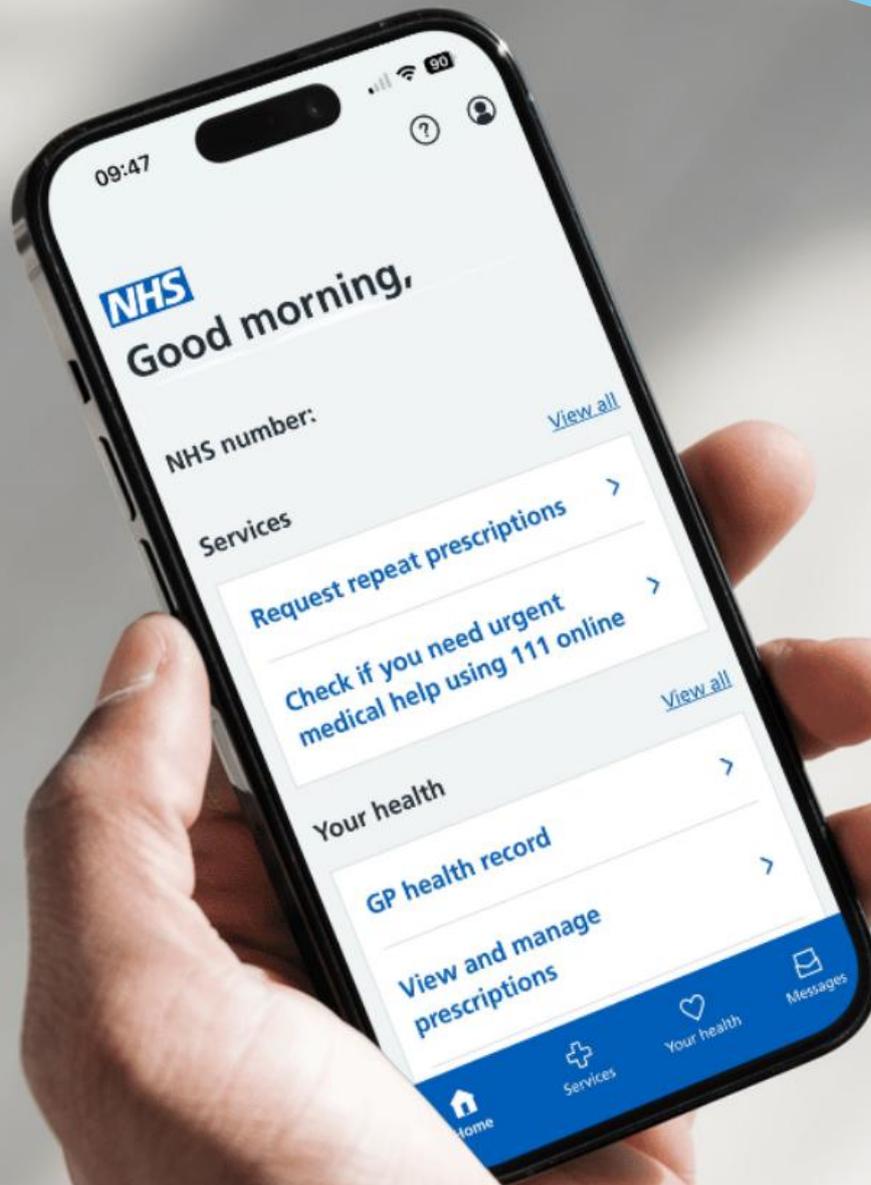


The NHS App

The views and experiences of Derbyshire residents.



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If you require this document in an alternative format, please get in touch with us using the details on the back page.

About us

We are an independent voice for the people of Derbyshire. We are here to listen to the experiences of Derbyshire residents and give them a stronger say in influencing how local health and social care services are provided.

Our mission

We are a strong, independent, and effective champion for people that use health and social care services. We will continue to influence health and care services and seek to improve joined-up care for the people of Derbyshire.

Our vision

We want to see consumers of health and social care services being put centre stage so that service providers and commissioners listen to what they have to say and use their voices to shape, inform and influence service delivery and design.



Summary

This work was carried out to raise awareness of the NHS App and to find out what people think works well and what could be improved.

The NHS App is owned and run by the NHS. It helps people to manage their healthcare using a smartphone or tablet. The same services are available by logging into an NHS account in a web browser, i.e. you can access the same information using a computer on the internet.

The NHS App can be accessed by anyone aged 13 or over who is registered with an NHS GP in England or the Isle of Man. Once you have proved your identity in the app, you have access to a growing range of health services and information.

Healthwatch Derbyshire wanted to find out if people know about the NHS App. We shared NHS leaflets on how to access the app and the things it can be used for. We also told people where they can go to get digital support in Derbyshire.

We know that what people can see and do on the NHS App is different for each person. It depends on the person's GP practice and the hospital(s) they attend.

We asked people which of the NHS App features they would use if they were available and relevant to them.

We asked people who had used the NHS App about their experience. We wanted to know how satisfied they are with the app and if there were things they would like to use it for but can't.

We also highlighted that using messages on the NHS App can help the NHS save money by reducing the number of text messages.

We advertised the survey on social media, our website and our e-bulletin and sent it to our contacts to share. We also gathered feedback in person at groups and events, including summer fetes.

Between June and October 2025, we collected the views and experiences of 650 people about the NHS App.

Key findings

- People want to take control of their own health, and many are happy to use digital technology to help
- Some people don't have the equipment, knowledge, support or confidence required to use the NHS App. Others want the choice to not use it. There is fear that these people will be disadvantaged and health inequalities might increase for people who don't use the app
- Some people didn't know that functions of the NHS App can be accessed on a personal computer, laptop or tablet through a web browser. They told us they find it easier to access digital information this way
- People shared problems with the registration process, particularly those without passports or driving licenses, or with shared email addresses
- Some people found it difficult to get help when they had a problem with the NHS App
- Some people don't think that their health professionals understand the NHS App enough, or can help them to access it
- Most people like the idea of a 'one-stop shop' for all healthcare, but many feel that the NHS App isn't quite there yet
- Lack of consistency across GPs and hospitals causes confusion and frustration for some people. It also makes training and support more difficult
- People who use the NHS App like the convenience of the app to order repeat prescriptions and look at health records, including test results. However, some said that there needs to be better information about what the results mean
- For some people, hospital referrals are something that could be much better on the NHS App. Although some told us the referral information is really good
- Some people told us that other digital systems used by their GP are better than the NHS App. Others told us that it would be better if their GP used the NHS App more

- People who told us they were women said they were more likely to use the NHS App features than those who told us they were men
- Deaf people said they feel empowered by the NHS App, but there was concern that older people with visual impairments would find it too difficult to use
- There is a general assumption that younger people are more open to using apps. However, there was more awareness and use of the NHS App among older people
- Voluntary sector groups supporting the public to access the NHS App said they received mixed levels of support from GP practices
- In Derbyshire, there are good examples of the NHS and voluntary sector working together to enable people to use digital technology and the NHS App to manage their healthcare
- People were happy to tell us about their GP practice, so the information from their survey could be shared with them.

Key statistics

- Most people (87%) were aware that there is an NHS App, but some were less aware of the features that are, or might be, available to them
- 86% of people said that they would, or do use, the NHS App to look at their medical records
- 84% said that they would use the NHS App to manage and order repeat prescriptions
- 79% of people told us they would or do use the NHS App to receive messages from their GP or health worker
- 111 people said that they would like to use the NHS App to book appointments with their GP or other health professionals (including appointments for physiotherapy, blood tests, and cervical smears), but can't
- However, 13% of people said that they wouldn't use the NHS App to book appointments, and 8% said they were unsure
- 81% of carers said that they would or do use the NHS App to see health information and appointments for people they cared for

- The under-25s had the lowest level of awareness (69%) and use of the app (42%).

Key recommendations

- Make it easy for people to access information about getting started with the NHS App
- Ensure people know they can access NHS App features through a web browser on a laptop or tablet, as well as on a smartphone
- Promote the NHS App and digital support available
 - Better promotion of the proxy part of the NHS App (especially for children)
 - Better promotion of the messaging and notification features.
- Consider a national helpline to support people to access and use the NHS App
- Consider the suggestions for improvement to NHS App as part of the ongoing development. (See page 30 for details)
- Consider standardising the use of the NHS App across GP practices and hospitals
- Ensure GP staff have good knowledge of the NHS App and inform patients how it is being used in the GP surgery
- Continue to encourage, enable and fund the NHS and voluntary sector organisations to work together in supporting people to use the NHS App
- Consider these recommendations alongside those from other NHS App projects, e.g. Healthwatch Nottingham and Nottinghamshire's work on accessibility and support around digital healthcare services
- Ensure people feel there is a real choice whether or not they use the NHS App.

Why we did this project

Our role is to listen to people who use health and social care services. We make sure that your feedback is heard by those who make decisions

The NHS 10-year plan focuses on three key shifts: moving care from hospitals to the community, focusing on prevention rather than just treatment, and moving from analogue to digital.

The NHS App is part of this digital shift. It aims to help people access services and information so they can take control of their own health.

GP practices can also save money by contacting patients through the app instead of using text messages, phone calls or letters.

We wanted to make sure people know about the NHS App, what it can do, and where they can get help using it.

Not everyone can access every service on the NHS App, because availability depends on how each GP practice uses it. We wanted to understand which services people would use if they were available and relevant to them. We thought this would be helpful to the teams that decide which features are offered.

We want to make sure that the NHS App is helping as many people as possible and that people who use it have a positive experience.

How did we do it?

Engaging local people, identifying NHS App publicity, and NHS App training

With the help of some of our Healthwatch Derbyshire volunteers, we developed a survey. The survey asked about people's knowledge of the NHS App, and which features they would use if they were available and relevant.

We asked people who use the NHS App about their level of satisfaction and whether there is anything they would like to use it for that isn't currently available to them.

Because we know the experience of using the NHS App varies depending on GP practice, we asked people to tell us their GP practice. This will allow us to share relevant data with individual GP practices on request.

We advertised the survey on social media, our website and our e-bulletin. We sent it to our contacts to share. We also gathered feedback in person at groups and events, including summer fetes. The survey could be filled in online or on paper.

At events, we used a 'spin the wheel' game to highlight features of the NHS App and encourage people to talk to us at our stall.

We made a QR code for the survey and displayed it at our engagements for people who use smartphones. We made small printouts of the QR code that people could take away.

People were also able to complete the survey on paper or using our tablets with the support of our staff if required.

We offered people copies of the leaflets 'Getting started with the NHS App' and 'Do more with the NHS App!'. These can be found on our website: [The NHS App report page](#).

We told people where they can go to find out about the digital support available to them.

We shared contact details for [Rural Action Derbyshire](#), who have a [map](#) of digital inclusion projects, activities, and support across the county.

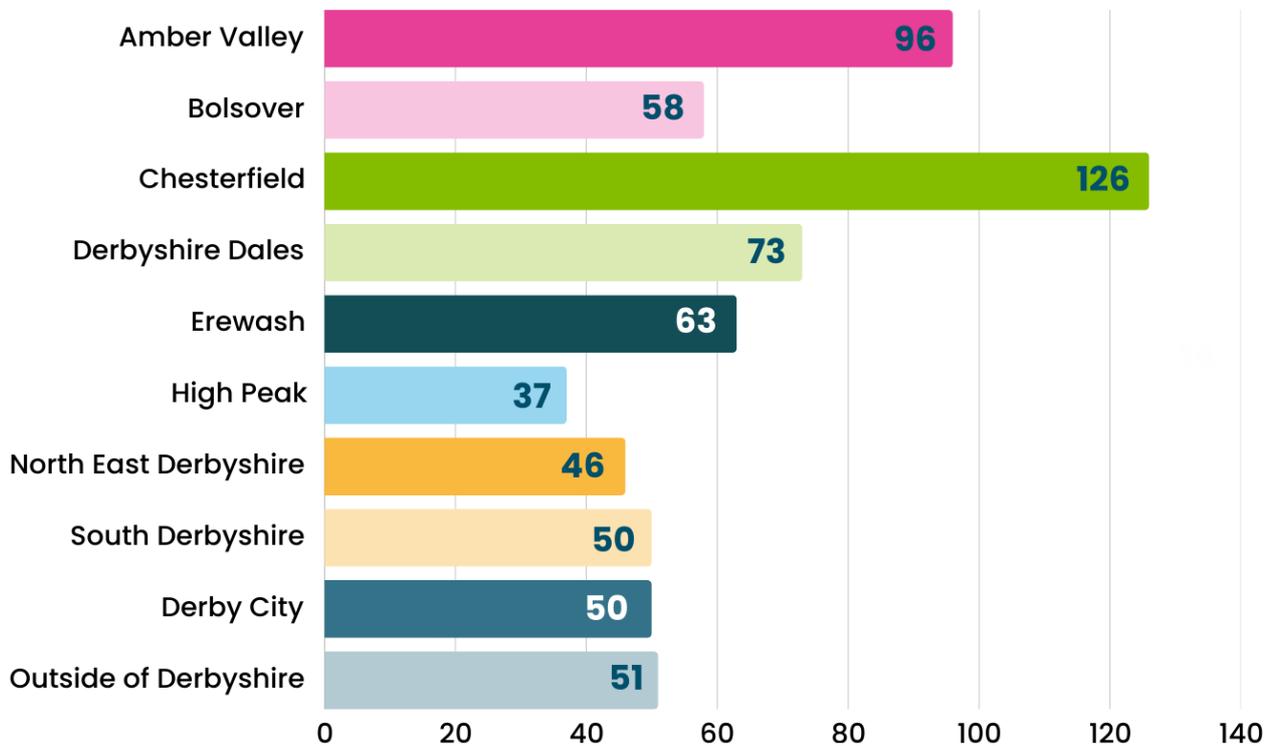
At events, we shared information specific to the areas we visited. For example, [Digital Connect](#) in North East Derbyshire and Bolsover, and [Tea, Talk & Tech](#) in Ashbourne and Wirksworth.

We also suggested that people speak to their GP practice to see if they offer any support to help people use the NHS App.

Who did we hear from?

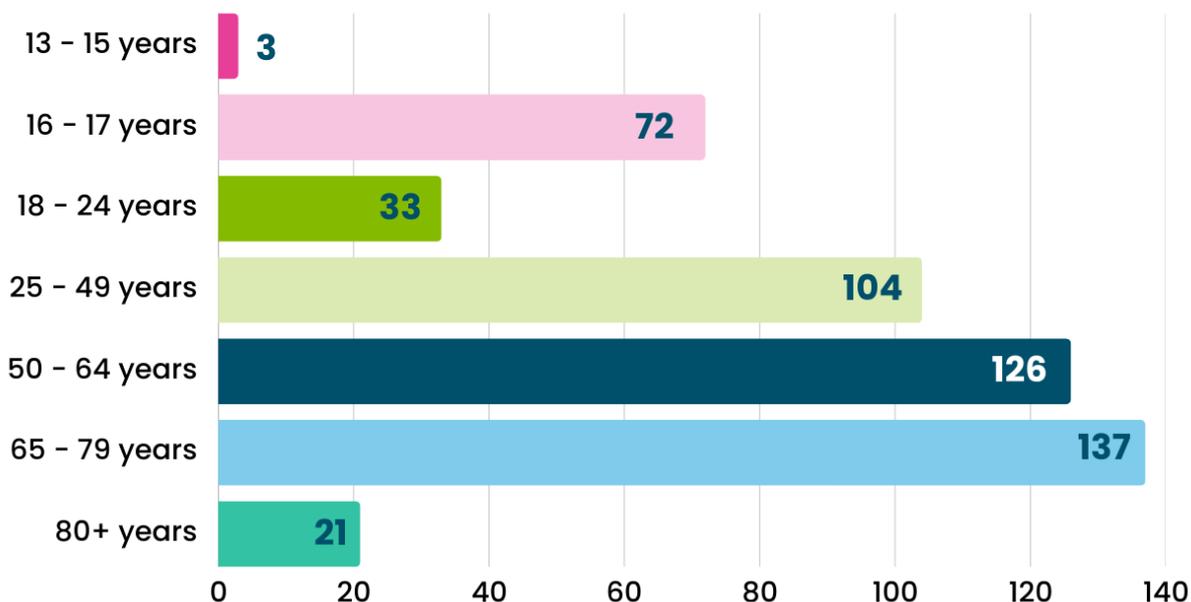
Area

We heard from 650 people. This included 50 people from Derby City and 51 who don't live in Derbyshire.



Age of respondents

496 people chose to tell us their age group.



We spoke to more 16 and 17-year-olds in the younger age groups because we attended freshers' events at Broomfield Hall, Chesterfield and Buxton colleges.

Health

497 people answered our question about long-term health conditions. 247 (50%) said they had a long-term health condition.

These conditions included both physical and mental health conditions. The conditions mentioned the most often were:

- Arthritis
- Cancer
- Cardiovascular
- Chronic fatigue syndrome/fibromyalgia, thyroid issues,
- Diabetes
- Mental health conditions
- Renal conditions
- Respiratory conditions.

495 people answered our question about disabilities. 133 (27%) said they had a disability.

These disabilities included:

- Hearing and visual impairments
- Learning disabilities
- Mental health conditions
- Neurodiversity
- Physical health issues.

Gender

496 people told us about their gender:

- 350 (71%) were women
- 129 (26%) were men
- Six (1%) were non-binary
- Seven (1%) preferred not to say
- Four (1%) preferred to self-describe.

Language

495 people told us about how well they understand, speak, read, and write English. We know that some people found this a difficult question to answer, with some possibly underestimating or overestimating their abilities.

How well can you understand, speak, read and write English?

	Not at all well	Not well	Well	Very well	Unsure/Don't know	Prefer not to say
I understand spoken English	3 people	3 people	26 people	436 people	1 person	5 people
I speak English	3 people	4 people	26 people	453 people	3 people	4 people
I read English	7 people	2 people	38 people	438 people	2 people	5 people
I write English	7 people	4 people	45 people	431 people	0	4 people

Ethnicity

Most of our responses were from people who said they were White British/English/Northern Irish or Scottish. However, in Derbyshire, 94% of the population is White British (Derbyshire County Census, 2021).

Of the 492 people who told us their ethnicity, 87% said they were White British.

- Arab - 2
- Asian/Asian British: Indian - 4
- Asian/Asian British: Pakistani - 2
- Black/Black British: Caribbean - 1
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and white - 4
- Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: other - 2
- Other: 4

- Prefer not to say - 8
- White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh - 429
- White: Irish - 9
- White: Any other White background - 27

Carer

77 people (16% of people who answered) said they were a carer.

What did people tell us?

Awareness and use of the NHS App

Of the 650 people who completed the survey, 565 (87%) said they had heard of the NHS App.

456 people (71%) told us that they had used the NHS App. The level of use varied from regular use to a one-off look to see what information is available.

Those who had used the NHS App mentioned:

- Accessing COVID information
- Booking appointments
- Checking results
- Managing repeat prescriptions
- Viewing medical records.

Those who had not used the NHS App talked about:

- Being in good health with no need for regular medication
- Not know it existed
- Preference for in-person GP contact
- Privacy concerns
- Technical difficulties
- Use of alternative apps

We looked at awareness and use of the NHS App across different groups, based on age, gender, health, and being a carer.

	Awareness of the NHS App	Have used the NHS App
Everyone in survey	87%	71%
Under 25s	69%	42%
25-49	91%	81%
50-64	99%	92%
65+	94%	80%
Men	88%	74%
Women	90%	76%
Have a disability	87%	74%
Have a long term condition	92%	83%
Carers	88%	78%

Not everyone gave us information to put them into age, gender and health groups. However, for those who did, only the under 25s had a lower awareness and use of the NHS App than the total population who completed the survey.

This could be because people in this group had less need to use NHS services and less contact with their GPs.

Several people in this age group also told us that other people managed health information and appointments for them. However, some young people were quite interested to learn about the NHS App.

Some of the young people we spoke to at freshers' events told us that they don't like speaking on the telephone. These people were pleased to hear that there are other options, such as the NHS App, available.



"I am generally fit and healthy so not heard about it."

"I will try it out when I get home, as I think it sounds incredibly useful for the doctors. Thank you!"



Even looking at the older section of the under-25s age group, figures for awareness and use of the NHS App were still lower. For the 18 to 25-year-old group, awareness of the NHS App was 78%, and use was 60%.

Awareness and use of the NHS App was greatest in the 50-64 year old age group (99% aware, 92% use).

Awareness was next highest for the 65+ age group (94%), although those with a long-term health condition were more likely to have used the NHS App (83%) than those aged 65+ (80%).

Would people think about using the NHS App?

One of the aims of the project was to raise awareness of the features that might be available on the NHS App, depending on a person's GP practice. We also wanted to find out if people would use the features if they were available and relevant.

We listed the features, combining similar ones to prevent the survey from being too long.

For each feature, people could answer 'Yes', 'No', or 'Unsure' to show whether they would use the NHS App for that purpose. We also gave people space to explain their answers.

The features were listed in alphabetical order in the survey. The results below are shown in order of the features that most people said 'Yes' to using on the NHS App.

	Yes	No	Unsure
Look at your medical records, notes or NHS number	86%	6%	8%
Ask for and manage repeat medicine prescriptions	84%	9%	7%
View and manage hospital or other health appointments	83%	9%	8%
Receive messages from your GP or health worker	79%	10%	11%
Book and manage GP appointments	79%	13%	8%
Search for NHS health information, advice or services	78%	11%	11%
Send messages to your GP or health worker	74%	14%	12%
Ask your General Practice (GP) for care or information using a form (online triage)	71%	13%	16%
Book and manage COVID-19 vaccinations	70%	20%	9%
Use NHS 111 online for help	70%	17%	14%
Manage your health choices (like organ donation or data sharing preference)	68%	15%	17%
See health info and appointments for people you care for	68%	18%	14%

The thing that most people (86%) said they would use the NHS App for is to look at their medical records, notes or NHS number.

The next most popular feature is requesting and managing repeat prescriptions (84%). Followed by viewing and managing hospital and other health appointments (83%).

79% of people said that they would be happy to use the NHS App to receive messages from their GP or health worker.

We thought that booking and managing GP appointments might come higher up the list, but several people told us that they prefer to speak to people when booking GP appointments.



"I find making appointments in the apps too complicated to follow. Everything else is fine."

"I prefer to talk to someone."

"I am happy with my GP practice. I find access and contacting them fine and will continue with that."

"I prefer face-to-face or the telephone. Too much reliance on computers, too many systems getting hacked."

"I already use some features but prefer to discuss appointment times, etc with staff at the GP surgery."



We looked at how these percentages varied for different groups of people.

We found that the percentages of people saying 'Yes' to using each feature was greater for women and lower for men.

Men showed a greater level of uncertainty, with more selecting the 'Unsure' option for every feature.

However, more men also said 'No' to all the listed features except:

- Ask for and manage repeat prescriptions (9%)
- Book and manage COVID-19 vaccinations (20%)
- Receive messages from your GP or health worker (8%).

Looking at age groups, we found that the willingness to use every NHS App feature was significantly higher in the 50 to 64-year-old age group. This group showed lower levels of uncertainty.

The 65+ age group showed variation in a similar way to men.

The percentage of people saying 'Yes' to each feature was lower for all except:

- Ask for and manage repeat prescriptions (87%)
- Book and manage COVID-19 vaccinations (81%)
- Receive messages from your GP or health worker (86%). Although in general, this group showed less uncertainty about their choices, with fewer 'Unsure' options selected.

The 13 to 24-year-old age group generally showed more uncertainty about using the features listed on the NHS App.

They were less likely to select 'Yes' than the whole population for all features except:

- Book and manage GP appointments (84%)
- Search for NHS health information advice or services (81%)
- Use NHS 111 online for health (76%)
- View and manage hospital or other health appointments (84%).

People in the 25 to 49-year-old age group were significantly more likely to select 'Yes' to using every feature listed on the NHS App, except for:

- Booking and manage COVID-19 vaccinations (68%).

Carers were more likely to select 'Yes' for every feature listed except for:

- Search for NHS health information, advice or service (77%).

The following NHS App features had the greatest level of increased interest to carers:

- See health information and appointments for people you care for (81%)
- Receive messages from your GP or health worker (90%)

- Book and manage COVID-19 vaccinations (81%).

People who told us they had a long-term health condition selected 'Yes' more than or the same as the general population, for every feature except:

- See the health information and appointments for people you care for which was lower at 63%.

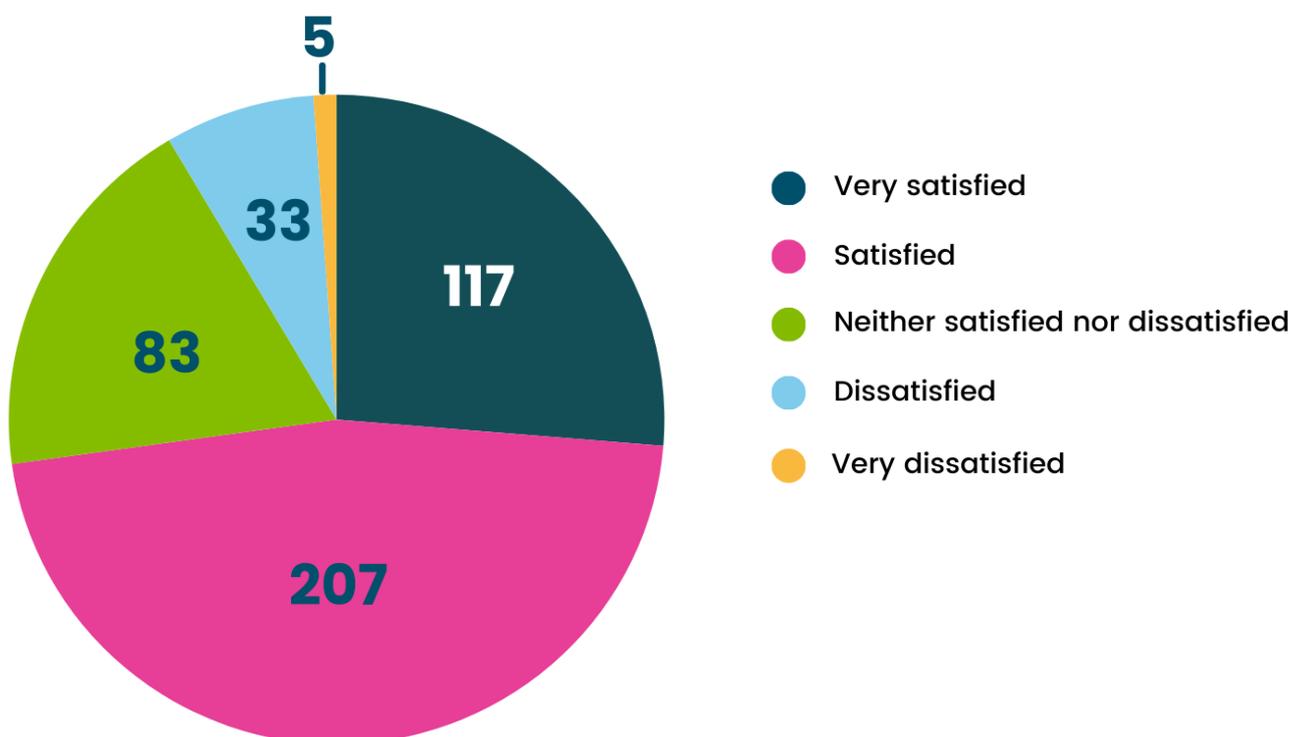
Looking at the group of people who told us they had a disability; the figures were quite similar to the general population. However, 'Yes' was selected somewhat less for two of the features:

- See health information and appointments for people you care for (63%)
- Book and manage GP appointments" (74%).

Satisfaction levels of using the NHS APP

Of the 445 people who had used the NHS App and chose to answer this question:

- 73% (324) were either 'Satisfied' or 'Very satisfied' with the service
- 9% (38) said they were 'Dissatisfied' or 'Very dissatisfied'
- 18% (83) said they were 'Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'.



Reasons for satisfaction included things like:

- Convenience
- Ease of use
- Features people particularly like, e.g. repeat prescription ordering
- Good alternative to telephone communication
- Having everything in one place
- The amount of information available.



"I like that I can order my prescriptions on the app, allowing me to do this out of office hours, and I can see my consultation history and test results."

"It's good to have one place where you can access all services and in your own time, place and pace."

"I like that I can look at my test results rather than taking up precious phone time of the care navigation team."



Reasons for dissatisfaction included things like:

- Difficult to access
- Features being unavailable
- Lack of explanation of results
- Lack of proxy access for relatives at different GP practices
- Language used is too difficult to understand
- Not enough medical history
- Not user-friendly or intuitive to navigate
- Uncertainty as to whether messages have got through
- Worrying or misleading information.



"It is very difficult and complicated to sign up to. It was impossible for my identity to be verified."

"Have downloaded it, but something has gone wrong."

"It is frustrating that surgeries decide what is and is not accessible."

"No records visible for hospitals."

"Not good enough yet - my GP doesn't allow booking of appointments, my history is not up-to-date."





"I had some blood tests recently, and looking at the results on the app it said that all of the results were abnormal. This was a great worry to me until I visited my GP practice and was told that the app always says that all of the results are abnormal if only one is abnormal, (as it was in my case)."

"It isn't always easy to navigate to find what I am looking for within the app!"

"The language used on the appointment part of the app is very professional. I am unsure what options to select sometimes."

"My mum is 94 and deaf and can only walk a couple of steps. She lives in Manchester. Before the NHS App I was able to communicate on her behalf re hospital appointments. Now I can't do this unless she is part of the same GP practice."



Several people who said they were 'Satisfied' or 'Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' told us that they would be more satisfied if all the features of the NHS App were available to them.



"For what I need it for, it is mostly good. However, there are a lot of restrictions, and I don't believe my surgery uses it to its full capability."

"I think the surgery could offer even more of the services than they already do. For example, two-way messaging."

"Would like to do more, can't access much."



Features people would like to be able to access

We asked people to tell us about features of the NHS App they would like to access but can't. There could be various reasons people said they couldn't access a feature:

- It is not currently available on the NHS App
- It hasn't been made available by the GP practice or hospital
- More training or support is needed.

The table below shows the features that four or more people in our survey said they would like to be able to access but can't:

Categories	Responses
Book & manage appointments	111
Book & manage GP appointments	68
View health records	28
View hospital records	27
Message - GP	23
View & manage appointments - Primary care not GP	20
View screening results	14
View and manage referrals	10
Prescription review	9
Proxy access – other GP practice	7
Message hospital	7
Prescription timing issue	5
Proxy - children	5
Records - export	4

Categories	Responses
Results - explanation	4
Better Login / Registration	4
Order acute medications	4
See vaccination record	4
Transcripts of appointments	4

Other things that fewer people requested included:

- Ability to request ad-hoc medication
- Access to GP triage
- Health screening requests
- Information on private alternatives to the NHS
- Links to dental and optician records and appointments
- Messaging nurses, physios, etc
- Notifications that messages have been read
- Prescription ordering
- Searches for local medical support
- Video calls with health professionals.

Booking and managing GP and other primary care appointments

Booking and managing GP appointments only came fifth on the list of features that people said they would use the NHS App for.

However, booking appointments, and specifically booking GP appointments, were first and second on the list of things people wish they could use the NHS App for, but can't.

People also told us that they would like to use the NHS App to book and manage the following types of appointments:

- Blood test
- Cervical smear tests
- Incontinence service
- Mental health
- Physiotherapy
- Practice nurses
- PSA test.

Things people said about viewing health records and test results

A lot of people told us that they like being able to see their health records and test results on the NHS App. However, this is also an area that people felt could be improved.

People talked about:

- Ability to see a full vaccination record, not just COVID vaccination history
- Access to print summary care records
- Lack of hospital records, including letters, imaging and screening results
- Limited history, especially after moving GP practice
- Unorganised information, becoming difficult to navigate
- Wanting better information about the meaning of results
- Wanting information to be more appropriate for patients and feel like it's for them and not just medical professionals
- Wanting to be able to search specific health issues in records and separate out the admin 'events' like raising a new online services password

What people told us about referral information on the NHS App

People like being able to see GP referral information and to be given the confidence that referrals have been sent. However, there is a lack of information around hospital referrals for some people.

Several people talked about wanting to see information about waiting times and alternatives for their care, including paid options, so they can make better decisions.

Things people said about accessing the NHS App

Some people found the NHS App easy to download and use. However, others told us about their difficulties, especially those who are less experienced using apps or don't have passports or driving licences to verify their identity.

Other people weren't aware that they could use their passports to prove their identity and get access to the NHS App. They thought they needed to go to their GP surgery to get access, which wasn't easy for them.

People told us that they didn't know where to get help when they had difficulty accessing the NHS App, and that staff at GP surgeries sometimes couldn't help.

People appreciated the 'Getting Started with the NHS App' leaflet, that we shared as part of this project. However, we also noted that this leaflet isn't easy to access online, particularly for the type of people most likely to need the support.



"I have only recently downloaded the app which I found quite complicated as it took me several goes and having to take a face scan. it is still not working properly."

"The registration process is too complicated for digitally excluded people."

"It was very difficult to actually get into the app. It wouldn't accept username information and password occasionally. Who you need to speak to if you need help with it isn't obvious."





“Tried to join but have no photo like passport or driving license, followed instructions to get reference numbers using my GP practice but local doctors knew nothing about this.”



Several people told us that they prefer to access digital information on a computer, rather than on a phone app where the text is small. They said it was easier to read a computer screen.

When we spoke to people, most were not aware that they could access the same information by logging into an NHS account in a web browser.

Training and support

As part of this project, we shared information about the places people can go to get digital support, including help with the NHS App.

The training and support available for people trying to access the NHS App varies across the county, and people aren't always aware of the support that is available to them.

Drop-in and training sessions that are well attended seem to be those that are well established and available on an ongoing basis. Often, people are encouraged to attend by others who have had a good experience.

One group delivering NHS App support said that the help they get from GP practices to promote the service varies. Some GPs send out text messages to tell their patients about the service, which results in well-attended events.

Others are unwilling to send out text messages due to the costs involved, and events are not so well attended.

The group understands there are costs involved in promoting events by text message but feels that savings would be made in the longer term.

During the project, we were able to see an excellent example of an NHS App support session in Glossop.

Staff from the local GP surgeries were there to help, alongside staff and volunteers from various voluntary sector organisations. People received one-to-one support to help solve their problems or improve their confidence.



"I have downloaded it but not sure what to do next."

"I am not an IT expert and feel as though I need to be."

"Support sessions run by the GP surgery are very important to people like me to get using the app."

"I would use it if I could learn how to use it. I need some help to get the app on my phone first."

"I have needed some support to get up and running with the app. I am attending an NHS app event in Glossop for support."



Some people told us that they felt staff at their GP practice also needed more training.



"It's a great idea and when it works, it works well. I think staff (including managers, doctors, everyone) should have to be trained before they use it. Our practice cannot get it right."



Proxy access

Proxy access to the NHS App is the ability to use the app to manage healthcare services for someone else, such as a child or relative, with their permission.

People told us about problems helping family members at different GP practices with their health because proxy access is only available for people at the same GP practice. We know that this is something that is going to be improved within the NHS App.

A parent told us of the difficulties they had with prescriptions for their child when proxy access was suddenly removed without warning on the child's eleventh birthday.

The parent was able to get proxy access for the child again when the child gave their consent. However, they felt that the processes around proxy access for children should be communicated and managed better.

One parent told us that although they can book GP appointments for their child, the details of the booking can't be viewed later, as they can for their own appointments.

Several parents we spoke to were not aware that they could have access to their children's details on the NHS App. They said that this would be useful.

Ordering repeat prescriptions, prescription reviews and acute medication

One of the main reasons people downloaded the NHS App is to order repeat prescriptions. Although many are happy that they can order prescriptions at any time, some people suggested improvements that could be made to this area of the NHS App.

People would like to see a list of items on repeat prescription and when they can be re-ordered. Now, an item only appears when it is available to re-order, and people feel they are left guessing when that will be.

Somebody told us that they didn't like the fact that they couldn't see when the prescription was ready for collection, especially as they didn't feel confident that the order had gone through.

People suggested that the NHS App could be used to improve processes around prescription reviews. For example, prompt that a review will be required and provide the ability to book it.

There were a few requests to be able to order medication prescribed before, but not on a repeat prescription, including medication prescribed by someone other than the GP.

Some people told us that other apps, such as Airmid, work better for ordering prescriptions.

Airmid is an app that is similar to the NHS App. It allows people to log in to their NHS account and see their GP records. Like the NHS App, the features available depend on what GPs and hospitals have made available to their patients.

Using the NHS App message system

People were interested to learn that GPs would like people to use the NHS App messaging system because it costs less than sending texts. It was something that a lot of people hadn't considered, so it should be more widely promoted.

We were told that people would also like to use the NHS App to message others involved in their care, including hospital staff, practice nurses and physiotherapists.

Several people were clearly unaware of the notification functionality and shared worries about missing messages on the NHS App.



“Receiving messages might be a problem because I would not know there was a message to see.”

“Too easy to miss messages on the app. Doesn’t seem to alert.”



Contacting GPs about a health problem

At Healthwatch Derbyshire, people often tell us that it is difficult to contact their GP and get an appointment.

Recently, some people we spoke to told us that their GP practice wants them to use the eConsult form on the practice website to tell them about their health needs. However, these people said they find it too difficult to do this on their phones.

They were not aware that the same function is available on the NHS App (under ‘Contact your GP about a health problem’), where they might find access easier.

Once shown the option on the NHS App, they were willing to try next time they need to request help from their GP.

What people with hearing and sight problems said

A person who was deaf said they like the freedom that the NHS App gives them to manage their own health.



“I use the app all the time and it is great. However, at our surgery you can't use it to book appointments, it would be really good if you could. I would find this very useful as I'm deaf so, at the moment, my husband has to phone up for me.”



A few people with sight problems said that they find text on phones difficult to read, so the NHS App would be too difficult to use.



“I cannot read text especially when tiny.”

“The issue for me is older people (mum is 98) who can't see or read a screen or use a smartphone.

With an ageing population this will not improve. Whilst young people will be fine older people will not, and we all get old and lose sight etc.”



Conclusion

Raising awareness of the NHS App was an important part of this work. Lots of people were already aware that there is an NHS App, but many were less aware of its features and were interested to learn more.

Although there are people who don't want to use the NHS App, many who have the required equipment are happy to try.

Some of these people do require support to help them download and access the NHS App and give them confidence to use it. Some would also prefer to access the features through a web browser on their laptops or tablets.

Some of the people we spoke with had found it difficult to get support to access and use the NHS App features.

People need to know where to go for help, be that in person, by phone or online. Professionals need to know where to direct people for the type of support they need.

Communication about the NHS App is made difficult because the features that are available to people depend on their GP practice or hospital. Things are further complicated by the fact that some GP surgeries use other apps as well as, or in preference to, the NHS App.

Some people told us that other apps work better than the NHS App. For example, you can see when prescriptions are available to re-order in Airmid (which is a similar alternative app to the NHS App).

When developing the NHS App, consideration should be given to include things that people prefer to use in other apps.

Lots of people said that the features of the NHS App looked useful, and they would download it and have a look. We encouraged them to find out which parts of the NHS App their GP practice is using.

In general, people liked the idea of the NHS App becoming a one-stop shop for all things health-related.

Recommendations

Make it easy for people to access information about getting started with the NHS App

The 'Getting started with the NHS App' leaflet and the 'Do more with the NHS App!' leaflet are useful sources of information. They are simple and have the NHS branding that gives people confidence.

However, access to this information could be easier. The leaflets currently seem to be hidden away in zip files as part of promotion packs for professionals, when they could appear in search results for people trying to get started with the NHS App.

Searches on getting started with the NHS App should take people to simple, up-to-date information for members of the public who have limited digital experience.

Ensure people know they can access NHS App features through a web browser on a laptop or tablet

Some people told us that they find digital information easier to access through a web browser on their laptop or tablet rather than through an app on their phone.

Publicity material and other information provided about the NHS App needs to be clearer that this is an option.

Promote the NHS App and digital support available

People who are most likely to need technical help often prefer speaking with someone or getting face-to-face support.

Promoting the support available locally will give more people access to the support they need to give them the confidence to use the NHS App. It will also give those who have had problems the opportunity to resolve their issues.

Consider a national helpline to support people to access and use the NHS App

This would provide an easy and clear method of support for people having difficulty accessing and using the NHS App. It would also provide information that those developing the App could use to improve it.

Consider standardising the features available to people on the NHS App

The varying use of the NHS App by different GP practices and hospitals makes it more confusing for people, especially those who are less digitally aware.

Training and support would be easier if the same features were available in the same way to everyone.

Ensure GP staff have good knowledge of the NHS App and communicate how it is being used within their practice

While standardisation of the NHS App for everyone would make communication and support simpler, we appreciate that this wouldn't be easy to achieve.

If GP staff have good knowledge of the NHS App and communicate clearly how it is being used within their practice, it will help to avoid some of the frustration and confusion for people. Practice websites could be used to share such information.

Better promotion of the proxy part of the NHS App

We are aware that some of the proxy access issues that people told us about are already being worked on. We hope that these changes will be communicated to carers once in place.

The opportunity should also be taken to highlight what proxy access is and how parents can view and manage their children's health via the NHS App, as this was an area that people told us they didn't know about.

Better promotion of the messaging and notification features

Because text messaging can be costly for GP practices, we know that they would prefer to be able to message people using the NHS App.

Many people we spoke to were unaware of the cost implications and said that it might influence their decision to try using the NHS App.

Some people were concerned that they would miss messages sent through the NHS App.

There needs to be more promotion of this feature, along with information about the reduced cost for the NHS and how notifications can be used to reduce the risk of missing messages.

People may also be reassured by more information about the functionality GP practices are using to send follow-up messages by text when messages haven't been viewed on the NHS App.

Suggested NHS App improvements as part of the ongoing development

- Simpler and more intuitive navigation
- Use language that people can easily understand
- Better processes around proxy access for children and adults at different GP practices

- More information about repeat prescription items
 - Include prompts that prescription reviews are due and enable these to be booked.
- More reassurance that messages and prescription requests have been sent and received
- Display and provide the option of printing summary care records
- Include easy to access information on over-the-counter medication for minor illnesses to reduce the need for pharmacy consultations
- Make a full vaccination history easy to access
- Compare features of the NHS App with those provided by other systems that people tell us work better.

Continue to encourage and enable the NHS and voluntary sector organisations to work together in supporting people to use the NHS App

There are lots of voluntary sector groups willing to support people using the NHS App. GPs need to work with these groups so they can provide the best support.

Funding and coordination roles (e.g. Digital Health Lead at the Bureau in Glossop) need to exist to facilitate this.

Consider these recommendations alongside those from other work looking at the accessibility of the NHS App

Healthwatch Nottingham and Nottinghamshire is currently collecting data on accessibility and support around digital healthcare services.

Bringing together the findings and recommendations from this and other similar projects will give a better overall understanding.

Ensure people feel there is a real choice whether or not to use the NHS App

While many people are willing to try using the NHS App with support, there are some people who will never have the equipment, knowledge, physical ability or desire to use digital systems.

Some of these people are happy for other people to take over management of their health care. But some are very independent and want to remain independent. They should not be forced to rely on other people simply because they do not use the NHS App.

Patients need to feel that they can continue to book appointments, receive communication and request support from their health professionals in the ways that currently work for them.



“Using online services for myself, I’m happy with as it’s quicker and easier than waiting on the phone for long periods, and it frees up valuable resources that can be spent elsewhere.”

“I would be worried if there is a push towards the use of apps etc in favour of more traditional methods such as telephones and letters. People like me who do not have a phone (and do not ever want one) might be disadvantaged.”



What is happening with the feedback?

This report has been shared with the Digital Transformation Team at Joined Up Care Derbyshire. It has also been shared with the Lead Communications and Engagement Manager in the Transformation Directorate at NHS England.

Most people told us the GP practice they are registered with, although some were unsure. Staff at GP practices in Derbyshire can request the anonymous survey responses for their practice.

We hope this will be helpful when making decisions relating to the NHS App.

Thank you

Thank you to the Digital Health Lead at The Bureau in Glossop, who shared some of her NHS App expertise and experience of helping both the public and professionals to use it. Seeing an NHS App support session in action showed the importance of making these available to everyone.

We would also like to thank the Healthwatch Derbyshire volunteers for co-producing the survey. Also, JUCD Digital Transformation Team for their suggestions regarding the survey and interest in the results.

Thank you to the community and voluntary sector groups for allowing us to attend events, promote Healthwatch and gather feedback.

Thank you to the people who spoke to us at these events and also to the stakeholders and partners for promoting the survey.

We would also like to thank the 650 people who took the time to complete the survey.

Finally, a huge thank you to our volunteers who helped with the theming and analysis of large amounts of free-text survey data.

Disclaimer

The comments outlined in this report should be taken in the context that they are not representative of all people within Derbyshire but nevertheless offer useful insight.

It is important to note that the engagement was carried out within a specific time frame and therefore only provides a snapshot of people's views as shared with Healthwatch staff.

They are the genuine thoughts, feelings, and issues people shared with Healthwatch Derbyshire. The data should be used in conjunction with, and to complement, other sources of data that are available.

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