

Alcohol Brief Intervention

October 2025

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About Healthwatch South Tyneside

Healthwatch South Tyneside is your dedicated consumer champion.

We work with users of local NHS and social care services to hear about your experiences, identify any issues or problems and help generate improvements.

We also assist commissioners and providers of healthcare services by conducting patient surveys, visiting healthcare venues, and attending meetings with user groups and feeding back our findings in regular reports.

Healthwatch South Tyneside:

- Has the power to enter and view services.
- Influences how services are set up and commissioned by having a seat on the local health and wellbeing board.
- Produces reports which influence the way services are designed and delivered.
- Provides information, advice, and support about local services.
- Passes information and recommendations to Healthwatch England and the Care Quality Commission.

Background

The Alcohol Brief Intervention survey was developed with South Tyneside Council's Public Health Team following the launch in March 2025 of 'Calling the Shots', the borough's Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy.

The strategy, developed by South Tyneside's Alcohol Strategy Group, partners and local residents who have faced alcohol-related issues, recognises that everyone in South Tyneside will play a part in reducing the harm caused by alcohol.

It builds on South Tyneside's '[A Better U](#)' campaign, which promotes everyone working together to improve health and wellbeing. It looks at how alcohol harm is influenced by individual drinking habits and community-wide consumption and considers universal and targeted support specific for certain groups in the community.

South Tyneside has the highest number of alcohol-related deaths in the North-East and second highest in England.

Six key priorities were agreed in the strategy which include:

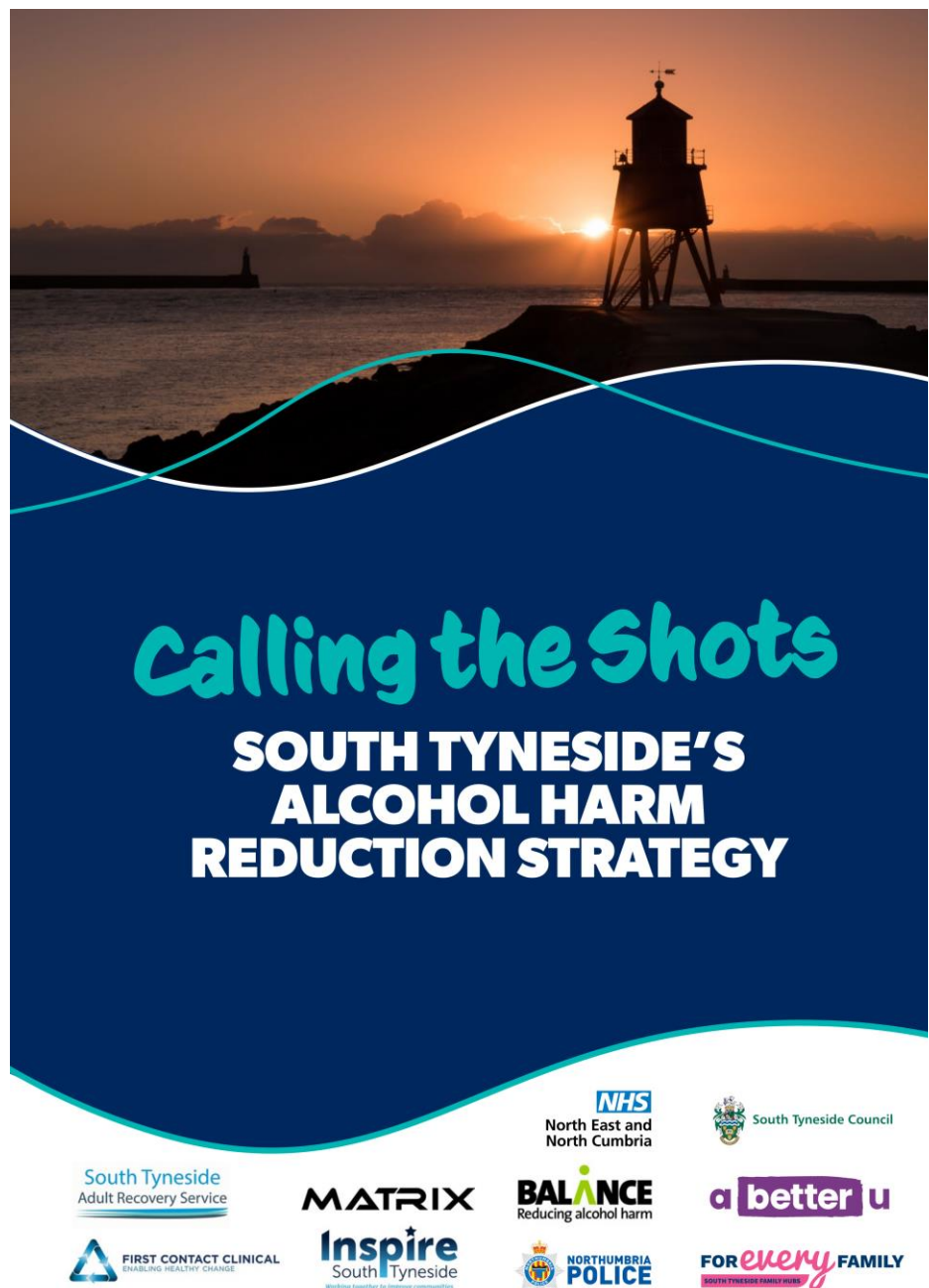
- Prevention and early intervention of alcohol misuse
- Protecting our children and young people, and creating the conditions for an alcohol-free childhood
- Reducing health inequalities
- Delivering a quality, safe and effective treatment system
- Tackling alcohol-related stigma
- Improving community safety.

Building on these priorities, in March 2025 Healthwatch South Tyneside was contacted by South Tyneside Council's Public Health Team. We were asked if during our community engagement work we could gather feedback to help them to better understand residents' experiences of Alcohol Brief Intervention (ABI).

The Public Health Team was especially interested in feedback from patients who experienced this intervention in GP practices and pharmacies, often the first point of contact.

Specifically, they wanted to find out:

- How do residents perceive ABI?
- Have there been any missed opportunities to deliver ABI?
- Are other health and care services (including primary care) asking about alcohol?



The Public Health Team provided copies of '[Calling the Shots](#)', which Healthwatch South Tyneside shared during our engagement activity with the general public, community groups, hospital information stands and voluntary and statutory organisations.

The report was well received and further copies were requested.

Methodology

Healthwatch contacted and planned visits to a number of established groups in the community led by a range of providers, giving consideration to possible barriers for each individual group.

Minimal demographic information was collected to ensure anonymity.

Visits took place throughout July, August and September 2025. Healthwatch South Tyneside's engagement team visited nine community groups and engaged with 64 people. Groups and venues included:

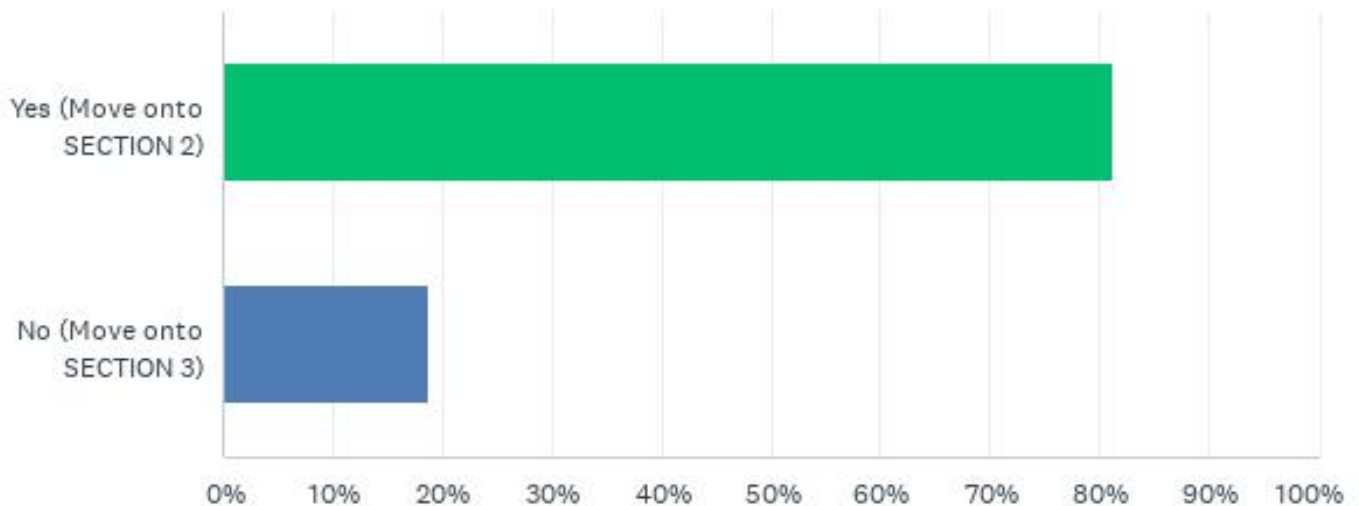
- ACTS Men's Group
- Alzheimer's Society Carers Support Group
- Cleadon Park Primary Care Centre
- Connected Caring
- Men's Pie Club
- NAAFI Break
- Palmer Community Hospital
- South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service
- South Tyneside College
- WHiST – Women's Health in South Tyneside
- Your Voice Counts – Equal People Group

We worked with South Tyneside Council's Public Health Team to develop the survey.

It was agreed to include an accompanying Participant Information Sheet about Alcohol Brief Intervention and why this research was being carried out, as well as a survey QR code which could be taken away and completed on mobile phones at a convenient time.

Survey responses

Q1. When you have met with health and social care workers, have they ever asked you about how much alcohol you drink?



Out of 64 respondents, 81.3% said yes, with 18.7% answering no.

Q2. Who asked you about how much alcohol you drink?

All 51 respondents recalled who had asked them/how information was requested. The most popular answers included doctor, GP, nurse and practice nurse.

Comments included:

"I am asked when attending most visits to the hospital or GP."

"Most recently at the dentist two weeks ago."

"When I go for my annual health check with my GP at Central Surgery. I have to complete a form prior to the check."

"I was asked the question by the online pharmacy which I use when ordering a period delay pill for my holidays."

"At every doctor or nurse appointment I have been asked how much alcohol I drink. I have also recently noticed my dentist has started to ask. Depending on what I have been prescribed the pharmacy also have started to ask."

Q3. Did they use a questionnaire to check how much alcohol you were drinking?

Again there were 51 respondents to this question. 70.6% responded no, 11.8% said they were not sure and 17.6% said yes.

Comments included:

"Yes, it had a range of health questions such medication (I was) currently taking."

"In 2018 I was given a questionnaire. More recently I have been asked verbally."

"Several years ago a questionnaire was used. I used to be a heavy drinker, not so much now as I have recently been treated for prostate cancer."

Q4. What triggered this conversation(s)?

There were 50 respondents and a wide range of answers to this question, including:

"Annual health check"

"Health questionnaire"

"General question asked at my health check"

"I think it is a routine question for all health-related appointments"

"Just part of the Well Man Health Check"

Q5. If appropriate, did you receive advice/information on what support is available to cut down the amount of alcohol you drink?

There were 51 respondents, with 54.9% answering no, 21.6% saying yes and 23.5% responding not applicable.

Comments included:

"No, it wasn't needed"

"Yes, a leaflet"

"I was told about the drug and alcohol service in South Tyneside – STARS"

**Q6. What type of information/advice did you receive?
(For example, a leaflet, website/app or a service that could support you)**

There were a range of answers from the 50 respondents, including leaflet, verbal advice, referral to online support and referral to South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service (STARS):

"I was given information about STARS"

"Verbal advice but I had self referred to STARS"

"I was advised to cut down and asked what I would like to cut down to. I was drinking 15 pints a day and said I would like to cut down to eight. GP referred me to STARS."

"We just had a conversation"

"Yes, a leaflet"



"I was told about the drug and alcohol service in South Tyneside – STARS."



Q7. Did you find the conversation helpful?

(If yes, what did you find helpful? If no, what could have been done differently?)

There were 50 responses, with 56.0% saying not applicable, 20.0% saying no and 24.0% saying yes. Comments included:

"Yes, made me think about my alcohol consumption"

"Yes, STARS have been a lifeline"

"Yes, STARS have given me the support I need"

"Being referred to STARS gave me the support I needed to make the change. I thought being given the option by the GP to set my own target was the wrong advice at the time as I should have cut down more."

"Yes, it helped me to understand the health implications of drinking alcohol"

"No, at the time I wasn't bothered what the doctor said. When you are younger you don't worry as much about the effects."

"No. As I admitted I drank more than the recommended 14 units per week maybe I should have had some advice. But the reply was mostly a shrug of the shoulders."

Q8. Did you change anything because of this/these conversation(s)?

(For example, you may have cut down the amount of alcohol you drank)

Of the 49 respondents, 53.1% said no, 36.7% said not applicable and 10.2% said yes. Comments included:

"Yes, it took me six months but I am no longer alcohol dependent. I attend regular group meetings at STARS. I had not heard of them until I was referred by the GP."

"Yes, I stopped drinking. I now smoke instead."

"No, I think it changed due to age not so much the advice from the professional."

Q9. Is there anything else that you would like to share with us?

There were 35 responses to this question, with 62.9% responding no. There were a range of comments made, including:

"I self-referred to STARS and receive great support."

"I don't think people will tell the truth about how much they drink or even admit if they have a problem."

"I think that it would be useful for health professionals to attend a workshop at STARS to see the different scenarios of how alcohol affects different people and the processes put in place for each individual."

"I think that all GPs need to understand dependency."

"I feel thrown away. You can't get help with your mental health until you get substance misuse sorted."

Q10. Can you think of any times when a health and social care worker should have asked about how much alcohol you drink?

There were 62 responses to this question, with 53.2% simply replying 'no', 3.2% saying 'not sure' and a variety of comments left by others including:

"It depends on what your health appointment is for and whether there could be a link between your health issue and alcohol."

"During pregnancy because this is a stressful time."

"It should depend what you visit a health professional for, but definitely if the appointment is for your mental health."

"If you are going through the grieving process."

"You should be asked at every GP and hospital appointment."

Q11. Is there anything else you would like to share with us?

Of 38 respondents to this question, 71.1% replied 'no'. Comments made included:

"Alcohol is seen as a depressant. Patients should receive three to 6 months reviews, regular blood tests and support with diet change. When we are in crisis we are given diazepam as an easy option – we have a legalised drug industry."

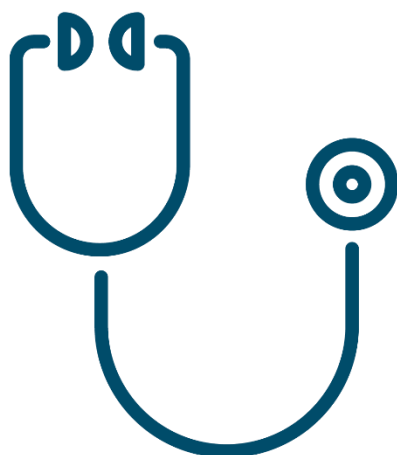
"Health professionals such as the GP or Practice Nurse are not specialists in this area."

"I would like to encourage a family member to cut down but she doesn't think that she has a problem. I have taken a "Calling the Shots" Alcohol Harm Reduction Strategy for her to read."

"When asked, people don't always tell the truth of how much alcohol they drink and don't take notice of the health implications of drinking."



"I think that it would be useful for health professionals to attend a workshop at STARS to see the different scenarios of how alcohol affects different people and the processes put in place for each individual."



What we learned

There were a number of key themes which emerged from this survey which could offer useful feedback to South Tyneside Council's Public Health Team.

More than four-fifths of respondents said they had been asked by a health professional about their alcohol intake and, of these, all gave an answer as to who had asked them – ranging from GP to nurse to dentist to online pharmacy.

Less than a fifth had been asked to complete a questionnaire by the health professional.

It would appear questions about alcohol consumption have become routine during general health checks and, where appropriate, a number of patients were referred to South Tyneside Adult Recovery Service (STARS). There was a definite brand recognition for this service, with positive comments including 'great support' and 'a lifeline'.

Some respondents felt that certain health professionals would benefit from additional training about addictions. Comments included:

"I think that it would be useful for health professionals to attend a workshop at STARS to see the different scenarios of how alcohol affects different people and the processes put in place for each individual."

"I think that all GPs need to understand dependency."

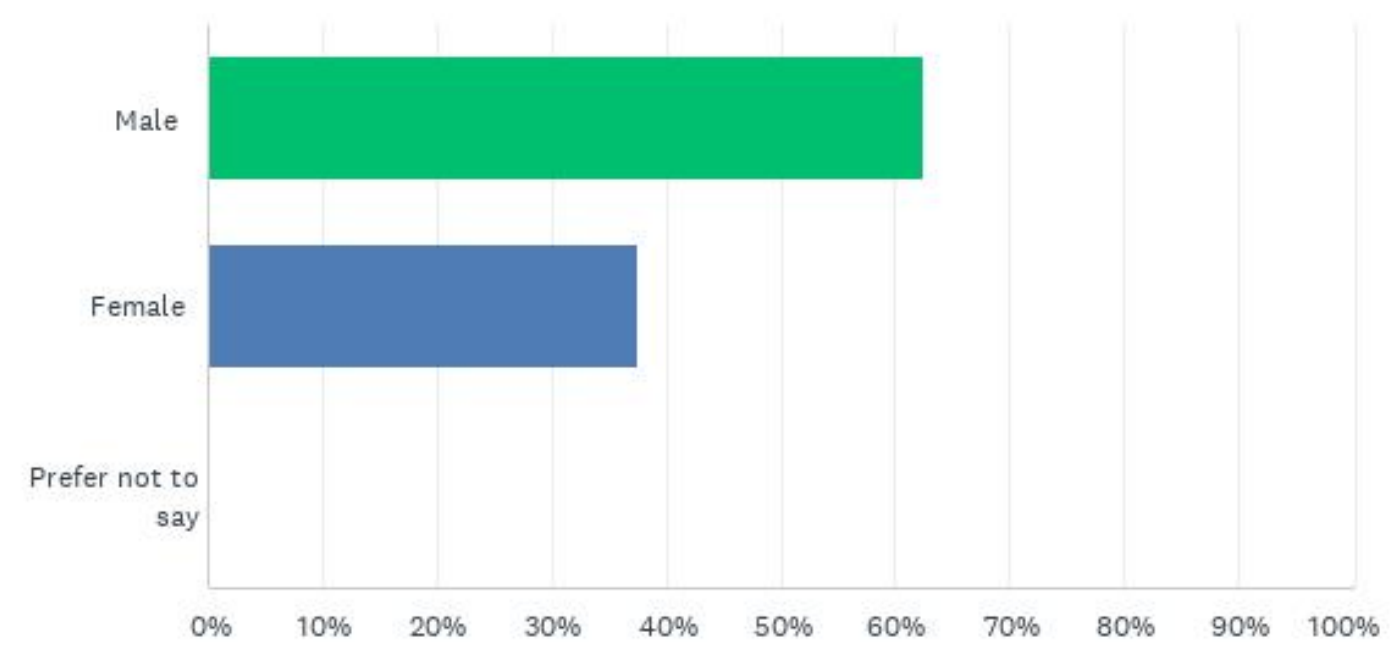
"Health professionals such as the GP or Practice Nurse are not specialists in this area."

There were also strong opinions about appropriate times for medical professionals to ask questions about alcohol consumption. They included during pregnancy, any appointments relating to mental health and anyone going through the grieving process.

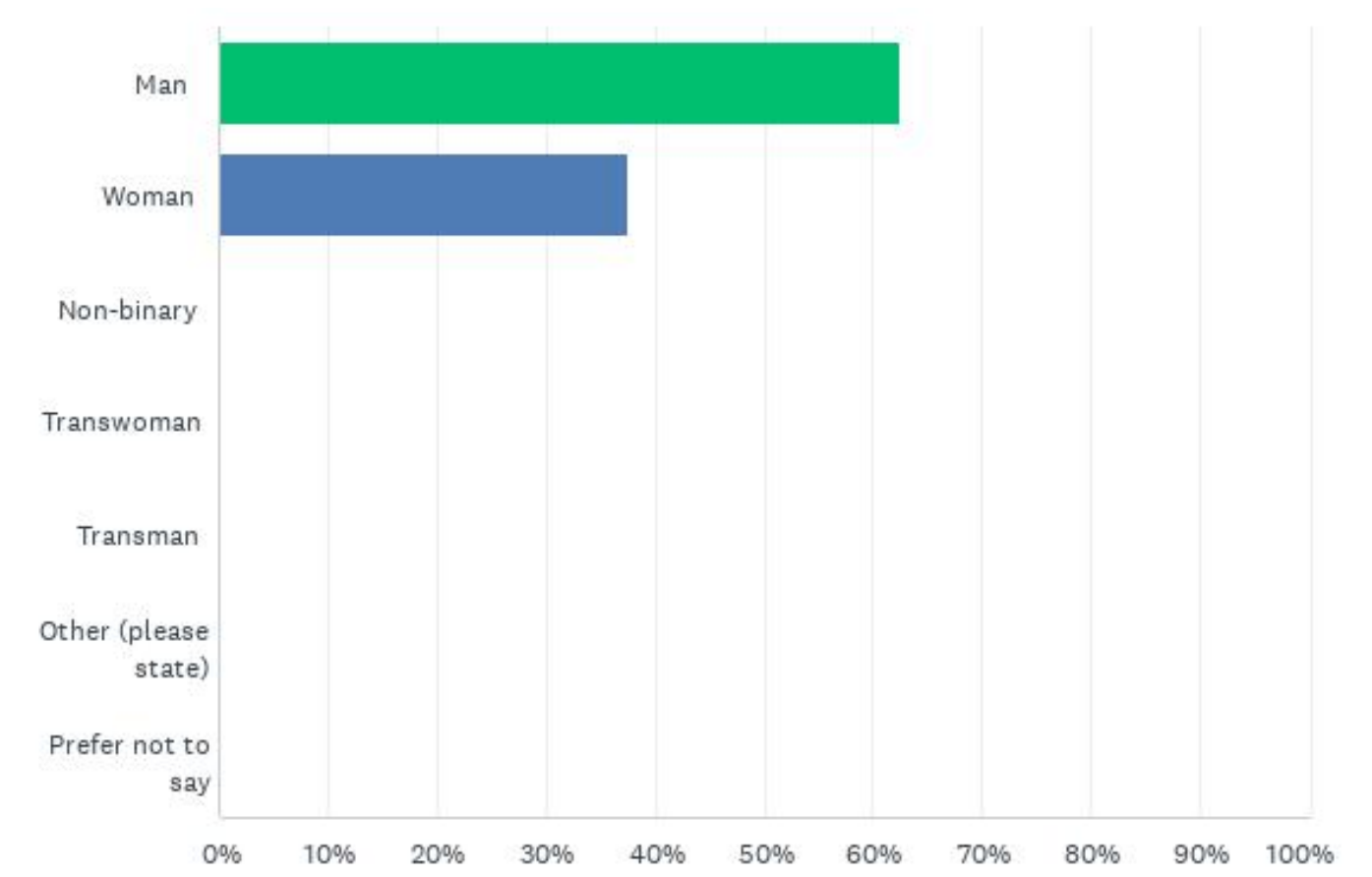
But some thought it should be a standard question at any medical appointment.

APPENDIX: Patient survey respondent profile

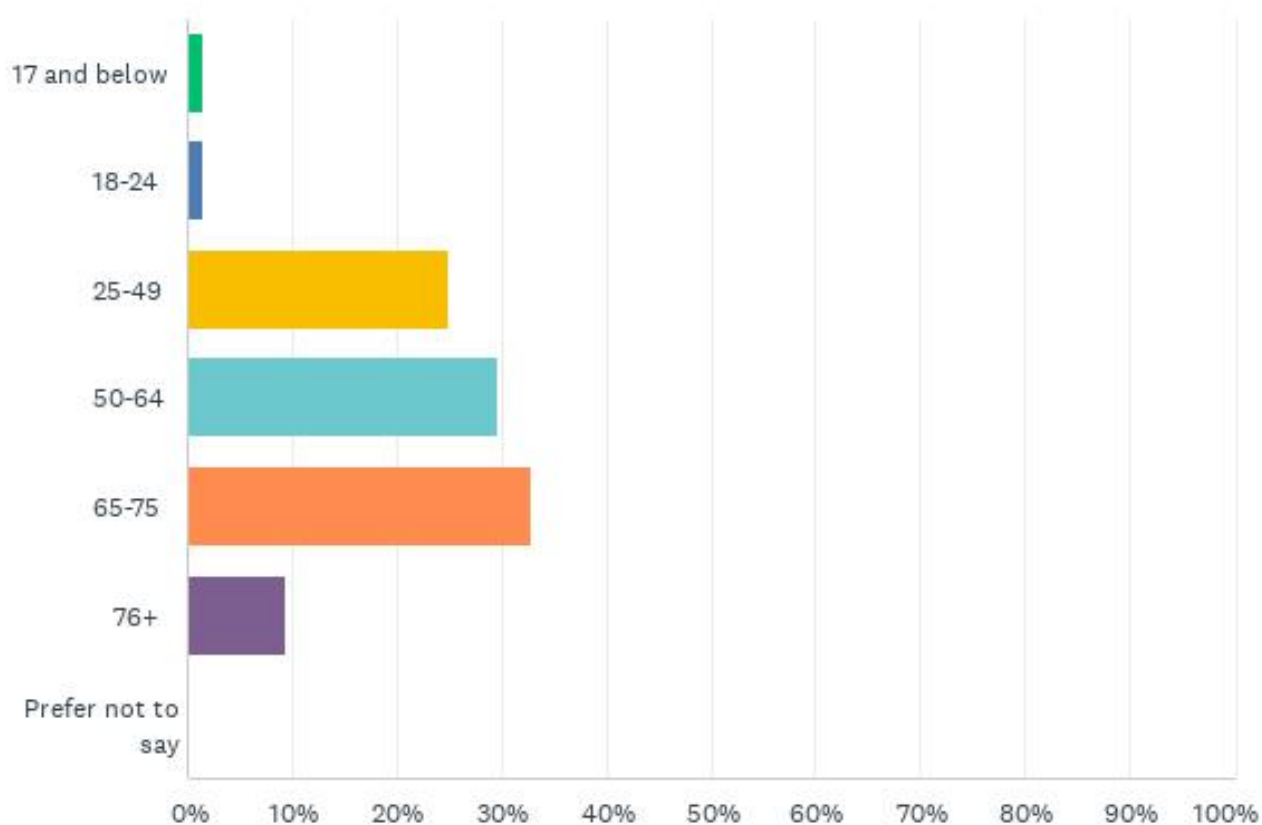
Q12. Sex



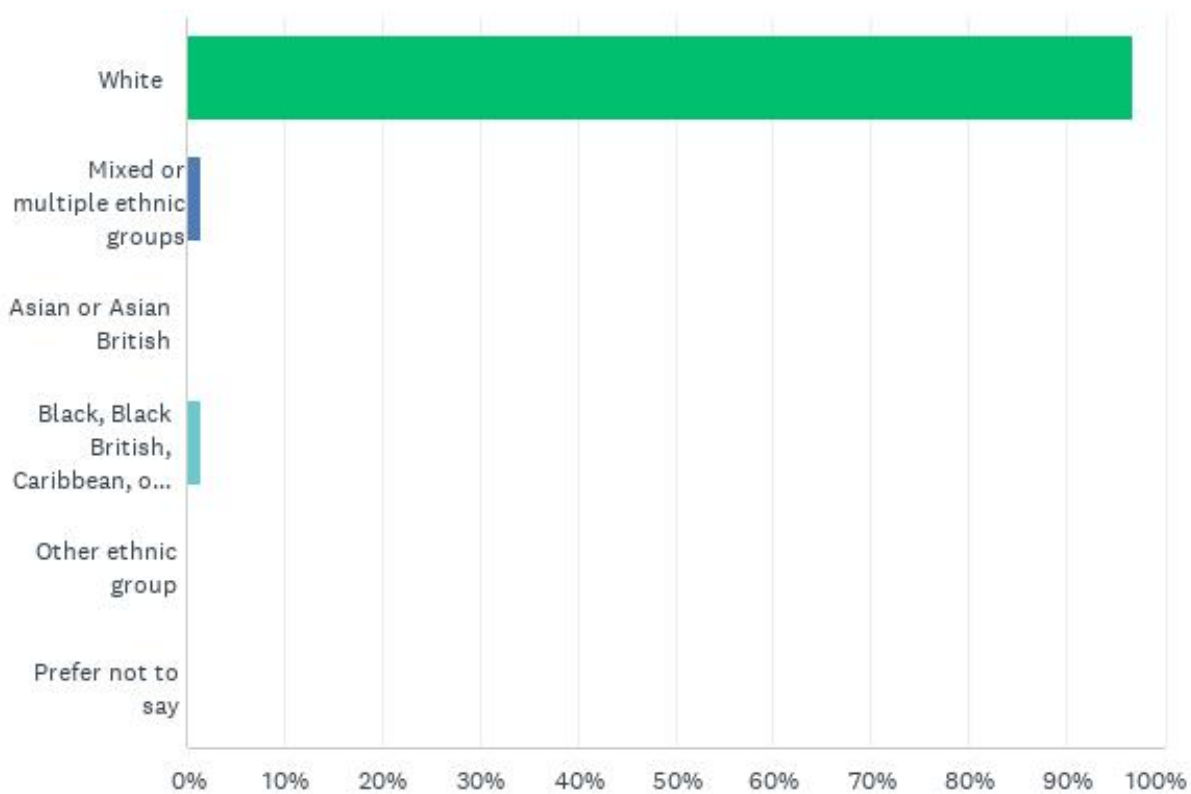
Q13. Gender



Q14. Age range



Q15. Ethnicity



Q16. First part of postcode and venue questionnaire was completed.

The 63 respondents came from most areas of South Tyneside.

Postcode district	Number of respondents
NE31	8
NE32	7
NE33	16
NE34	30
NE35	0
NE36	1
SR5	1
SR6	0

Venue	Number of respondents
STARS	12
ACTS Men's Group	9
Action Station Men's Pie Club	7
Connected Caring	10
Cleadon Park Health Centre	7
Monkton Hall - Alzheimer's Carers Group	4
Palmers Hospital	2
Your Voice Counts	4
Action Station - NAAFI BREAK	9

Public Health Team response



“We would like to express our appreciation to Healthwatch for supporting resident engagement and helping us gain a clearer understanding of community needs and experiences. The insights gathered will inform a broader initiative focused on strengthening our system-wide approach to Alcohol Identification and Brief Advice. Thank you!”

South Tyneside’s Public Health Team



Acknowledgements

We would like to thank South Tyneside Council’s Public Health Team for their support, all of the local groups and venues who helped us conduct this survey and all of the respondents who took part.



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