



# Do you use the NHS App?

January 2026

**healthwatch**



*We want patients to contact their practice, by phone, online or by walking in, and for people to have an equitable experience across these access modes. This will be a key intervention in the government's ambition to end the 8am scramble.*

Dr Amanda Doyle OBE, MRCGP, National Director for Primary  
Care and Community Services, NHS England  
February 2025



# Introduction

The NHS is encouraging more and more patients to use the NHS App to access information and services.

Healthwatch Southend appreciates that this is helpful for many residents, but we are concerned about those who are unable to use an app. This could be because of the cost of using a mobile phone, or a disability which makes typing on a small screen difficult. There are also barriers to using the NHS website on a tablet or computer as the alternative.

# Digital disadvantage

Ofcom has undertaken research into barriers to getting online and digital engagement. Their research suggests that

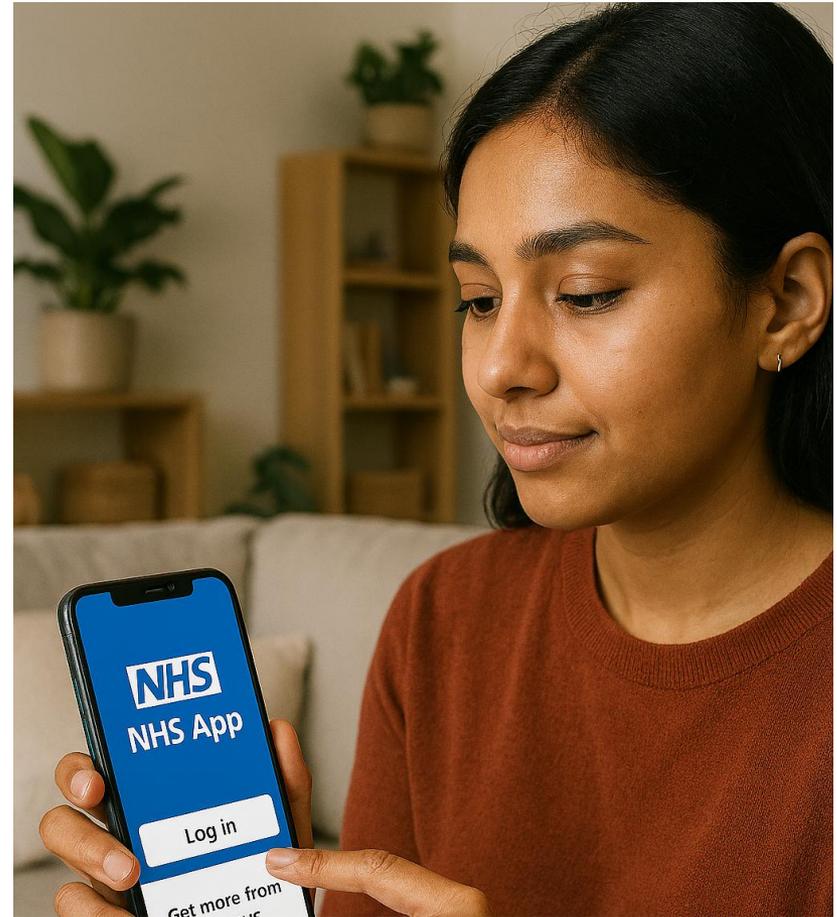
- 5% of the population have no access to the internet – possibly some 9,000 residents in Southend
- 8% of internet users do not feel confident on-line
- Many users connect via 2G or 3G, meaning slower downloads and a phasing out of this level of connectivity by providers
- 18% of internet users go online exclusively via a smartphone, and 27% of these users say they feel disadvantaged as a result

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/siteassets/resources/documents/internet-based-services/technology/research-digital-disadvantage/ofcom-response-to-digital-disadvantage-research.pdf?v=393694>

# Methodology

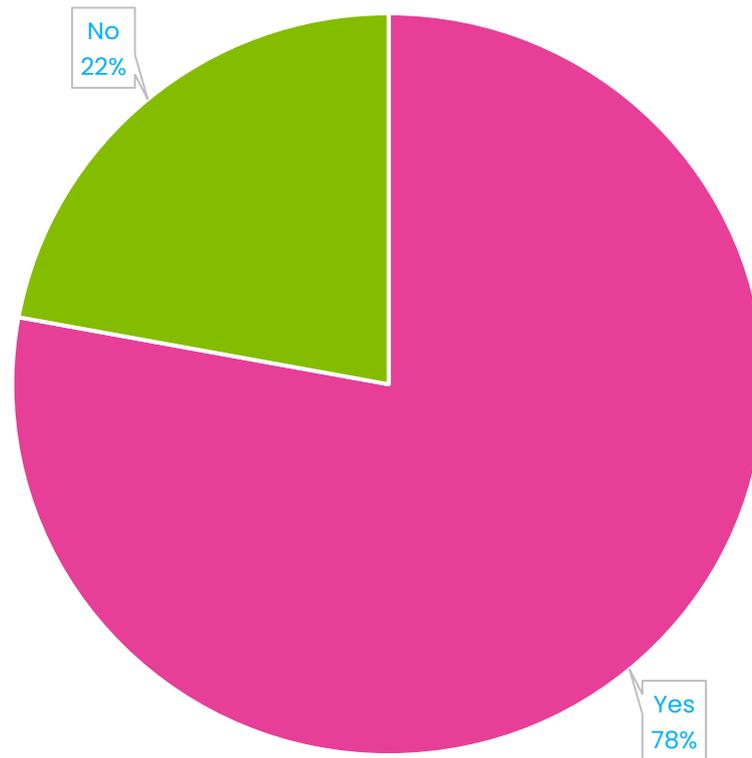
Healthwatch Southend developed an online survey as well as a paper version. Copies of the paper survey were available at events like the Feel Good Festival and a meeting of the Southend & District Pensioners Campaign. The online survey was promoted via our website and social media feeds, as well as the SAVS weekly bulletin.

We received 95 responses.



# Do you use the NHS App?

N=95

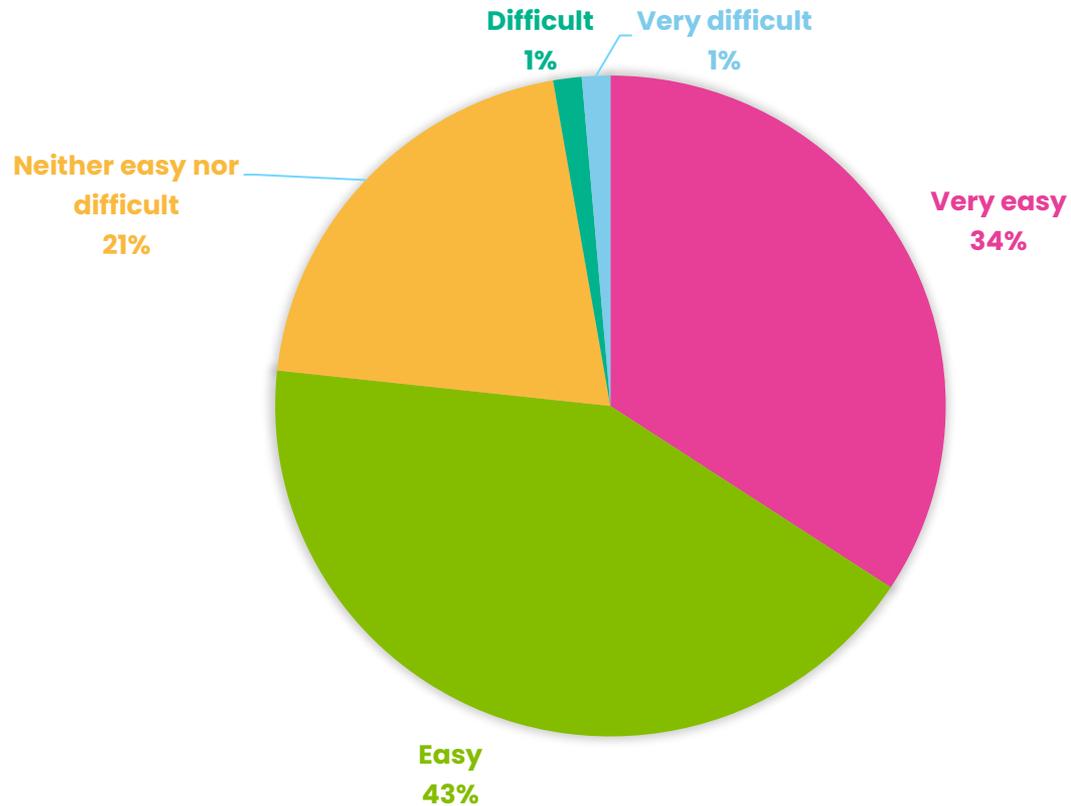


# What do you use the NHS App for?



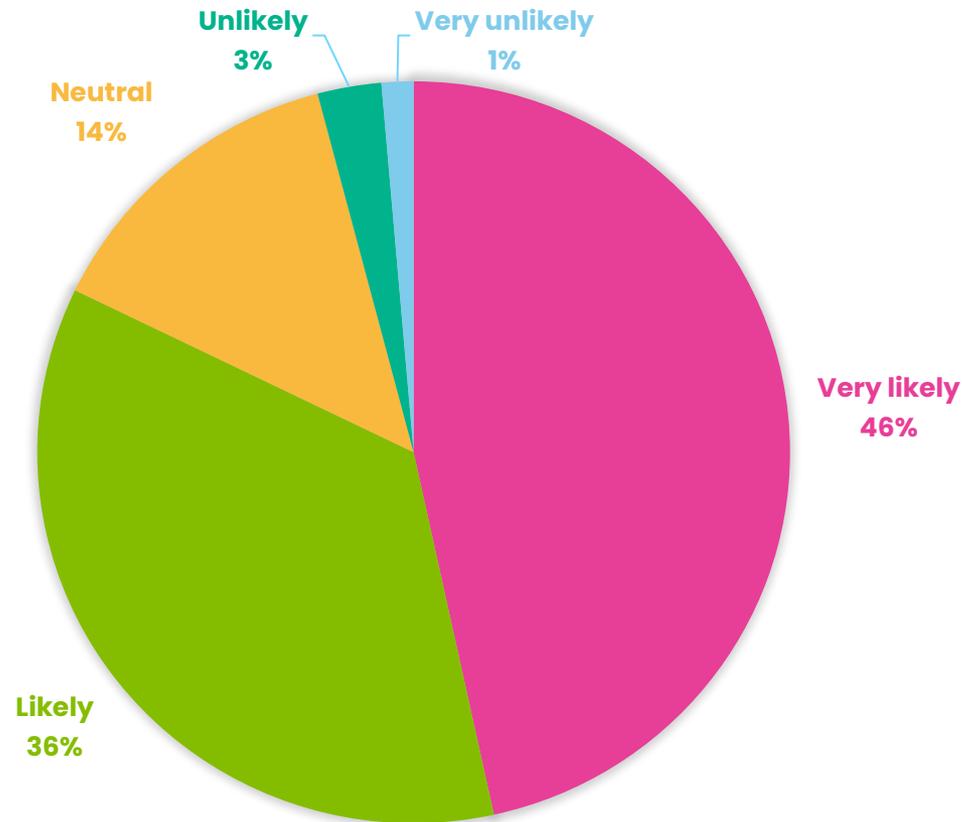
# How easy is it to use the NHS App?

N=73

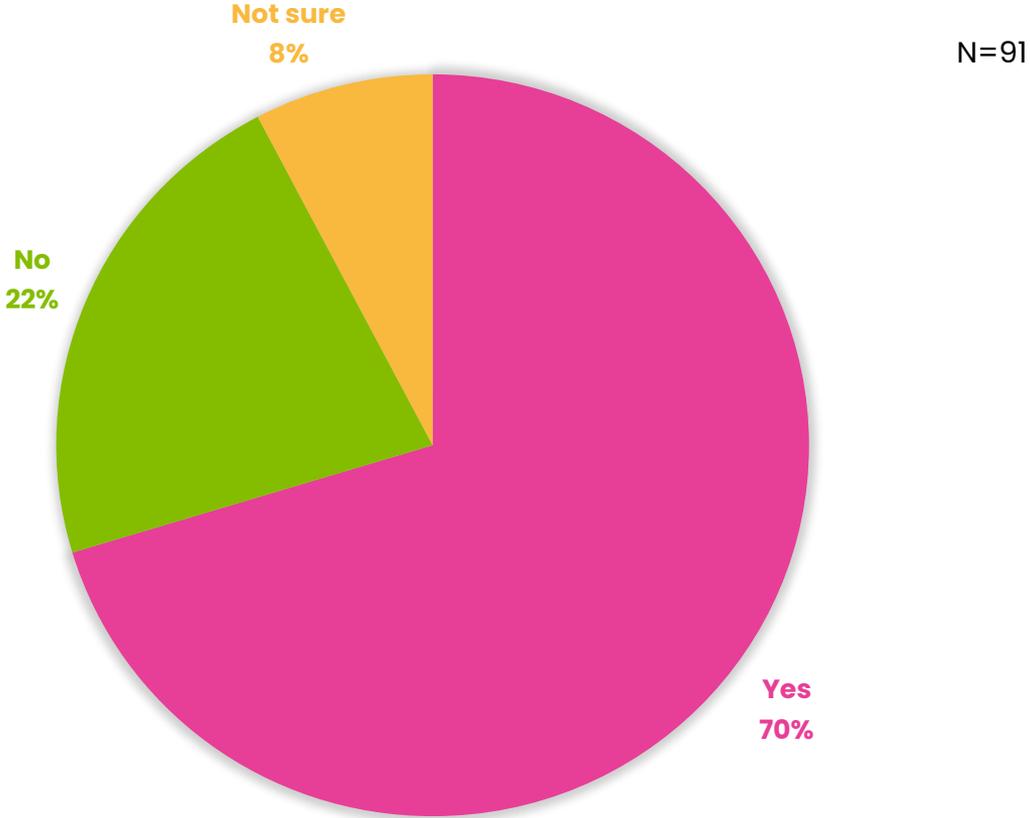


# How likely are you to recommend the App to family or friends?

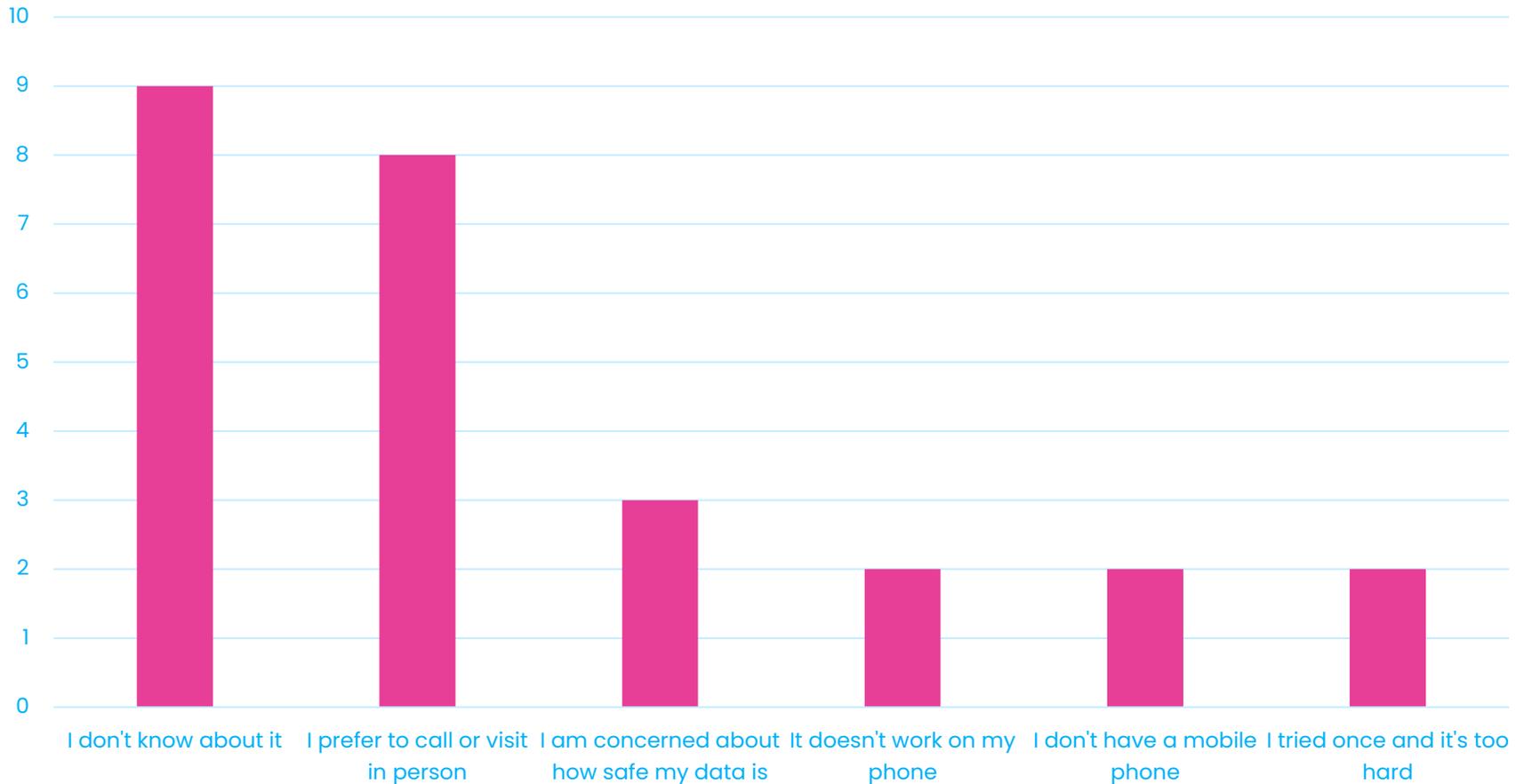
N=73



# Did you know you can also use your tablet or computer?



# Why don't you use the NHS App?



# Communication difficulties

Ten respondents said they had a disability, impairment or sensory loss that could make accessing information challenging.

However, only 1 person found using the App very difficult to use, with most responses saying it was easy or very easy to use. About half of respondents would recommend the App to family or friends.

Most respondents used the App for viewing their medical records or seeing test results, a slightly higher proportion than of the overall respondents.

We also asked how well respondents could understand, speak, read and write English? All our replies said “well” or “very well”.

# COPD Community Connectors

In a project with the Southend Association of Voluntary Service (SAVS), we have been working with residents with living/lived experience of chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

As part of this work, a small group assessed their digital skills using the Digital Help Finder (<https://digitalskills.hoopd.co.uk/essex/>). To make full use of all the facilities in the NHS App, individuals need to score 28 points. Our Community Connectors scored 10-14 points on average.

*“I was very surprised to hear how many skills you need to use the NHS app, no wonder I struggle”*

This illustrates the scale of the challenge some residents face.

# Patient feedback

I think it's pretty good as it is

it does enough for my current needs, but in a "clunky" way

It would be good if it linked to other apps eg My Care used by UCLH

I do not find it easy for appointments It is very difficult to put your problem in words on the app rather than speaking to a human .

Hospital records could be linked properly so I become one person with one number not a different number at each hospital I attend with different records, none of which I can access. I attend 5 different hospitals and it's very frustrating

Finding I've got hospital appointments I knew nothing about

My infant son's profile is visible from mine, but it doesn't show any of his medical history or test results. It would be useful if it did.

yes for quick and easy issues. No for bigger concerns as speaking to a medical professional provides more reassurance and allows you to ask more personal questions

# Key words from free text

medical apps person time  
frustrating appointment surgeries access  
app password store test services

# appointments

easier easy difficult book phone  
records email prescription booking clear

# Conclusion

The feedback we received showed local people found the App easy to use and would recommend it to family or friends. Most used the App for ordering prescriptions and viewing their medical records. Fewer used it to make appointments and only 5 to manage organ donation choices.

A few respondents mentioned difficulties in viewing records for their children. Similarly, some mentioned difficulties in signing in to the App.

A smaller number of respondents were apparently unaware of the App. Those who knew about it, but didn't use it, preferred to speak to someone in person. A small number had concerns about data security.

# Recommendations

We recognise that the NHS App is a national initiative. However, we would ask the Mid & South Essex ICB to raise the following with NHS England:

1. The NHS should consider how to link other health service apps or platforms – Patient Knows Best, or Swiftqueue, for example – to help patients access more information in one place

The ICB, as the local commissioner of NHS services, should

1. Provide more information about how to request GP appointments via the NHS App
2. Continue to remind patients that they can still book appointments by visiting their GP surgery in person or by telephoning, as well as using the NHS App or online platforms
3. Highlight the range of functions available to users of the App, giving assurances about the reliability of health advice in particular.
4. Provide parents and carers with more information about the ability to access a child's/young person's records (proxy access) and how this is done. This could also apply to unpaid carers. The ICB might also consider how to engage young people so that they understand their rights in terms of having their own accounts.

## Recommendations (2)

Whilst we did not actively reach out to residents whose first language was not English, we are aware that the App cannot be translated into other languages on a mobile phone. As the website can be translated on tablets and computers, we encourage the ICB to raise awareness of this route amongst residents, thus addressing potential inequalities.

Through our engagement with local people, we are also aware of their frustration about telephones not being answered when they wish to cancel or change appointments. We would therefore encourage the ICB to promote the ability to manage appointments via the NHS App for those who can do so.

# Next steps

1. Regulation 44 of The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trusts, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012 requires the ICB within 20 working days to
  - a) acknowledge receipt; and
  - b) provide an explanation to Healthwatch Southend of any action the ICB intends to take in respect of the report or recommendation or an explanation of why the ICB does not intend to take any action in respect of that report or recommendation.
  
2. Healthwatch Southend will revisit the recommendations in this report during 2026/27 to understand what actions have taken place

# Appendix

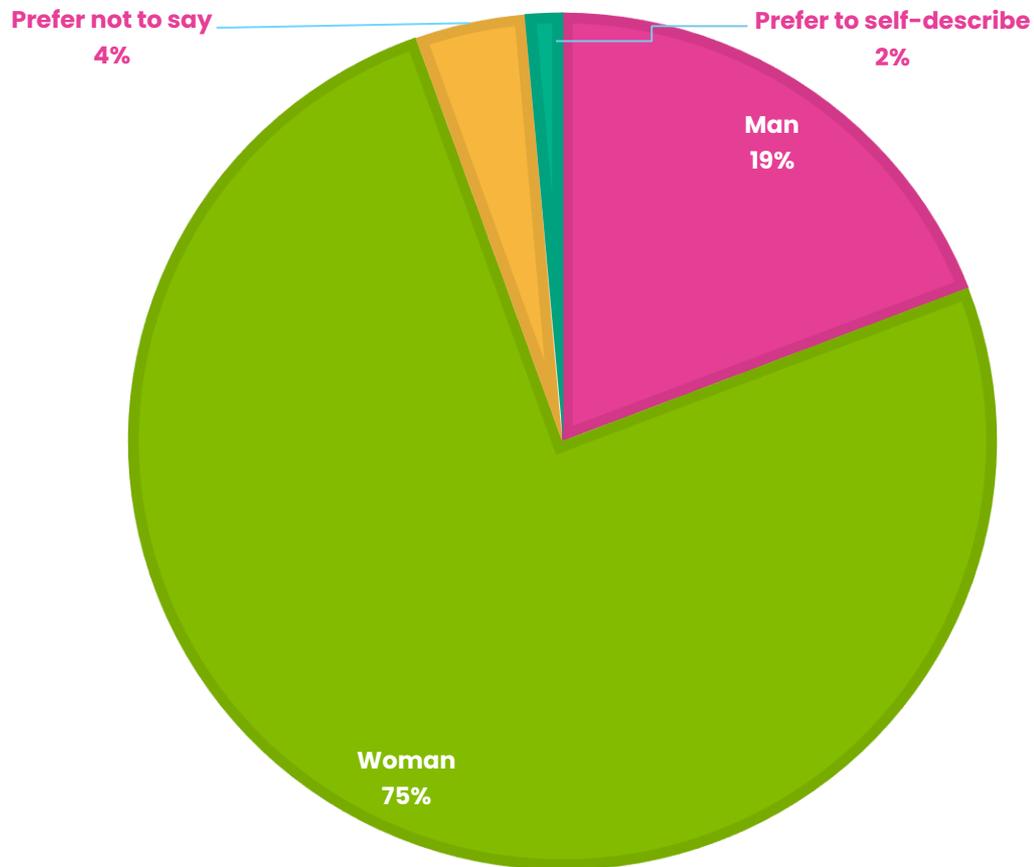
# Demographic details

We ask people who take part in our surveys to tell us a little about themselves. These questions are voluntary. We can then see if we are hearing from the different groups which make up our community.

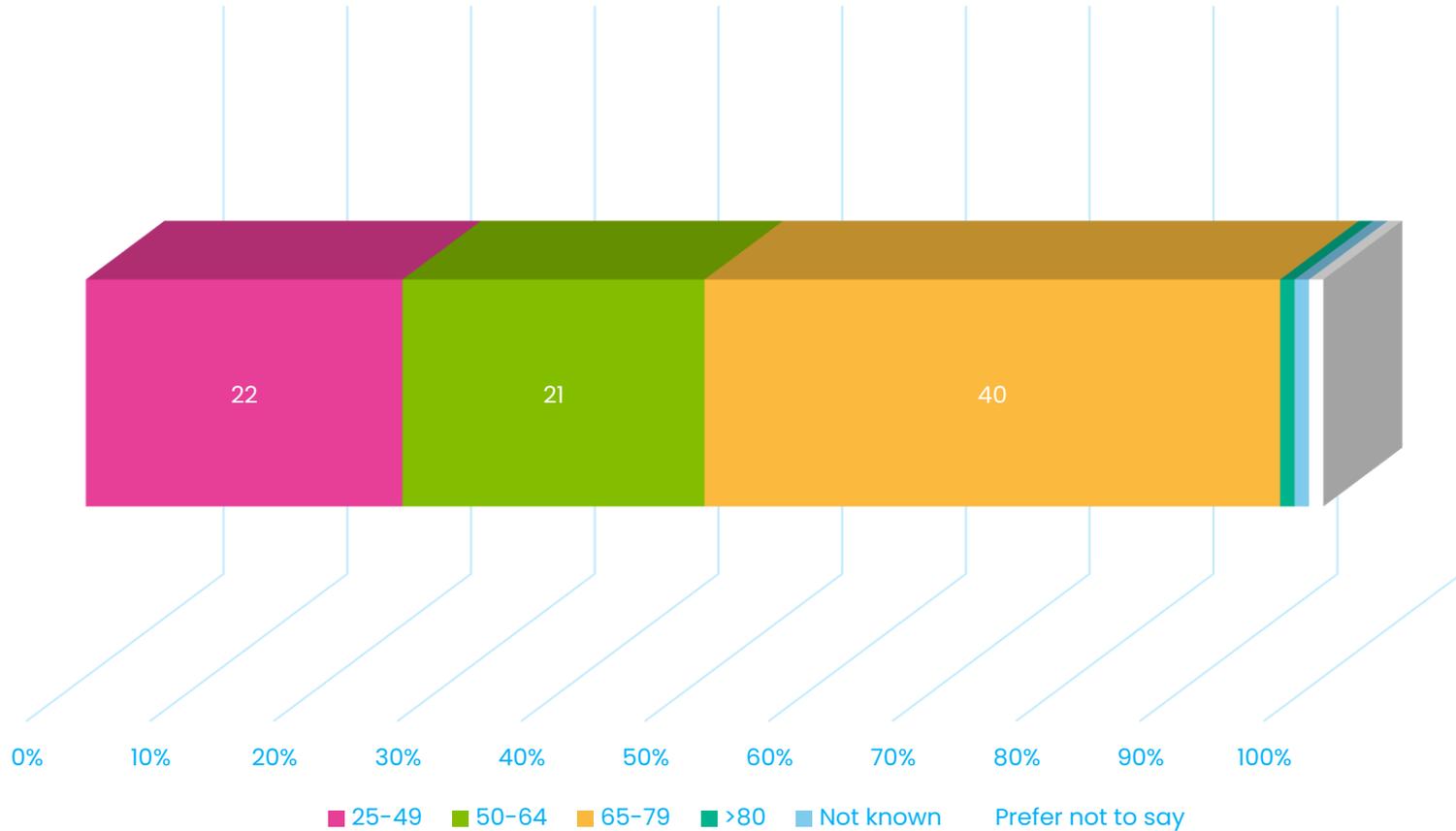
For example, the 2021 Census showed that 87.5% of Southend's population described themselves as white. Of those who told us about their ethnic background in our survey, 87.1% were white. However, we need to do more to hear from other ethnic groups in future.

# What gender are you?

N=73

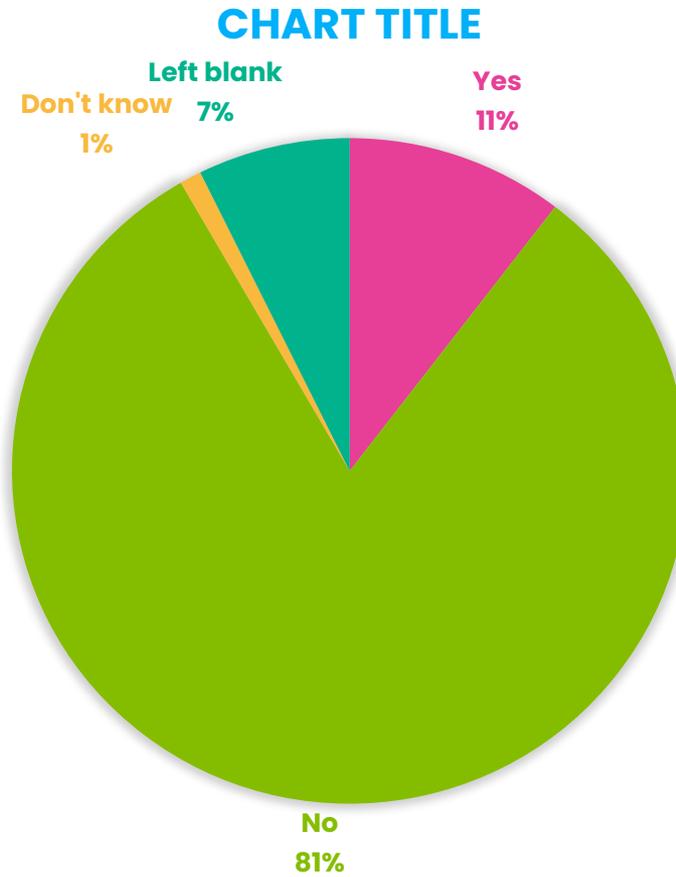


# How old were respondents?



# Do you have a disability, impairment or sensory loss that can make accessing information challenging?

N=89



# For more information

Healthwatch Southend  
The Haven Community Hub

138-140 Hamlet Court Road

Westcliff on Sea

Essex SS0 7LW

[www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk)

t: 01702 416320

e: [info@healthwatchsouthend.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsouthend.co.uk)

[Facebook.com/HealthwatchE](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchE)

**healthwatch**