Women's Health in Barnsley

Autumn 2025

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About Healthwatch Barnsley

Healthwatch Barnsley is the local health and social care champion for Barnsley. We are independent and have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. Healthwatch Barnsley is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We are here to listen to the issues that really matter to people in Barnsley and to hear about their experiences of using local health and social care services. We are entirely impartial and people can share their stories with us in confidence.

The Healthwatch Barnsley contract is delivered by Barnsley Community and Voluntary Services (BCVS). The BCVS Board has oversight and accountability for the delivery of the Healthwatch Barnsley service. The BCVS Board is committed to having a strong and vibrant Healthwatch Barnsley Local Advisory Group, rooted in the local Barnsley community.

Healthwatch uses feedback to better understand the challenges facing the NHS and other care providers and we make sure people's experiences improve health and care for everyone – locally and nationally. We can also help people to get the information and advice they need to make the right decisions for themselves and to get the support they deserve. We believe it is important that people share their experiences and we welcome feedback that is positive as well as negative. If someone has had a negative experience, it is easy for them to think there is no point in complaining and that 'nothing ever changes'. If they have had a positive experience, we will ensure that this is cascaded to the relevant service provider in order for it to be used to consolidate good practice. Feedback about health and care services is powerful and can help to improve people's lives. When anyone is ready to tell their story about health and care services locally, we are here to listen!

Find out more about us on our website **www.healthwatchbarnsley.org.uk**

Our mission, vision and values

Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.

Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.

Our values are:

- **Impact** – We're ambitious creating a change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.
- **Collaboration** –.We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.
- **Truth** – We work with integrity and honesty and we speak truth to power.
- **Independence** – Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision makers.
- **Equity** - We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Project background

Each year we look at the information we have received on services via our intelligence and feedback. We also take advice from our Local Advisory Group, look at what is happening locally in Barnsley and talk to our Overview and Scrutiny Officers.

Once we have gathered all this information together we formulate a survey to go out to the public vote so local residents can have a say in our work for the coming year. This year we ran the survey between 1st April and 31st May. The survey was accessible online via a link or QR code and widely publicised in our newsletters and on our social media channels. We also took the survey out to local groups and events that we attended during this period.

Women's Health Issues was a top priority for residents alongside
- Urgent and Emergency Care Services in Barnsley
- Social Isolation Issues.

In this report, we present our findings on Women's Health Issues

"Everyone gets old but not much attention is paid to keeping women healthy as they age. Also I worry that people (especially women) live with long-term conditions that should be treated early before they become long-term."

"Women's gynaecological conditions are often linked to other health complications."

"Menstrual health has been ignored and not researched for far too long and women need to be heard."

"Because it is not understood enough."

What we did

We ran an online survey during August and September 2025, proudly adapted from Healthwatch Warrington's Women's Health survey. To reach as many voices as possible, we spread the word across social media, our website, and partner newsletters, and shared links and posters with everyone on our mailing list.

We collected feedback via our website and our Engagement Officers attended local groups to speak with residents about their experiences. We tried to cover a range of age groups to ensure we captured the women's voice across the life course.

We spent a day during the summer holidays in Barnsley Town Centre where we were able to speak to women of all ages. During this session, we provided information on services available to women including cancer screening. We also entertained young and old alike by hosting a bracelet/keyring making activity.

Our findings

Survey

We received **276 full responses** to our survey. We also had **25 partial responses** and another 129 residents followed the link to the survey but did not progress to completing any of the questions.

Question 1

For our first question we asked people to rate Women's Health Issues (as identified in the Governments Women's Health Strategy August 2022) in order of importance to them. The issues highlighted were
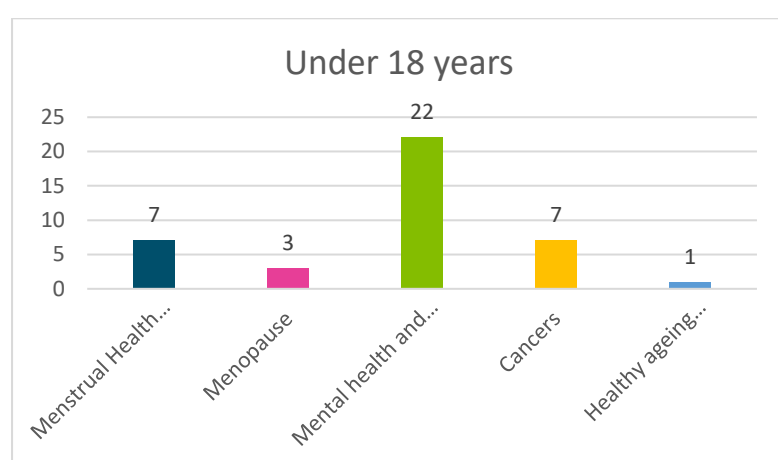
- Menstrual Health and Gynaecological Conditions
- Menopause
- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Cancers
- Healthy ageing and long term conditions

The total responses show that menstrual health and gynaecological conditions were a top priority, with healthy ageing and long-term conditions coming in a close second.

Total Responses

| Menstrual Health and Gynaecological Conditions	Menopause	Mental health and well-being	Cancers	Healthy ageing and long-term conditions
79	52	56	58	70
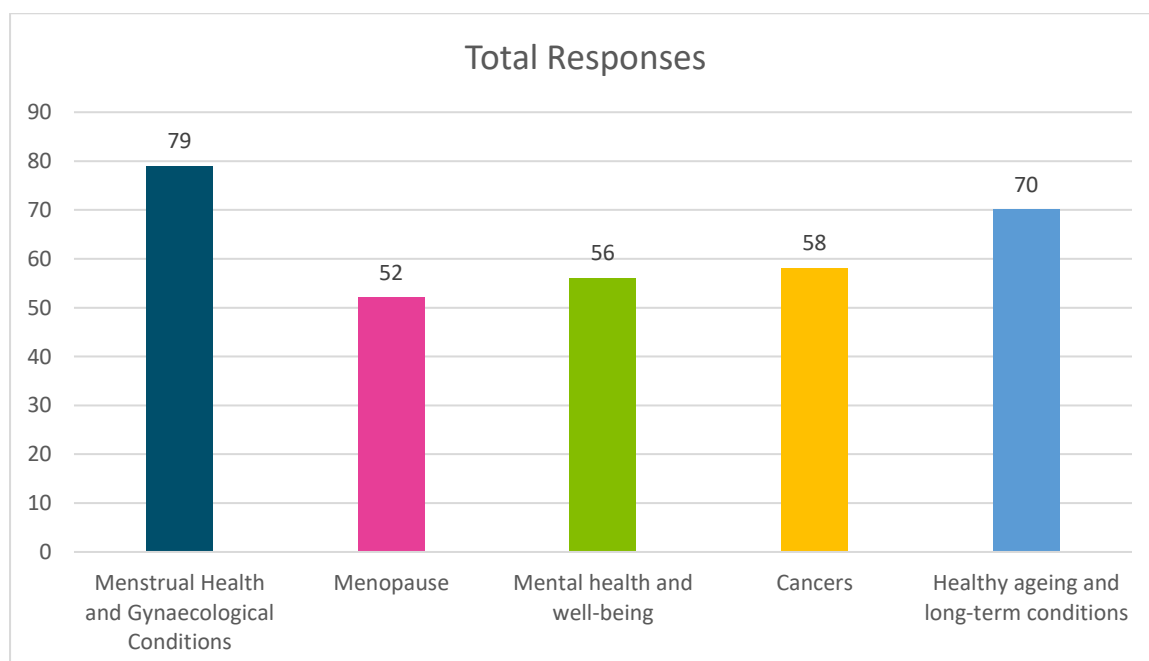
When we analyse the results via age group of the respondents we can see that as our health needs change throughout our life course so do our priorities.

40 women under the age of 18 completed our survey and as we can see **Mental health and well-being** is a big priority in this age group with **55%** choosing this as their top priority. Only one person chose **healthy ageing and long-term conditions** as a priority in this age group.
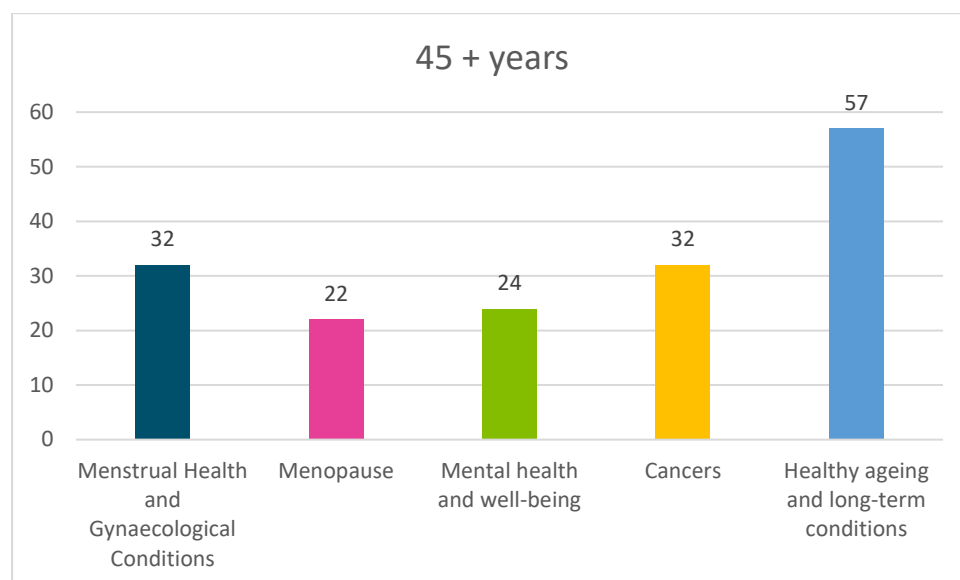

As we move into the 18–44 years age group, we can see the priority changes to **menstrual health and gynaecological conditions** with **37%** of women in this age group voting this as their top priority.

We also see that **25%** of this age group are now also looking towards their health needs changing as they head towards perimenopause.
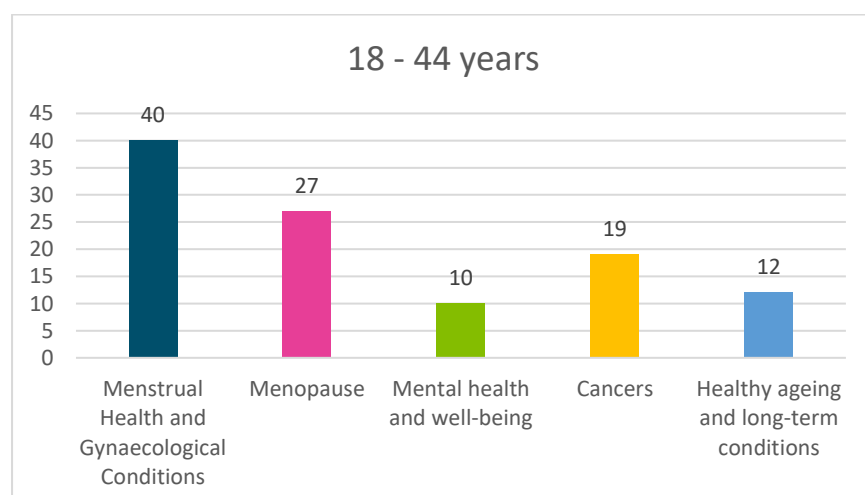
As we move on and look at the **45+ year's** age group there is a definite move towards **healthy ageing and long terms conditions** becoming a priority for **34%** of respondents.

45 + years

Category	Value
Menstrual Health and Gynaecological Conditions	32
Menopause	22
Mental health and well-being	24
Cancers	32
Healthy ageing and long-term conditions	57

Cancer remains a priority for just under **20%** of women across all age groups.

Question 2

For this question, we asked what had influenced the respondent to choose their top priority – here are some of the comments we received

Comments from women who chose menstrual health and gynaecological conditions as their priority
Issues with menstrual cycle, irregular periods, but never given a reason why.
Struggled with endometriosis for years. Only diagnosed in 40's. Have been fighting for treatment even after diagnosis, treatment, and appointment takes so long. I have been referred from one hospital and department to another and this has taken 5 year.
I myself have been through issues with both of these. I went through a miscarriage and have not had a follow up since, my mental health has taken quite a hit but there isn't anything to help with mental health after a miscarriage.
Due to having endometriosis and adenomyosis took 8 years to get diagnosis and treatment. I had surgery in May and needed 6 week follow up appointment which was scheduled for end of October had to go through PALS to be listened to.
Gynaecological conditions often are brushed off as normal or take an extremely long process for a diagnosis to enable symptom management. Women suffer for way too long in this area.
I have been suffering for over 2 years with really bad menstrual cycles, extremely heavy bleeding and after being referred it took nearly a year for an appointment. It is just not good enough, it has affected my relationship and mental health.
I feel that a lot of women's health conditions such as endometriosis, adenomyosis, fibroids, PCOS, general ovarian cysts and many many more are not taken seriously (especially in young women below age 30) by GP and hospitals. Often women are 'fobbed off' or told to use contraception as a form of pain relief- this only masks symptoms as there is no 'cure' for a lot of conditions, and the most successful treatment being unfortunately surgery. There is not enough research into these conditions and next to no support for those seeking/ coping with a diagnosis. I feel that this goes hand in hand with mental health as these debilitating conditions can leave too many women with

poor mental health states after being told 'it's just a bad period' or made to feel their pain and symptoms are normal.

Because it's the one I am most affected by constantly - really bad PMT, having to try lots of different contraception and dealing with side effects, etc. I don't think there's anywhere near enough support for women with it.

Because it has the most impact for a lot of women. We are often fobbed off by Gp's telling us that our pain is normal. Heavy bleeding, passing large clots, being unable to function well for half the month, equating to half the year should never be acceptable. Being told that only pregnancy will solve it is inacceptable. Being told to put hormones in your body at a young age is unacceptable.

Comments from women who chose menopause as their priority
this is what is directly impacting me at the moment and i am worried that it may affect my ability to work, and i have another 5 years until i can retire
Menopause as it causes so many ailments
I think that it has a huge impact on the life of a woman.
As a woman i often don't feel listened to or validated when i go to the GP with "women's issues" i am told I am fine, it is in my head, i am just anxious, could it be my anxiety.
I feel that not enough in-depth training for medical staff is included in their training, along with GPs, regarding healthy aging and long-term conditions, i.e. the Menopause, considering the number of women constitutes at least 50% of the population, e.g. menopause.
Struggling to see GP about this

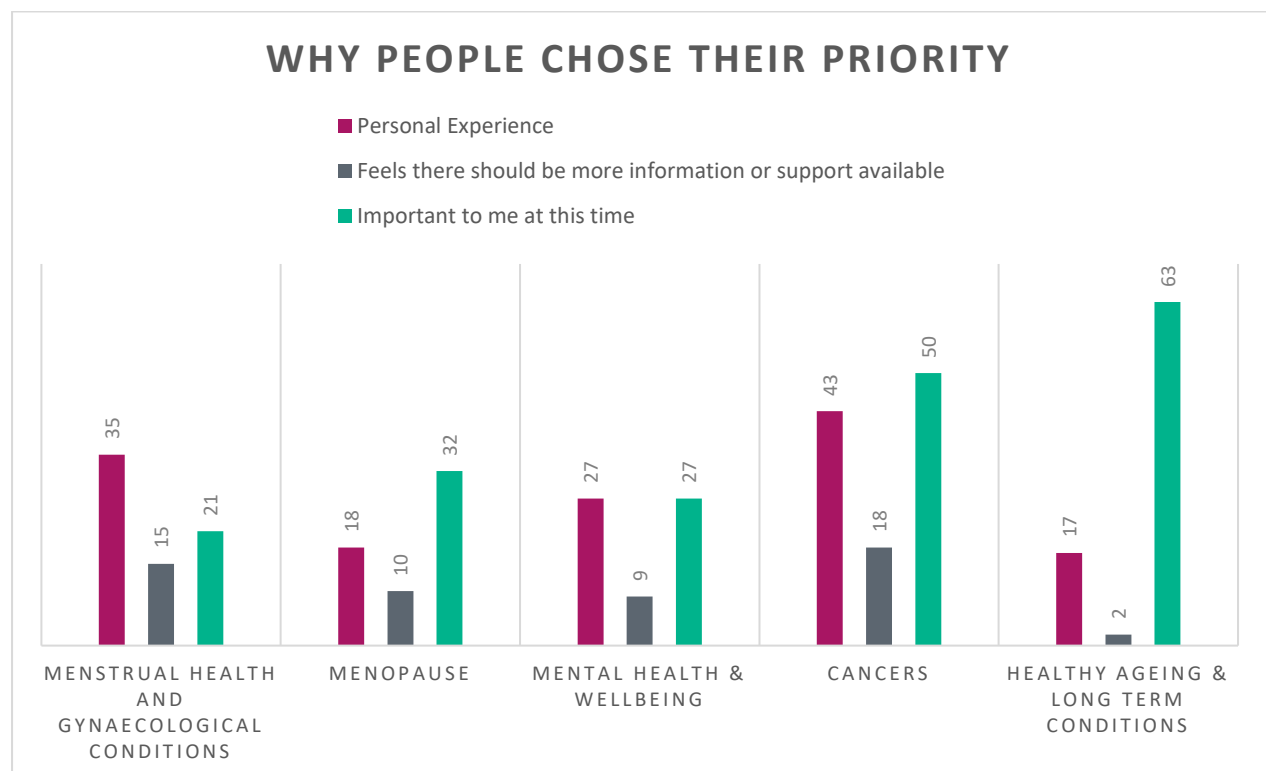| Comments from women who chose mental health as their priority |
|---|
| Busy lives many responsibilities - family, bills, caring responsibilities, working etc. takes its toll on mental wellbeing. |
| There are no walk in Mental Health support for people living with mild/moderate anxiety and depression. |
| Good mental health is important as they get older to avoid isolation. |
| I myself have been through issues with both of these. I went through a miscarriage and haven't had a follow up since, my mental health has taken quite a hit but there isn't anything to help with mental health after a miscarriage. |
| Mental health is the pinnacle of all health conditions and how someone feels within themselves |
| mental health is so important and can isolate and stigmatise some women. women can talk about it more but not always. we have andy man club for men - which is great. i feel we need something like this for women - one service everyone knows about. but mental health has a huge impact on other life style factors suchs as long term conditions, healthy lifestyle, general care of self and so much more |
| If you are mentally healthy, it is possible to manage life's stressors and other illnesses, but when we start to struggle to maintain our mental health other conditions we live with or suffer from or life stressors become more difficult to manage too. Good mental health is a strong foundation to manage other health issues. There seems to be a lot of focus on improving men's mental health but not so much for women, hopefully this can be improved in time. |
| Managing full time work along with two children and life pressures can feel overwhelming and affect mental health. Finding time or money to do things to support mental health and wellbeing can be challenging for women |
| Mental health is in crisis and it underpins many physical health issues |
| A lot of women need support with their wellbeing and mental health due to pressures of work, children, health etc. |
| Without good mental health nothing else matters. You can't function, go to work, be happy with mental health issues of severity |

Comments from women who choose Cancer as their priority
I have had cancer and am concerned it will reappear
Feel that more needs to be done with dealing with cancer, prevention and treatment and making information more available and accessible
No one should still be dying from cancer and I have lost lots of friends to various cancers
I worry because my mum had 3 unrelated cancers and I feel I will be next
I find this most worrying personally as it can present at late stages
I'm a breast cancer survivor, I believe if cancer is caught early you have a better chance of survival
Identifying Cancer is important to me as I am BRACA1 positive
Better Screening and services for women
catching it early is a main priority
I've had cancer and lost 2 husbands to it so it is very important that I check myself regularly, just in case
Prevention of cancer is most important, as we do not do enough to support people living with cancer and the drugs that are available to treat this due to pharmacy and expensive drugs for some people it might even be a postcode lottery.
I worry that awareness is lacking regarding screening
Many people I know or have known are affected
Cancer?! why does it need an explanation
There is more Cancer around and it is the first thing we think of if something wrong
This affects me every day already and have ongoing access with the service
I think smear tests and breast checks are not regulated and monitored enough. I think they have been put on a back burner.
I choose cancers as these are possible life threatening conditions
Early detection will be good for treatment
Earlier screening for female cancers and age related conditions

Comments from women who chose healthy ageing and long term conditions as their priority
I am 61 and have a few long term conditions
With ageing comes the rest for women. I have LTC and menopause
Rheumatoid arthritis causing me more issues with age
As someone with many long term chronic illnesses this is a major point of contention for me.
as I am in this age bracket
I suffer with a Long term condition and it is currently managed by my GP
My health and mobility are not good
Suddenly realise you're old
Want to age as well as possible
Concerned that health checks stop at a certain age
Because of my age and how age impacts you even though I eat a healthy diet and exercise regular.
If you look after healthy ageing and long-term issues this will encompass all the other issues too. Support women and listen to what they say - we are so much more in-tune with our bodies, we have to be with pregnancies/periods/menopause etc. we know when something is wrong and not being listened to or understood is where our true health declines. GP's do not know enough about women's overall health - fact!
I'm 54 and don't mind getting old but want to age well
I am through menopause, hopefully. Am down to yearly checks after a cancer diagnosis. I have recently lost one parent and am caring for the other, as well as caring for my adult son and working part time.
I'm 68 and long term health and cancer prevention very important to me
Ageing well is important to allow people to enjoy later life. Particularly if you have worked since an early age, you should be encouraged to access time/resources/information to age well.
Because I'm over 50 and starting to fall apart!
Coming up to 60 next year makes you reprioritise what is important to you therefore that is why I chose my top priority even though I feel that they are all a priority

In addition, we looked at the results to try to pull out some key themes as to why people had chosen top priority; we put them into three categories

- Personal Experience
- Important to me at this time
- Feels there should be more information or support available

The graph below shows as we age we think more about our health and it becomes more important to us, whereas the priorities that were chosen by younger women – menstrual health and gynaecological conditions alongside mental health and wellbeing were chose because of personal experiences.

WHY PEOPLE CHOSE THEIR PRIORITY

- ■ Personal Experience
- ■ Feels there should be more information or support available
- ■ Important to me at this time

Category	Personal Experience	Feels there should be more information or support available	Important to me at this time
MENSTRUAL HEALTH AND GYNAECOLOGICAL CONDITIONS	35	15	21
MENOPAUSE	18	10	32
MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING	27	9	27
CANCERS	43	18	50
HEALTHY AGEING & LONG TERM CONDITIONS	17	2	63

- *Some women chose more than one top priority as they felt they were just as important as each other.*

Conclusion

Healthwatch Barnsley's survey is a "snap shot" sample and is not meant to be representative of the population of women in Barnsley. However, by providing a sample of views and experiences we are able to share them with partners and service providers.

As the reader can see, the age of women who have shared their experiences has dictated their preference of choice in the 5 areas. This does not mean, for example that menopause issues were classed as less important; just the women reporting on this area were fewer in numbers. It would appear from our survey that poor mental health is inter-woven with all the other themes. The women we spoke to commented that they wanted to be "treated with respect and taken seriously" many felt they were "fobbed off" and not sent for any diagnostic tests around their problems, instead they were told their symptoms were "normal" and sent away with pain relief.

We know the demand for services has increased, but the quality of services should be upheld. Women have commented that their well-being is not just about women as it often affects the whole family. More information, education and support is needed for everyone.

During the Autumn Healthwatch Barnsley will be producing "Herwatch" a magazine aimed at women in Barnsley giving information and real life experiences from local people based on the women's health priorities and addressing some of the issues that were raised.

Next Steps

1	Using information and experiences we have gathered in our survey we will work with partners to publish a magazine for Barnsley women. It will include real life experiences, myth busting and practical tips covering the five highlighted women's health concerns.
2	We will make sure our report reaches the right people in NHS women's health service commissioning in South Yorkshire, service providers, and Barnsley Council.
3	We will share findings and our report with the groups that we spoke with, as well as groups and individuals not previously involved to expand our reach.
4	With input from local women involved with the project, we will develop signposting materials and based on the five highlighted women's health concerns.

With Thanks

Healthwatch Barnsley would like to say thank you to all those that participated in our Women's Health survey and who spoke and shared their experiences with us during our session at Barnsley Market in August.

We would also like to thank Healthwatch Warrington for their support and for sharing their 2023 Women's Health Survey and Report with us https://www.healthwatchwarrington.co.uk/report/2023-06-07/womens-health-report-2023

Further information about the people we heard from

Age Groups

What age are you?	Percentage
Under 18	6%
18 – 24 years	6%
25 – 34 years	13%
35 – 44 years	15%
45 – 54 years	21%
55 - 64 years	25%
64 – 75 years	9%
75 years +	4%
Prefer not to say	1%

Sexual Orientation

Are you?	Percentage
Man	1%
Woman	97%
Prefer not to say	2%

Ethnicity

Ethnic Group	Percentage
Arab	1%
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	
Asian/Asian British: Indian	
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	1%
Black/Black British: Another Black/Black British Background	
Mixed/Multiple ethic groups Black African and white	
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Any other mixed/multiple ethnic groups background	
White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	89%

White: Irish	**1%**
White: Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller	
White: Roma	
White: Other White background	**4%**
Other Ethnic Group (Please specify)	
Prefer not to say	**4%**

Where in Barnsley do you live?

Which area of Barnsley are you from?

Central · Dearne · North · North East · Penistone · South
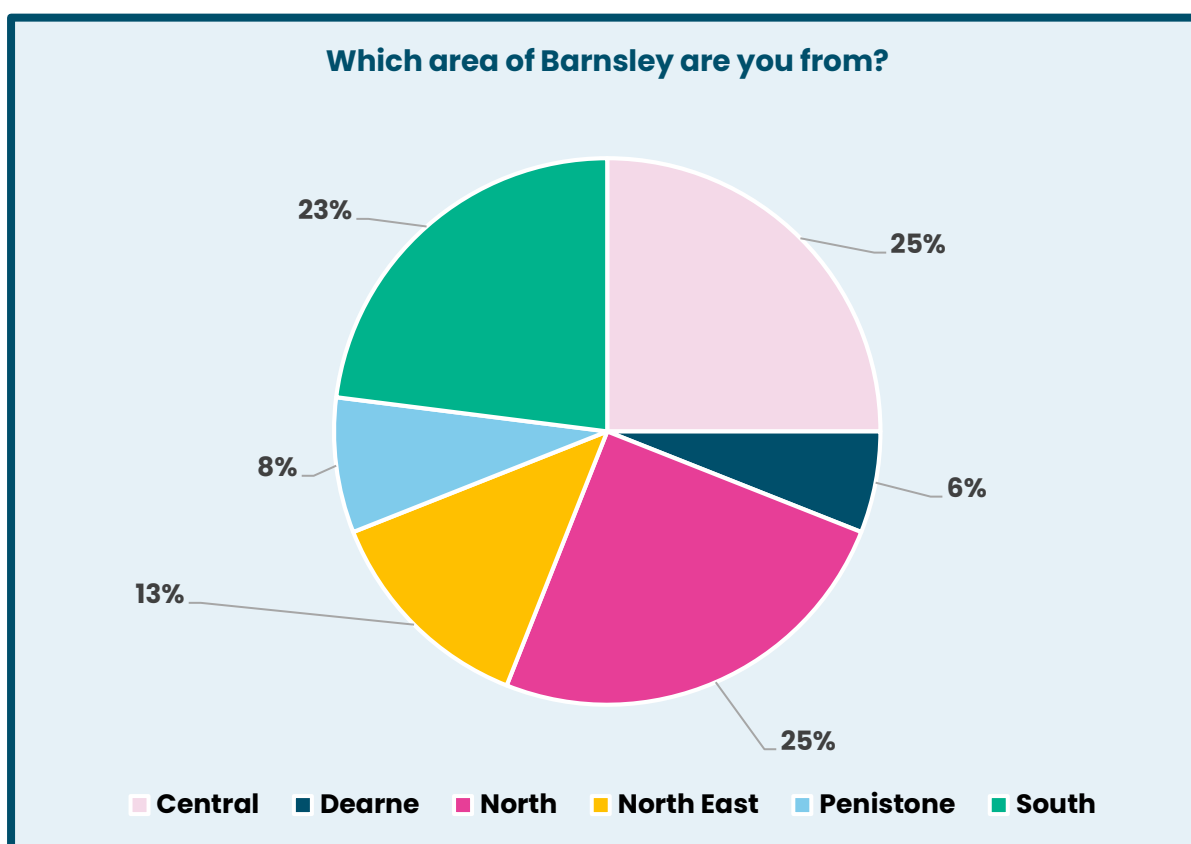
Seven respondents were out of area, coming from adjoining towns including Rotherham, Doncaster and Wakefield.

Ten respondents preferred not to say which area they were from.

healthwatch Barnsley

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Committed to quality

At Healthwatch Barnsley, we aim to provide the best service we can to our community and to make the greatest difference we can to local people.

To help us be the best we can be, every three years we undertake a comprehensive assessment of our work using a tool called the Quality Framework.

This helps us to understand what we are doing well and where we might need to improve.