



Annual Report 2024–2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Islington

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The feedback local Healthwatch hear in their communities and share with us at Healthwatch England is invaluable, building a picture of what it's like to use health and care services nationwide. Local people's experiences help us understand where we – and decision makers – must focus, and highlight issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. We can then make recommendations that will change care for the better, both locally and across the nation.

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive, Healthwatch England

A message from our chair

This year, we have delivered a wide-ranging programme of engagement, reaching over 3,000 residents across the borough.

We've continued our commitment to tackling health inequalities through targeted projects, including work on cancer screening and childhood immunisations. Through our work promoting the Progressing Equalities Toolkit, we have secured commitments from key system stakeholders to develop more accessible and equitable services for residents.

We've strengthened our partnerships. Working closely with our Diverse Communities Health Voice network, we delivered an innovative model of community research. Over 500 people from minority communities attended workshops on topics including cancer awareness, diabetes, hypertension, menopause, mental health, and winter wellness. These sessions have had a lasting impact – many participants told us they changed their attitudes towards accessing screening or clinical support, and/or reported making positive changes to their diet and lifestyle as a result of the workshops.

We continued our collaboration with North London Foundation Trust, with Healthwatch staff embedded in clinical teams, helping patients connect with community services. We also worked with the Trust to co-develop their carer's strategy. By engaging widely with carers across North Central London, we've helped ensure that the carer voice is central to the Trust's approach, and that mechanisms for strategic accountability are in place to drive meaningful change.

We've also made important strides on the social determinants of health. Through Evidence Islington, we're working with researchers and community partners to understand the health impacts of poor housing and explore systemic solutions that can lead to better outcomes for local people.

Turning to internal matters, we've made good progress against our own equality pledges; introducing indicators of inclusivity including rainbow lanyards for staff ID, increasing the diversity of our staff and board, introducing a women's health policy and incorporating training around LGBTQI+ awareness, language and inclusivity into our staff training programme.

It's been a year of leadership change. In late 2024 we welcomed a new Chief Executive, Laura Saksena, who joined from South East London Mind and a new Chair, Ewan MacLeod, who had previously served as Treasurer. We also had two additions to the board, Gary Duncan and new Treasurer, Paul O'Donnell. With this refreshed leadership and the continued dedication of our team and partners, we look forward to building on this year's achievements in the year ahead.

About us

Healthwatch Islington is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

Improved health and social care outcomes for local residents.



Our mission

To collect knowledge that reflects the diversity of needs and experiences within the borough and encourage people to feedback their honest views on services.

To use the evidence we gather to influence service delivery, provision, and commissioning for the benefit of local people to improve their experience.

To reach out to empower our local community to be informed about and involved in local services and exercise choice in taking up services.

To support the independent assessment and audit of local services.



Our values

We want to engage communities on issues that matter to them, in ways that are accessible and meaningful to them.

We don't ask people to give us their opinions or feedback on services without offering them information or support in return.

Our year in numbers

We supported more than 3,000 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 10 staff and our work is supported by 15 volunteers.

Reaching out:



858 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

2,707 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as mental health support and finding an NHS dentist.

Championing your voice:



We published 4 reports about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report highlighted the experiences of people managing long-term health conditions.



Statutory funding:



We're funded by Islington Council. In 2024/25, we received £170,258, which is £14,158 more than last year.

Statutory funding comprises 25% of Healthwatch Islington's total funding.

A year of making a difference

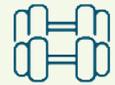
Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Islington. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

We spoke to Deaf residents and patients who needed support to communicate in English about their experiences of interpreting services in primary care.



Our mental health team ran an innovative programme supporting vulnerable young people to access a gym and personal trainer to build confidence and self-esteem.



Summer

Hosting a Healthwatch stall at the Cally Festival and on Chapel Market for a week in July helped us reach over 300 people we wouldn't otherwise have heard from.



Our move to a new office space means we can now offer more volunteering opportunities, and placements to young people with Special Educational Needs.



Autumn

At our Progressing Equality event in October, organisations came together to share ideas and discuss progress on making their services more inclusive.



We shared our insight with the London Assembly Health Committee as part of the Mayor of London's investigation into the state of NHS dentistry.



Winter

Our childhood immunisations outreach worker visited community settings to provide good quality information, supporting residents to make informed choices.



Thanks to our work, a new system was introduced across North and East London to improve access to breast screening for women who need an interpreter.



Working together for change

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, and Islington influence decisions made about services at North Central London Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

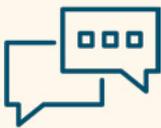
A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



We led the formation of a network of 5 local Healthwatch, helping to change health and social care services at a regional level.

Funding from our Integrated Care Board allows us to run surveys and workshops, gathering region-wide public feedback. A representative from our network (this year, the role sits with Healthwatch Haringey) now works directly with the ICB, ensuring they hear the public's voice.

Improving interpreting in primary care:



We worked with local Healthwatch in the other 4 boroughs, and with our community partners to survey 60 North Central London residents with communication support needs. We asked them about their experiences of interpreting (both signed and spoken word) in primary care.

Many complained of a lack of consistency in terms of quality. They also wanted interpreting to be available more routinely to support a wider range of interactions. We published a report in August 2024 with a series of recommendations based on what we'd heard. We also asked that service users be more involved in the monitoring of the service. We shared our report with commissioners. Our feedback has helped shape the look of the new interpreting service being introduced later this year.

Supporting GPs in North Central London:



Healthwatch Enfield led on producing a guide for GP practices to better engage with and support patients. This included a literature review, pooling examples of good practice from local Healthwatch' reports across North Central London. They also developed a patient survey collecting opinions on GP websites and how they could be made easier to use, which we promoted in Islington. A report on the findings has been shared with the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

Making a difference in the community

We harness the strength of the voluntary and community sector to help shape services and improve care over time.

Here are some examples of our work in Islington this year.

Bringing statutory and community services together



The active participation of statutory services in our community research has built relationships and improved access to support.

We invited iCOPE (the NHS service which offers assessment and treatment for a range of psychological problems) to give a talk on managing better sleep to the Kurdish and Turkish community. The event was hosted by IMECE Women's Centre in January. As a result of learning more about IMECE's work during their collaboration, iCOPE are now actively referring Turkish speakers who require support to IMECE's community language counselling service.

Increasing the diversity of responses to consultations



By listening to people who have the hardest time accessing services, decision-makers can improve care for everyone.

We supported our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners to contribute to the council's consultation about the help available for new mothers with breastfeeding. There is a concern that certain communities are not accessing these support services. Our participation helped public health colleagues develop their understanding of the barriers to access.

Representing the needs and priorities of carers



We co-designed North London Foundation Trust's carer's strategy, ensuring it reflects the needs of carers across North Central London.

We reached out to carers hubs, carers, and local community organisations working with residents under-represented in the Trust's engagement. We brought the carer voice to the forefront, making it a driving force behind the Trust's direction. By embedding clear mechanisms for strategic accountability, we've helped lay the foundation for lasting, meaningful change.

Listening to your experiences

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.

This year's community research brought health providers together with small community organisations and the residents they support. Service providers were given the opportunity to hear first-hand from residents about the barriers they face.



Listening to your experiences

Tackling taboos & empowering the community: raising awareness of prostate cancer

Residents who don't have English as a first language are less likely to get good-quality information about health.

We put on a programme of prostate cancer information workshops. We invited health professionals to deliver the content. Holding these events in community settings helped the men feel more comfortable and more engaged. They shared their thoughts and experiences with the clinicians, who were able to address their concerns and tackle any misunderstanding.

Who did we reach?

Around 90 men came to our information workshops on prostate cancer. Urologists from local hospitals delivered the highly interactive sessions. The events were well attended by Black African men who are considered higher risk.

“Men are normally quite quiet in sessions, but in this one they were empowered by other men opening up and sharing. The session was great. It really tackled a lot of misinformation around the topic.”

Project lead at Community Language Support Services

What difference did this make?

- Most of the men attending the sessions said that they would be making changes to their diet and/or exercise levels as a result of attending
- After one session, three asymptomatic participants requested to be tested by their GP. The results came back positive for prostate cancer, but at early stages. They are currently discussing treatment and were extremely grateful for the timely information that prompted their action.
- The NCL Cancer Alliance Clinical Network Director for Urology Pathways delivered most of our prostate cancer awareness sessions. He found them very worthwhile. Involvement in the project has prompted him to consider what could be done more broadly to increase uptake of PSA2 testing (the test for prostate cancer) in higher risk groups.

Listening to your experiences

Improving access to breast screening for women with language support needs

As part of this year's Health Inequalities-funded Community Research and Support project, Healthwatch has been bringing health providers together with small community organisations and the residents they support.

By coming out into the community to meet residents in places where they feel comfortable, and where interpreting support is available, the North London and Central and East London Breast Screening Service have been able to get information to communities that weren't being reached by other means.

They've also been able to listen to women's experiences. We've brought providers and service users together in the same room, so the process of giving feedback to drive service improvement becomes more straightforward and more dynamic.



“The conversational approach ... builds rapport and gives women the confidence to raise issues that matter to them. Going forward this is the style we will be using when we go into the community – we want to have a conversation.”

Health Promotion Lead, NL and CEL Breast Screening Service

Women said that they were being turned away when they arrived for their breast screening appointments because they had asked for an interpreter. Upon further investigation, it was discovered that the radiographers were not only sending these women away, they were also recording them as DNAs (Did Not Attends). Radiographers have strict targets for the number of screenings they are expected to carry out and can allow only 8 minutes for each appointment. There were often long waiting times to access interpreters virtually, and there were technical issues with the iPads that were used in the screening cabins. Radiographers were not offering interpreting because it took too long.

What's changed as a result of the women's feedback?

The system has been changed. Radiographers can now use their mobile phones to enable translation via Google. A copy of the patient's questions, and the answers given, are saved and added to the patient record, so language needs are recorded going forward. This new approach was introduced in April, so it's still early days, but feedback from radiographers has been overwhelmingly positive.

Hearing from all communities

Over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Working with our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners to widen our reach. Partners hosted information workshops on topics such as prostate cancer and men's mental health, to ensure we reached more men.
- We delivered two projects with City & Islington college to reach more young people.
- Our stalls in local libraries and at events across Islington helped us reach residents who were not involved with community organisations.



Hearing from all communities

Hearing from residents who are housebound or need help to look after themselves at home

We've interviewed residents receiving council-funded home care

It's not always easy to have your say if you're dependent on carers who visit you at home. This year, we've gone out to meet with home care service users at community centres and carried out surveys by phone. We've asked people for feedback on the care they receive and related topics including their relationship with their home care agency, how easy the agency is to contact, and if they've ever had to make a complaint. We've enjoyed comprehensive and in-depth conversations. 26 residents and family members have taken part.

What difference will this make?

We are collating the data we have gathered into a report to share with Adult Social Care at Islington Council. We will make recommendations for improvements based on the issues we've identified, which we will continue to investigate. Going forward, decision-makers will have a better understanding of people's needs.

Helping college students understand the facts about vaping and its impact on health

We delivered a series of information workshops at City & Islington college.

We collaborated with the college on a project for students following Level 2 Health and Social Care and Sports courses. We designed a bespoke workshop on vaping with input from colleagues in the Public Health team and resources from Breathe, the locally commissioned service providing support to stop smoking.

Our volunteer manager and our advice and Information worker delivered 4 workshops in January reaching between 40 and 50 students.

What difference did this make?

Students increased their knowledge of the health impacts of vaping. They also used the information gained at our workshops to develop their own activities and messaging which they shared with the wider college community at a special public health event in March.

Information and signposting

Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint, or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us. This year 2,707 people have reached out to us for advice, support or help finding services.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Putting on information events on topics including cancer awareness, mental health, childhood immunisations, menopause, diabetes, and hypertension.
- Healthwatch staff embedded within our local mental health trust provide advice and signposting to colleagues managing patient caseloads on the support available to patients within the voluntary and community sector.
- Providing an advice and information service for all Islington residents.



Supporting a domestic violence survivor to access dental implants

A psychologist in the NHS Foundation Trust contacted us on behalf of a client who had suffered the loss of her teeth.

The client, who was on benefits, wanted to get dental implants to restore her confidence and quality of life, but this treatment is not covered by the NHS.

We contacted NHS England who suggested a number of options: approaching the Integrated Care Board for a discretionary relief fund application, Women's Aid (who have funds available for DV survivors), Dentaaid (a charity offering pro bono dental treatment) and the Criminal Injury Claim route. We sent all the information back to the Psychologist to follow up.

As a result of this case, we are reaching out to local community organisations offering support to DV survivors to build a wider picture of the current experience of survivors needing dental treatment, and pathways for financial support.



■ Thank you so much this is really helpful.”

Helping a young mother with no support networks

She needed immediate assistance with items for her newborn whilst her application for Universal Credit was being processed.

We were contacted by a hospital professional on behalf of a young mother, newly arrived in the community and without income or benefits. She was living in temporary accommodation and also needed access to a washing machine. We contacted two organisations who were able to provide support with baby equipment - Little Village and Manor Gardens. We submitted an application to the Resident Support Scheme on her behalf for the washing machine and other baby essentials, which was successful.

The resident gained access to the items that she needed and developed knowledge and a network of support around her.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given 65 days of their time to support our work. Thanks to their dedication, we can better understand what's working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited community centres, libraries, and public spaces to promote our work
- Gathered feedback on local people's experiences of health and care.
- Participated in research projects investigating home care, cancer awareness, and hypertension.



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think, to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.

“I’m learning so much as time goes by.”

Nji has recently joined our volunteer team.

“Although my volunteering experience is short, it is a privilege for me to volunteer at Healthwatch Islington which is a part of Healthwatch England.

At Chapel Market, I enjoyed meeting the community and talking to residents.”



“Volunteering with Healthwatch Islington has been incredibly rewarding.”

Alka Rita has been volunteering with Healthwatch Islington since last year. She has helped us gather feedback about home care, carrying out in-depth interviews with residents at day centres. She’s also represented us at numerous community events and on our information stall at Islington Central Library.

“This experience has helped me grow personally and professionally while reinforcing my belief in the importance of Healthwatch’s work – ensuring that every community member’s health concerns are heard and addressed.”



Be part of the change.

If you’ve felt inspired by these stories, contact us and find out how you can get involved.



www.healthwatchislington.co.uk



07538 764436



info@healthwatchislington.co.uk

Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from Islington Council under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure

| Income | | Expenditure | |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------------|----------|
| Annual grant from Government | £170,258 | Staff Costs | £380,068 |
| Additional income | £507,166 | Project Costs | £184,124 |
| Total income | £677,374 | Total Expenditure | £564,192 |

Additional income includes:

- £135,000 from North London NHS Foundation Trust to fund the work of our Mental Health Partnerships team.
- £68,000 from North London Foundation Trust to fund development of the carers' strategy
- £20,000 from the Integrated Care Board to fund our research on interpreting services in primary care
- £47,000 from the Integrated Care Board to support our childhood immunisations work
- £70,000 from the Integrated Care Board to support Community Research.
- £14,000 to promote our challenging inequalities toolkit to statutory and voluntary sector partners.

Finance and future priorities

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of community, especially people experiencing health inequalities, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Challenging Health Inequalities

Tackling inequality remains at the heart of all we do. This year, we'll continue delivering our ICB-funded projects focused on increasing uptake of cancer screening and childhood vaccinations in communities with the lowest access. We'll also support system partners to embed equalities pledges into their work, holding them to account to make services more inclusive and accessible.

2. Working at the Intersection of Needs

Through our signposting work and embedded roles within North London Foundation Trust, we'll keep shining a light on the gaps in support for people with multiple, complex needs. We'll work closely with voluntary and community sector (VCS) partners to raise awareness and push for action. This includes developing new resources for patients currently on ADHD waiting lists and continuing with innovative and empowering models of health research and education.

3. Supporting Sustainability

Healthwatch Islington is run by a skilled and passionate team of staff and volunteers. To support and sustain this, we're investing in the systems that help us do our best work—including a new CRM, HR database, and a refreshed learning and development programme. These changes will help us strengthen our foundations as we head into another ambitious year.

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Islington, Claremont Building, 24-27 White Lion Street, N1 9PD

Healthwatch Islington uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Board consists of seven members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2024/25, the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as the recruitment of the new chief executive, financial matters and improving the infrastructure support for the organisation by subscribing to an HR advisory service. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

There were no providers who failed to respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we've consolidated our strategic presence, actively contributing to forums. We've presented our community research findings to the Borough Partnership Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board, and the All-Age Mental Health Partnership Board, where we've helped shape system-level thinking.

We take insight and experiences to decision-makers at the North Central London Integrated Care Board. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Islington is represented on the Islington Health and Wellbeing Board by Laura Saksena, our Chief Executive. Laura also represents us on the borough's Safeguarding Adults, Borough Partnership, and All-Age Mental Health Partnership Boards.

Healthwatch Islington is represented within the North Central London Integrated Care Partnership and on the North Central London Integrated Care Board by Healthwatch Haringey. This representative role is rotated between Healthwatch on an annual basis. At our monthly team meeting, Haringey updates the other local Healthwatch and gathers their feedback for these committees.



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