



Your Experiences of Screening

What you told us about NHS screening services and how we used your feedback to influence change

April 2026



We listened. Your stories matter.

We spoke with five people who shared their stories about NHS screening.

While this is a small group, their in-depth stories give us valuable insight into what helps and what gets in the way when people try to access screening.

These experiences show both the strengths of current services and the points where people may encounter difficulties within the system.



What you told us

People shared a mix of positive and negative experiences. Several themes came through clearly:

Changes to venues for screening can cause significant anxiety for patients. A change of location can make the whole process harder, especially for individuals with visual or mobility impairments. As one person put it:

"It would benefit me a lot to attend a regular place because I like having certainty."

Accessibility needs may not always be carefully considered for screening. One person explained that they avoided asking for adjustments because they worried it would slow things down or create extra steps:

"Some days I can barely walk, but I have found it takes longer to request additional support, so I tend to just not ask."

Stigma and assumptions can make it harder for some to be taken seriously. Past addiction or mental health history can sometimes shape how concerns are responded to. One person told us:

"They need to look past that and listen to what is wrong."

Timely follow-up was described as reassuring and sometimes lifesaving. One person highlighted how pleased they were with prompt follow-up from the screening team:

"The screening services are better than they have ever been before. Sometimes I have had contact from the team in less than two weeks."

Communication can have a strong impact on people's emotional experience. Clear letters, explanations and personal contact help people feel safe. Rushed or unclear conversations can make people feel unsure or forgotten. One person told us:

"I sometimes call the service myself if I haven't heard anything because I can find myself panicking about the results."

These issues can influence whether someone can comfortably attend screening appointments, feels able to return or chooses to avoid the process completely. They therefore need to be considered to ensure comfortable and accessible screening for those who need it.

The stories behind these insights

The summaries below are anonymised but reflect real accounts shared with us. They help show what accessing screening can feel like.

Jennifer

Jennifer is visually impaired and attends diabetic eye screening every year. She told us that several parts of the screening process cause her significant anxiety. Unfamiliar buildings, difficulties with parking, and unclear directions all make attending the appointment more challenging.

“To me everything can look like a blob ... trying to find another place is a headache, even more so when parking is not easily available or the building is a longer walk away.”

She also shared that the appointments can feel rushed, with limited interaction to help ease her ongoing anxiety. This continues after the appointment with results sometimes taking a long time to arrive and not always in an accessible format, leaving her to chase them herself for reassurance. Jennifer wants professionals to recognise the anxiety people may face when attending regular screening and to understand how much clear, compassionate communication and attention to additional needs can mean to people.



Mandeep

Mandeep lives with osteoarthritis and fibromyalgia, both of which affect her mobility. She described screening as essential but not always easy to navigate. After finding a lump, she booked an appointment with her GP which led to screening and prompt surgery. Whilst she was happy with this prompt action, she questioned why routine screening starts at age 50, especially after not being offered routine breast screening which could have identified the need for action sooner. She now attends regular cervical screening but told us that she finds the experience both physically and emotionally challenging.

“The cervical appointments are not pleasant. You are usually in a tiny room and once done, you are just left to go on your way and wait for the results.”

Whilst she feels that her additional needs due to her long-term conditions are not properly considered, she often avoids asking for these adjustments as it can cause delays. She also feels that cervical screening could be better promoted, to ensure that people do not miss out on potentially lifesaving care.

Fran

Fran takes part in annual bowel screening at home. For her, the simplicity of the test and the speed of follow-up makes a huge difference. A previous screening led to a referral and surgery within two weeks. She describes the service as reliable, clear and reassuring. Her story shows how well-designed screening programmes can support early diagnosis and build trust. She told us,

“The screening services are better than they have ever been. Sometimes I have had contact in less than two weeks.”

Tom

Tom has symptoms that he feels need further investigation, but he worries they are dismissed because of his past addiction and mental health history. He described feeling pushed aside and not fully listened to. This has stopped him from accessing the screening he believes he needs. His experience highlights how damaging stigma can be and why careful, non-judgemental listening is so important. He told us:

“I think you would be surprised to hear how many people feel they have been pushed aside in this way.”

Stephen

Stephen attends regular liver screening to ensure any issues resulting from his past alcohol dependence are identified promptly. He told us that his experiences with regular liver screening have been positive and he feels well supported by the screening team. He receives timely results through his GP delivered in a personal and tactful manner and any issues are followed up promptly.

"If there is an issue identified they will bring me in to follow up and discuss next steps."

However, he told us that other parts of the healthcare system sometimes focus on his past alcohol dependence rather than the symptoms he is raising now. This leads to him being referred back to the liver screening team whenever he raises concerns despite having recently attended. This leaves him feeling misunderstood.

"It feels like a part of the prejudice against alcoholics. They need to look past that and listen to what is wrong."

His story shows how important it is for professionals to look at the whole person and not rely on outdated assumptions. It also shows the importance of professionals properly engaging with a patient's medical history to rule out issues rather than making assumptions.

What we did with what we heard

We shared these insights directly with the NHS England West Midlands Screening Team. The stories form part of a regional webinar for providers across the West Midlands which is scheduled for May 2026. The webinar will be focused on improving access to screening and understanding the barriers some people face.

In the session, providers will explore how screening feels from the patient perspective and consider practical ways to make services more inclusive. The anonymised stories will also be shared on FutureNHS following the webinar so that providers can use them as an ongoing learning resource.

These experiences are now influencing real conversations about how to make screening more consistent, accessible and compassionate.

Why your feedback matters

These insights help providers see the person behind the appointment letter. They support a deeper understanding of what needs attention and remind services that small changes can make a meaningful difference. By listening closely to these experiences, services can better shape patient-centred care that feels supportive and comfortable for everyone.

What happens next?

This work feeds into NHS England's wider plans to improve screening uptake and reduce health inequalities. As this work continues, we will:

- Update our website with any further actions taken by providers
- Continue to advocate for accessible and inclusive screening
- Keep listening to people's lived experiences

Your voices helped start this work and will remain central as improvements take shape.

Thank you

Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences. Your openness and trust help ensure services understand the reality of what people face. If you would like to tell us about your own experience of screening, we are here to listen.

Tell us about your experience.

Your feedback helps us make services fair for everyone.

[Leave your feedback here.](#)



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Birmingham & Solihull

www.healthwatchbsol.org.uk

t: 0800 652 5278

e: info@healthwatchbsol.org.uk

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