

The views of Sefton Residents on the GP Access Survey

April 2025

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“The nine local Healthwatch continue to be critical friends and champions of the patient voice for NHS Cheshire and Merseyside. They have delivered an important piece of work – gathering thousands of views from residents on how they access and experience GP services across our region.

This survey offers an essential temperature check on how well recent investment and changes to primary care are landing with the public. The findings provide us with rich insight into what’s working and where further improvements are needed to ensure timely, fair, and effective access to GP services.

As always, we are grateful to the Healthwatch network for their support, constructive challenge, and for ensuring we stay grounded in real patient experiences as we plan for the future.”

— Clare Watson, Assistant Chief Executive, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside

Executive Summary

The Healthwatch Sefton GP Access Survey looks closely at how local residents feel about their primary care services. Conducted between October 2024 and March 2025, we gathered feedback from 689 people in Sefton representing different backgrounds. The survey revealed both challenges and successes in how GP services are provided.

In Spring 2024, national plans were introduced to improve patient access to primary care services through the Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP). To understand the real-world impact of these changes and ensure that the patient voice is central to any future developments, all 9 Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside ran a joint ICB-commissioned project to hear directly from residents. The Cheshire and Merseyside-wide along with individual reports for each Healthwatch area can be found in Appendix 4.

One of the key issues highlighted was that many people found it hard to get appointments. A lot of residents had trouble with the phone systems and online booking. Only 50% of those surveyed eventually managed to get face-to-face appointments, it often took several tries using different methods to secure them for those who couldn't. Out of all the Healthwatch, Sefton showed the lowest rate of securing appointments.

Key findings from our research include:

- **Nearly 69% of respondents used the telephone** to contact their GP, but many experienced long wait times and interruptions. The average ease-of-access rating was 4.9 out of 10, lowest among all the Healthwatch. **While 89% of those who secured appointments were satisfied with their experience, the process of getting to this point was challenging for many.**
- **Vulnerable groups**, including elderly patients, people with disabilities, and caregivers, **faced barriers to accessing services**. However, when support was available, these groups reported positive experiences, particularly appreciating staff who understood their needs.
- **Alternative service routes, such as pharmacies and other healthcare providers were used** by some patients when they were unable to secure GP appointments. While these options offered support for some, others found them insufficient for their healthcare needs.
- **Interactions with staff received mixed reviews**, with almost half of respondents rating their experience as excellent (5 stars). However, the other half reported feeling dismissed or not fully heard, especially during their contact with reception staff.

These findings will contribute to future improvements to primary care services across Sefton, ensuring that patient experiences inform strategic planning and changes in service delivery.

Key themes and trends

Our analysis identified many themes in patient experiences, emphasising both issues in the system and opportunities for improving GP service delivery.



Challenges with Access and Booking

- Patients commonly reported challenges with the 8am booking system, which affected working parents and those with caregiving responsibilities.
- The 'competition' for same-day appointments often led to multiple call attempts and long waiting times, causing some patients to seek alternative care options or postpone seeking treatment.



Challenges with Digital Services

- Digital services provided convenience for many, but they also created barriers for others.
- Elderly patients and people without reliable internet access have reported feeling excluded by the growing trend toward online booking systems like PATCHS.
- This 'digital gap' especially affects people or groups who might not have the tools or knowledge to use these platforms easily.



Inconsistent Staff Experiences

- Patient experiences with practice staff were mostly negative.
- While many praised the professionalism and empathy of the clinical staff, some reported challenges with the reception staff and doctors, especially regarding not being seen by the doctor but the Advance Nurse Practitioner (ANP) and attitude.



Other Ways to Access Care

- The use of alternative services, such as pharmacies and NHS 111, has also produced mixed results.
- Some people took care of their health issues using these options, but others had to go back to their GPs.
- This was mostly because of a lack of appointments.

1. Introduction

Healthwatch Sefton are the local independent consumer advocate for health and care services, forming part of the national network of local Healthwatch across England.

As part of our core activity, we seek the views and experiences of residents of Sefton, to help inform how health, care and wellbeing services are planned and delivered. The information we gather is then analysed so we can identify and act upon trends, presenting our findings to decision-makers to improve the services people use. We also share Sefton resident's views anonymously with Healthwatch England who strive to ensure that the government puts people at the heart of care nationally.

The project ran from **25th October 2024, until 20th March 2025**, delivered and supported by the wider Healthwatch team.

In line with the **Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP)** priorities for Cheshire and Merseyside, the GP Access survey explored various important aspects of accessing and delivering GP services.

- **Patient contact methods:** We asked people how they book GP appointments—**by phone, online, or in person**—and whether these options are **simple, accessible, and reliable**. The survey also looked at whether patients get **clear and friendly information from their first contact**, ensuring **fewer barriers, quicker access, and a better overall experience**.
- **Appointment availability and delivery:** We explored **waiting times for appointments**, what type of consultations people are offered, and whether these **options meet their needs**. We also checked if patients receive clear appointment details, including who they will see and why.
- **Support for vulnerable groups:** The survey looked at how GP surgeries support people who need extra help, **such as those with disabilities, language barriers, or unpaid carers**. We asked whether these groups feel listened to and whether practices are making reasonable adjustments to improve access.
- **Technology and alternative healthcare routes:** We explored whether patients are aware of and comfortable using **digital tools like online booking systems, NHS apps, and virtual consultations**. The survey also looked at whether patients understand when and how to use these tools, and **what alternatives are available if they cannot access digital options**. Additionally, we examined whether **people turn to pharmacies, private healthcare, or urgent care services** when they can't get a GP appointment—and how well these alternatives support patient needs.

2. Methodology

The survey was created to gather a wide variety of feedback about GP services. It was made to be shared in different environments and online so that many patients and service users could respond.

The survey was produced in both online and paper-based formats to accommodate different respondent preferences and to increase accessibility.

Healthwatch Sefton would like to thank all the people who participated in this project – for generously sharing their experiences and time to help inform future strategies and services.



689 responses

collected via including

digital survey link and **paper responses** gathered through physical distribution and collection points.

Cross section of places we engaged

(See Appendix 3 for a complete list)

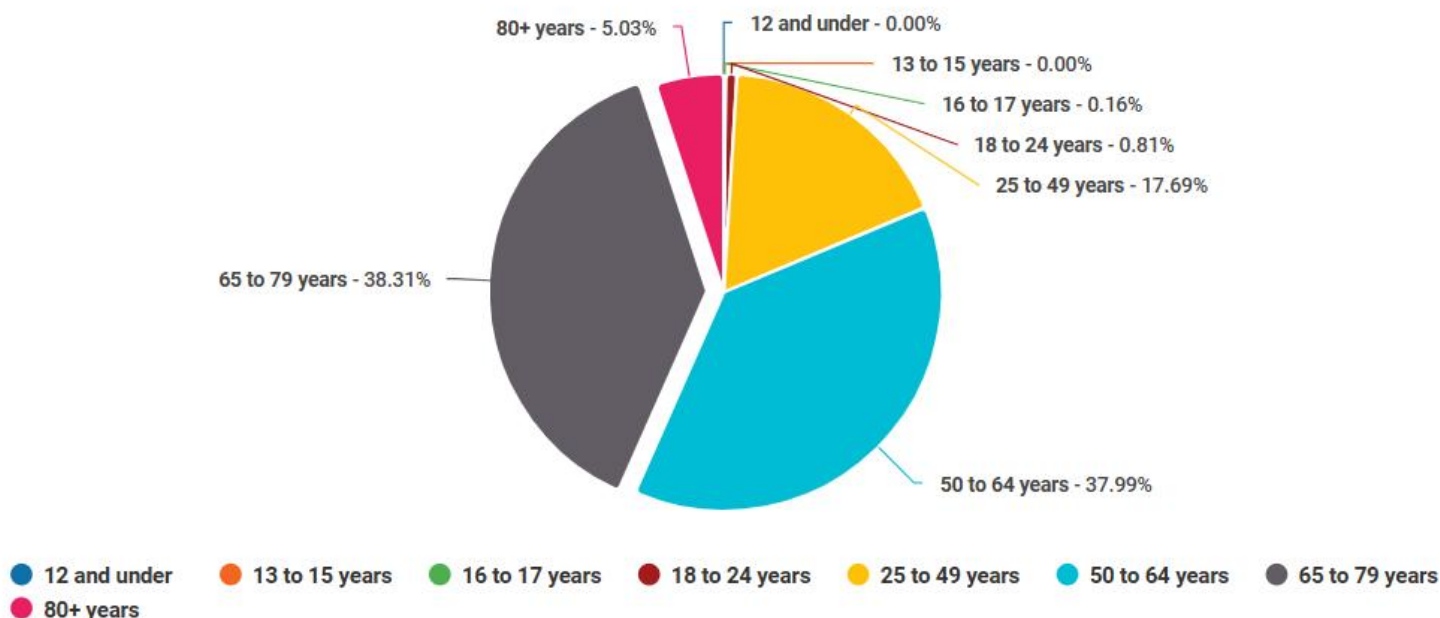
Open Engagement Responses	Gathered through in-person discussions at community hubs, leisure centres, libraries, and market stalls.
Survey Promotion & Distribution	Digital outreach via social media (primarily Facebook), email newsletters, and website links. Printed materials placed in GP surgeries, pharmacies, and public spaces.
Partner Organisations	Supported by NHS Trusts, ICBs, local councils, and third-sector organisations to extend survey reach.

3. Who did we hear from?

The survey gave respondents the opportunity to complete demographic information should they wish to disclose it.

3.1 Age

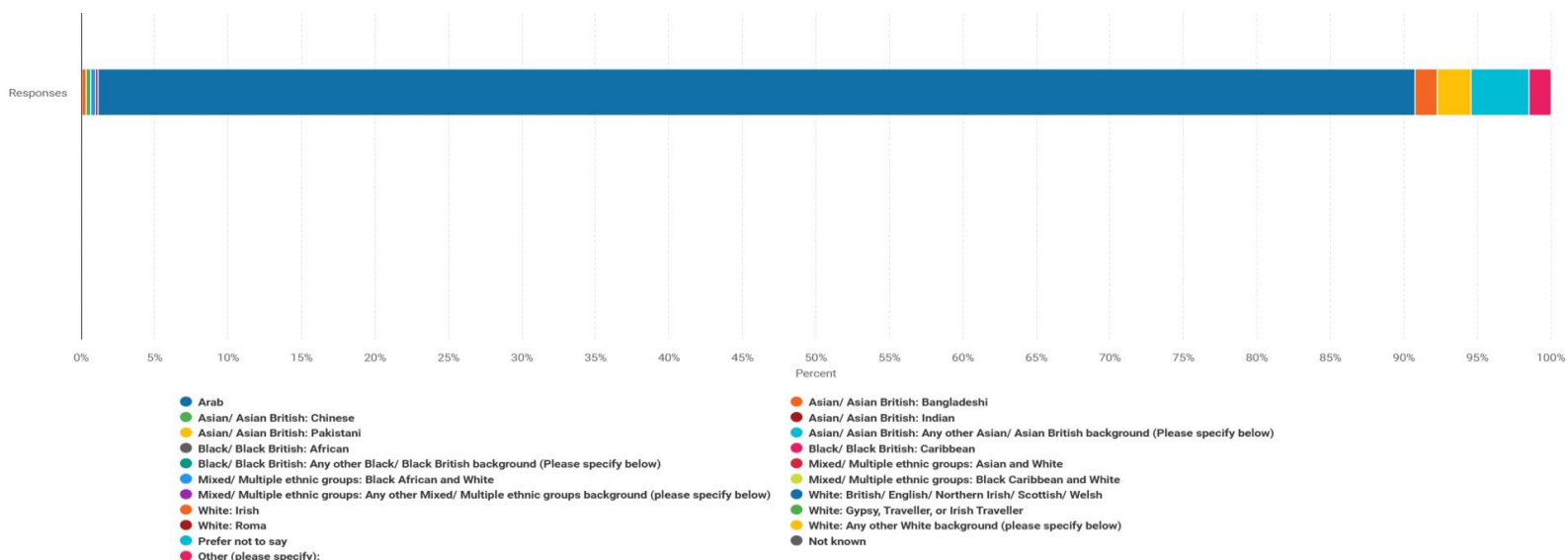
616 responses



- **82% of respondents were aged 50 years and over.** 77% identified as women and 20% as men.
- 97% indicated their gender identity matches their birth sex, and **83% identified as heterosexual/straight.**

3.2 Ethnicity

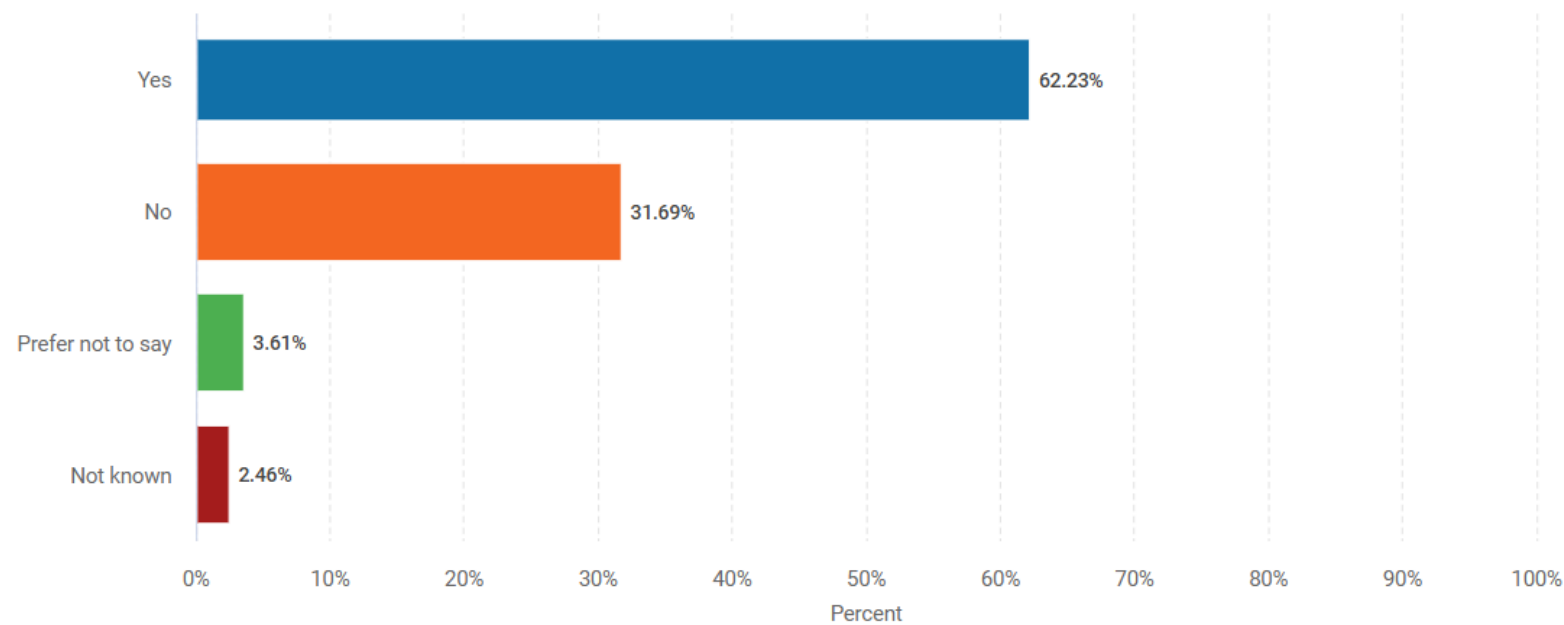
608 responses



- **90% of respondents identified as White British**, with small representation from Asian, Black, and Mixed backgrounds, each below 1%.

3.3 Do you have a long-term health condition?

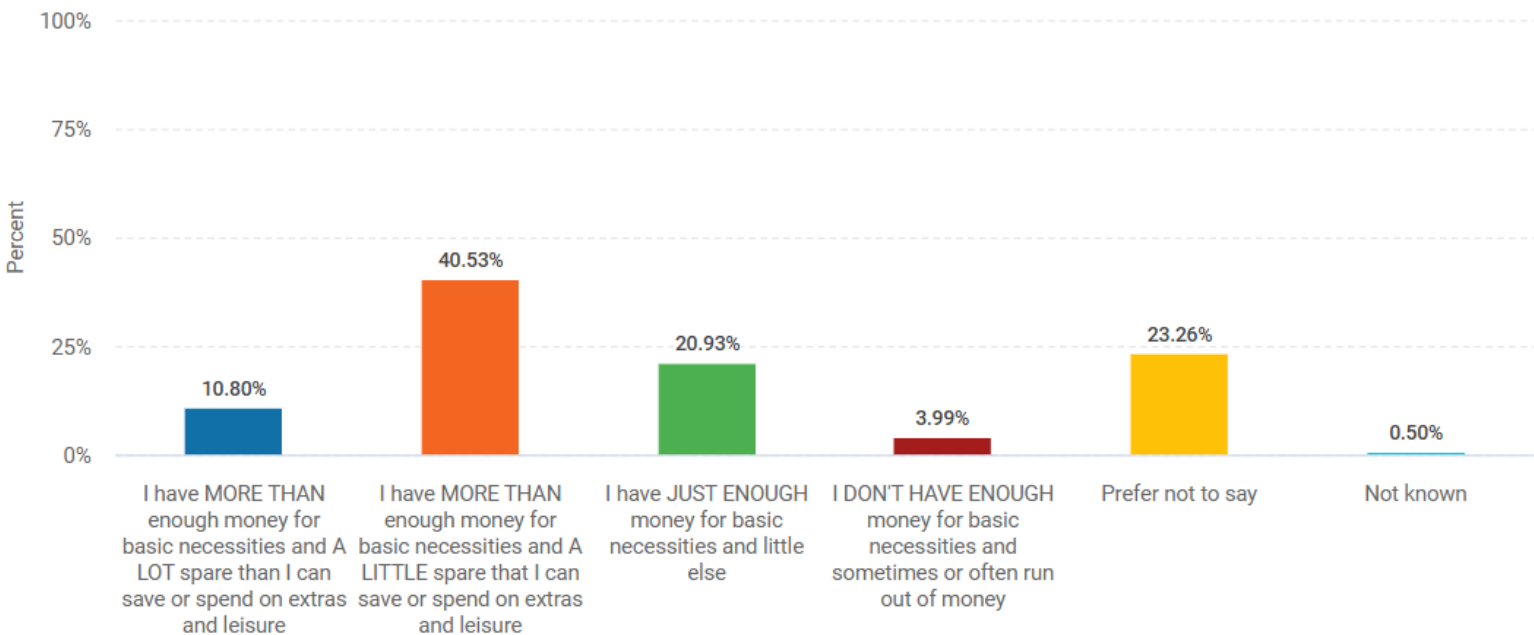
609 responses



- **62% of respondents reported having a long-term health condition**, while 32% said they did not.

3.4 Which of the following best describes your current financial position?

602 responses



- 70% of respondents said they have enough money to cover their basic needs. Of those, 11% said they have a lot of extra money, while 40% said they have a bit of extra for saving or leisure. Nearly 1 in 4 people (21%) said they just have enough or don't have enough to meet their basic needs.

4. Findings

Our survey highlights important challenges in accessing GP services in Sefton, with **long wait times, difficulties booking appointments, and issues with staff interactions** emerging as key concerns, including not being able to see a GP instead of an Advanced Nurse Practitioner (ANP).

While **some patients praised the support received**, others faced **barriers due to limited availability, accessibility issues, and a lack of clear communication**. Many turned to **alternative services such as pharmacies and NHS 111**, but these were not always effective.

The findings in this section provide a deeper insight into the experiences of patients and the impact of these issues on their health and well-being.

The comments, views and accounts of all our respondents can be found in Appendix 2.

4.1 GP Access – reasons, barriers, channels and ease of access

Many people needed to contact their GP practice multiple times in the last year, mainly for advice or treatment of new or existing health issues. A lot of people found it difficult to get through, with an average ease-of-access rating of **4.9 out of 10**. This is the lowest among all the Healthwatch areas.

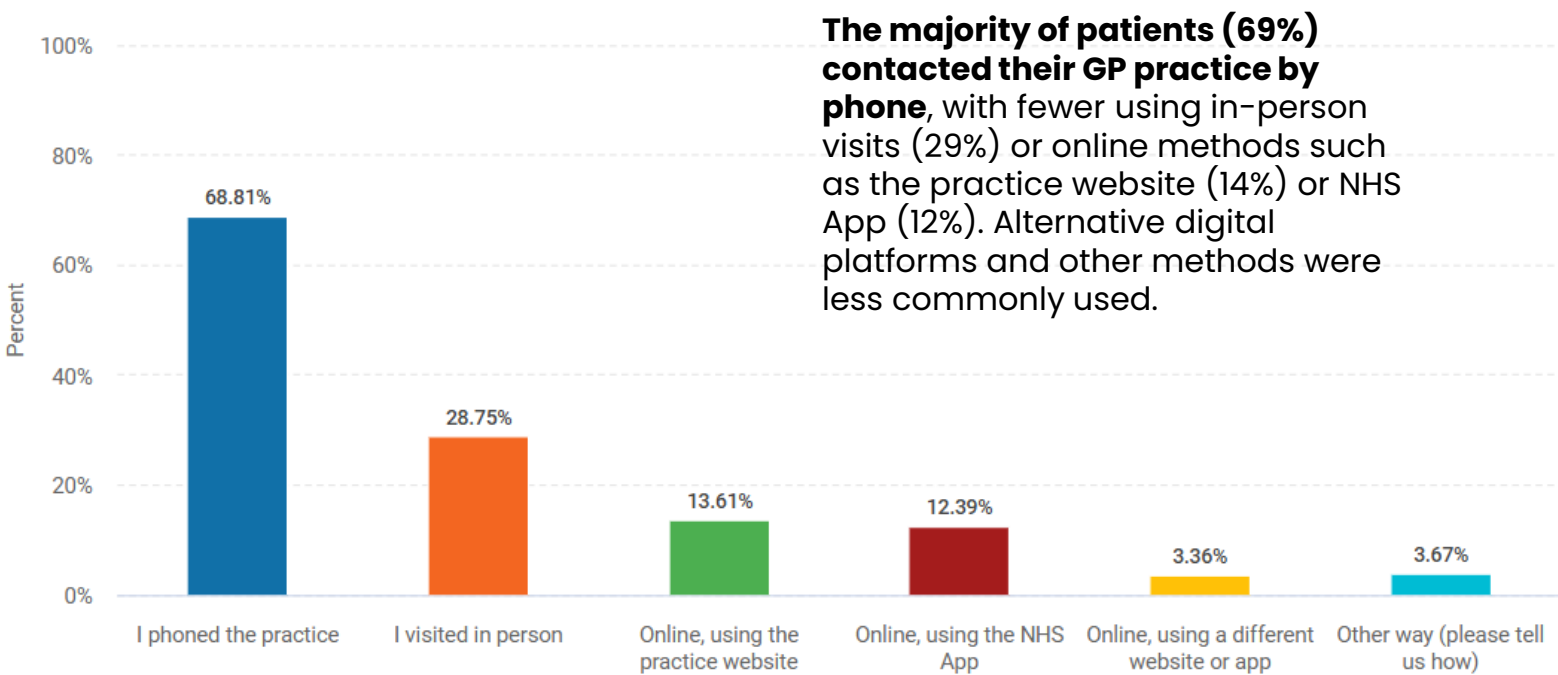
The most common way to contact a GP was by phone, though in-person visits, and online platforms were also used. **Barriers included having to call at 8am, long wait times, limited appointment slots, and difficulties for those with work commitments, caring responsibilities, or disabilities.** Some patients felt frustrated by not being able to see the GP of their choice or a GP instead of an advanced nurse practitioner.

However, some patients had **positive experiences, appreciating helpful reception staff, efficient booking processes, and the availability of online options.** Those who successfully accessed care often found their GP practice responsive and supportive.

A small group avoided contacting their GP due to previous negative experiences or dissatisfaction with the service. Most people who don't use the service said they don't try to get care because it's hard to make an appointment.

Which method did you use to contact your GP?

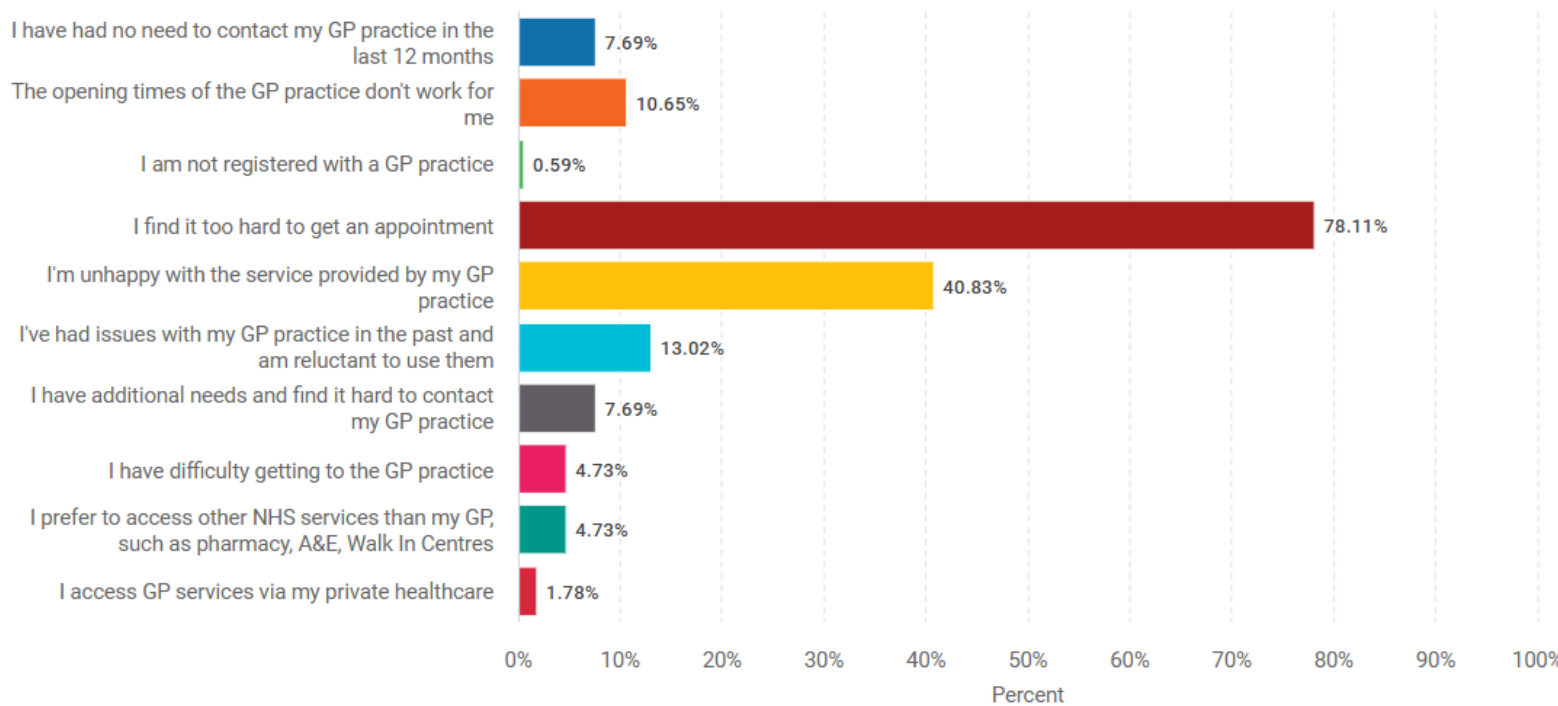
654 responses



Why have you not accessed or tried to access your GP Practice in the last 12 months?

613 responses

We asked people why they had not accessed their GP practice in the past 12 months. The question explored whether this was due to personal circumstances, service-related challenges, or a preference for alternative healthcare options.



The main reason people did not go to their GP practice was **difficulty getting an appointment (78%)**. Others said they were unhappy with the service (41%), the opening times did not work for them (11%), or they had past negative experiences (13%).

This report further explores alternative care pathways for those who found it difficult to access primary care.

What did not work?

In line with ensuring fair and timely access to appointments, many people described frustration with having to call at 8am, often facing long queues or finding that appointments had already gone. Some said they had to take time off work just to try and get through, while others found even calling before 8am left them far back in the queue. For people with mental health conditions, the stress of competing for an appointment in this way was particularly challenging.

"It's not convenient having to call at 8am to try and get an appointment, you can't get an appointment for a few days ahead. Nor can you call into the surgery to book an appointment they will only process 8am calls."

"Because I work in a school, I find it impossible to make an appointment to see a GP. You have to phone from 8am and stay on the line, this could be 10 minutes or 20 mins. I can't do this as I am travelling or in work. I would need to take time off just to make an appointment."

"You can only 'possibly' get an appointment if you phone at 8am. But even phoning at 7.55am to be certain to get through I can still find myself at number 20 in the queue and all appointments have gone."

"It is impossible to get an appointment unless you are on the phone at 8am or fill a form in at that time. My serious mental health condition does not always allow me to do this and I end up missing out. It is an extremely stressful way to get an appointment."

"The queue on the telephone system at 8am each weekday feels like a battle to get through and then to get an appointment to see a Dr. Then you are left concerned you may have taken a scarce appointment with a Dr from another person more in need."

"Allows calls at 8am but automated message says no appointments straight away."

Additionally, **some people find it hard to use online systems, either because they don't have internet access or struggle with technology** suggesting that **access is not equal**. This is especially true for elderly patients or those with disabilities, like hearing impairments or mental health issues, who might not feel comfortable or capable of using the internet. People reported that even if they figured out how to use online systems, there were still no bookable appointments left.

"They won't make you an appointment via the telephone. Online only. They say if you don't have internet access you can call and they will fill the form in for you. If you go to the surgery they point you in direction of a screen, show you how it works and leave you to it. I was waiting for someone who had an appointment, I watched a woman have to be helped 3 times by another patient because she had no idea what to do!"

"Had to fill in form online and send photos. Was fobbed off and told to go to optician, waited 3 weeks for appointment with swollen, red raw eyelids, optician said it was dermatological infection and to go back to doctor."

"I have a smartphone and am well above average with using online technology but the response from the Practice is slow, sporadic and poor."

What did not work?

For those with disabilities or chronic health conditions, accessing healthcare is especially challenging. They reported finding it hard to book appointments online or by telephone.

"Everything is now done online or via Text message. You can't get an appointment at all as they go too quickly in the morning. GP appointments can be booked but not at short notice. I am also main Carer for my Husband who is 82 with health issues. I recently got him an appointment with Specsavers for a hearing test, and he now has Hearing Aids. It seems they are doing less."

I have ADHD, my partner makes my appointments, but the set up makes it impossible.

"I am disabled and can't always be on the phone at 8 am to get an appointment, depending on how bad a day I am having."

What worked?

Despite these difficulties, many people also share positive experiences that show the GP practice is trying to support everyone. **Some patients have reported that, although there may be delays or busy times, the reception staff are usually able to help when they finally answer the phone.** Many 'working patients' said that online booking systems proved helpful for them. Others appreciate the extra support given their caring responsibilities and are happy with the assistance they receive when calling to book an appointment.

"They are really good with me, I'm a nurse, so I only request when I need it, mainly telephone triage."

"Tricky to attend for an appt in person due to working hours, but contact via phone or through PATCHES has been excellent."

"The online system is actually much easier for working patients, much better than waiting in telephone queues when you are working. Streamlines your problem."

"I care for my husband who has Alzheimer's and vascular dementia, and they are very kind and understanding about appointments."

"Generally, not a great difficulty in contacting surgery, but you need to be very early and fast on the redial to get an emergency same day appointment. Internet works well for repeat prescriptions."

"Once I finally got to see my GP, he was brilliant, although not surprised it had taken me so long to get to see him."

4.2 Making an Appointment

We talked to people about their experiences when trying to make an appointment with their doctors and how quickly they could get care. Their responses showed the difficulties in reaching the reception, the long waiting times, and how available appointments really are. **This part also looks at how easy it is to schedule an appointment and if other options like going to a pharmacy or using NHS 111 services, were explored.**

62% (383)

respondents reported **waiting in a queue** to have their call answered when trying to reach their GP practice.

40% (274)

were **unsuccessful** in securing an appointment.

48% (156)

respondents **were able to get an appointment on the same day**, and 84 respondents were seen within a week.

89% (288)

found the **date and time of their appointment convenient**, indicating that most respondents were satisfied with the scheduling once appointments were secured.

48% (298)

respondents tried to treat themselves through self-care before attempting to get an appointment, while 268 sought information online.

A regular theme was **the unavailability of appointments**—many respondents reported that when they called, all slots were already booked or only emergency appointments were offered, forcing them to either wait weeks or be told to call back at 8 am repeatedly.

Additionally, many people noted **issues with the online triage system**, which either prevented booking in advance or redirected them away from receiving a proper appointment. **Poor communication and strict booking rules make it hard for patients to get care.** Receptionists often refuse to book appointments over the phone or transfer calls without helping. This leaves patients with no choice but to look for care through other means.

Could you tell us more about why you didn't get an appointment?

Many respondents said that when they called, there were **no appointments available or available in advance (three weeks or more)**. Some were told to call back at 8am every day, and only emergency appointments were offered in many cases.

"Reason I did not get an appointment they told me I was number 10 in the queue so I waited and waited for an hour and 45 minutes then the receptionist told me all appointments have gone for that day. please ring back tomorrow morning first thing I've done this numerous amount of times days and still get no answer."

"Because after over an hour (125 phone calls) the line was still busy and I basically lost the will to live."

"Because despite it being Tuesday all appointments were taken up for the next fortnight. I was told to ring at 8 am this is hopeless you just hang on and are then told no appointments available."

"I called the practice, to book an appointment with the doctor who I had been dealing with, I know from there website they can book up to 2 weeks in advance, the receptionist told me I can't book in advance she informed me I can only ring on the day tried this for 2 weeks without getting to see the GP who I had been dealing with. I eventually did an online request and was given an appointment the same day, but with a GP I do not want to deal with."

"I wanted to rebook an appointment that they had previously cancelled due to lack of staff. I was directed to website but when I went to website nothing available so I rang them again to be told all routine appointments are cancelled.....emergencies only due to staffing. They didn't know when appointments would be available again."

Some respondents reported problems with the **triage system** – that the online system was always full/unavailable and the receptionists often **stopped them from booking appointments in advance. The system required using an online form, which was not easy for everyone to use.**

"Got fobbed off with a nurse rather than a doctor."

"The receptionist decreed (incorrectly) that I needed a physio, not a doctor."

"Takes weeks even month's and receptionists who are not medically qualified give appointments and not always appointments available when given. It is not right to wait until end of day and say ring 999 as all GP's have gone home."

"I have been fobbed off twice. Back pain isn't important. I have then been seen by 2 trainee GPs who were terrible."

"No idea! Was told that I could have a phone consultation in a week's time. I was having all the symptoms of a heart attack."

"I was told that unless I was acutely unwell I would not get an appointment."

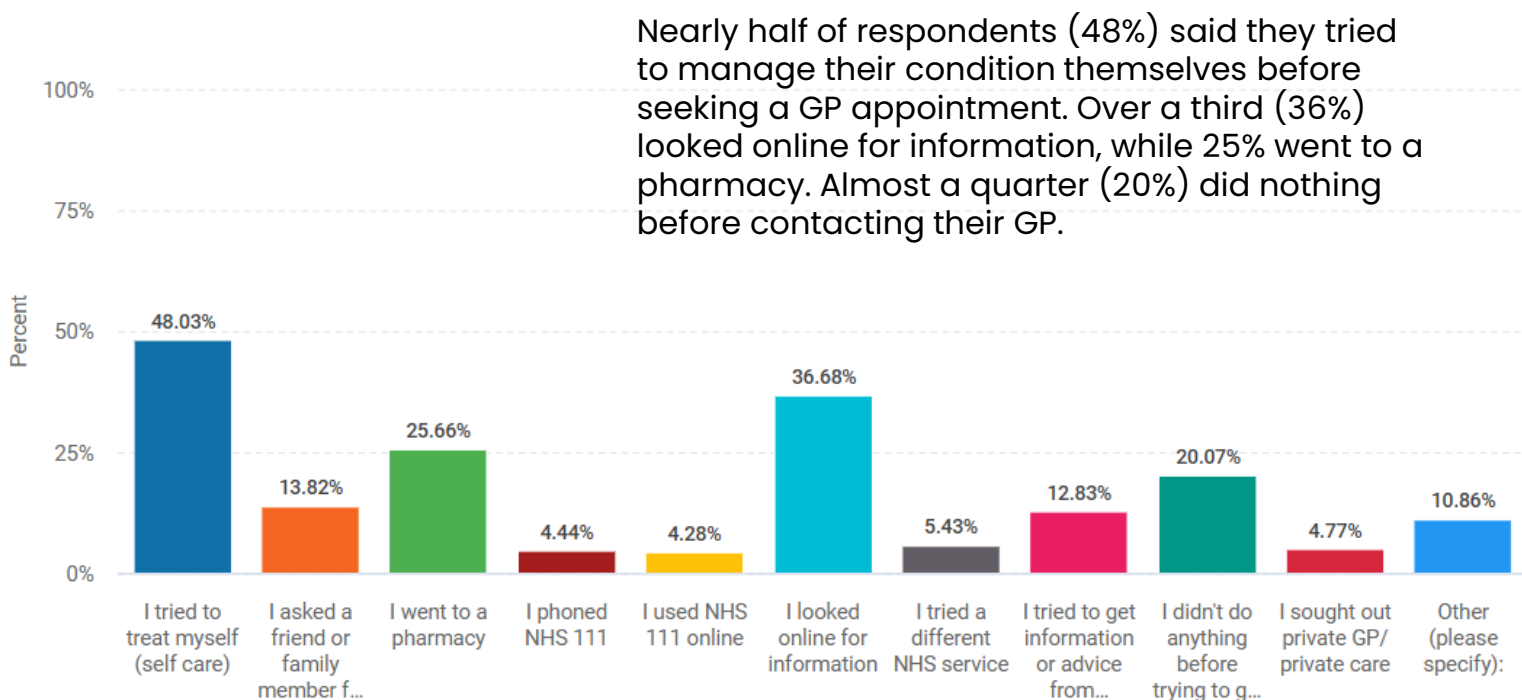
"Because there wasn't an appropriate appointment available and it was outside the Patches time. It did feel frustrating."

"Refused to make an appointment and told me to go away and use the triage service and way to for a call, which can take up to 48 hours"

Thinking of the last time you tried to get an appointment; did you try any of these alternative routes first?

608 responses

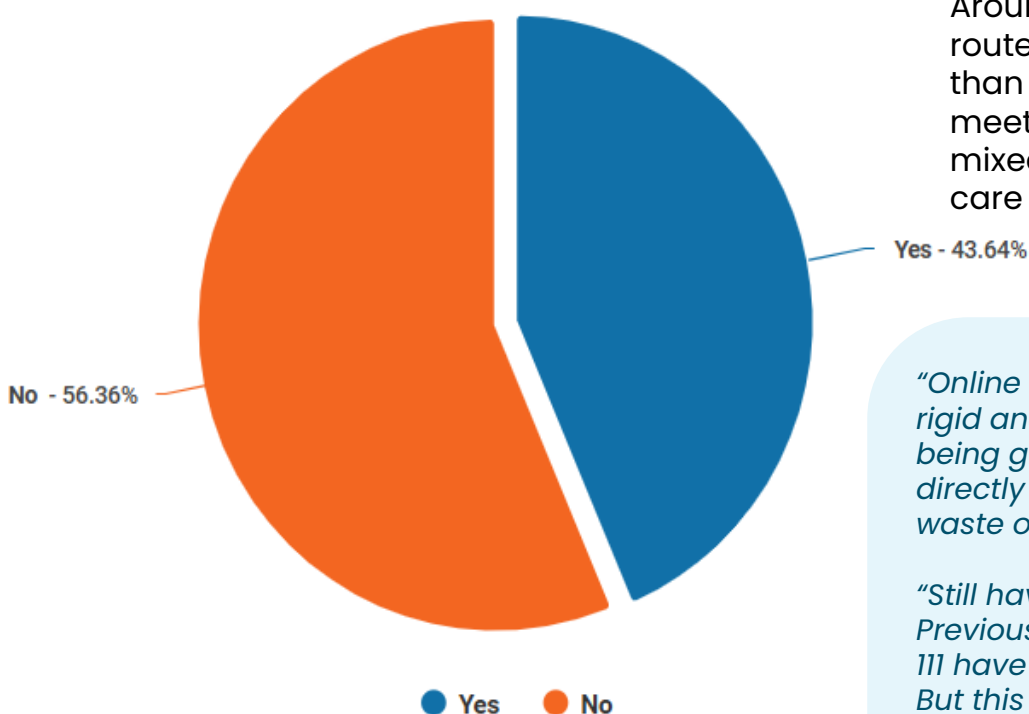
We asked respondents whether they tried any alternative routes before attempting to book a GP appointment. This included self-care, asking family or friends for advice, visiting a pharmacy, calling or using NHS 111 online, looking up health information online, or seeking help from another NHS service. We also asked if they sought private care, tried to get advice elsewhere, or if they went straight to their GP without trying anything else.



- Several mentioned needing face-to-face care due to complex or urgent conditions, or being instructed by hospital consultants, nurses, or opticians to see their GP.
- Others cited medication reviews, mental health concerns, or needing treatments not available over the counter. Some had already tried online services, e-consult forms, or walk-in centres without success.
- People also mentioned challenges with booking links, unavailability of appointments, or feeling their issue couldn't be self-assessed.

Did you find the route(s) worked well for you?

582 responses



Around 43% (254) found alternative routes worked well, while more than half 56% (328) felt they didn't meet their needs, suggesting mixed success in finding suitable care outside GP appointments.

"Online e-consultation is slightly rigid and often results in advice being given to contact the surgery directly so can often feel like a waste of time which is off putting"

"Still haven't got an appt. Previously, after repeated failures, I have been able to book me in. But this isn't a IHI situation really as it's for planned involvement."

"Quite often I will try any other avenues possible before trying to contact our GP. The hunger games of trying to secure an appointment is extremely off putting. This leaves people like me, those we care for and the elderly who may have no support at a real disadvantage."

"Pharmacies I found to be rude and dismissive even though my issues within the remit advised by NHS. Told basically to go see my GP!"

"Went to the chemist as I'd been bitten by an insect and my arm was swollen hot. Chemist they could not treat it as it was infected and needed antibiotics. So went straight to doctors but no one could or would see me. Told to go to the drop in centre. Rang the drop in centre they were fully booked for that day. So I ended up going to hospital A & E where I was eventually seen to and prescribed antibiotics."

Some respondents said that alternative routes worked well for them. They mentioned getting same-day appointments via NHS 111 or the NHS App.

"A and E was excellent, health care was excellent."

"I tried home solutions, read up about it and tried the suggestions, I bought 2 items to try help it. I didn't try the pharmacy as I knew what it was and help as needed by the Dr."

"The chemist works well"

"111 were very helpful and send me to A&E [hospital name]"

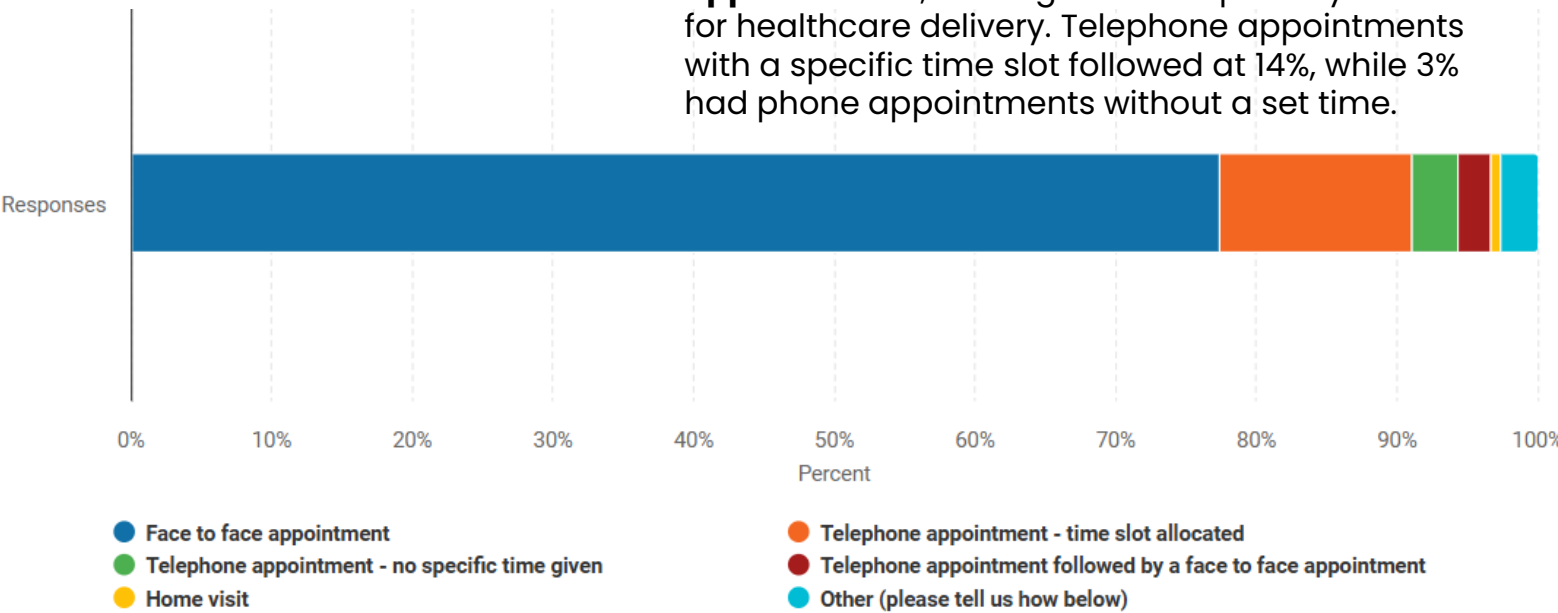
However, many **mentioned long wait times, having to give up on appointments.** They also mentioned 'Pharmacy First' to be insufficient.

4.3 Appointment Experience

How was the appointment delivered?

336 responses

Most respondents (77%) attended in-person appointments, making them the primary method for healthcare delivery. Telephone appointments with a specific time slot followed at 14%, while 3% had phone appointments without a set time.



What worked?

Many respondents praised the care they received once they reached a doctor—sharing positive experiences with both GPs and nurse practitioners who were described as empathetic, helpful, and knowledgeable.

"I asked to see a specific GP who has a long waiting list but I was prepared to wait. He gives me time and is a good listener and acts accordingly."

"The PATCHS system asks your preference regarding f2f or telephone and I have always been allocated my preferred choice. Most recent appointment within two weeks but it was non urgent and I had asked for certain days and face to face so was happy with how this was accommodated."

"Very helpful on all issues."

What did not work?

Respondents reported long waits for face-to-face consultations, **confusing telephone triage** that sometimes led to unnecessary extra appointments, and **difficulties with online booking methods that excluded some patients**. Some people are worried that impersonal reception practices and policy decisions are getting in the way of providing patient-centred care.

"The staffing in the surgery also appears to be insufficient. It is incredibly hard to access any information when the 'relevant' person would only work 1 day per week."

"My blood test results were not made available to me prior to the appointment. Two weeks later, they still haven't been added to my record and I don't know my actual results. The doctor didn't tell me and they're not on my record. Also, I'm still getting texts from them telling me I need to have a blood test and to come and pick up the forms, even though I've had the test and the follow up appointment."

"Reception staff not helpful."

"Already mentioned above problem with ANP attitude. I was sent to a&e and told surgical team accepted me as she'd spoke to them ahead and I wouldn't wait. Triage nurse told me this wasn't the case and this wasn't the process. I waited 7 hours in extreme pain. ANP should be aware of process if sending patients to A&E."

"I do not like telephone appointments - get nervous trying to give full details - can be distracted by questioning consequently miss out some of what I meant to say. Feel nervous and constrained more so on telephone."

"It takes my husband longer to get a face to face appointment than me, I assume because I'm vulnerable as I have cancer"

"Problem came as person doing appointment changed and unknown to me it went from double to single appointment which was not helpful."

Were you satisfied with the way your appointment was delivered, and did you feel that the person you saw was the right one to speak to?

We asked people if they were happy with how their appointment was delivered and if they felt they spoke to the right person. The answers show that the majority of people were happy, but a few had some concerns.

89% (277)

said they were happy with how their appointment was delivered.

80% (255)

agreed when we asked if they felt the person they saw was the right one to speak to.

Some respondents reported poor experiences due to staff unfamiliarity with their history, lack of continuity, and feeling dismissed or misunderstood. Concerns were raised about poor communication, unhelpful attitudes, and a reliance on Advanced Nurse Practitioners (ANPs) or locums for complex needs. People with long-term conditions or disabilities felt the care lacked the consistency and understanding they needed.

"There was another occasion when I received a text from GP to contact them re blood test required. Eventually after numerous failed calls I got through. The person on the phone told me there was nothing on the system re a requirement for blood tests! She said someone would ring me that day after 1:00 no one rang but I received a call from a Doctor the following day. He told me there was no record of blood test requirement on System & the text could not have come from their Surgery. I said I would call in & show them text & had the name of GP who requested tests. He then said he would arrange the paperwork! He then commented "so it's not an emergency then". I never said it was an emergency, I just wanted the paperwork for blood tests, as requested by their Surgery, I never asked for a Doctor to ring me either."

"This was the second time I had been with the same issue. The first doctor I saw was uncommunicative didn't look me in the face, seemed totally bored and didn't examine or ask questions. After 3 weeks of getting worse I specifically asked for a different doctor and was dealt with in an excellent manner and was booked for steroid injection."

"Our family does not know who our GPs are or what they look like..... no idea!"

"Felt she was bored never looked me in the eye, never examined me properly seemed annoyed I asked questions. Came out feeling really disappointed."

"I've never seen the GP whose list I'm on and feel this is a lost opportunity for a conversation about my ongoing health issues."

"Doctors can no longer refer to a consultant and have to go through a triage system at the hospital which is pointless when you have been under care of a consultant previously."

"The doctor wasn't trained or it was a nurse, they didn't know what they were talking about."




"Telephone manner was awful, felt like I was being told off and didn't give me any information or support etc."

"As mentioned above I should've seen a GP. I explained my concerns and receptionist told me ANP could deal with it but this advice was incorrect."

"I was given a prescription for pregabalin . Had to return due to no improvement, saw different practitioner who put me in line for blood test. The results turned out not to be neuropathy but thyroid, anaemia and B12 issues. Waiting for another blood test but still lost feeling in end of my fingers! Maybe an earlier blood test might have prevented this, just saying."

Thinking of the reason for your last appointment, did you feel your needs were met?

608 responses

Yes		61.87%	482
No		18.49%	144
Partly		19.64%	153

What did not work?

Many people expressed difficulty in obtaining **timely GP appointments**. They reported experiencing long wait times, repeated cancellations, and sometimes being unable to secure an appointment at all. The booking system is frequently described as “frustrating”, leading some patients to either give up or resort to emergency alternatives like A&E.

“Terrible service, near impossible to book appointments online or even speak to a receptionist unless you are prepared to wait till they are ready to answer the phone.”

“Eventually, my needs were met by the health centre I was referred to. Unfortunately, the difficulty in contacting my GP practice and the subsequent delays in getting a response prolonged the issue I was experiencing.”

A common theme in patient feedback is the **delay or inaccuracies in diagnoses and treatment** plans. Some patients feel that their medical concerns were not thoroughly investigated, resulting in delayed or incorrect diagnoses. This has led to ongoing issues or worsened conditions, with several patients reporting that they had to advocate for further investigations, such as blood tests, X-rays, or referrals to specialists.

“I was given treatment for a personal condition, I would prefer an examination to confirm a diagnosis as the treatment hasn’t worked to relieve the issue.”

“I took my daughter for further check and antibiotics after being partially treated at a walk in centre. Doctor accused me of lying about obtaining antibiotics from walk in centre (presumably poor record keeping!)”

“Eventually my needs were met by the health centre I was referred to. Unfortunately, the difficulty in contacting my GP practice and the subsequent delays in getting a response prolonged the issue I was experiencing.”

“Not listen to had tests but nurse did not completed specimen properly by her so test could not be performed.”

“Urine test showed kidney problem. Asked for a further sample which I did the following day. Still no results. I’ll have to phone again.”

What worked?

Many people felt well cared for, highlighting that doctors and nurses took the time to listen, provide clear guidance, and act on their concerns. Some patients were pleased with how quickly they could get an appointment. Others mentioned being referred for further tests quickly.

"I felt heard, supported, was given information and the issue was discussed with me carefully."

"Examination very thorough. I was sent for blood tests - although there was no follow up."

"I called in to drop off repeat prescription & receptionist gave me an appointment for that day, I was so grateful. Saw a lovely Doctor who gave me a prescription for antibiotics."

"Once I was seen by the GP things moved well."

"Appropriate treatment plan initiated."

4.4 Practice Staff

How would you rate the attitude of the people you spoke to?

611 responses

We asked respondents to rate the attitude of the practice staff they interacted with, considering factors such as friendliness, kindness, professionalism, helpfulness, and respect. Participants rated their experience on a scale from 1 to 5 stars, with 5 stars indicating an excellent or highly positive attitude and 1 star reflecting a poor or negative experience.

Star Rating	Responses		
1	<div><div></div></div>	9.82%	60
2	<div><div></div></div>	8.84%	54
3	<div><div></div></div>	22.75%	139
4	<div><div></div></div>	20.29%	124
5	<div><div></div></div>	38.30%	234

Only 38% of the respondents rated their experience 5 stars, while 20% gave 4 stars. The remaining responses were more evenly split, with 22% rating 3 stars, 9% rating 2 stars, and 10% giving 1 star.

If you have additional needs how well were you supported by the practice staff?

584 responses

We asked people how well the practice staff supported patients with additional needs, such as being an informal carer, having a disability, hearing difficulties, or requiring language support. **Responses were mixed**, with a majority of patients indicating they had no additional needs (74%).

Answer Choices	Responses		
I have no additional needs	<div><div></div></div>	71.40%	417
Well	<div><div></div></div>	8.73%	51
Ok	<div><div></div></div>	12.33%	72
Poor	<div><div></div></div>	7.53%	44

However, those with additional needs reported varying experiences. **Of the 167 people with additional needs**, 30% said they were well supported, 43% indicated they were okay, and 26% expressed poor support. The answers suggested that there is further opportunity for improvement in awareness and tailored support for people with specific requirements.

What did not work?

Some people felt their specific needs were ignored by staff, which made them feel unsupported. Additionally, negative feedback was given regarding reception staff, with some patients feeling dismissed or given medical advice by unhelpful receptionists, which affected their experience.

"Nobody has ever asked me about my carer role - I looked after my dad for several years before he died and now I am running around after my mum."

"Nobody has ever taken into account any needs, I've brought it up but was fobbed off and told I could only discuss one thing per appointment."

"As a carer who regularly tries to make appointments for my children with additional needs they are appalling."

"The practice doesn't offer any support for additional needs as far as I know? I have hearing loss and wear bilateral hearing aids plus a lanyard stating I have hearing loss. I have never been asked if I need support. My children have additional needs and this is on their system. They have never been asked if they need support, but I am always challenged about talking on their behalf despite their being permission on their file."

"My age.. Another surgery will not accept me....I and other people I know believe they're nor interested in older people...and just want to avoid abs ignore ya."

What worked?

Some respondents were thankful that the practice staff helped meet their needs, such as changing appointment times for those with mobility or hearing issues. Others appreciated the flexibility in scheduling for carers.

"My GP knows about my carer role, on top of needing support for my own mental health. I feel that I get good support when I feel that I need it. They contact me, to review my medication & wellbeing."

"I often take my mum whose 89 for appointments and everyone is always lovely and understanding with her."

"Parkinson's disease as well as other chronic illnesses. Mobility issues managed appropriately."

5. Summary of GP Access Survey Findings Against PCARP Objectives

PCARP Question	Yes/No/Partly	Explanation
Feel valued and important/understood from first contact	No	Only 38% of respondents rated staff interactions 5 stars. The overall ease-of-access was 4.9/10, with many reporting feeling dismissed during initial contact.
Feel confident when calling GP practices	Partly	69% contacted their GP by phone, with 62% reporting waiting in queues. Many lacked confidence in calling due to long queues, unhelpful reception staff, and difficulty in securing an appointment. Almost half of the respondents tried self-care before.
Accommodating the needs of carers	Partly	Out of 142 who identified as carers, 14 responses around carer needs suggested positive experiences.
Able to make/manage appointments through phone, online, or in person	Partly	Phone was the most used method (69%), almost half secured same-day appointments in the 8 AM rush. Online booking was useful for some but excluded digitally disadvantaged groups. In-person booking was rare and often required prior appointments.
Understand the process/system for apps and technology	No	A digital divide was evident, with only 29% trying online methods. While some found online tools convenient, others (especially the elderly) struggled with confusing systems and a lack of clear alternatives.

5. Summary of GP Access Survey Findings Against PCARP Objectives

PCARP Question	Yes/No/Partly	Explanation
Assurance that language & translation services are effective	Inconclusive	There was little mention of translation services or language barriers meaning we were unable to classify.
Choice of appointment types (face-to-face vs. online)	Yes	76% were satisfied with the delivery method, many reported difficulty specifically getting face-to-face appointments
Clear appointment details – time and doctor	Yes	89% of respondents found their appointment time convenient, some were unclear about who they were seeing and why.
Clear appointment details – why	Yes	80% of respondents agreed that the person they had their appointment with was the right person to speak to. 76% were happy with how the appointment was delivered.
Set times for online consultations rather than open-ended wait	No	11% (of 326) said that they received a specific time for phone/video appointments. Most of them had face-to-face appointments.

6. Next Steps

Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside will continue to listen to the experiences of local people in accessing GP services and encourage residents to share their feedback with their local Healthwatch through their online Feedback Centres.

- [Healthwatch Cheshire East](#)
- [Healthwatch Cheshire West](#)
- [Healthwatch Halton](#)
- [Healthwatch Knowsley](#)
- [Healthwatch Liverpool](#)
- [Healthwatch Sefton](#)
- [Healthwatch St Helens](#)
- [Healthwatch Warrington](#)
- [Healthwatch Wirral](#)

The findings of this joint report highlight what is working well and identify where improvements can still be made. It will be shared with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), and partners across Cheshire and Merseyside to help inform the development and delivery of GP primary care services.

Each local Healthwatch will also share their individual reports and findings with their respective Place Leads, Primary Care Networks, Local Authority and VCSFE system partners to support discussions and improvements in access to primary care.

Local Healthwatch will monitor the impact of the actions and activity that is generated as a result of these findings through our independent engagement and feedback gathering activities.

We will provide regular updates to the ICB System Primary Care Committee to ensure that patient insight and intelligence continues to inform and shape future services.



7. Appendices

(Click the underlined phrases to access the files)

Appendix 1: The survey

Appendix 2: The comments, views and accounts of all our respondents can be found here. This includes feedback from our online survey.

[Comments on the spreadsheet can be filtered by Place (Q3)]

Appendix 3: Cross-section of places we engaged

Appendix 4: Link to the Cheshire and Merseyside wide report and other local reports



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