

Experience the change:

Community Perspectives on Menopause Support in
Luton



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Introduction

This report explores the experiences of women in Luton in relation to menopause—an area of health that remains widely under-discussed, despite its significant impact on physical, emotional, and social wellbeing. Drawing on community engagement conducted by Healthwatch Luton, the report aims to highlight how menopause is understood, supported, and accessed by local women, particularly those from ethnic minority and marginalised backgrounds.

Conversations held through focus groups, surveys, and health events revealed that many women feel unprepared for the onset of menopause, and unsure where to seek support. Common concerns included a lack of accessible information, limited GP guidance, and cultural barriers that make open discussion difficult. For some, symptoms were dismissed or misunderstood, while others expressed uncertainty around treatment options such as HRT.

Women also identified the need for safe, informal spaces to speak about menopause with peers, and called for services that reflect their lived experiences, including translated resources, culturally aware staff, and female-led support.

This review offers insight into how menopause support in Luton can be strengthened—through improved awareness, better access to care, and community-driven approaches that prioritise inclusion, dignity, and understanding. By centring the voices of women across different ages and backgrounds, the findings contribute to a wider conversation about how to improve midlife women's health across the system.

Methodology

To explore the experiences of women in Luton regarding menopause, Healthwatch Luton used a community engagement approach rooted in inclusive, informal discussions. The aim was to understand how menopause is perceived and supported across different communities, and to identify barriers to care, information, and symptom management. Menopause was not a standalone focus of the original evaluation but consistently emerged as a significant concern during wider women's health discussions.

Community Events and Conversations

Menopause was discussed during two targeted *Healthy Mother, Healthy Pregnancy* events at Hockwell Ring Community Hub and Bury Park Community Centre. These events were attended by over 70 women in total, many of whom were aged 35–55. While the events were originally focused on preconception and family health, menopause emerged naturally during conversations about hormones, mental health, and access to GP services. Several women shared experiences of untreated or misdiagnosed symptoms, confusion around HRT options, and difficulty accessing specialist support.



Informal feedback and Lived Experiences

In addition to event-based engagement, informal feedback was gathered through open discussions and verbal testimonies at stalls and drop-in sessions. Some women described experiencing symptoms such as hot flushes, anxiety, sleep issues, and changes in menstruation, but did not associate them with menopause until much later. Others reported being turned away or offered minimal advice by GPs. These lived experiences helped identify gaps in both menopause literacy and service response.

Women who had reached or were approaching menopause shared concerns about stigma, lack of culturally relevant support, and difficulties navigating GP services for symptom management or HRT.

Inclusion and Sensitive Engagement

The engagement approach prioritised cultural sensitivity and discretion, recognising that menopause is often considered a private or taboo topic in some communities. Particular attention was paid to including voices from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, African, and Eastern European backgrounds—groups who face additional barriers to accessing healthcare. Language needs and cultural context were carefully considered throughout the engagement.

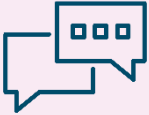
The methodology aimed to ensure inclusivity and representation, with a focus on engaging students from a range of ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. A mixed-methods approach was used, combining informal qualitative interviews, thematic analysis of open-ended feedback, and observational insights gathered during engagement events. While the sample size was limited, the diversity of participants and the depth of responses provided valuable insight into unmet needs, systemic gaps, and opportunities for more responsive service design.

Key Themes and Findings

Summary of Perspectives

Women across Luton shared a wide range of experiences and views about menopause—highlighting not only gaps in awareness and service provision, but also the emotional, social, and cultural challenges surrounding this stage of life. Their perspectives reveal common concerns about access to support, recognition of symptoms, and the lack of open conversation—especially within underrepresented communities.

Midlife Women



Many participants in their 40s and 50s described feeling unprepared for the onset of menopause. Several were unsure whether their symptoms—such as anxiety, poor sleep, or irregular periods—were menopause-related, and many had never received clear guidance from a health professional. Some expressed frustration about long waits for GP appointments or being offered limited treatment options. There was also a strong call for more accessible, plain-language information and for menopause to be discussed earlier in life, before symptoms begin.



“I thought I was losing my mind – I didn’t know it was menopause.”
(Participant, Community event)

“No one ever explained to me what to expect, I just had to figure it out” (Woman, Focus group)

“it took three appointments to be offered HRT.” (Attendee, Health engagement session)



Women from Ethnic Minority Backgrounds

Participants from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African, and Eastern European backgrounds shared concerns about the lack of culturally sensitive menopause support. Some said menopause was a taboo topic within their communities or families, while others reported feeling unable to speak to male doctors about symptoms. A recurring issue was the absence of translated materials or trusted outreach—especially for older women. Despite placing trust in local staff, many felt that menopause was not treated as a visible or supported issue within the health system.

Summary of Perspectives

Impact on access and Wellbeing



Lack of access to information and support for menopause symptoms had a clear effect on women's health and confidence. Several described feeling dismissed by professionals or unsure how to raise the issue during appointments. Symptoms like brain fog, anxiety, and sleep disruption impacted work, relationships, and day-to-day life. Many reported not knowing that their experiences were menopause-related until much later.



"I just thought I was burning out, no one ever explained it could be hormonal." *(Participant – Community Health Event)*



Views on Service Access and Delivery

Participants highlighted the need for menopause support that is clearly signposted, proactively offered, and free of stigma. Many felt that GPs lacked the time or knowledge to discuss symptoms in depth, and that support was only given if requested explicitly. Others wanted more women-led, peer-based spaces where experiences could be shared openly. The importance of culturally sensitive, multi-lingual materials was also raised.

Key Feedback



68%

of those consulted, said they had not received any formal information about menopause prior to experiencing symptoms.

52%

Felt their symptoms were not taken seriously

25%

stated they would prefer to access menopause advice outside of traditional GP appointments.

Summary of Key Findings

The evaluation identified several critical themes affecting women's access to and experiences of menopause related support in Luton:

Key Themes Influencing Women's Experiences:

Low awareness and Health Literacy

Many women reported not recognising early menopause symptoms or knowing where to seek help. Common signs such as anxiety, fatigue, and irregular periods were often misunderstood or dismissed until much later. Few had received information about menopause prior to experiencing symptoms.

Gaps in GP Support and Follow-up care.

Participants described inconsistent support from GPs, with some being offered little advice or treatment options. Others faced delays in accessing HRT or referrals. Follow-up care was rarely offered, leaving many women feeling unsupported throughout their journey.

Emotional and Mental Health impact

The psychological effects of menopause—including low mood, irritability, and sleep disruption—were widely reported. Several women shared feelings of isolation, embarrassment, or being overlooked, especially in workplaces or healthcare environments.

Silence and Stigma in the Community

Women from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, and Black African communities noted that menopause remains a taboo subject within their families and wider communities. This made it more difficult to seek advice or share experiences openly.

Lack of Culturally Sensitive Support

Language barriers, male GPs, and a lack of tailored information made services feel inaccessible for some. Participants expressed a need for women-led, culturally competent support delivered in trusted local settings.

Recommendations

Increase Early Education

Introduce menopause awareness earlier in life through schools, community health sessions, and women's wellbeing programmes. Early understanding of symptoms and hormonal changes helps reduce fear, misdiagnosis, and delayed help-seeking.

improve Primary Care Responses

Equip GPs and frontline health staff with up-to-date training on menopause symptoms, communication skills, and referral pathways. Women reported feeling dismissed or confused by inconsistent advice; consistent, compassionate care is essential.

Make Support Visible and Accessible

Ensure menopause-related support is clearly signposted in GP surgeries, pharmacies, workplaces, and community hubs. Promote available services—such as HRT clinics or NHS guidance—through posters, social media, and outreach in trusted spaces.

Provide Peer- Led and Women Only Spaces

Create opportunities for informal, women-only support groups in community settings. These peer-led sessions help reduce stigma, encourage open discussion, and offer reassurance through shared experience—particularly valuable for those who may avoid clinical settings.

Address Cultural and Language Barriers

Develop translated materials and culturally appropriate resources tailored to the needs of Luton's diverse communities. Consider involving local women in the design and delivery of content to ensure relevance and accessibility.

Embed Menopause in Public Health Planning

Treat menopause as a core part of women's health policy, not a niche issue. Embed it into local health strategies, workplace wellbeing agendas, and Integrated Care System priorities to ensure long-term, systemic change.

Continue Community-Led Engagement

Regularly consult women across age groups and backgrounds to ensure menopause support reflects real needs and lived experiences. Ongoing engagement through listening events, surveys, or outreach in underrepresented areas will help shape more responsive, inclusive services.

Conclusion

This review has shown that menopause is a significant yet often overlooked area of women's health in Luton. Many women described feeling unprepared for the changes they experienced, with limited access to clear information or timely support. Despite its widespread impact, menopause remains under-discussed and poorly recognised—particularly among women from ethnic minority backgrounds, where stigma or language barriers often make it harder to seek help.

Participants spoke of missed opportunities for early advice and shared concerns about inconsistent support in primary care. Some described being offered little more than basic reassurance, while others faced long waits or confusion around treatment options like hormone replacement therapy (HRT). These experiences highlight a pressing need for more informed, accessible, and compassionate responses within local services.

Women expressed a clear desire for peer-led, culturally appropriate support that extends beyond clinical settings. Many welcomed the idea of local drop-in groups or women-only spaces to share experiences and access advice in a safe and supportive environment. Translated materials and visible signposting were also seen as key to ensuring inclusion for older women and those with limited English.

While this review draws on insight gathered through broader women's health engagement, it provides an important foundation for further exploration. A dedicated, system-wide approach is needed to ensure menopause support is built into public health planning, workplace wellbeing, and community care. By acting on the voices shared in this report, services in Luton can help ensure no woman is left to navigate menopause alone or without support.

About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Luton is the local champion for people using health and social care services across Luton. We promote choice and influence the provision of high-quality health, social care, and wellbeing services for all in our community.

Healthwatch Luton (HWL) has significant statutory powers to ensure that the voices of local people are heard and acted upon by those who commission, deliver, and regulate health and care services. HWL engages with all parts of Luton's diverse population to ensure that a broad range of experiences and views are considered, understood, and reflected in decisions about care. Our work is rooted in strong community connections and grounded in the real-life experiences of the people we serve.

Healthwatch Luton is part of the wider Healthwatch network across England, one of three local Healthwatch organisations in Bedfordshire. We belong to a national network supported by Healthwatch England, which provides guidance and oversight to ensure local Healthwatch work consistently and effectively in each of the 152 local authority areas in England.

As the only independent body focused entirely on people's experiences of health and social care, our role is to make sure that these services—and the decisions surrounding them—are shaped by the people who use them. At Healthwatch Luton, we believe that everyone's voice matters and should be at the heart of care.