved information for visually impaired individuals and implementing a lanyard system to raise awareness of hidden disabilities.



"Let people on trams with mobility scooters."

"Ensure priority seats are free and available to those who need them. No students refusing to sit or stand and also stop people blocking seats with large four wheel shopping trollies."

"Buses need more space for the physically disabled to accommodate their mobility aids such as wheelchairs, walkers and mobility scooters. It's unfair to expect a wheelchair user to be late because more than one disabled person needed to catch the bus."

"Some form of talking timetables or a dedicated phone line for accessing bus times information if you are visually impaired."

"Bus stop seating. More or specialist transport for disabled people. I can't risk having to stand up on a bus."

"Lanyards mentioned as an improvement to how people access transport. The lanyard could show hidden disabilities and help general awareness by the community to help people with disabilities travel more comfortably and safely."



A further 25% of people highlighted the need for increased training for transport employees. There was a particular emphasis on drivers receiving training on hidden disabilities and a general need for consultation with disabled individuals to inform training and service improvements. Comments emphasised the importance of staff being able to recognise that not all disabilities are visible and that assumptions about passenger behaviour can lead to feelings of exclusion.



“Drivers and conductors need to be properly trained to understand that verbal communication might not always be an option, and that just because I do not remove my noise cancellation does not mean I am rude. I imagine this also impacts deaf people, as if they cannot lip read or simply cannot see the driver’s mouth they would be unable to communicate with them.”

“There needs to be education around hidden disabilities. I used to support a young girl in a wheelchair and I tried to access a taxi and it was a nightmare. They might not have anyone on. If we could get a taxi I’d ask could you pick us up at 4 and they’d say we don’t know if we have someone on then. If you’ve got medication go get back for what can you do.”

“Consult with wheelchair users and disability awareness training.”

“For neurodevelopmental disabilities however I feel that Blackpool Transport is lacking. This is not intentional of course, but I feel that further training could and should be given to drivers and staff regarding the less visible disabilities. Where a bus driver may just see a person who doesn’t want to take their headphones off because they’re listening to music, for me they are getting annoyed or trying to verbally communicate with someone who wears noise cancelling headphones as an accommodation for my disability to make transport more comfortable for me - removing my headphones for a moment so that the driver can ignore my accommodation might not seem like much, but the sound of the engine and the passengers on board can be overwhelming even for a few moments. Additionally, even without headphones I struggle to hear people in loud environments, trying to verbally communicate to someone like me feels like an unintentional failure to understand that everyone is different.”



23% of residents suggested improvements to information accessibility for public transport in Blackpool, particularly for visually impaired and neurodivergent individuals. Individuals felt there should be a greater focus on providing clear, user-friendly information to enhance navigation and reduce anxiety for passengers with diverse needs.

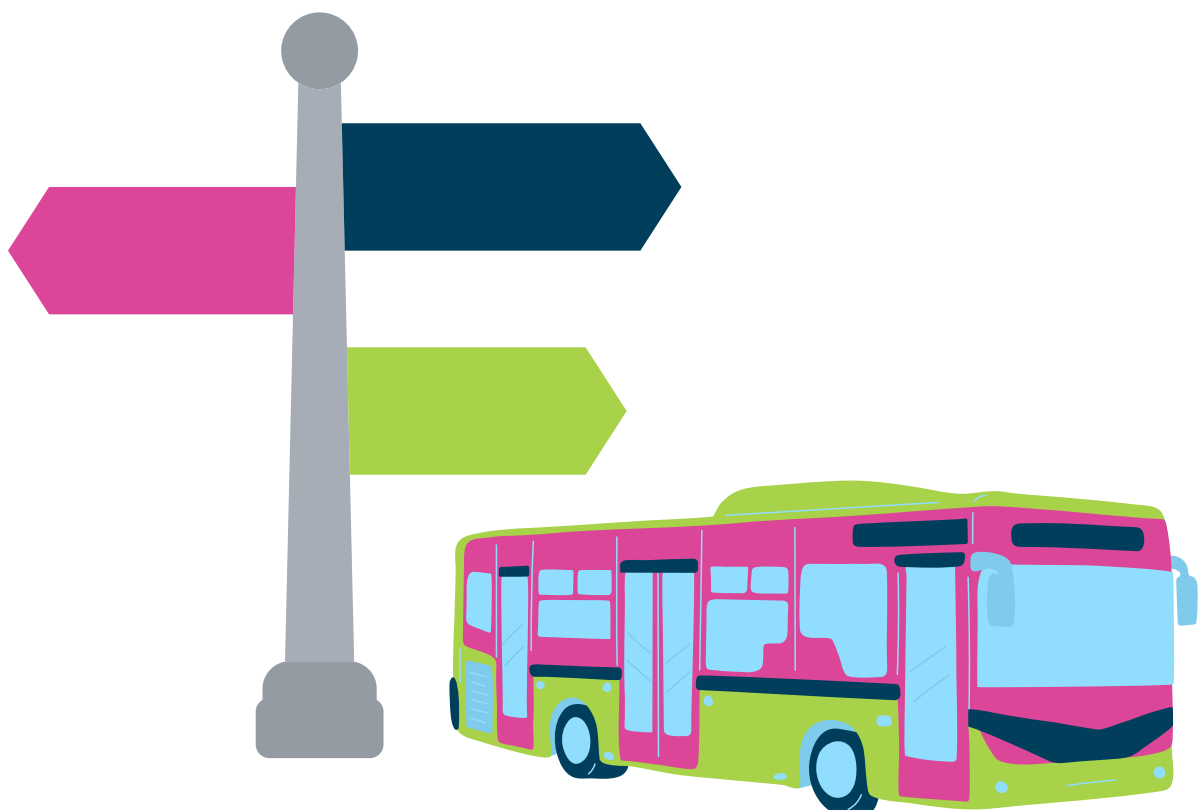
“Showing videos of the bus stops/transfers on a journey using public transport so that users know where to get off a bus, what the next bus stop and surrounding area looks like etc.”

“Blackpool transport you need to improve on the maintenance of the onboard destination boards. Often there is either no sound or they aren’t working – these are crucial for some people with disabilities especially in the winter months when it’s dark outside . They should be checked every day before leaving the depot.”

“Difficult to read in current format – presented as a block at the moment – needs simplifying.”

“Bigger font on timetables in simple format.”

“Maybe 12 hour clock rather than 24 hour on timetable.”



Mystery shopping

Highlights



Experiences

- Buses and trams were mixed, due to inconsistent accessibility and staff support
- Taxis were very positive due to staff care
- Rideability was generally positive



Accessibility

- Accessibility of buses and trams were mixed
- Accessibility of taxis were very good
- Accessibility of Rideability were very good

Staff and safety



- There were mixed experiences of bus/ tram drivers, with negative experiences due to lack of training
- Shoppers felt safest in taxis
- Rideability staff generally demonstrated care

Suggestions for improvement



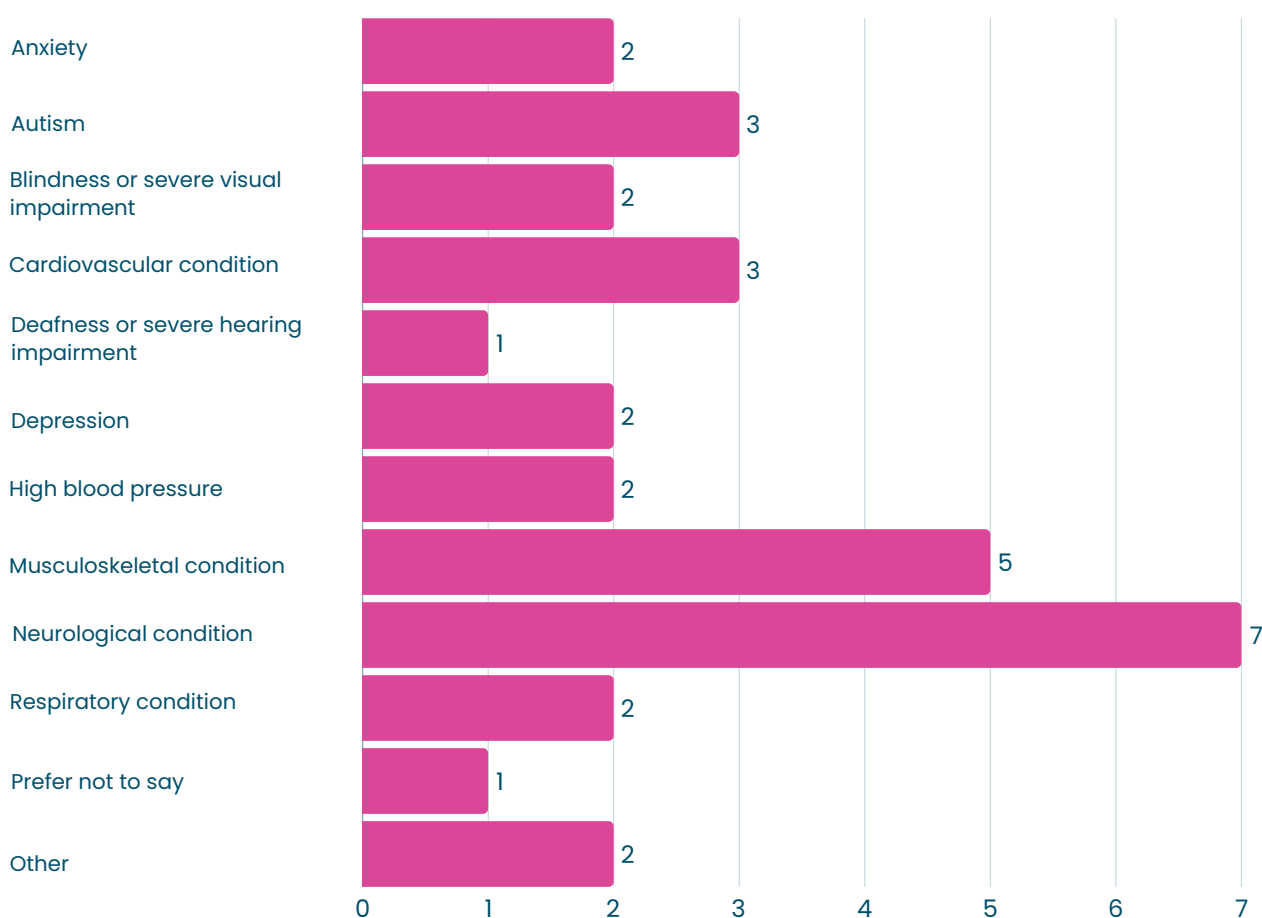
- Increased accessibility features
- Training of staff
- Companion passes for carers



Overview

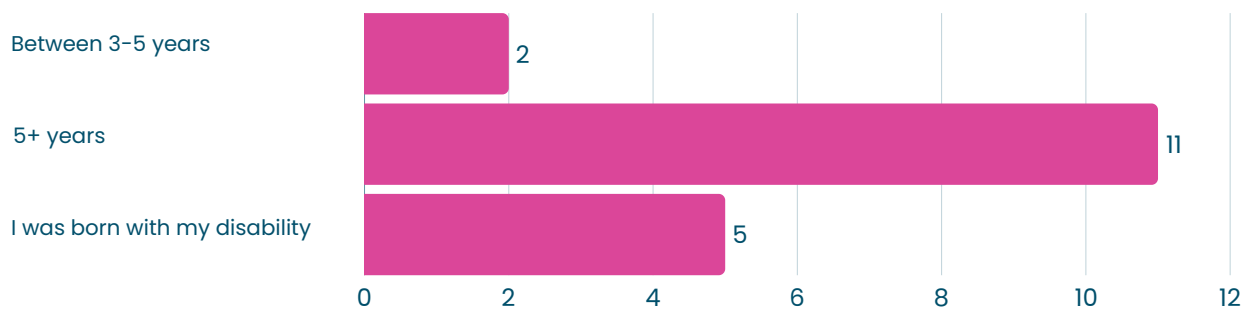
As part of our efforts to understand transport accessibility, Healthwatch Blackpool organised a mystery shopping exercise. During our consultation phase, we recruited **9 participants with disabilities**, who were regular transport users. The mystery shoppers then undertook journeys on local buses, trams, taxis, and the Rideability service, documenting their experiences in post-journey surveys. Participants received Love2shop vouchers as a thank you gesture for their participation. Healthwatch Blackpool is deeply grateful for the time and feedback provided by our mystery shoppers.

*Which of the following long-term conditions or disabilities do you have?
Please tick all that apply.*

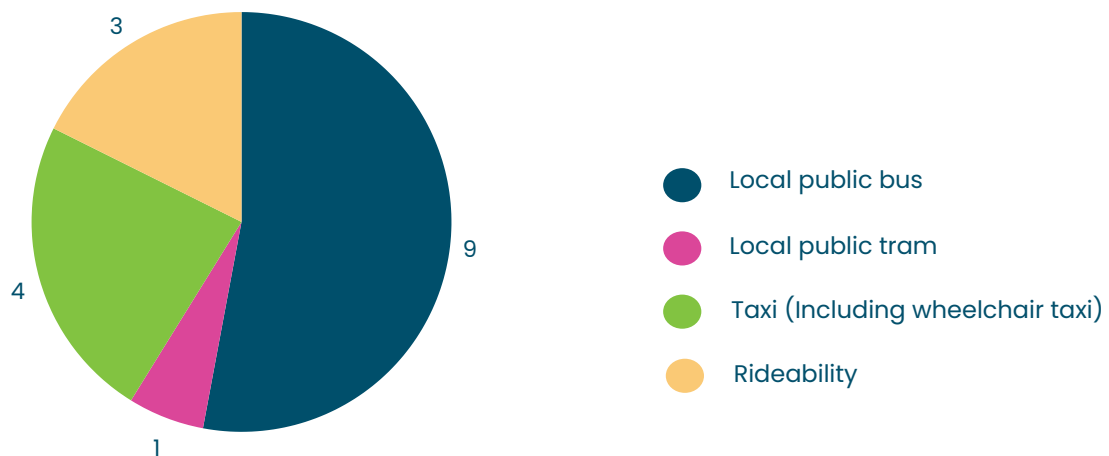


‘Other’ comments included “Systemic sclerosis, EUPD, bronchiectasis”, and “VVS – passing out condition.”

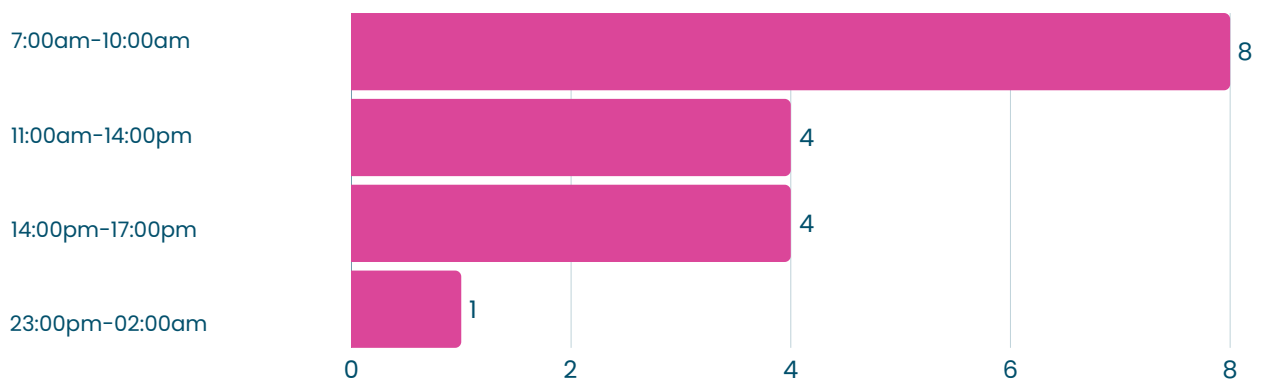
*How long have you been living with this disability/disabilities?
(Please select all that apply)*



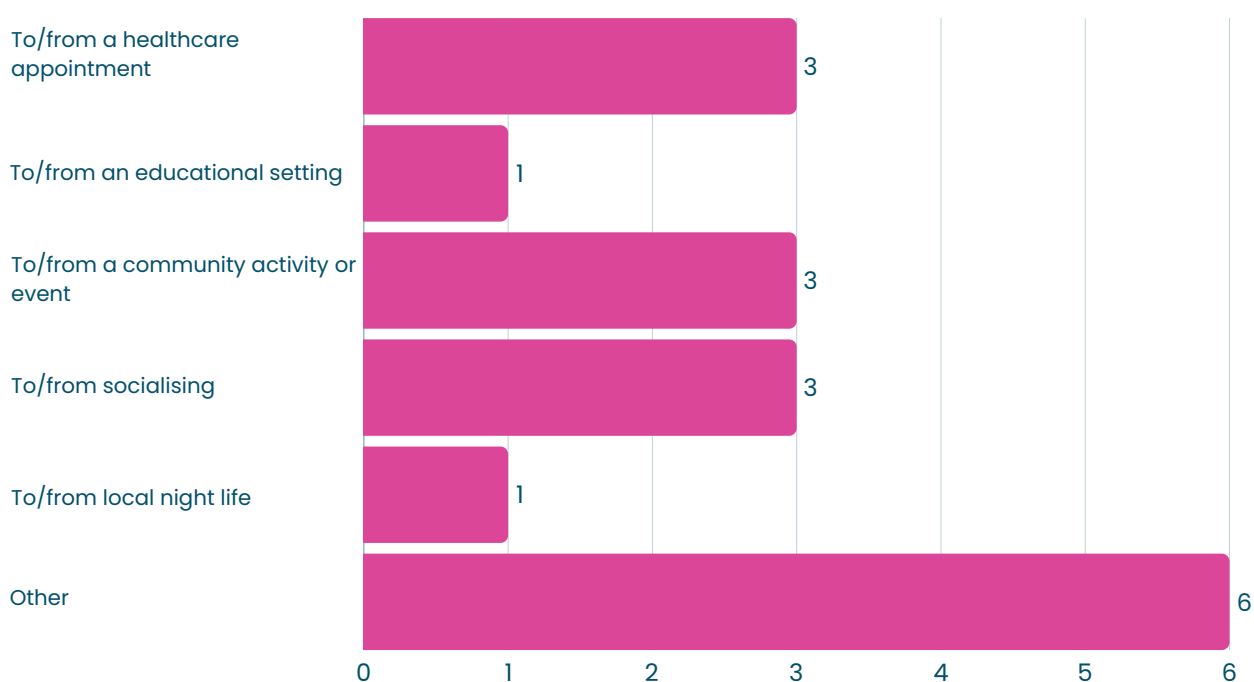
What mode of transport did you use?



What time did your journey take place?

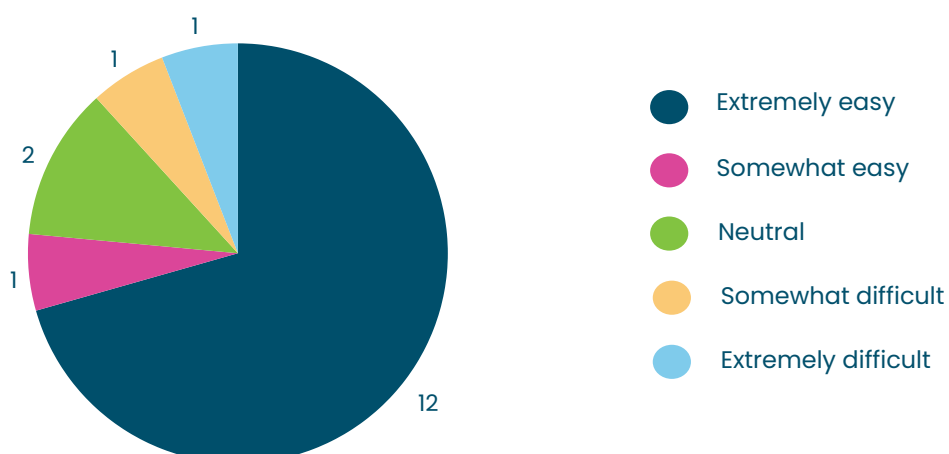


What was the purpose of your journey?



‘Other’ comments included “From adult learning class”, “Taking service dog to vet for check up”, and “Jobcentre appointment.”

How easy was it to access the service from the start to the end of your journey?



Buses & trams



Overall, our mystery shoppers shared mixed experiences when using public buses and trams in Blackpool. Some shared positive experiences highlighting easy accessibility and helpful drivers. Negative experiences were attributed to drivers and a lack of training and confidence in supporting those with disabilities.

"We had a really lovely bus driver who was really patient and kind because i had my friend with me who is blind. He stopped and led us on, waited until we sat down, really thoughtful and really pleasant."

"I got on the bus and I said I have a service dog. The bus driver demanded paperwork - I said don't need paperwork and already raised this before that staff need to be made aware of this. The bus driver laughed at me and said law isn't clear and said you need to provide paperwork. I said the law is very clear and I got on the bus. Other passengers saw it and asked if I was ok and it made me feel humiliated."

"My journey back was fine, friendly, helpful. He was fantastic, he helped other disabled people on the bus."

"Driver not fully confident putting it out to get on. Bus stop has no curb and has grass verge so stop isn't great for getting on. Got off Victoria road just before tram stop , driver didn't get out of his seat to put the ramp out was clear he couldn't be bothered. Did pull up close and lowered bus but was a drop that i was a little uncomfortable with."

Accessibility

The majority of mystery shoppers reported reasonable adjustments being made, such as ramps and availability of priority seating. Others provided a mixed response, where either an attempt was made to provide reasonable adjustments such as ramps, but concerns were raised regarding the 'sturdiness' of the ramp. Another individual shared that reasonable adjustments were not made on their outbound journey, but were on their returning journey, evidencing inconsistencies in drivers offering reasonable adjustments.

"Yes ramp inbuilt on this bus much easier."

"Drive straight on. Space available for my chair. Tram quiet so easy."

"No by the first one - he did everything he could not to provide this. Second driver everything - lowered hydraulics to get on. When I was about to show him the ID he said yeah you're fine and didn't need it. Getting off he lowered the ramp to assist."

"Removable ramp not sturdy awkward but works."

In terms of information, the vast majority of our mystery shoppers reported that information was clear and accessible. Specific praise was given to accessible assistance buttons, the Blackpool transport app with live updates for journey planning, and clearly displayed timetables at bus stops. While one individual praised the availability of braille on the assistance button, two individuals reported a lack of braille/ large print for bus timetables.

"Yes button panel in space with braille and to ask for assistance if needed."

"Using the app the information is clear and easy to find, and there are live updates so that I know if I need to recalculate my journey. This is essential for me, as I struggle with changes to my plans, so having the app able to do the recalculations for me is important."

"Very clear bus timetable at stop."

"I use the app, so the information is clear and available, and there are live updates which help a lot. There were also timetables at the bus stop indicating which routes and times were available."

"Bus timetable on stop very easy to read no brail though."

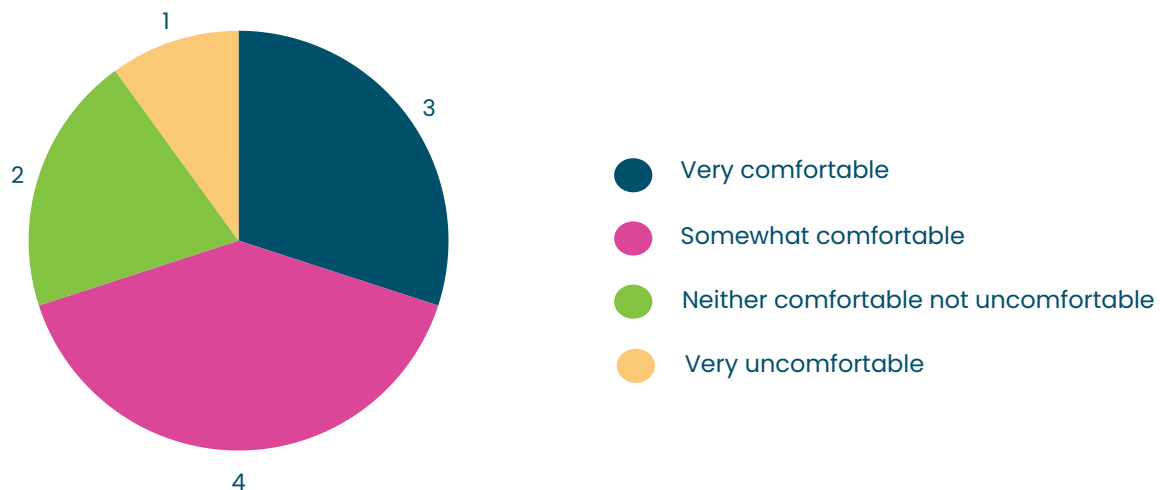
"There wasn't any braille or large print."

2 mystery shoppers raised issues with purchasing multiple bus tickets in advance.

"I buy my tickets in advance on the app, although the ability to buy multiple tickets at once would be a welcome improvement. However, other than that, the experience is straight forward and quick."

"I can buy tickets that I need on the app, but if I need to buy more than one at once for upcoming journeys, I can't. I have to buy each ticket individually and it would be much easier if I could state the number of tickets that I wanted instead."

How comfortable was your journey in terms of space and ease of movement?



Experiences of access to priority seating was mixed. Some reported ease of access to these seats, with others either having to ask people to move or there being no access at all due to prams or overcrowding.

"Fine with space. Newer bus easy to navigate."

"Yes much better space on this bus. Easy to maneuver into."

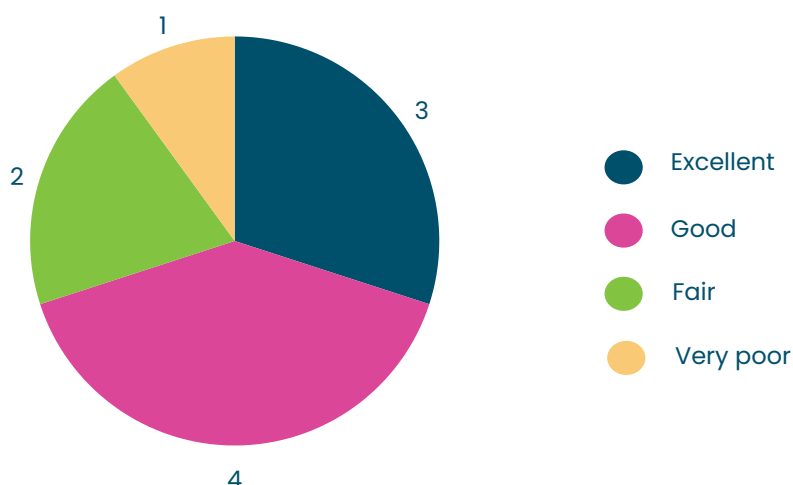
"Seats were down I had to kick them up. This bus is awful for space. Really difficult to get into allocated space due to layout and size."

"Lady had to move this bus difficult to maneuver very small space bar in awkward place too."

"The trip I took was at school leaving time so, for most of the journey, the bus was too crowded for any wheelchair users to have been able to access it. There were prams on both sides in the allocated spaces and too many people standing for anyone with movement difficulties to have used that particular bus on that journey."

Staff and safety

How would you rate the attitude of the staff towards your needs as a disabled passenger?



'Other' comments included "My disability isn't obvious externally, so this is somewhat inapplicable."

Mystery shopper experiences of staff was again mixed, with some reporting positive experiences where staff demonstrated adequate knowledge and care for disabled passengers. Others appeared to lack confidence when using ramps and knowledge surrounding the use of service dogs.

"Yeah he was really nice without making you feel like you were being a pain or anything."

"Yes very thoughtful."

"I think the removable ramp is unfamiliar to some staff this driver was lazy and miserable."

"The first on not even remotely - no knowledge of service dogs, claimed he knew the laws but he didn't."

The majority of our mystery shoppers shared that they either did not feel safe, or responses were mixed. For those who did not feel safe, this was attributed to the drivers themselves or overcrowding. In terms of accessibility to the assistance button, responses to this were also mixed, contributing to shoppers feeling unsafe.



"On the way there yes, on the way back slightly afraid of letting go of the railing."

"With the first bus, I don't think he would have waited - he would have just set off. I didn't feel safe being on that bus at all I felt intimidated by the driver."

"No. I was already anxious about the appointment I was going to, and then the massively overcrowded bus, plus the noise of kids and parents, meant that I was rapidly getting overwhelmed and struggling to stay calm on the journey. In addition I was worried that I would miss my stop and not be able to get off the bus - however, by the time we reached my stop enough people had already got off that I could reach the door again. We were running about 5 mins late though, which meant I was very nearly late for my appointment - not really the driver's fault, but it added to my anxiety."

"No you have to reach and stretch to get them even on the disability seats. It is the same on the trams - you get on and go to the seat area and there's one button."

"Bell on bus inaccessible too far back can't reach."



The key issues faced by our mystery shoppers were overcrowding and uneven road surfaces which again contributed to individuals unable to feel safe or comfortable.



"There are some rough stretches of road on the no. 6 route, but the driver was good and handled these well, making the journey as smooth as possible. The bus got busy and a little noisy (as it was a school day) but not overcrowded."

"First bus - the bus was late, uneven surfaces and rubbish on the floor."



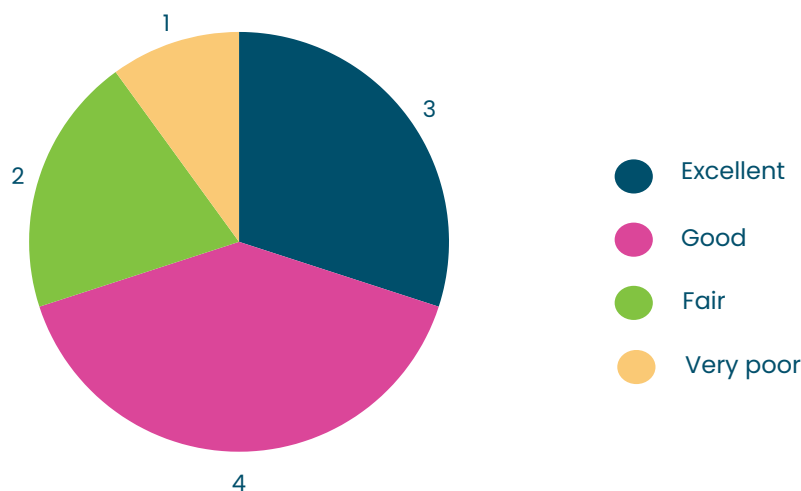


"I was very uncomfortable on this journey due to the excessive number of people on the bus. Once we reached the areas where we started to pick up families collecting their young children from schools, we rapidly reached standing room only, and then proceeded to take on more passengers. To the extent that I was getting anxious about the bus actually being overloaded for its capacity. I understand that I cannot always have a seat to myself, but there were so many people on the bus that not only all the seats were at capacity, but also the entire aisle was packed with people, making it very difficult for anyone to make their way off the bus at their stop. Kids were sitting on parents' laps and the entire space of the bus was packed."



Positive experiences, barriers and suggestions for improvement

How would you rate the overall accessibility?



When asked if anything was positive about their journey, the majority of mystery shoppers shared that the friendliness and helpfulness of the drivers had the most positive impact.

"The driver was considerate and braked smoothly at stops, making the journey more pleasant. Even though it was a school day, and kicking out time, the bus wasn't overcrowded, so I didn't need to share my seat."

"The particular driver is very thoughtful accommodating and friendly always is."

"Friendliness and thoughtfulness of the driver in both directions."

"The driver was considerate and braked smoothly at stops, making the journey more pleasant. Even though it was a school day, and kicking out time, the bus wasn't overcrowded, so I didn't need to share my seat."

"The particular driver is very thoughtful accommodating and friendly always is."

"Friendliness and thoughtfulness of the driver in both directions."

The main barrier reported by our mystery shoppers was overcrowding. Other barriers included the cost of bus fares, particularly for those who are having to pay for their carers ticket. One individual highlighted that the bus driver was a barrier due to the lack of adequate knowledge, resulting in feelings of humiliation.

"Mostly just the overcrowding on that journey. It really stressed me out."

"Expensive having to pay £3.50 for the carer because it's a tram. Buses charge £2 for carers."

"Lack of training, knowledge, disability inclusion and respect. I just felt humiliated and it deters me from using buses and isolates me or increases my travel costs."

The vast majority of our mystery shoppers also reported poor quality bus stops and shelters. Common issues included a lack of adequate shelter from rain and wind, accumulation of litter, unsafe or non-existent pavements and anti-social behaviour.



"There is often some rubbish near or in the Branstree Rd bus stop, and no bin nearby. The shelter is ok for some rain, but not great for wind protection. It appears to be a somewhat older design."

"The Stronsay place bus stop had a shelter - it's dirty, covered in rubbish, food all over the floor constantly like that. No accountability for the college, usually students intimidating people."

"No shelter getting off in Thornton school, footpath narrow, so difficult not to cause obstruction to other people using it. Round the corner the next stop has grass verge and no marked bus stop or pavement St John's church."

"It didn't provide much shelter. It doesn't keep you dry if it's raining. It was clean and there is a bench opposite but no shelter for that."

"But stop at St John's bad. No allotted bus stop. Grass verge and no pavement so the angle of ramp steep."



Mystery shoppers were also asked to suggest improvements based on their experiences. The majority felt that accessibility of buses requires improvement, particularly in regards to more space and seating for those with mobility issues, as well as other adaptations such as better ramp access. Others suggested allowing carers to have a 'companion pass' to reduce the cost to those living with disabilities. One individual felt that drivers needed to be better trained to support those with disabilities and understand disability laws.



"Better ramps. More space with thought as to where posts are positioned for easier maneuverability."

"More disabled seating. There were 2 big spaces but only one space had pull down seats. I don't understand why they only put it on one side."

"Make it free for support staff to accompany a disabled person."

"Fire this bus driver - I recognised him and this is not the first instance. Educate the rest of the drivers - not just a quick email. They need to do an inclusion module like taxi drivers do. This needs to include disability and service animals. The bus company themselves need to understand the law and then educate their staff - the company have misquoted the law to me."



Taxi



Overall, our mystery shoppers shared positive experiences when accessing taxis and wheelchair taxis in Blackpool at different times of day. In general they reported short wait times and accessible vehicles with staff who provided additional support when needed.

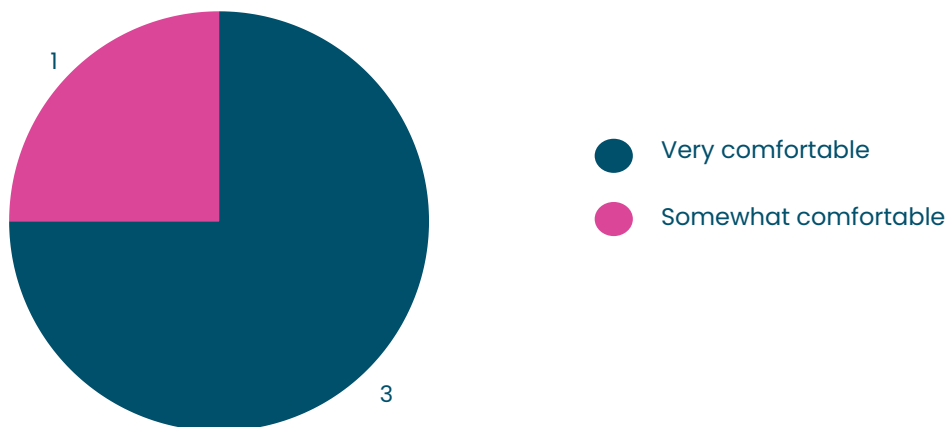
"Myself and the majority of the residents here use Blacktax. It was at a difficult time school traffic wise so i pre-booked on Friday. The young lady who answered told me how long I needed for my journey. The taxi driver was on time."

"I waited at the taxi rank near Walkabout and managed to get a hackney taxi after a night out with no wait at all. The lady driver was lovely and explained that as I am in a wheel chair, she would have to pull down the side street to be able to utilise the ramp. Throughout the journey, she checked if I was ok and went slow round corners."

"The taxis are always good."

Accessibility

How comfortable was your journey in terms of space and ease of movement?



Across all of our mystery shoppers, reasonable adjustments were made for those with mobility issues and visual impairments. Drivers demonstrated proactive assistance, aiding with vehicle entry, escorting individuals to their door, checking on wellbeing and ensuring additional aids are available such as ramps and audio loops. Mystery shoppers also reported facing no issues or barriers with prebooking a taxi.

"They see me coming with my walker and they immediately get out of the car and open the boot to take the walker off me. They have wheelchair accessible - I always ask for the saloon because this is fine for me and I do find the higher vehicle are difficult to get into. If they do send one the driver will help me in. In fact one taught me how to get in on the front seat because I was having difficulties."

"I asked the driver if he could escort me to the door which he did and he helped me get the key in the door."

"The driver pulled the ramp down and helped my friend push me in. She made sure the brakes were on and asked if I was feeling ok."

"There was a hearing loop in the taxi."

Staff and safety

All of our mystery shoppers reported positive experiences with drivers, where they demonstrated adequate knowledge, proactively assisting passengers with mobility aids, ensuring walkers are secure and automatically deploying ramps for wheelchair users. For passengers, this demonstrated an awareness of their needs and providing efficient, considerate service.

"I find their drivers very very helpful."

"Yes- he knew I had the walker and he made sure it was locked properly when he was leaving me."

"Yes, the driver automatically asked if I needed the taxi ramp due to me being in a wheelchair. This was facilitated quickly and efficiently."

"The taxi driver asked my friend to ensure the brakes were on my wheelchair throughout my journey."

When asked about safety, mystery shoppers reported feeling safe throughout their journey. This was largely due to drivers demonstrating care and attention to their needs, offering flexible seating arrangements while actively ensuring safety through seatbelt reminders. For wheelchair users, safety is further emphasised through the efficient use of ramps and a deliberate reduction in driving speed to enhance feelings of safety.

"Yes because all the taxi drivers allow you to sit in the front with them or in the back."

"Yes because if I was in the front seat and he made sure I put the seatbelt on - I have a habit of forgetting to put my seatbelt on."

"Yes, I felt my needs were catered to exceptionally throughout my taxi ride, being a wheelchair user. The ramp was used and the driver made an effort to make sure I felt secure by driving slower."

Positive experiences, barriers and suggestions for improvement

Mystery shoppers attributed positive experiences to supportive and attentive drivers and accessibility of the vehicles. In particular, passengers felt that helpful and reliable staff who proactively focused on safety and comfort, contributed to a positive experience. The availability of vehicle types caters to a range of accessibility needs, and access to discount schemes allow for better affordability.

"Taxi driver was helpful. I think the consistency in the courtesy of c cab drivers - i must say they live up to it in my experience."

"The taxi driver made effort to make me feel secure by driving slower, and was very efficient with using the ramp to cater for my wheelchair. She ensured the brakes were on the chair when in the hackney and made me feel at ease."

"Blacktax have a variety of vehicles i.e. someone with severe physical disabilities would need a bigger van - they have several different styles."

"They have a discount scheme - the drivers will say that's £2.40 but £2 for you with your discount."

While our mystery shoppers did not experience any barriers when using taxis in Blackpool, one mystery shopper suggested the following improvement:

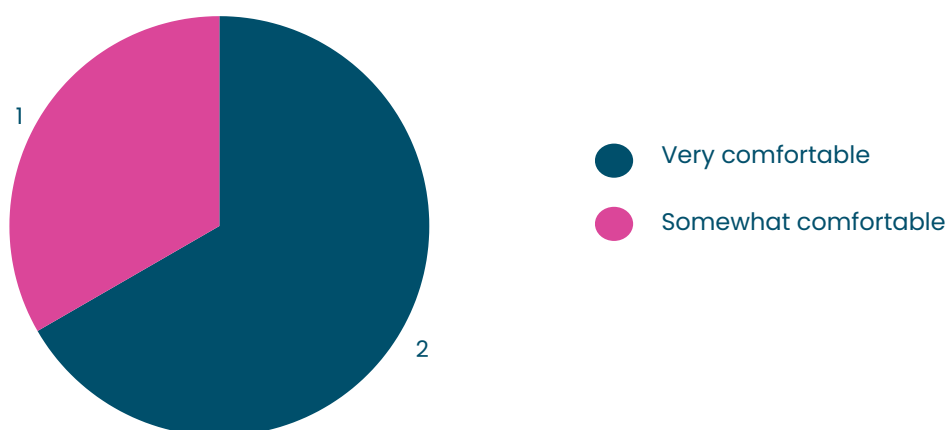
"Sometimes when you first ring them I like to speak to an operator but when you first ring it's automated. It would be good if it was clear from the beginning that you could speak to someone straight away otherwise I don't feel safe if I can't speak to somebody. It would be helpful if there was a separate line to speak to an operator. I like to remind them for each journey that I need to be collected from the door."

Rideability



Rideability's accessibility and safety were generally praised by mystery shoppers, who highlighted helpful drivers, accessible seating, safety features like seatbelts, and easy booking. However, one incident involving an unhelpful driver who failed to assist a passenger resulting in an accident, was raised as a concern by one mystery shopper. While most journeys were comfortable and enjoyable, with clean vehicles and helpful staff, one mystery shopper reported a lack of information documenting upcoming available trips.

How comfortable was your journey in terms of space and ease of movement?



Accessibility

Mystery shoppers who evaluated the accessibility of Rideability reported positive experiences regarding driver assistance, the presence of rails, accessible seating and safety measures such as seatbelt checks. They also reported easy pre-booking processes and generally clear information, however one mystery shopper noted missing information regarding upcoming tips.

"No but I don't need the ramp and I know he is there to make sure you are alright. I like doing it as far as I physically can. He takes the trolley for us and there are lots of rails to use. The driver makes sure we strap ourselves in. With it being a new bus each of the seatbelts are different but he made sure each of us were safely strapped in."

"There are on the pane of glass behind the driver, there is usually a list of trips for the following month but there wasn't this sign up this morning."

Staff and safety

All of our mystery shoppers consistently praised the safety features of Rideability and generally felt secure, with drivers typically being helpful. One shopper reported observing an unhelpful driver, failing to assist a passenger with mobility issues, leading to an accident.

"Yes - we had a good journey back as well."

"All drivers on rideability are very helpful - only exception was one driver. Didn't help anyone on or off the bus. One lady fell getting off on a Cleveleys trip. He was still in the driving seat while passers by helped."

"Drivers very helpful."

Positive experiences, barriers and suggestions for improvement

Positive experiences were attributed to comfortable and clean environments, ease of access and helpful drivers. Mystery shoppers reported experiencing no barriers during their journeys and had no suggestions for improvement.



"Always comfortable and enjoyable."

"The ease with which I was able to access it, the driver could not have been more helpful. The bus was nice and clean and upholstery bright."




Conclusions

Healthwatch Blackpool spoke to a total of 207 Blackpool residents, 131 via surveys and 76 through focus group discussions. A further 9 individuals took part in our mystery shopper exercise. Individuals were asked to share their unique experiences as a disabled person living in Blackpool accessing community healthcare, community activities and transport.

Feedback on community healthcare was mixed. While positive feedback highlights the strengths of specific services like occupational health, local pharmacies, and specialist care teams, a significant amount of respondents expressed dissatisfaction. The main barriers were systematic issues such as lengthy waiting times, inaccessible facilities and transportation barriers, impacting their access to community healthcare. Communication gaps were also identified, including a lack of communication from services, or communication which was unsuitable and difficult to understand due to the use of medical terminology.

Community activities in Blackpool were reported to offer significant social and physical benefits, particularly creating a sense of belonging and well-being for those living with a disability. While sport and social groups are popular, there is a lack of awareness of the activities on offer, stemming from inadequate signposting and information. Accessibility issues, including physical limitations, financial constraints, and transportation challenges, further impact individuals use of community activities. Some individuals suggested that an information hub would be beneficial, so those living with a disability have one single point of contact to find information on local community activities. Others suggested improved physical accessibility to community activities, as well as tailored activities catering to specific disabilities such as neurodiverse individuals and those who are visually impaired or deaf. A small number felt the provision of community activities specifically for young people living with a disability requires improvement.



Feedback regarding transport in Blackpool was also mixed, revealing issues with staff awareness and understanding of disabilities and accessibility challenges. While the accessibility of trams and the benefits of NoW card are appreciated, bus accessibility is compromised by physical limitations, restrictive pass times, and inconsistent audio information. Taxi availability and affordability pose significant barriers, especially for wheelchair users. Individuals report that transportation problems directly impact healthcare access, with unreliable schedules and vehicle limitations hindering attendance at medical appointments.

Feedback from our mystery shopper transport exercise reflected some of these issues, with a distinct contrast between the experiences on Blackpool's public buses/trams, taxi, and Rideability services. While taxi and Rideability services were consistently praised for accessibility, driver helpfulness, and safety, experiences of buses and trams were mixed. Positive aspects, such as clear information and some helpful bus drivers were reported, however these experiences were inconsistent. Mystery shoppers echoed suggestions from other participants within surveys and focus groups, suggesting improved driver training regarding disability support, in particular ramp deployment and understanding hidden disabilities. Further improvements to physical accessibility, such as ramp sturdiness, availability of priority seating and addressing overcrowding were suggested by our mystery shoppers.

To ensure a truly inclusive and equitable Blackpool, significant and coordinated improvements are essential across community healthcare, activities, and transport. Despite existing positive elements, a persistent pattern of accessibility barriers – including physical limitations, financial constraints, and information gaps – continues to negatively impact the lives of disabled residents. Therefore, prioritising and implementing recommendations based on the voices of residents is paramount.

Recommendations

Community health and care

1. Enhance accessibility of community health care services:

- Improve the accessibility of healthcare services by ensuring ramps, lifts, wider doorways and parking spaces are readily available, enhancing inclusivity for people with disabilities.
- Include individuals with disabilities in the planning and designing of healthcare buildings to ensure they are accessible for everyone.
- Address lengthy NHS waiting times, with an emphasis from residents on reducing these to improve quality of life.
- Ensure clear and accessible signposting information within healthcare services.

2. Improve communication methods used by community health services:

- Implement a variety of communication methods that meet individual needs, such as face-to-face conversations, accessible digital systems, and clear and understandable written materials in the appropriate format.
- Health professionals should use clear, simple language and avoid using medical terminology.

3. Implement a holistic, person centered approach to community healthcare services:

- Improve communication between healthcare services (primary and secondary care) so residents can receive the care they need, without confusion or delays.
- Address medication delays and ensure people receive clear and understandable information about how to manage their medication.
- Ensure that staff are trained in providing reasonable adjustments, and that reasonable adjustments are consistently offered.

Recommendations

Community activities

4. Improve awareness and information of community activities for disabled people in Blackpool:

- Raise awareness of Blackpool Council's Local Offer webpage which forms a central information hub, listing all available community activities, including details on accessibility, location, and contact information.
- Use a variety of communication channels to promote activities, such as online platforms, community notice boards, and collaborations with local organisations.
- Actively encourage social workers and healthcare professionals to maintain a current awareness of local activities suitable for people with disabilities, so they can ensure regular signposting to appropriate provision.

5. Enhance accessibility to community activities:

- Community activities should consider the physical accessibility of activity venues, ensuring ramps, lifts and accessible toilets are available.
- Where possible, community activities for people with disabilities should be either free, or offered at a discounted rate, to help remove financial barriers.
- Ensure activities are available throughout the day and evening to accommodate for those who work during the day.

6. Expand the community activity provision in Blackpool, particularly physical activities, and activities for neurodiverse, visually impaired, hearing impaired and young people with disabilities:

- Increase the availability of physical activities and sports for individuals with disabilities, including specialised equipment and trained staff.
- Ensure there are activities available for specific disabilities, such as autism, visual impairment, and hearing impairment.
- Develop the offer of community activities specifically for young people with disabilities.

Recommendations

Transport

7. Improve the accessibility of transport in Blackpool:

- Ensure buses are as accessible as possible, including those with disabilities in future service design, to ensure wider aisles, secure wheelchair spaces, and easier-to-use ramps are incorporated.
- Address time restrictions on NoW cards, to ensure people with disabilities who are in full time employment can utilise the benefits of this provision.
- Ensure audio announcements for visually impaired passengers are consistently available and at an accessible volume.
- Increase the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis, especially during peak times.
- Ensure taxi companies offer alternatives to automated phone systems, allowing people with disabilities to speak directly to an operator if needed to request reasonable adjustments.
- Improve the efficiency of hospital transport services, by coordinating transport for those patients who live in close proximity to share a journey.
- Consider the introduction of a companion pass for carers to travel for free or at a discounted rate when supporting the care recipient.

8. Enhance staff training of all transport employees in Blackpool:

- Implement mandatory disability awareness training for all transport staff, focusing on both visible and hidden disabilities.
- Increase awareness of how to assist passengers with mobility aids and service animals.

9. Improve information accessibility on transport services:

- Provide clear and accessible information about public transport schedules, routes, and accessibility features. Use a variety of formats to display this information, such as audio announcements, braille, large print, and digital platforms, to ensure information is accessible for everyone.
- Ensure that trip information regarding upcoming Rideability journeys is visible and accessible for Rideability passengers.

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