

Healthwatch Wirral Carer's Survey – Accessibility and support

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healthwatch
Wirral

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Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a survey exploring Carers' experiences launched to coincide with Carers Rights Day on Thursday, November 20th, 2025, which had the theme "Know your rights, use your rights." The aim of the day was to inform unpaid Carers about their entitlements such as flexible working, Carer's assessments, financial support, and rights during hospital discharges, encouraging them to access available help and feel empowered. The survey was launched by Healthwatch Wirral to promote, acknowledge and support Carers who have not been identified by their Practices, local authorities and other support services.

Building on previous independent research carried out by Healthwatch Wirral (Primary Care Enhanced Access Review, 2024; Review of the Implementation of the Primary care Access Recovery Plan, 2025; NHS App Survey, 2025) the survey aimed to explore Carers' experiences of digital health channels, for both their own and those people that they care for, as well as reviewing their awareness of enhanced and additional adjustments available to them for accessing information relating to health and social care and any gaps in provision. The survey also aimed to identify any barriers to access, levels of satisfaction, and any areas for improvement.

Results indicate that Carers face significant challenges accessing health and social care services. Ensuring that these individuals are identified in a timely and consistent manner as a system will decrease health inequalities widening further.

The survey demonstrates a clear need for:

- More Carer-inclusive primary care services
- Ensuring a range of contact methods and channels of communication with Carers
- Improved access to online services for Carers using digital channels to manage the health of the person they care for
- Easier access to Carer's assessments
- The development and dissemination of credible information and training for Carers in relation to health and their rights

Background

One of the biggest challenges in making sure Carers receive the right support is identification – both self-identification and recognition by health professionals.

There are an estimated seven million unpaid Carers in the UK, and over 40,000 in Wirral according to a recent census, yet many do not receive the support they are entitled to.

Self-identification can be difficult because many Carers see their role with the person they care for as a parent, child, neighbour, friend or partner, and therefore do not associate themselves as their 'Carer' officially.

Identification by healthcare professionals is very important as it allows Carers to know what support is available to them. This includes being registered as a Carer with their GP, using community groups and services which support Carers, completing adult Carer's assessments via their local authorities, and receiving training to aid them, as well as receiving financial and legal support for their role.

Healthwatch Wirral was keen to assess whether Carers are being inadvertently disadvantaged and whether GP Practices have adequate systems to identify and support Carers rather than creating barriers to access.

As the NHS continues with the recovery and improvement of its services as part of the 10-year health plan, it is vital that the broadest population can enjoy the benefits of digital health and digital transformation delivery ambitions. Realising these benefits without further widening healthcare inequalities requires action on multiple fronts including:

- 1) Designing user-centred and inclusive digital health approaches
- 2) Promoting widespread adoption of digital health approaches
- 3) Promoting digital inclusion and removing the barriers to digital approaches
- 4) Providing and maintaining non-digital healthcare support, alongside digital health approach

Methodology

A survey consisting of 25 questions was developed and launched as part of national Carers Rights Day.

The survey was made available online and shared via a link as well as paper copies. Both were distributed to various local services and groups and GP Practices to help improve accessibility.

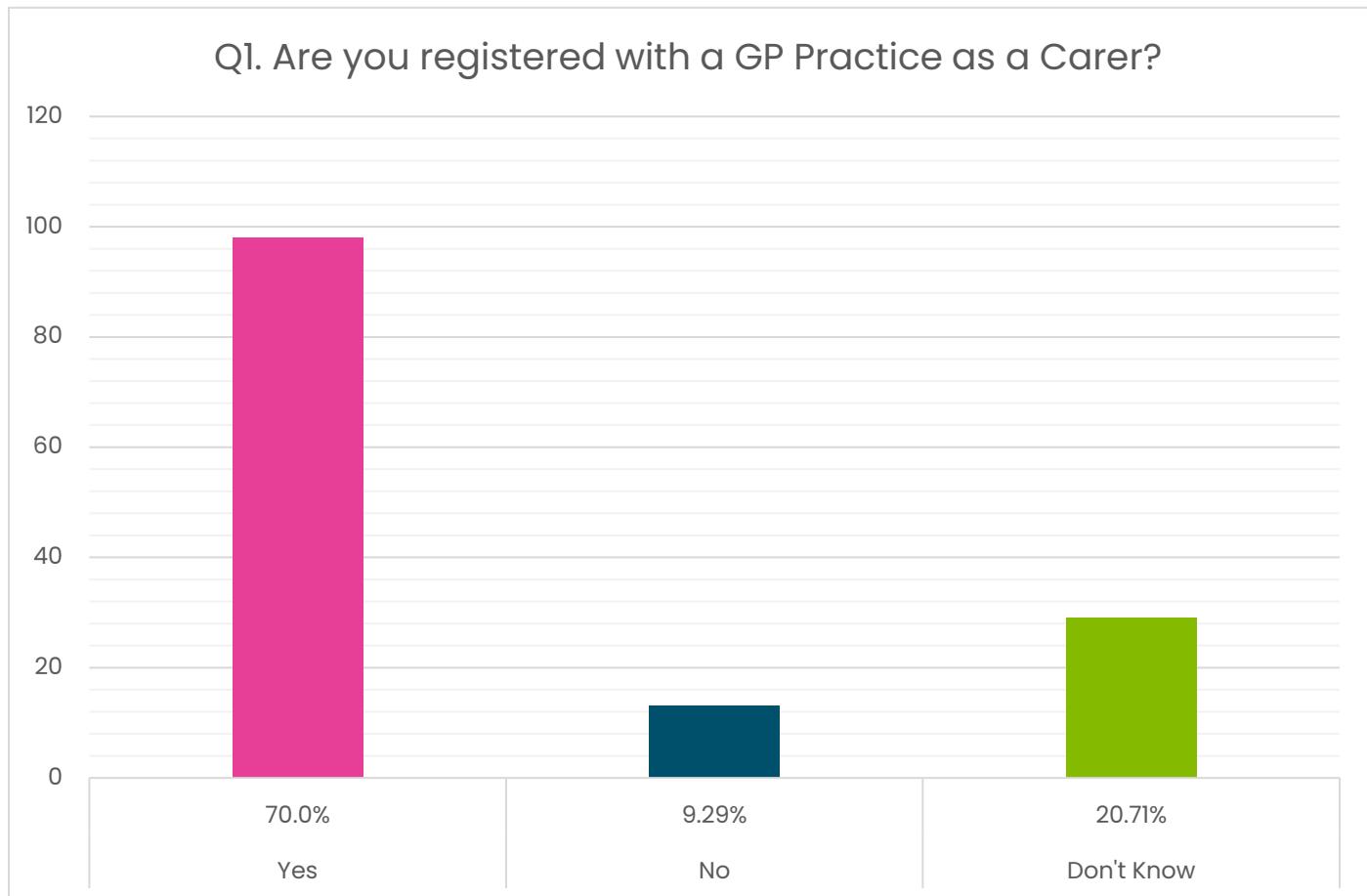
The link was also shared with 353 attendees at Healthwatch Wirral's BRIDGE Forum. BRIDGE (Bridging Resources, Information, Direction and Guidance for Everyone) is a well-established, online forum designed so that all attendees are in positions that allow them to cascade the information that they receive via BRIDGE to the wider public and grassroot organisations.

Information sheets for Carers were also developed and distributed to help improve knowledge regarding Carer's rights in terms of health and social care provision.

Findings

A total of 162 Carers completed and returned the survey. It took respondents an average of four minutes to complete the survey. The majority of respondents were over 45 years of age (91.11%), with 78.10% identifying as women, and 20.44% identifying as men.

The following are responses about Carers' experiences in Wirral.

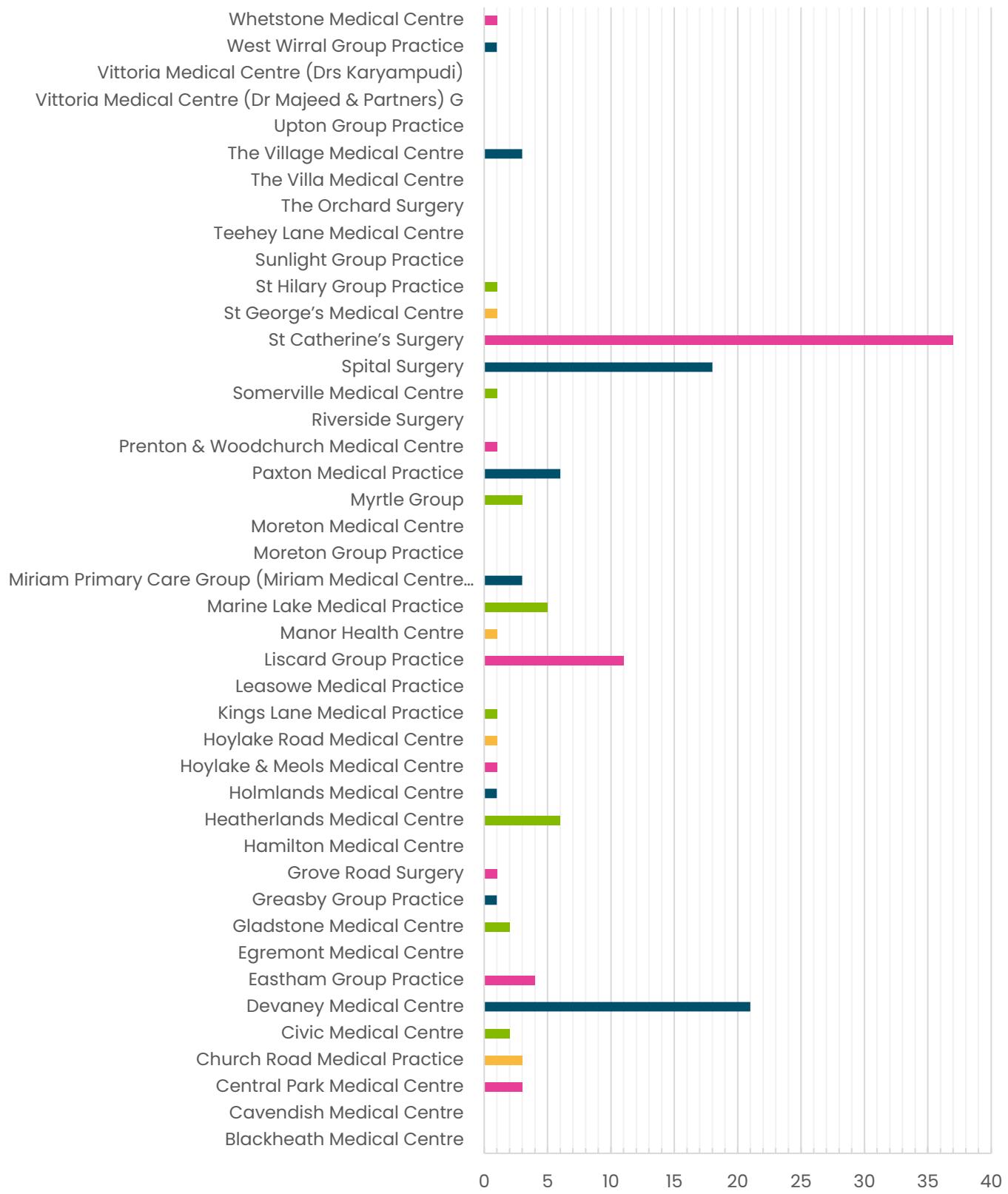


Q1. Are you registered with a GP Practice as a Carer?

70% of respondents said Yes. 9.29% reported not being registered as a Carer and 20.71% didn't know if they were or not.

Survey responses indicate potential areas for improvement within GP practices, particularly around the identification and registration of patients who provide care for others. Enhancing communication strategies to encourage Carers to register and clearly outlining the benefits of being registered as a Carer could help address this gap.

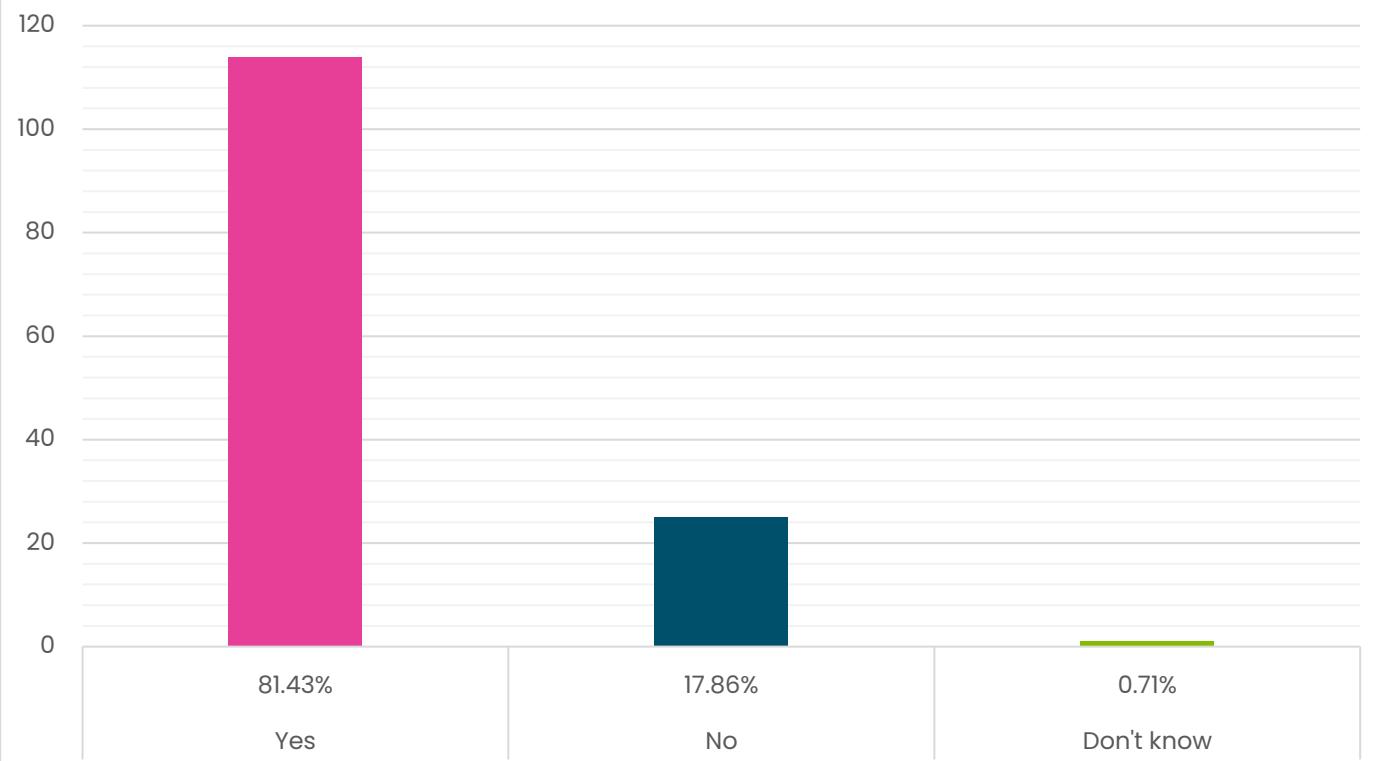
Q2. Please select your GP Practice



Q2. Please select your GP Practice.

The majority of responded were registered with St. Catherine's Surgery, followed by Devaney Medical Centre, Spital Surgery, and Liscard Group Practice.

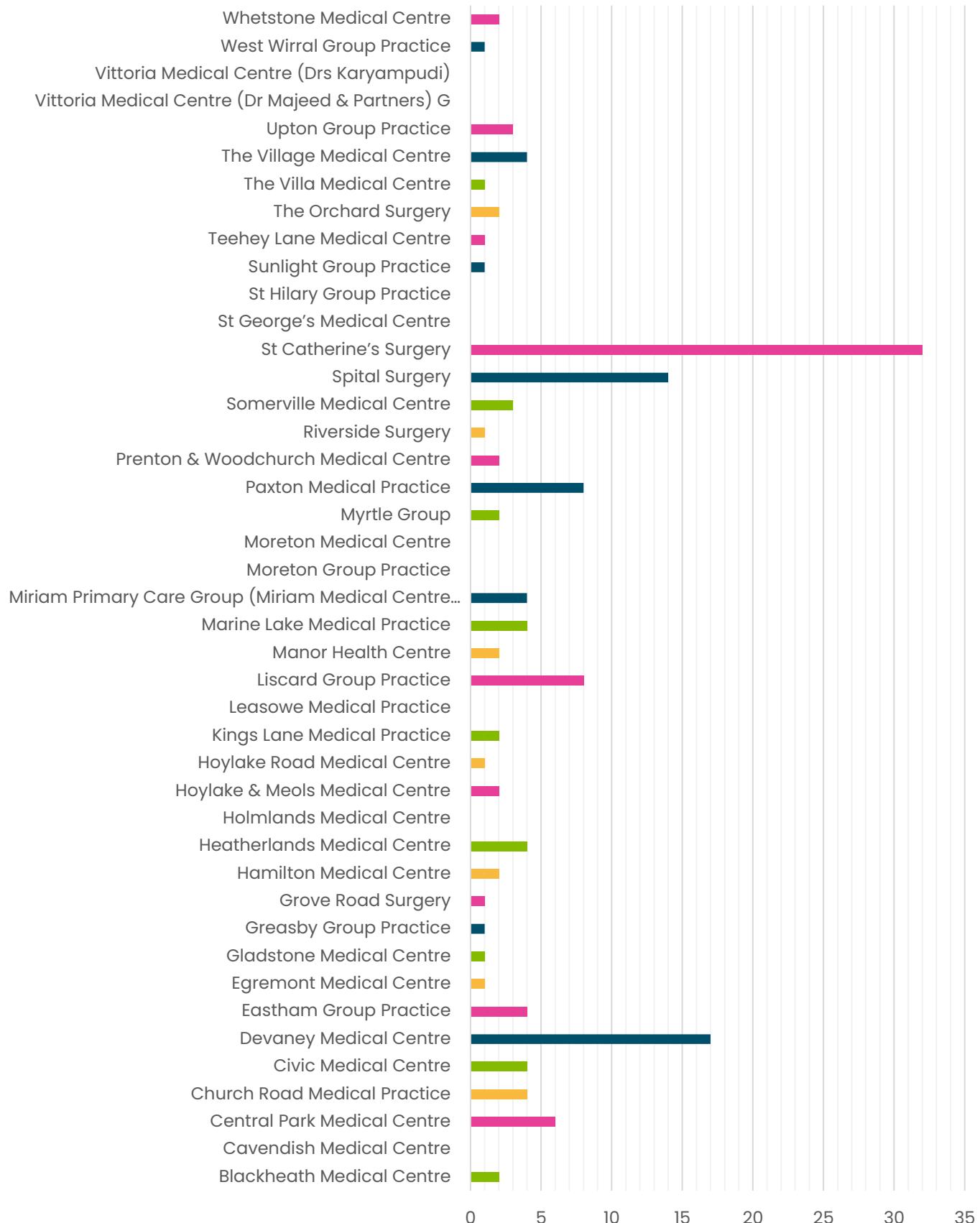
Q3. Does the person you care for go to the same GP as you?



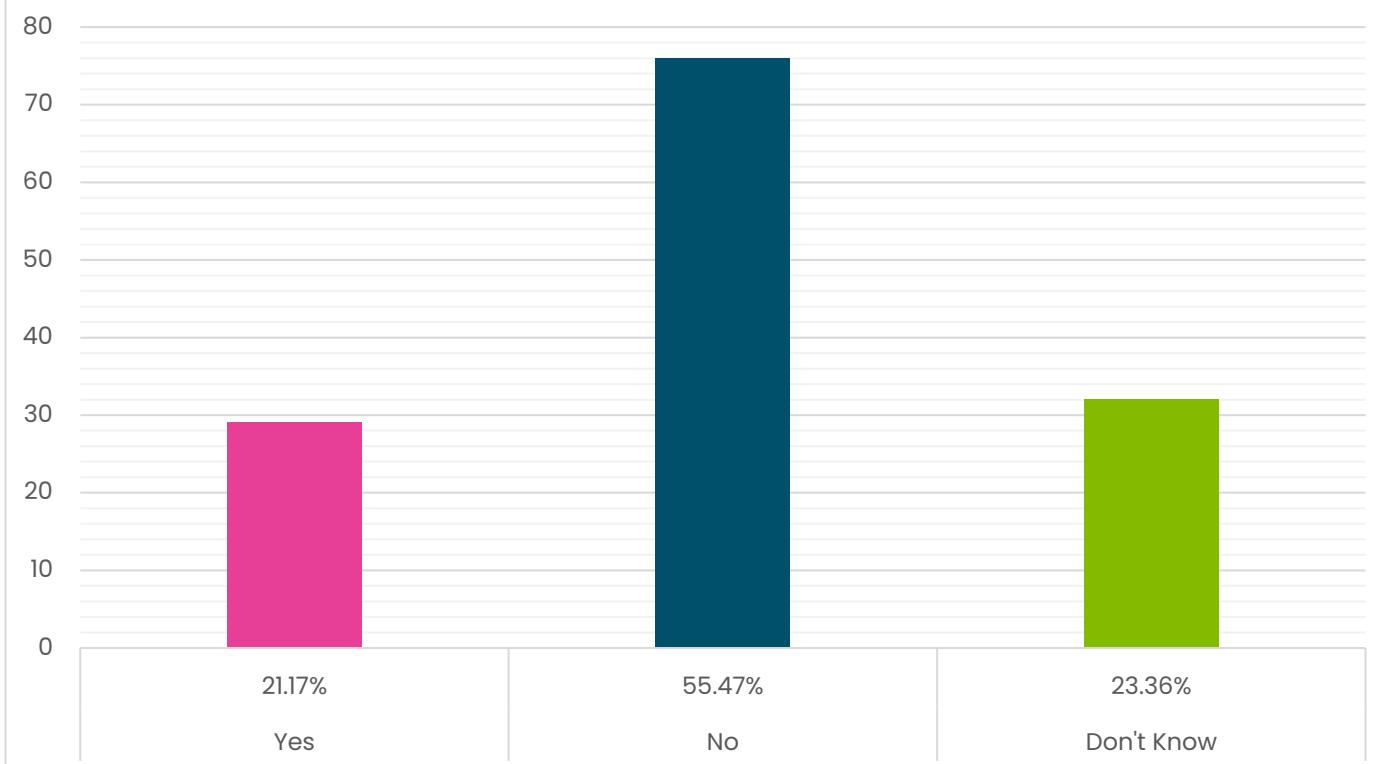
Q3. Does the person you care for go to the same GP as you?

17.86% were registered with a different GP Practice from the person they cared for and 81.43% shared a GP Practice.

Q4. Please select the GP Practice that the person or people that you care for attends (If you care for more than one person, select all GP Practices that apply)



Q5. Have you been offered a wellbeing check at your GP Practice in the last 12 months (1 year)?

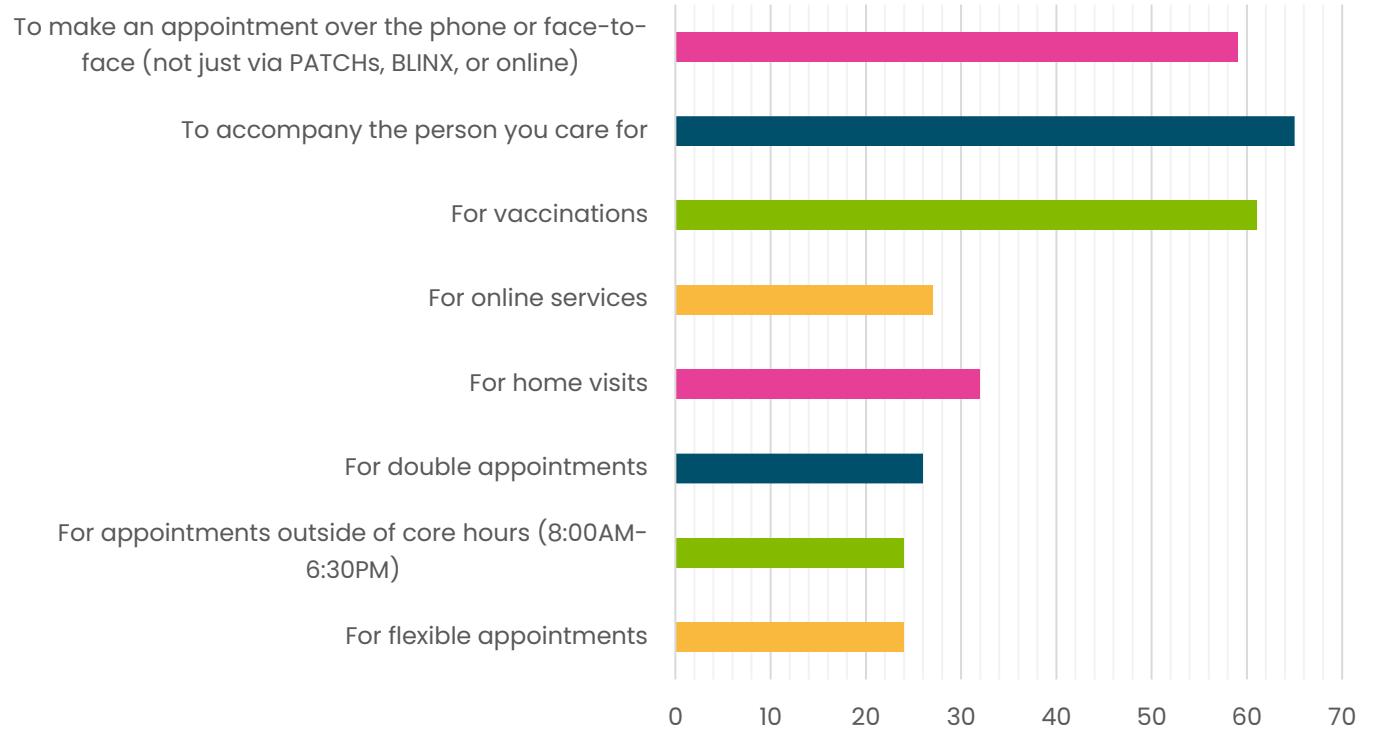


Q5. Have you been offered a wellbeing check at your GP Practice in the last 12 months (1 year)?

55.47% of Carers who responded had not been offered a wellbeing check at their Practice whilst 21.17% had, and 23.36% reported that they did not know if they had or not.

Responses suggest that offering free annual health checks for Carers could be valuable. These checks should focus specifically on the Carer's physical and mental health, lifestyle, and support needs, separate from those of the person they care for.

Q6. Are you aware that you can ask your GP Practice for any of the following? (please tick all that apply)

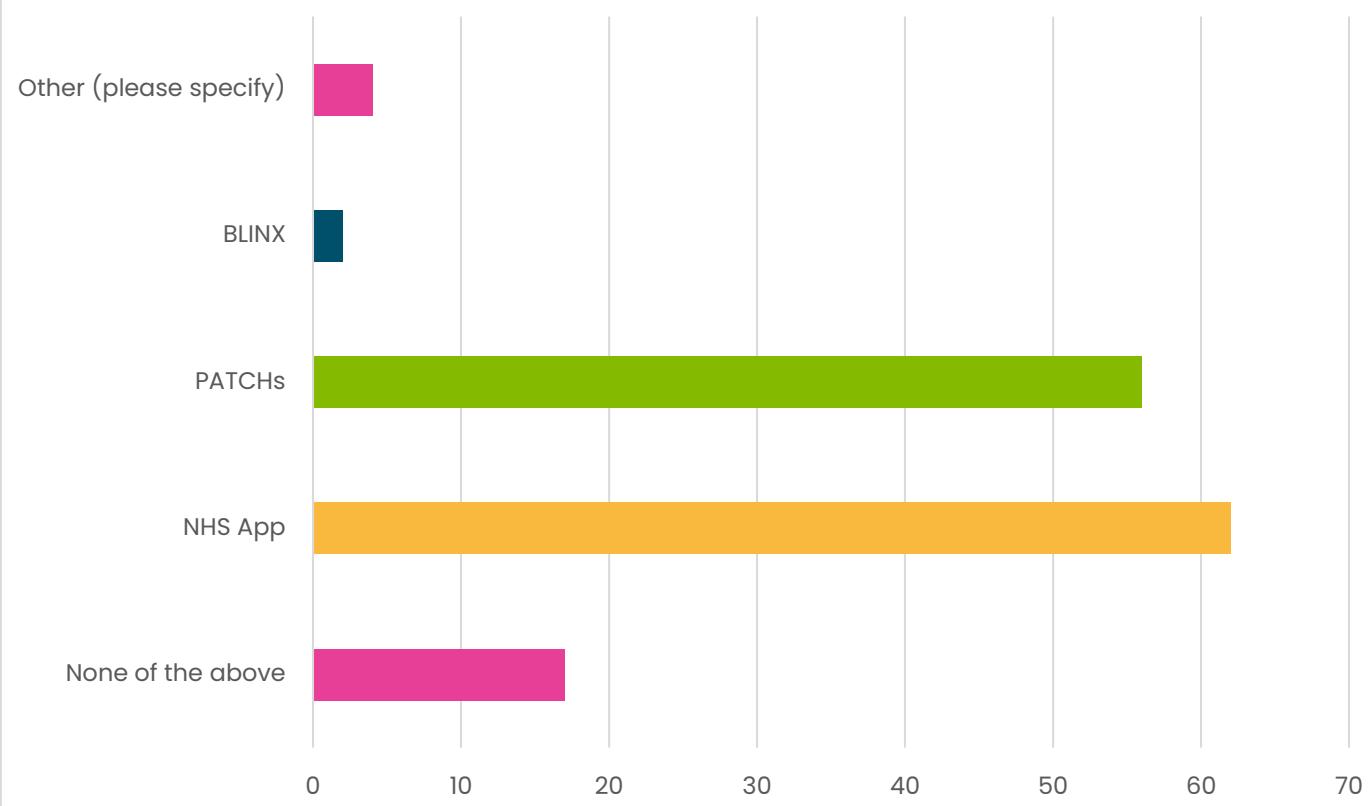


Q6. Are you aware that you can ask your GP Practice for any of the following? (please tick all that apply)

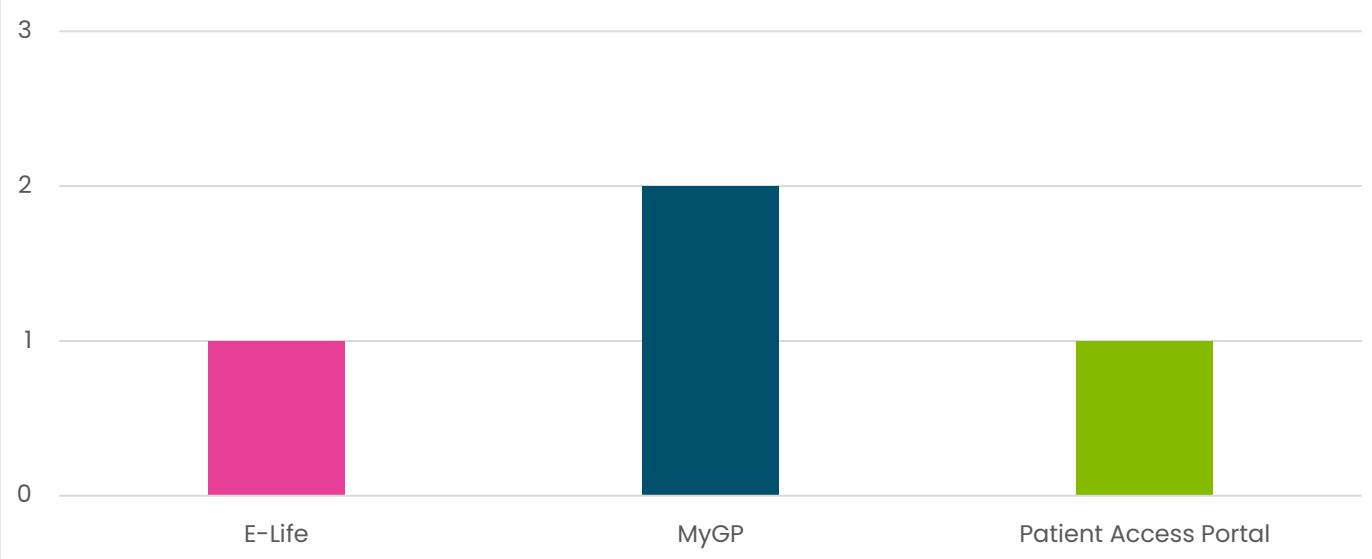
Survey responses show varying levels of awareness among Carers regarding available services and options at GP Practices. While a majority knew they could accompany the person they care for (62.86%), were aware of vaccination availability (59.05%), and understood they could call the practice instead of using online systems (56.19%), awareness was significantly lower for other services. Only 30.48% were aware of home visit requests, 25.71% knew about online services, 24.76% about double appointments, and 22.86% about flexible appointments outside core hours.

Overall, there is fair awareness of additional offers for Carers and those they care for. Improvements, however, are needed in promoting home visit options and how to arrange them, supporting Carers in using online services while clarifying alternatives, and increasing visibility of flexible and enhanced access appointments.

Q7. Do you use any of these online services for yourself?



Q7. Other (please specify)

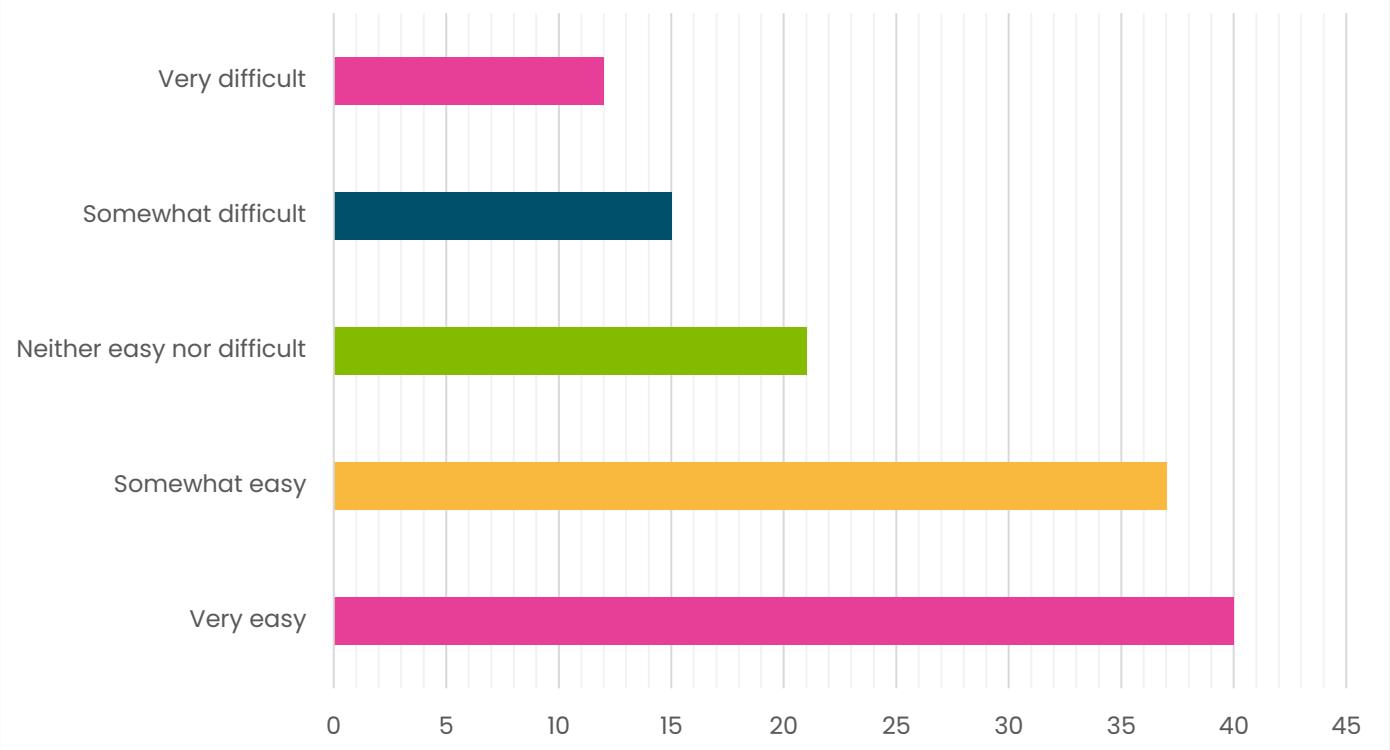


Q7. Do you use any of these online services for yourself?

Survey results show that 41.13% of respondents reported using the NHS App, 38.30% used PATCHs, 1.42% used BLINX, and 12.06% do not use any online services.

These findings highlight the need for additional support to help Carers make effective use of online services, while making sure that alternative options are available for those who do not use online services.

Q8. If you use online health services, how do you find them to use?

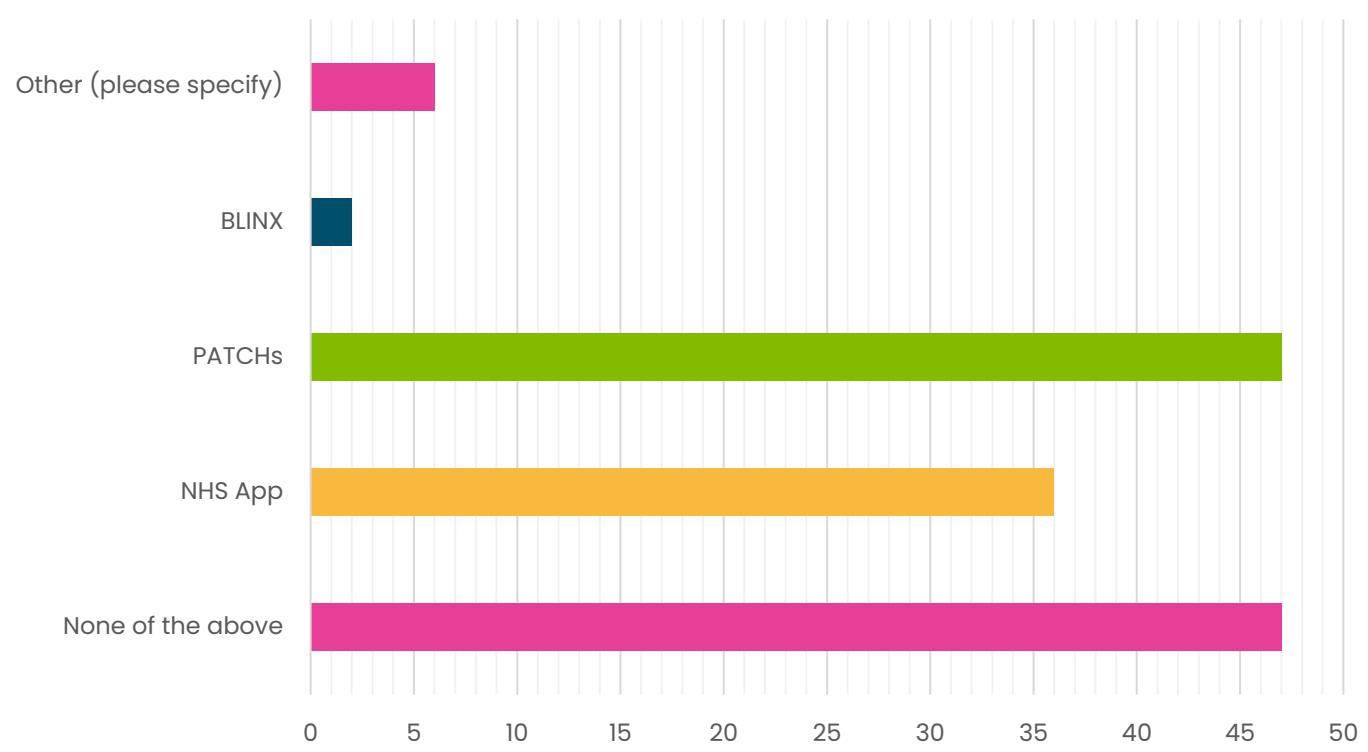


Q8. If you use online health services, how do you find them to use?

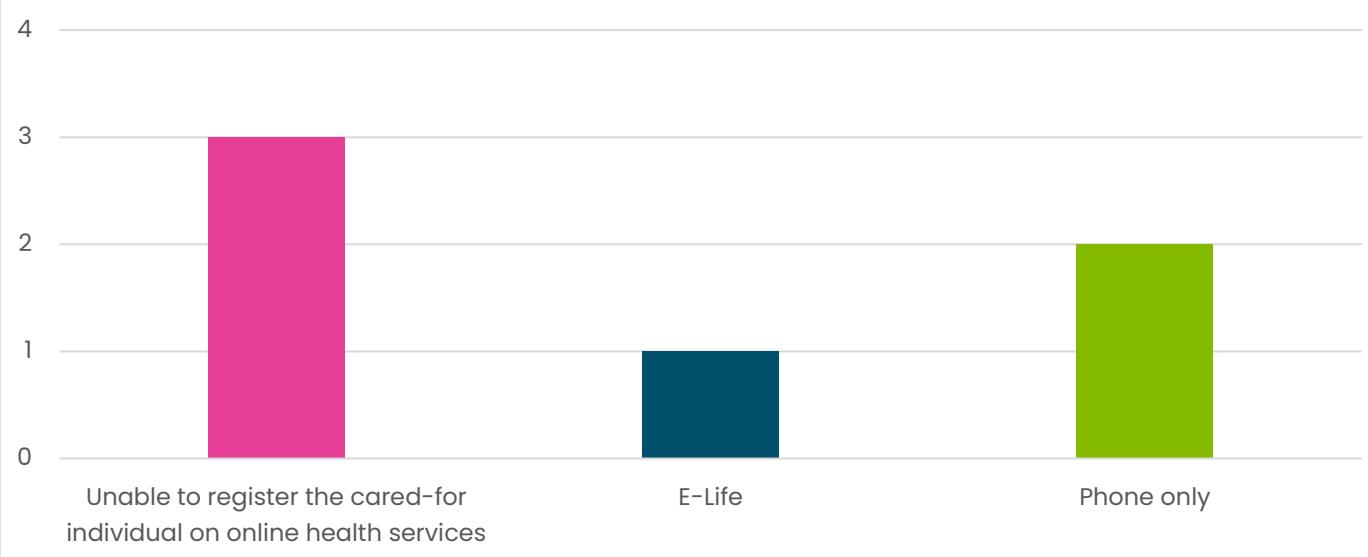
Survey results show that 31.75% of respondents found online health services very easy to use, 29.37% somewhat easy, 17.46% neither easy nor difficult, 11.90% somewhat difficult, and 9.52% very difficult.

These results indicate that while a majority find online services relatively easy to use, a significant proportion experience challenges. There needs to be continued support in using digital tools and ensuring that clear alternatives remain available for Carers when managing their own healthcare or supporting those they care for.

Q9. Do you use any of these online services for the people that you care for?



Q9. Other (please specify)



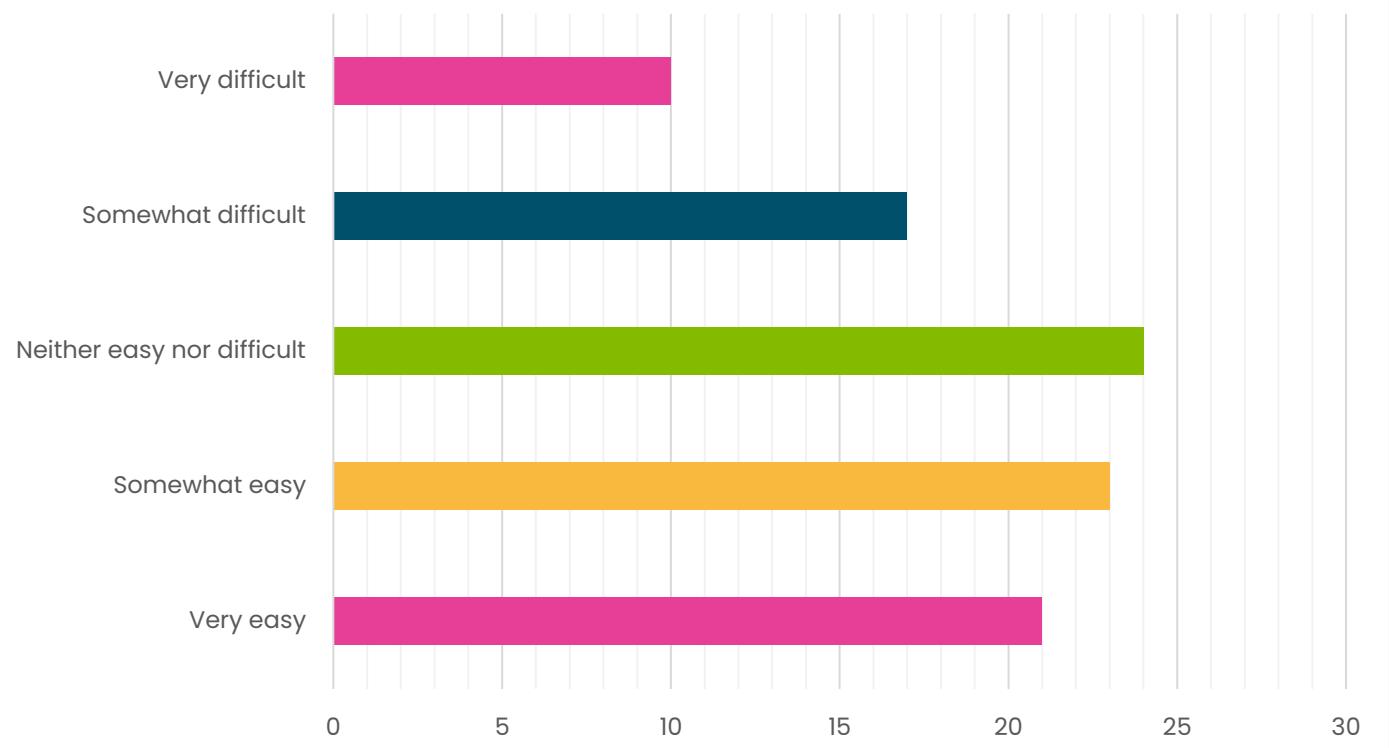
Q9. Do you use any of these online services for the people that you care for?

Survey results show that 24.06% of respondents do not use online services for the person they care for, while 33.33% use PATCHs, 26.09% use the NHS App, and 1.45% use BLINX.

In the qualitative responses, a number of Carers explained the significant difficulty they have in using an app/ online service for someone else. These difficulties include registering, managing accounts across different practices, and technical barriers such as verification codes being sent to the cared-for person's phone. Despite many Carers requesting assistance (e.g., registering children), one respondent reported waiting several years for support.

This underlines the importance of addressing barriers to access and considering the potential impact on the quality of care if Carers or those they care for cannot complete certain actions relating to their health, digitally.

Q10. If you use online health services for the people that you care for, how do you find them to use?

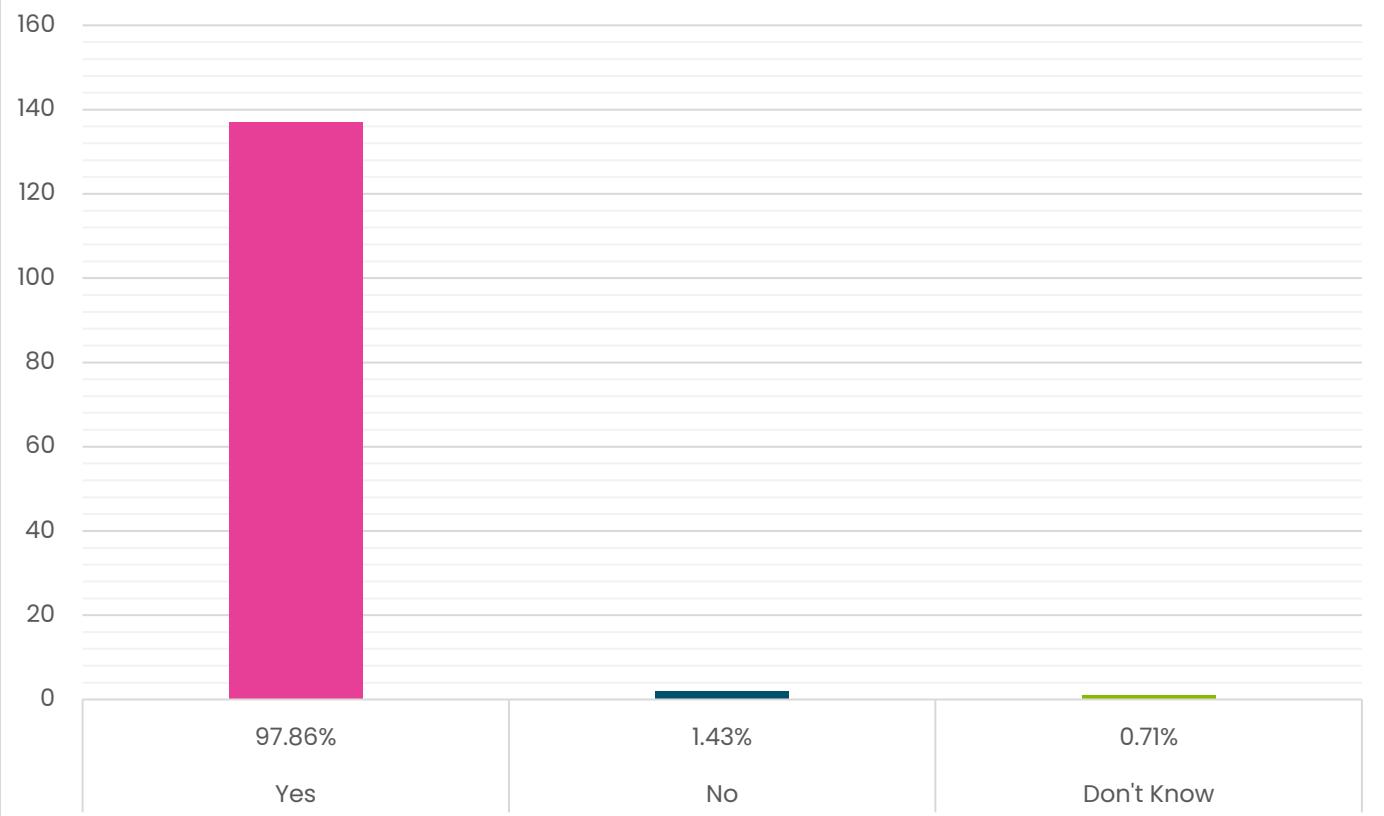


Q10. If you use online health services for the people that you care for, how do you find them to use?

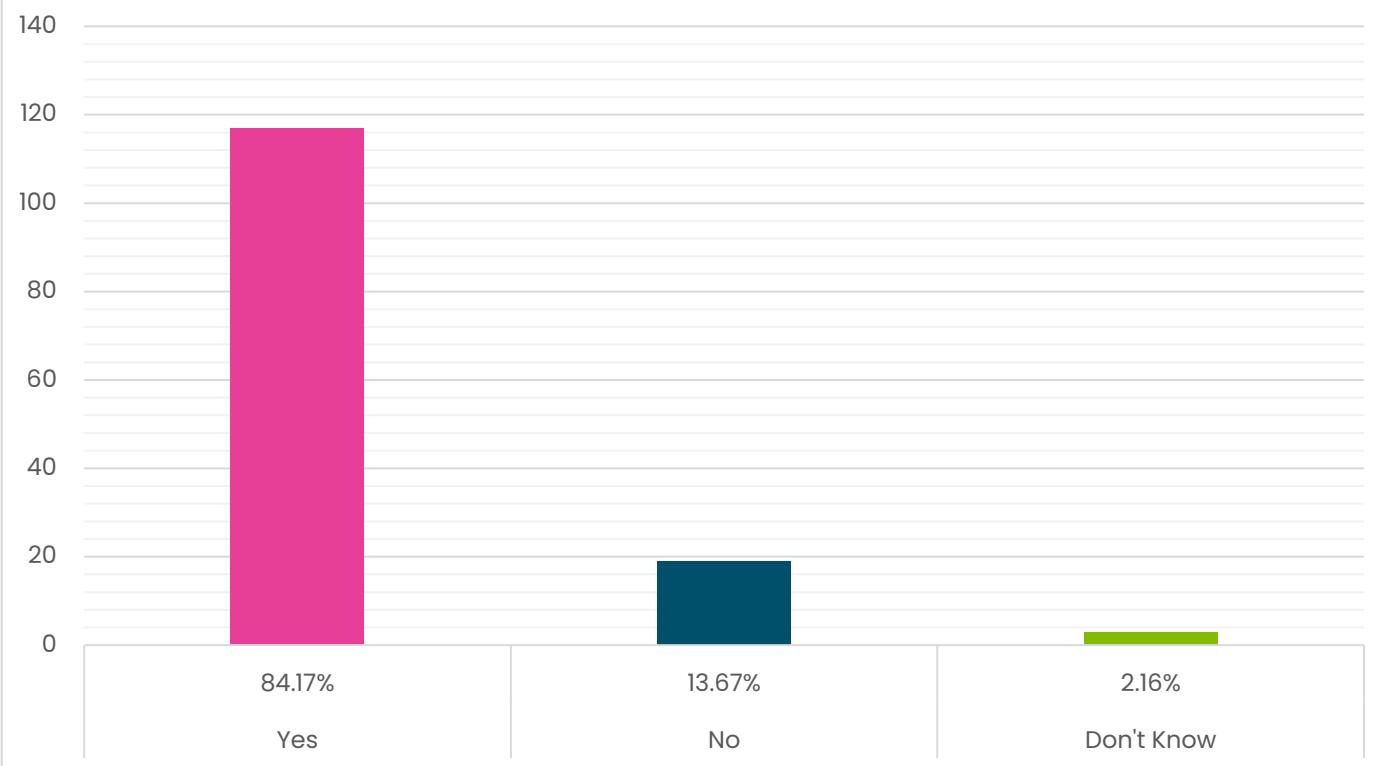
Survey results indicate that when Carers use online health services on behalf of the person they care for, 21.88% find them very easy to use, 23.96% somewhat easy, 26.04% neither easy nor difficult, 17.71% somewhat difficult, and 10.42% very difficult.

There are still improvements to be made to improve the accessibility of managing care for others via digital systems.

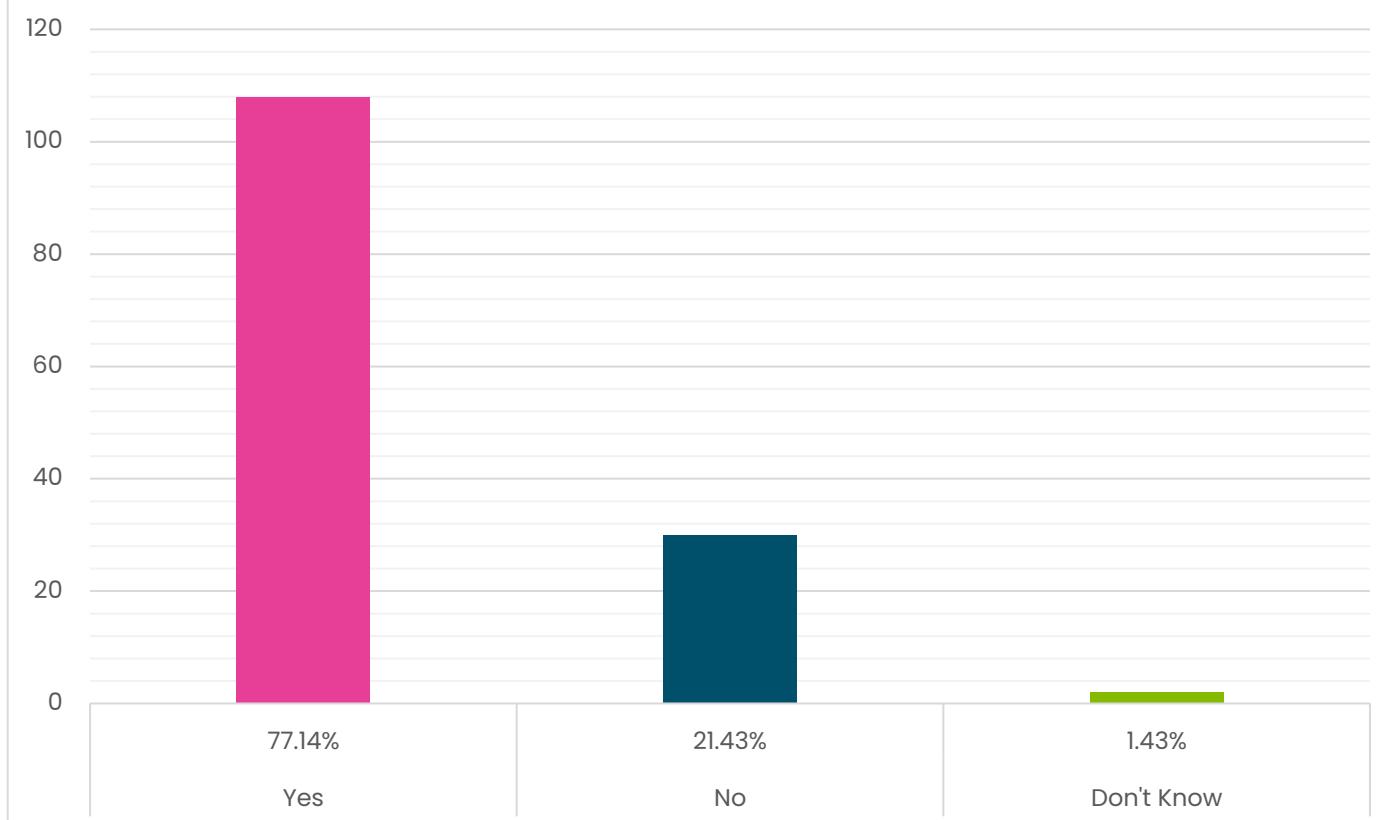
Q11. Have you heard of the NHS App?



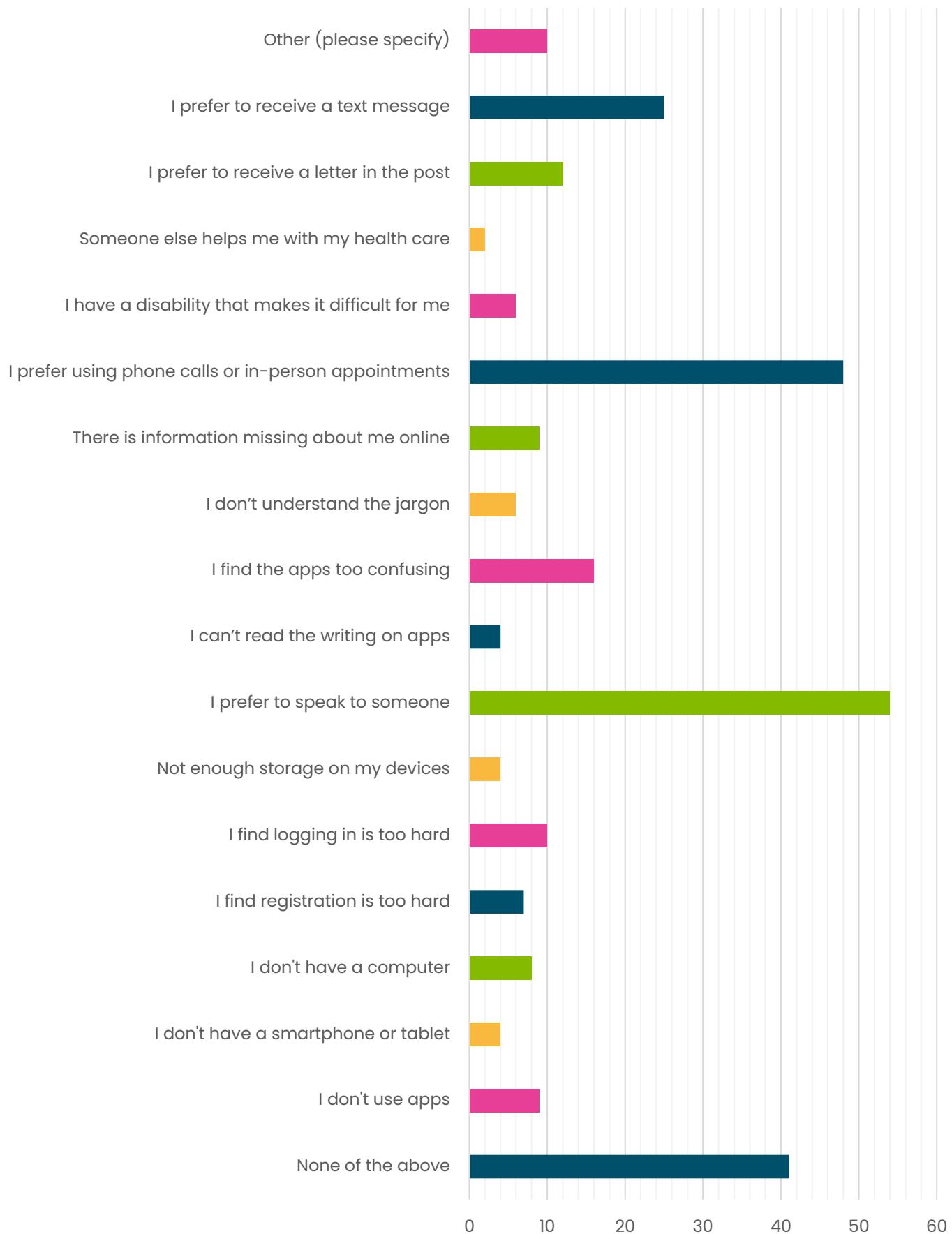
Q12. Do you have the NHS App on your device? (e.g., smartphone, tablet, etc.)



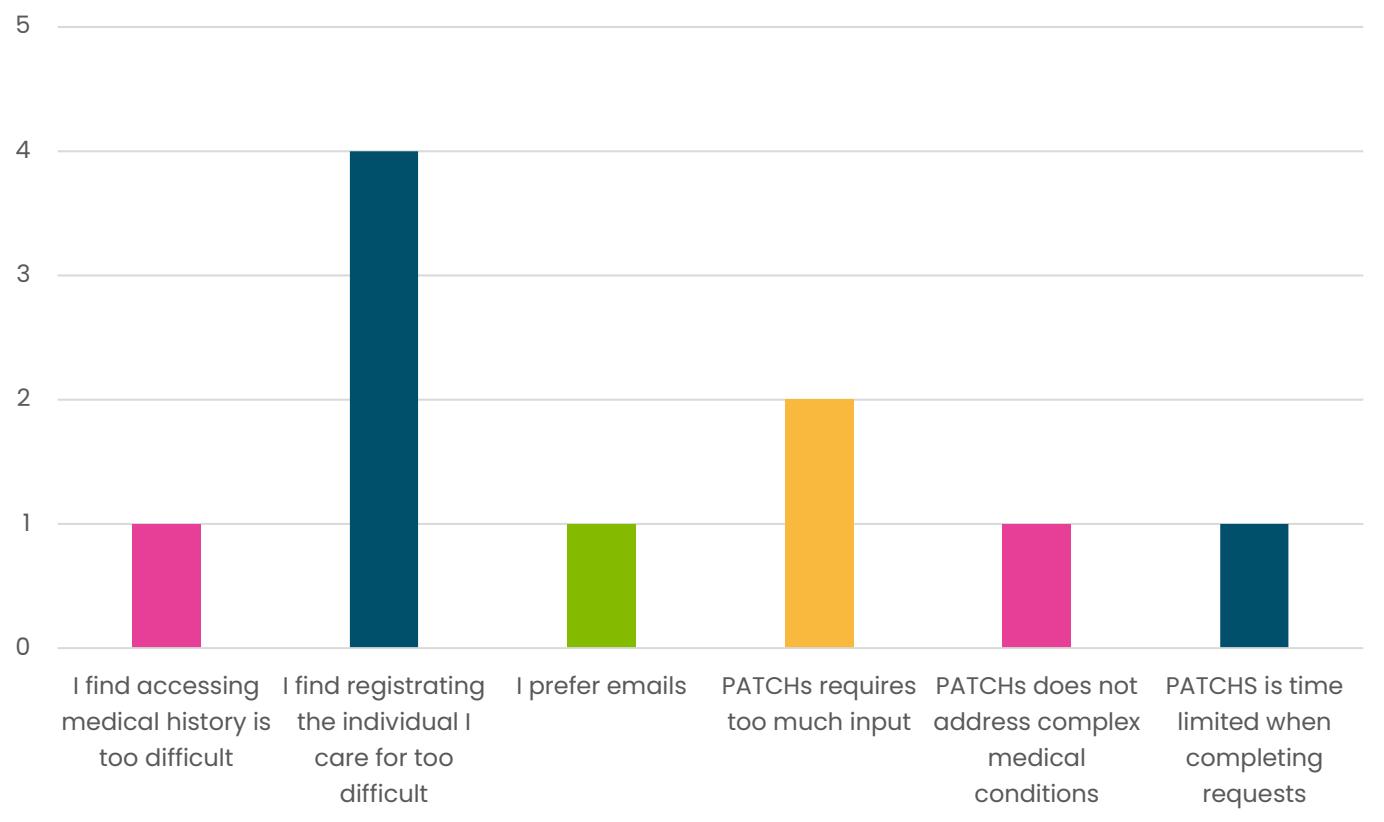
Q13. Do you use the NHS App?



Q14. Do any of the following statements about accessing healthcare online apply to you? (Please tick all that apply)



Q14. Other (please specify)

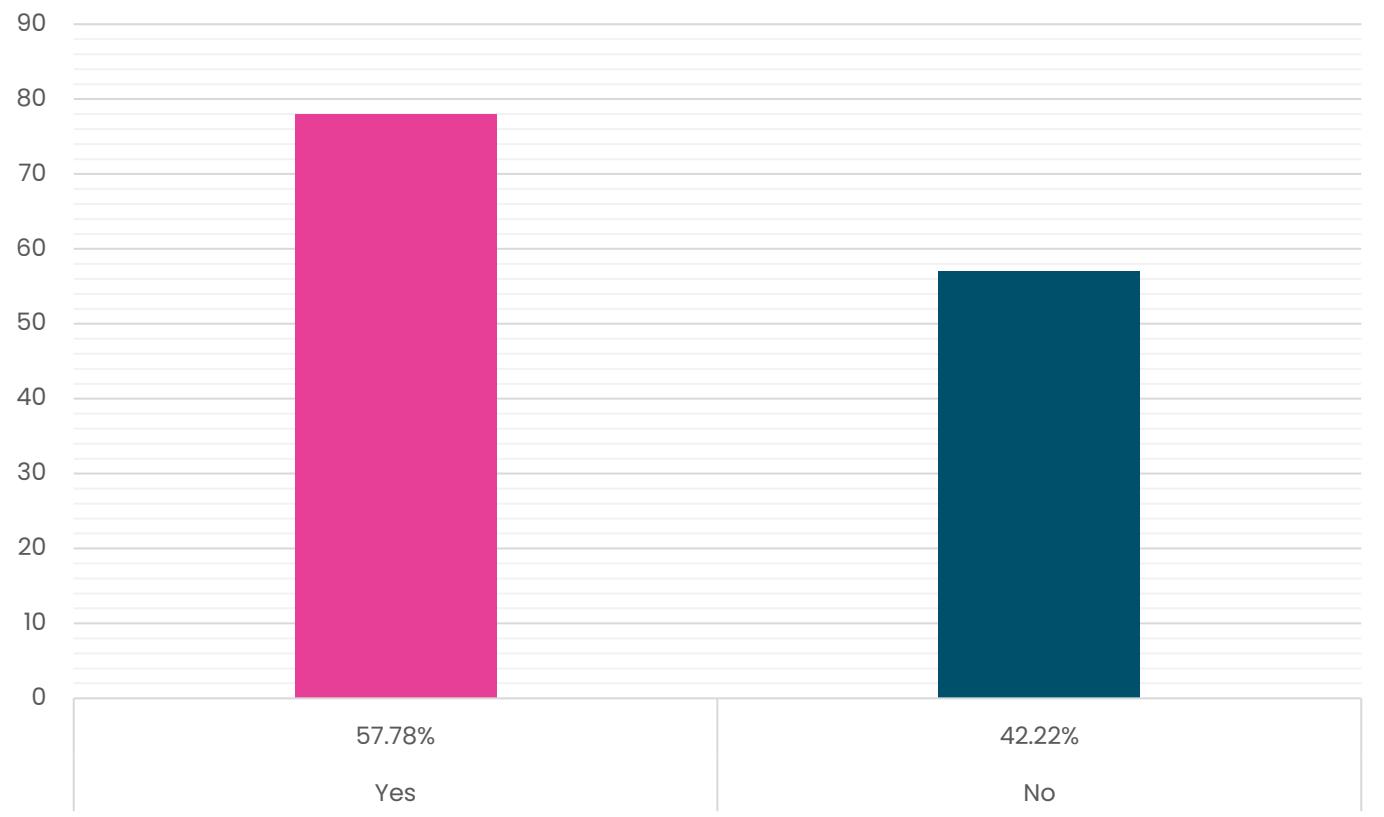


Q14. Do any of the following statements about accessing healthcare online apply to you? (Please tick all that apply)

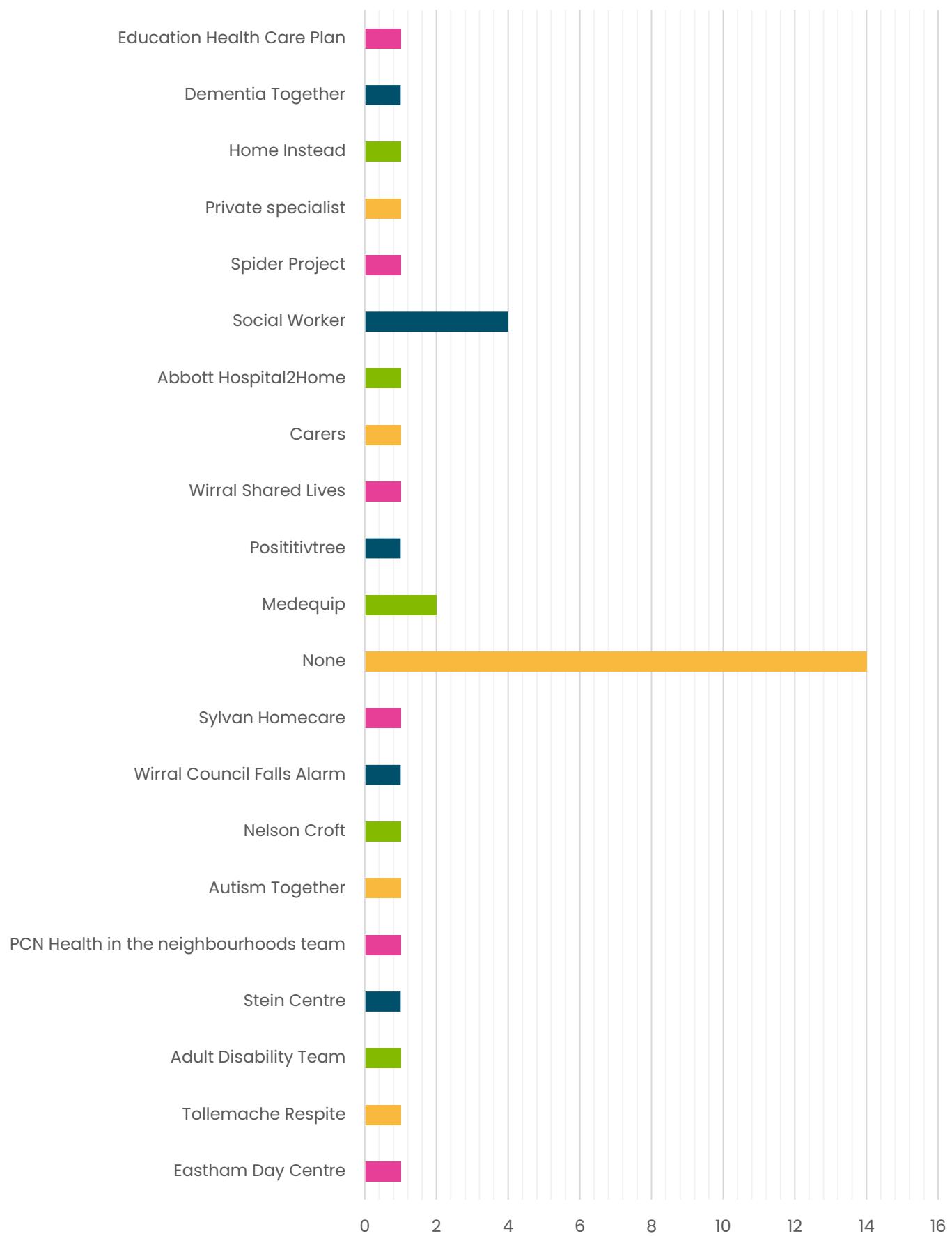
Survey results show that 43.55% of respondents prefer to speak directly to someone, 39.52% prefer phone or in-person contact, and 33.06% felt none of the listed options reflected their experience.

Qualitative feedback suggests a strong preference for direct communication, with respondents reporting confusion, difficulties logging in, and a preference for letters and text messages.

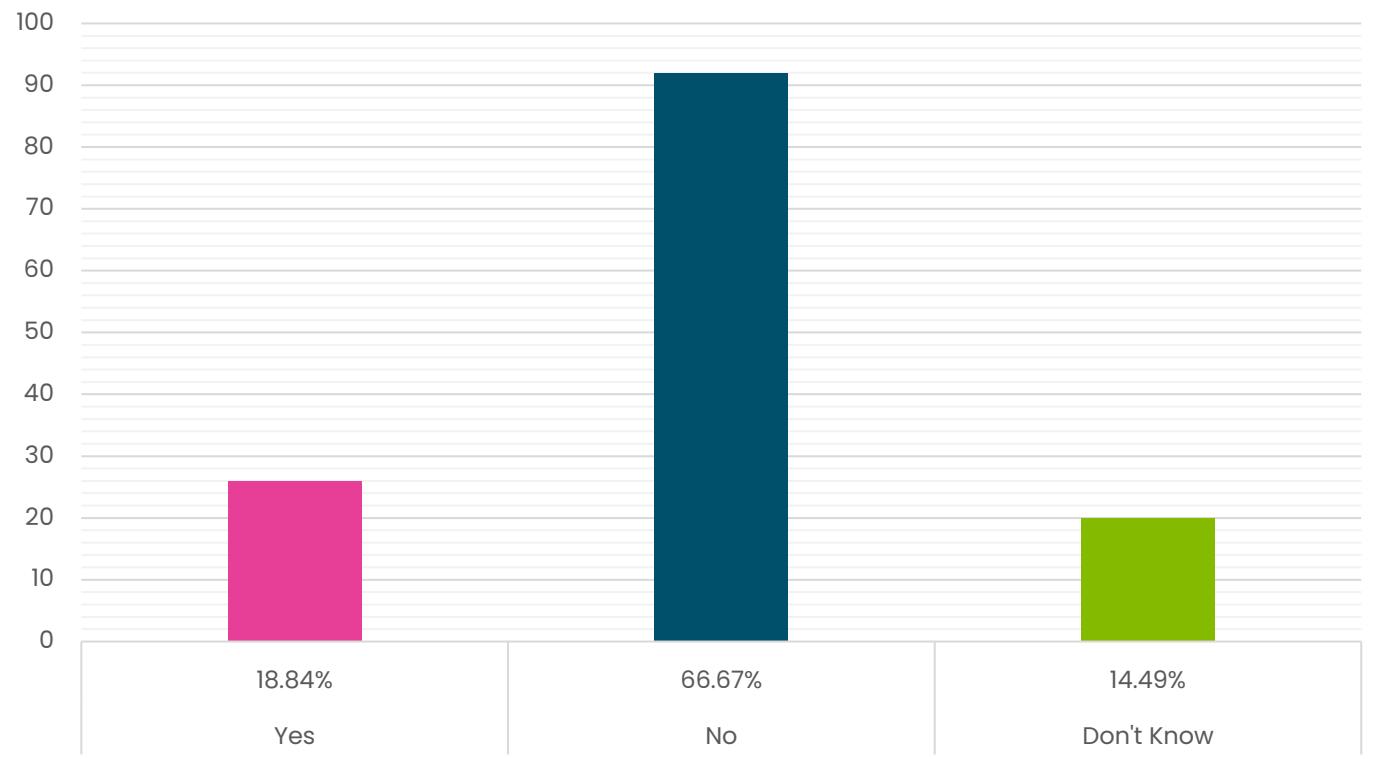
Q15. Are you registered with Wired as a Carer?



Q16. Please list here any other services that are providing you with support as a Carer.



Q17. Have you had a Carer's assessment from Wirral council or from Wired?

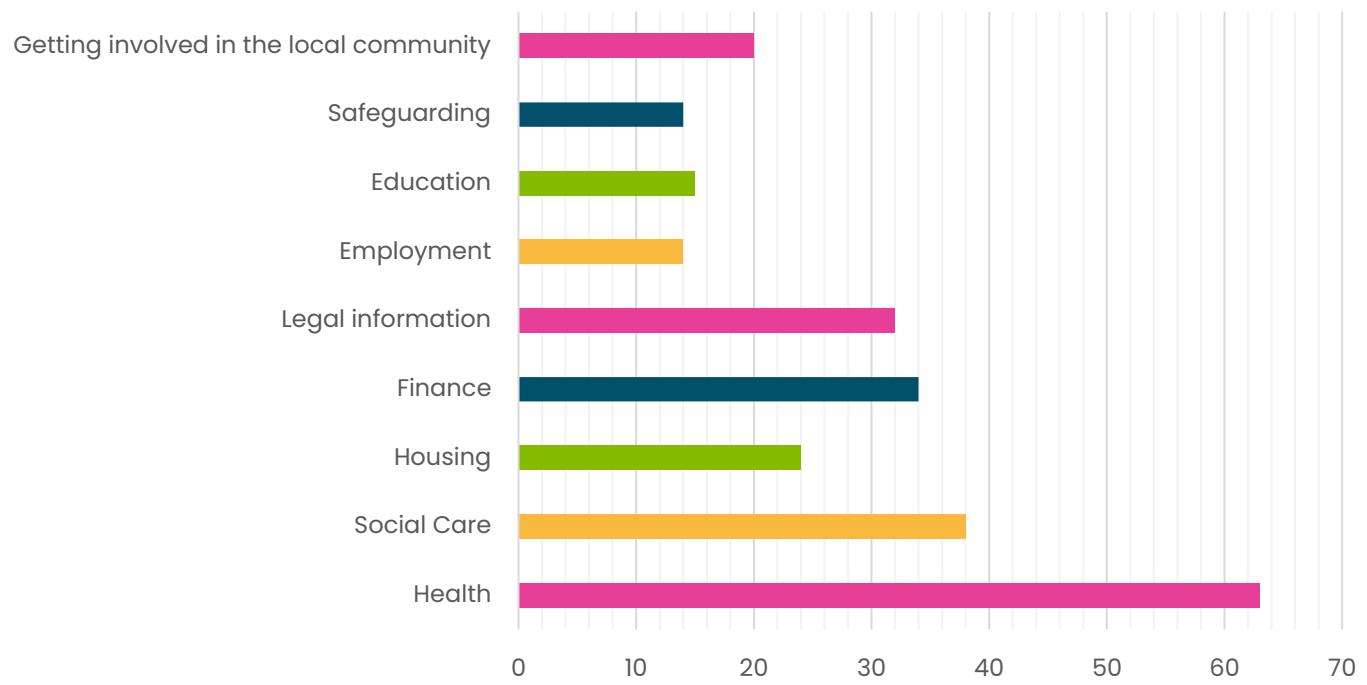


Q17. Have you had a Carer's assessment from Wirral council or from Wired?

Survey results show that 66.7% of respondents have not had a Carer's assessment, with 18.84% reported to having had a Carer's assessment, and 14.49% said they did not know.

This indicates a significant gap in the assessment and identification of Carers, which could contribute to widening health inequalities for individuals who are already vulnerable.

Q18. Please select any of the areas below that you would like information about that will help you as a Carer, in the future?

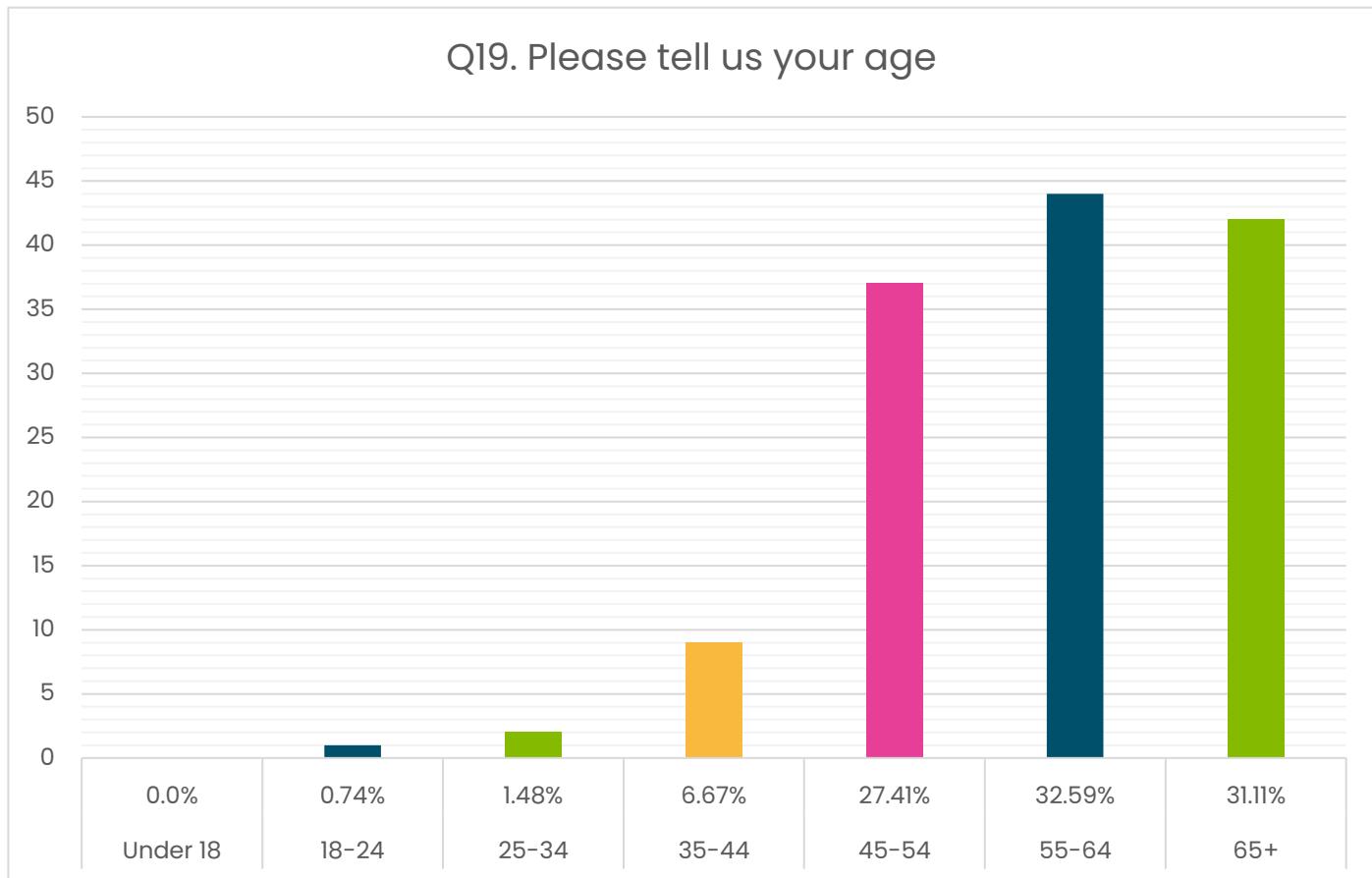


Q18. Please select any of the areas below that you would like information about that will help you as a Carer, in the future?

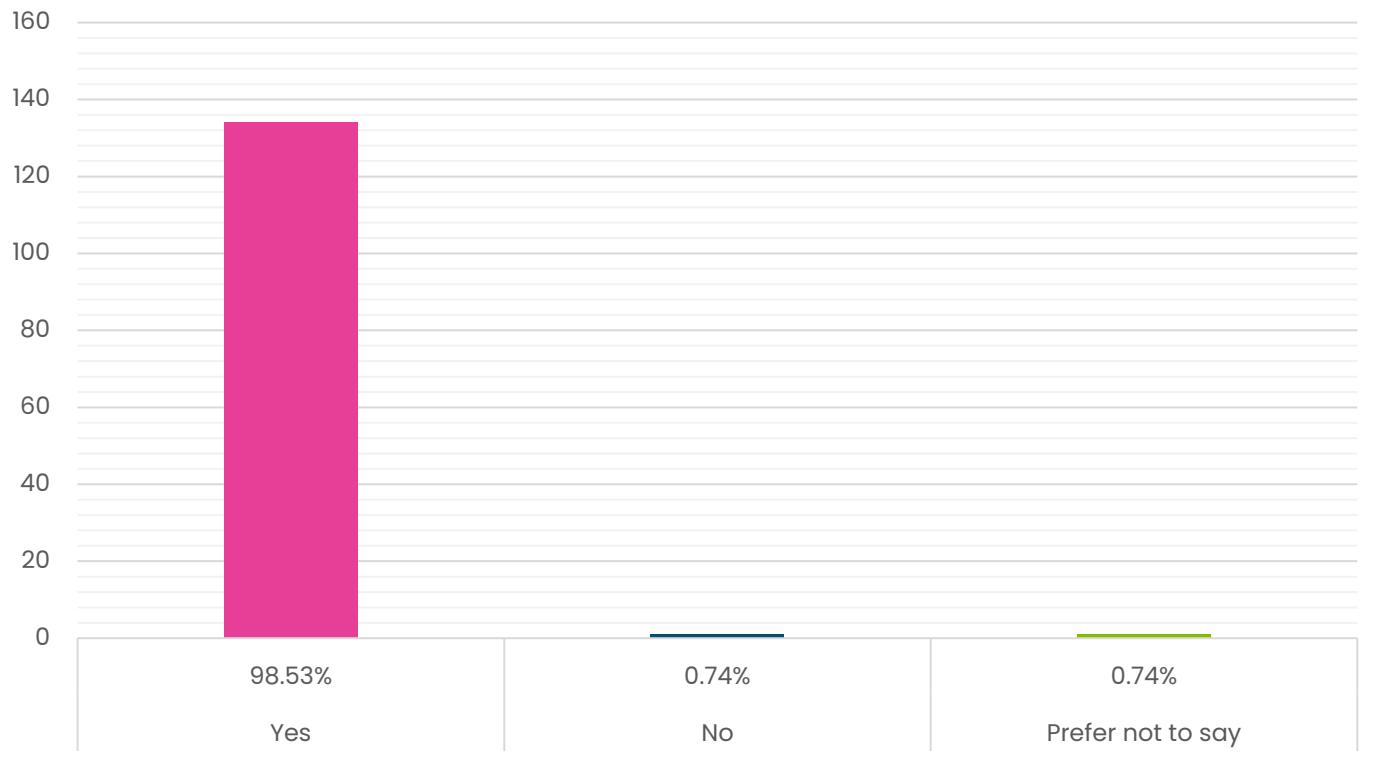
Survey results show that 73.56% of respondents want further information about health, 44.83% about social care, 40.23% about finances, and 37.93% about law and legal matters.

These findings show a clear need for maintained support for Carers, ensuring they have access to information across a range of issues that affect both themselves and those they care for. Additionally, registering Carers is essential so they can be offered opportunities to engage with health and social care services in ways that meet their needs.

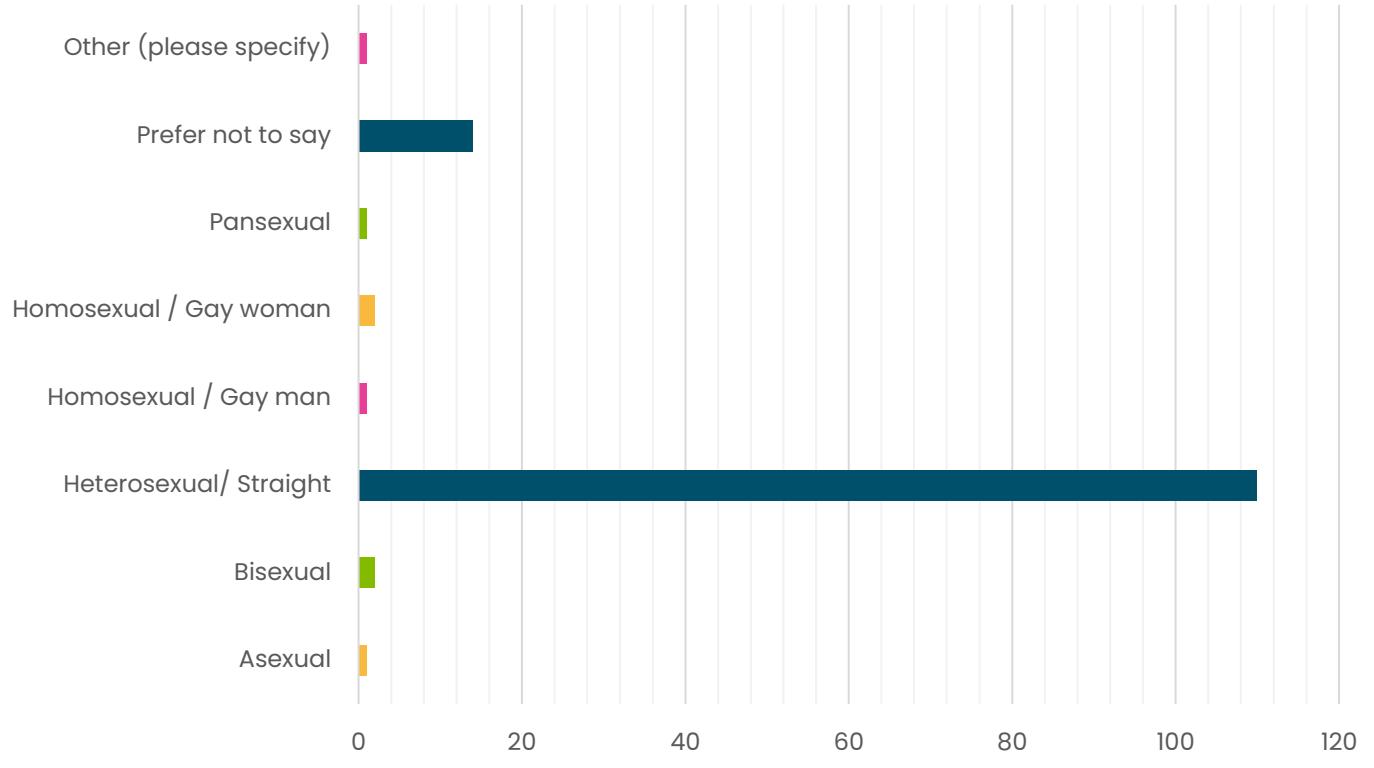
The following are questions regarding demographics of those who participated in the survey.



Q21. Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?



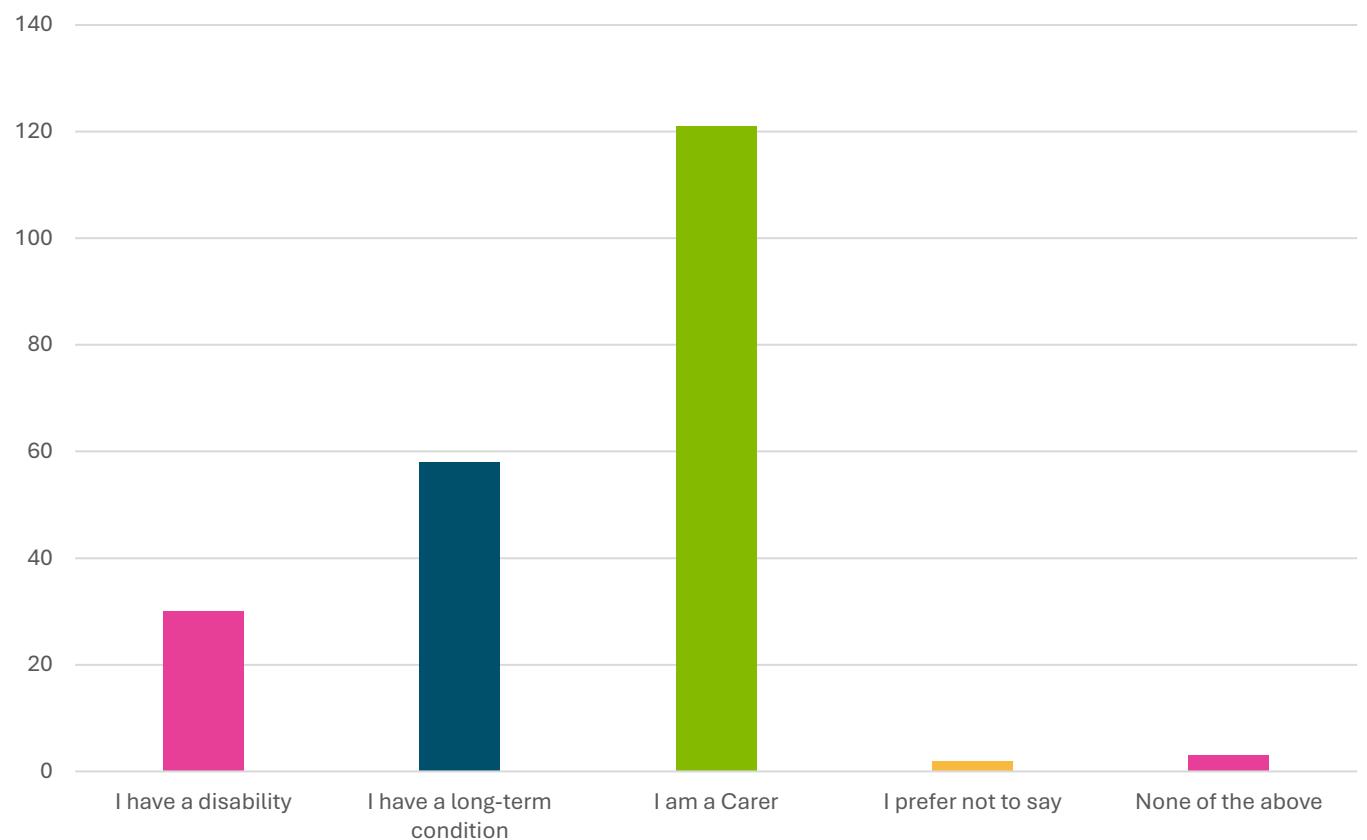
Q22. Please tell us which sexual orientation you identify with



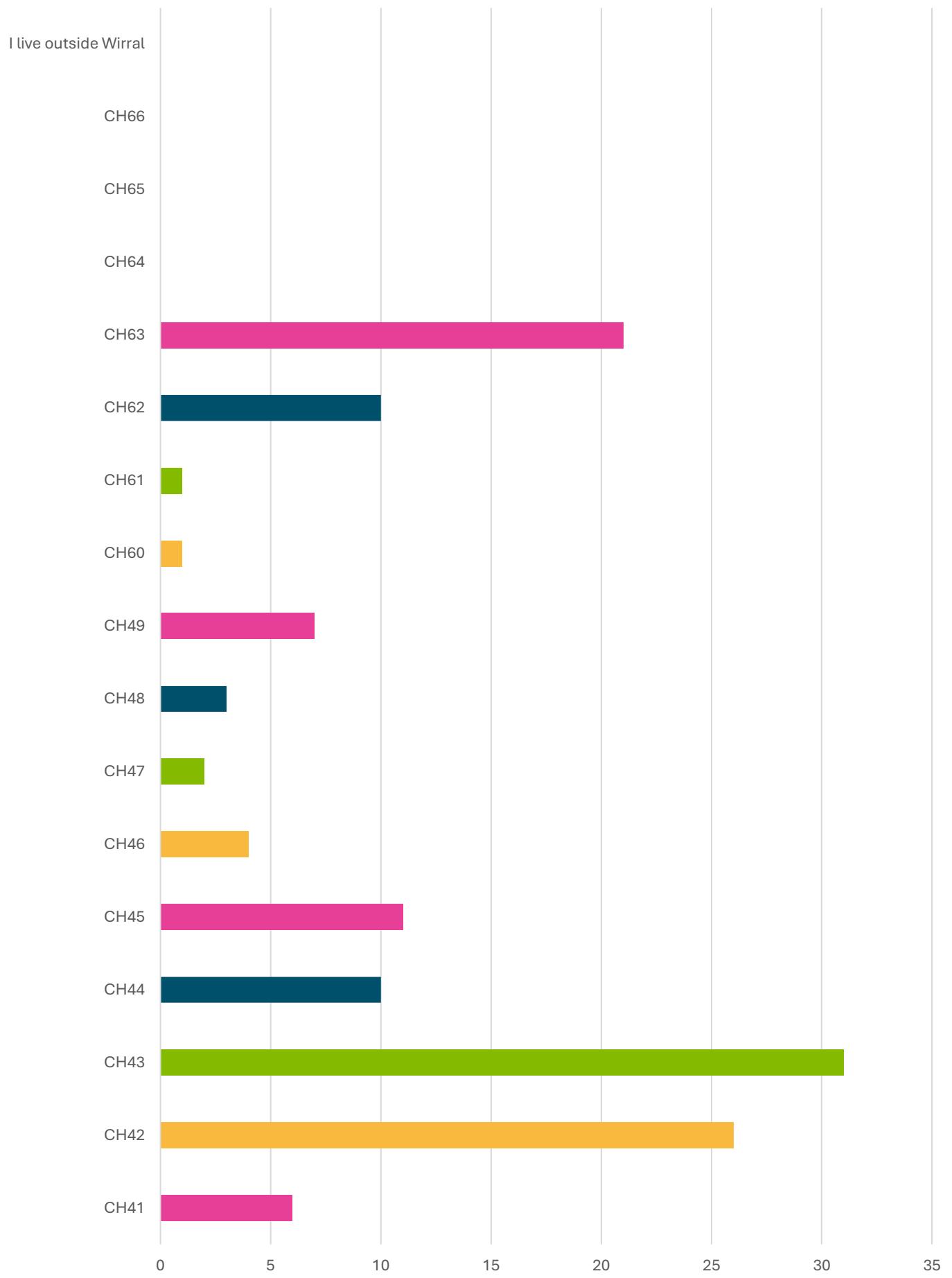
Q23. Please state your ethnicity



Q24. Please select any of the following that apply to you



Q25. What are the first four digits of your postcode?



Recommendations

1. Establish or improve communication campaigns across PCN's and Practices to:
 - a. Identify unpaid Carers who are not yet registered as Carers.
 - b. Let already identified Carers know about what additional support is available to them such as double-bookings, enhanced access appointments, home-visit appointments, or that they can attend and organise appointments via the telephone for with those that they care for.
 - c. Let already identified Carers know about helpful community organisations such as WIRED, and what support they offer unpaid Carers.
 - d. Signpost already identified Carers to what support is available to help them access their healthcare online, such as drop-ins or digital champions. **Healthwatch have begun to develop a model of supporting Primary Care Network Patient Participation Groups to provide peer-to-peer support and informal training to other patients within Practices.*
 - e. Identified Carers supported to register and use the NHS app and be informed of how it can benefit them as a Carer.
2. Signpost Carers to receive a Carer's assessment from Wirral Council. 66.6% respondents stated they hadn't received a Carer's assessment. Additionally, communicate the benefits of a Carer's assessment, such as benefits, training, and wider support being made available to them.
3. Provide additional support from GPs to help Carers manage the healthcare of those they care for, especially online. 17.85% were registered with a different GP than those they care for, where they cannot link accounts on the NHS app.
4. GPs to ensure that those registered as Carers receive an annual wellbeing check, focusing on their physical and mental health, lifestyle, and support needs that are distinct from the person they care for.

5. GP practices to ensure Carers that appointments and information regarding care is still available via telephone. 43.55% reported that they prefer to speak to someone in relation to care at GP practices.



healthwatch Wirral

Liscard Business Centre, The Old School,

188 Liscard Road,

Wallasey, Wirral, CH44 5TN

www.healthwatchwirral.co.uk

t: 0151 230 8957

e: info@healthwatchwirral.co.uk

 Facebook.com/Healthwatchwirral/