

Healthwatch East Sussex

Quarter 2 Report 2025 – 2026

1st July 2025 – 30th September 2025



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About Healthwatch East Sussex

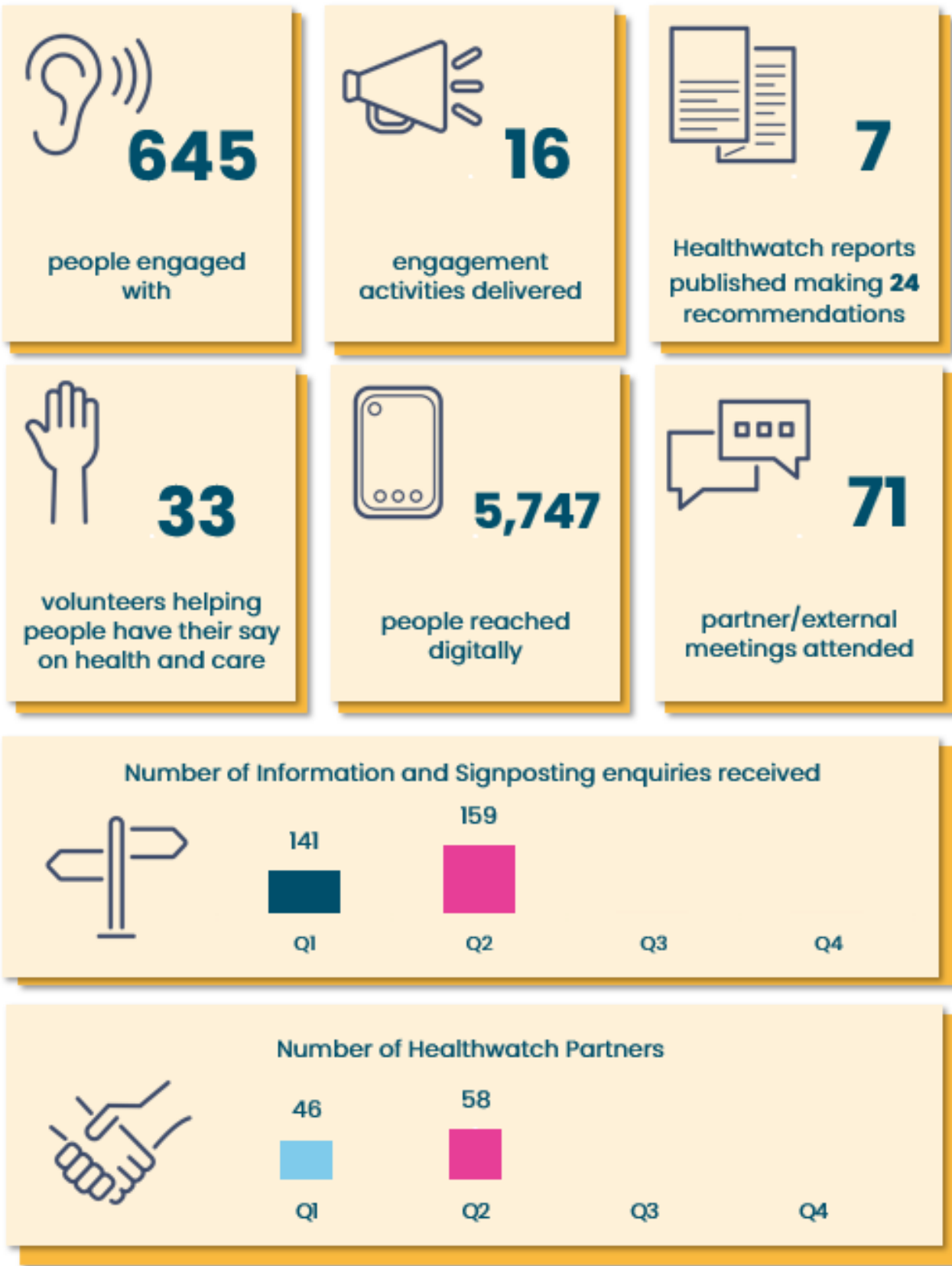
Healthwatch East Sussex is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and local council decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



About this report

The purpose of this report is to summarise the activity, publications and impact delivered by the Healthwatch programme in East Sussex this quarter.

Quarterly Dashboard



Highlights of the quarter

Nutrition poll

With the support of Young Healthwatch and young designers from the NHS Sussex Independent Youth Panel, Healthwatch in Sussex ran a poll on nutrition and dietary needs, [receiving 166 responses](#) from across Sussex. We heard about how people's dietary needs impact them, how support could be improved, and we shared findings with local NHS and Public Health teams.

Eastbourne 999 event

During July, Healthwatch heard about the [health and care experiences](#) of more than 200 people at the annual Eastbourne 999 display event. People of all ages shared their stories. We heard frequently about frustrations with delays and wait times, but many positive stories were also shared about instances where services were delivering high quality care.

Lewes Prison follow-up work

We have continued to share the [findings and recommendations](#) from our engagement in Lewes Prison to raise awareness of the issues experienced by residents. In this quarter we met staff from East Sussex County Council to explore how access to adult social care services could be increased and we met with NHS colleagues to ensure that healthcare is accessible and inclusive.

Co-design of engagement toolkit for GPs

GP practices regularly go through mergers, re-locations and site developments which require engaging with the community. We worked with NHS Sussex to develop guidance to support GP practices in robustly engaging patients, so that their views may inform decision-making. The guidance offers advice about engagement methods, timelines, safeguards and the support available, including from Healthwatch.



Did you know?

Healthwatch East Sussex represents you at **over 40 meetings quarterly** including the East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board and the Sussex Health and Care Assembly.

Listening Tour

Who we have engaged

This quarter, we began our Listening Tour in Rother, hearing from 67 people about their experiences of health and care. As part of this, we held our Listening Tour workshop, bringing together members of the public and stakeholders to discuss experiences of health and care in Rother, and to consider what the NHS should focus on following the publication of the NHS 10-year plan.

What we've heard

In Rother, we heard about the difficulties people are facing in accessing GP services, including long waits on telephone lines, and a lack of face-to-face appointments. We heard largely positive feedback about experiences of pharmacy services. However, there were concerns around the reduction in opening hours in many pharmacies across Rother, as well as a lack of access to pharmacies in more rural areas of the district during weekends and holidays.

We also heard a range of experiences regarding mental health services. While some people shared positive experiences, others shared their experience of being left on a waiting list for months without any support while waiting for treatment. Alongside this, we heard about the difficulties in accessing support for children with avoidant/restrictive food intake disorder (ARFID) due to a lack of a treatment pathway for this condition.

What we've done with your views

During this quarter, we presented our [summary report](#) for the 2024-25 Listening Tour at the [East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board](#), feeding back the experiences shared with us during our Listening Tours in Wealden, Lewes and Hastings over the last year. In particular, we highlighted issues around access to GP services, and the need to ensure that there are different ways to contact your GP practice.

Following feedback heard through the Listening Tour around transportation, we are developing a project aimed at better understanding people's experiences of non-emergency patient transport services, with this project expected to begin in quarter 3.

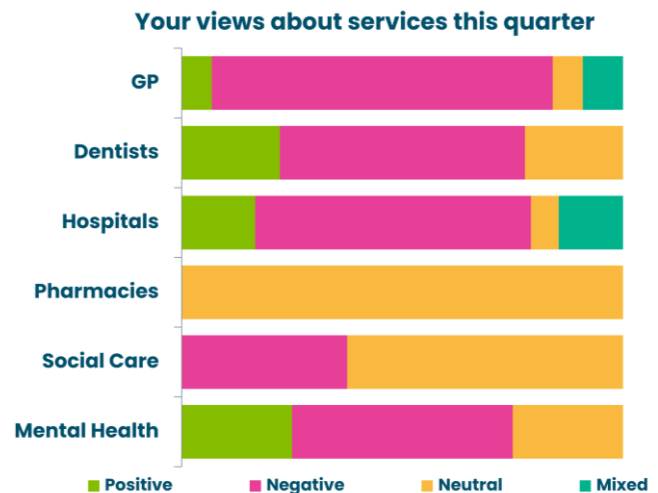
Information and Signposting

This quarter our information and signposting service has responded to 159 public enquiries from phone calls, emails and web-based contacts. We also provided outreach sessions at HMP Lewes and Bexhill and Battle Foodbanks.

Key themes from enquiries

This quarter, we heard about:

- **GP services** – difficulties booking appointments, lack of continuity of care, decreased provision of blood tests, poor responses to complaints.
- **Dentists** – lack of transparency about charges, concerns about quality of treatment, difficulties accessing translation services for NHS patients, positive feedback about check-ups.
- **Hospitals** – long waits for planned and emergency care, last minute cancellations, positive feedback about care and kindness.



What we have done

This quarter, we have:

- Escalated concerns from enquirers about dentists and GPs to commissioning teams at [NHS Sussex](#) for their investigation.
- Produced public-facing advice articles on [Independent Advocacy Services](#), [Dentistry](#) and the East Sussex [Carers Card](#).
- Signposted to support and resources from a range of organisations including [Support through the Courts](#), the [Equality Advisory Support Service](#), the [Housing Ombudsman](#), [ADHD UK](#), [Mencap](#), [Sense](#), [Doctors of the World](#), [Macmillan](#) and [Action Against Medical Accidents \(AvMA\)](#).
- Presented key findings from our report on [Residents' Experiences of Health and Care Services at HMP Lewes](#) to a national Healthwatch research group.
- Attended a patient engagement event at [Foundry Healthcare Lewes](#) to hear practice updates and gain insight into patient experience.

Projects

Pharmacy

We visited 10 community pharmacies in Hastings and engaged with nine patients to better understand the service provision available at different locations and how accessible the pharmacies were for diverse patients.

We found that there were substantial differences in terms of which services were available at different pharmacies and a lack of clear and consistent signage made it difficult to understand what could be accessed where. We also found that there were issues with physical accessibility at many pharmacies as well as a lack of accessible information provision.

We used our findings to produce a report along with recommendations which we will share with NHS commissioners, the local pharmaceutical committee, the local authority and other strategic partners.

Mapping of Patient Participation Group information

In July, we published [results](#) from a review of Patient Participation Group (PPG) information on 55 GP practice websites in East Sussex.

While there is a contractual requirement for all GP practices to have a PPG, we found significant inconsistencies in the information available about them:

- Some websites were excellent, but many were basic or out-of-date, and six practices shared no information at all about their PPG.
- Fewer than a third of practice websites provided named contacts or dedicated contact details for their PPG.
- Reception and other practice staff had mixed and often limited awareness of the existence and operation of the PPG at their practice.

We shared our findings with NHS Sussex commissioners, GP practices and Patient Participation Groups, including eight recommendations seeking more consistent information, greater detail on activity and actions, regular reviews to ensure content is up-to-date, and improved clarity on how people can contact or join PPGs.

Paediatrics at East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust

Since September 2023, we have undertaken a range of activities to explore paediatric services provided by East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust (ESHT) and to hear young people's views and experiences of these services. The work involved visits with young volunteers to Conquest and Eastbourne District General Hospital, as well as holding a focus group with 7-11 year olds.

Through this work, we heard that young people find it very important to have activities available in hospital settings to keep them engaged, and while most departments had toys for young children, there were less activities for older children and teenagers. We also heard about the ways in which the hospital environment affects how safe and comfortable young people feel.

This quarter, we collated the findings and reports from this work for publication. The reports on our activity will be published in early October, and the insight is being shared with ESHT and NHS Sussex to see how the learning can be utilised and recommendations implemented to improve the experiences of children and young people.



Volunteer Updates

This quarter, our volunteers were involved in a range of activities with health and social care partners, which included:

- Developing a survey to support the Healthwatch in Sussex poll on nutrition and dietary needs (see page 3).
- Visiting pharmacies in Hastings and speaking to patients using their services (see page 6).
- Participating in our Healthwatch Listening Tour event at Pebsham Community Hub on experiences of health and care in Rother (see page 4).

We also held an online volunteer meeting in July to provide refresher training on data protection, and an in-person meeting at Polegate Community Centre in September to update volunteers on Healthwatch projects.

Do you want to make a difference to health and social care in your area? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please [get in touch](#) today.

How can Healthwatch help you?

Healthwatch can help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

If you need information or support to access health and care services, please contact our information and signposting service. We can help you to:

- Navigate health and social care services and support groups near you.
- Get information about what you can do when you have concerns or a complaint.
- Find out about support, advocacy services, safeguarding and patient rights.
- Share feedback about services.

How to contact us

-  www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk
-  0333 101 4007
-  enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

The East Sussex Picture

Sussex Surgical Centre

September saw the opening of the [new Sussex Surgical Centre](#), a purpose-built day surgery unit in Eastbourne. It aims to deliver 7,000 planned day-surgery procedures each year, operating 10 hours a day, five days a week. Healthwatch will engage users on their experiences of the centre in early 2026.

GP Charter: You and your general practice

From 1st October 2025, all GPs are required to publish [guidance](#) on their website about what patients can expect from their practice, and ensure that channels of communication are open between 8am and 6.30pm, including digital channels, phone systems and face-to-face visits to surgery sites.

Winter vaccinations

October 2025 sees the rollout of [NHS winter vaccinations](#) for flu and COVID-19 as the NHS seeks to protect people's health and manage demand on services.

Changes to Integrated Care Boards (ICB)

Progress continues on moving towards a single Integrated Care Board (ICB) covering Sussex and Surrey by April 2026. The body will be overseen by one board. A Chair, Ian Smith, has been [appointed](#) and a Chief Executive will follow shortly. Wider reconfiguration of staffing and functions is currently underway.

NHS Sussex Commissioning Intentions 2026–27

NHS Sussex released their Commissioning Intentions for 2026–27 in the summer. They identified priorities for the next 12 months, including increased roles for Integrated Community Teams, improved primary care access, new pathways for urgent and emergency care, and reduced waiting times for planned care and diagnostics. Healthwatch shared some concerns over the timescales for change.

Dissolution of Healthwatch

Healthwatch East Sussex has continued to deliver its workplan on a 'business as usual' basis since its dissolution was [announced](#) last quarter. No detail on next steps has been released by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) as yet. We continue to engage with East Sussex County Council and NHS colleagues to explore how patient and public voice can best be delivered moving forwards.

Coming up next

PLACE: Patient Led Assessments of the Care Environment (PLACE) inspections are taking place from October 2025, with Healthwatch volunteers taking part. PLACE assessments are an annual appraisal of the non-clinical aspects of healthcare settings, undertaken by teams made up of staff and members of the public.

Joint Community Reablement: Healthwatch East Sussex will be working with East Sussex County Council in quarter 3 to gather feedback on people's experience of the Joint Community Reablement (JCR) services.

Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service (NEPTS): During October and November, Healthwatch in Sussex will be gathering user feedback on the NEPTS service in Sussex, following EMED becoming the contracted provider in April 2025.

Sussex Surgical Centre: Healthwatch East Sussex is planning to visit the Sussex Surgical Centre early in 2026, to gather feedback from patients and their families on this new service based at Eastbourne District General Hospital.

To find out more about the different ways you can get involved with Healthwatch East Sussex please visit our website or get in touch using the details at the end of this report.

Chief Executive's Comment

We started the quarter with the news that Healthwatch would be abolished, and it has been a challenging period for the team as we wait for further information about the future. Despite this uncertainty, we have continued to deliver a full programme of work, attending over 16 engagement events and completing 7 reports. We've been incredibly fortunate to recruit and welcome several new volunteers to the team, each bringing a wealth of skills and experience.

As always, there are many great examples of the impact of our work, but for me, the highlight this quarter is the impact from our project at HMP Lewes. Finally, we have been working with colleagues across the system to explore the future of Healthwatch and the wider patient and public voice. Going forward, we hope to gain greater clarity on these developments.

Recent Publications

[‘You Said – We Did’ August 2025](#)

[Poll Results: How do your nutritional and dietary needs affect you?](#)

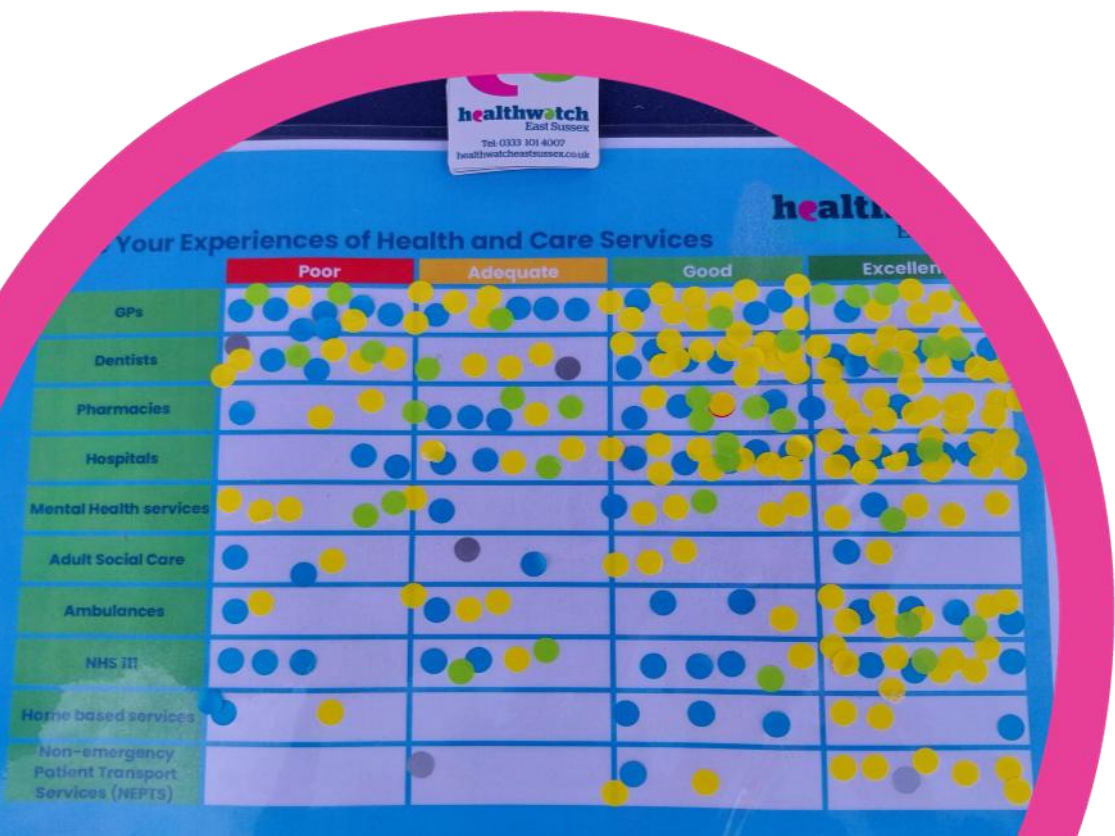
[‘Your Said – We Did’ July 2025](#)

[Mapping of Patient and Participation Groups in East Sussex](#)

[Women’s and girls’ experiences of health and care](#)

[Healthwatch East Sussex Quarter 1 Report – April to June 2025](#)

[‘You Said – We Did’ June 2025](#)





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