

**Exploration into GP Services in
Southampton
March 2025**



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Section 1: What You Told Us About GP Services

In Spring 2024 we conducted our annual survey “What Matters Most to You!” to identify the main issues residents of Southampton were facing with health and social care services. 61% of respondents (105 out of 172 people) identified GP Services as a priority issue.

Issues raised included:

- Long waiting times on the phone
- Short time window for eConsult
- Opening hours of GP surgeries for working people
- Access to services if vulnerable, digitally excluded and language barriers
- Access to mental health support within GP practices

Comments included:

- It is hard to see a GP at the moment and I would like to - love it to get better.
- It is really hard to get an appointment with GP. Often wait over 30 mins on the phone before being told there are no appointments and to call again the next day. Using E-Consult is also difficult - it opens at 8am but seems to close by 8.05am (really small window).
- GP access is difficult - just getting through on the phone. Those you can't use a computer are at a big disadvantage as those who have English as second language / hearing problem etc. seeing the same GP / communication.
- I've noticed that there have been many occasions where I or many others I know have been let down by GP services, by either being brushed off and concerns not being taken seriously or not getting a chance to see a GP face to face. The GPs don't provide any support or care over the phone, and I think it's ridiculous that they believe they can. There have been many cases of mental health concerns that have risen in the past few years following covid and it's not being taken seriously. For females, hormones are to blame, which is a disgusting response to people's issues.
- We end up using 111 or emergency services as things escalate, which a GP could have treated if we were able to see one.

- GP Surgery at present since covid. Doctors' surgeries are a joke that needs improving very hard to get any help or GP appointments especially if you are not on the internet etc.
- GP's are very hard to reach.
- I'm only directly affected by the shortage of GP appointments.
- Access to GP services is vital, many make it difficult for working adults to access with rules about ringing before a certain time, better websites would allow patients to book blood tests or appointments themselves.
- All these services appear to be short of providers at the present time resulting in the majority of the population appear to have difficulty accessing them resulting in them requiring increased needs when they are finally available.
- I have difficulty contacting the GP, getting my call through to the operator, waiting up to 45mins.
- GP - The system is broken. It shouldn't be so hard just to talk to someone. eConsult should be more readily available, sometimes you just need a conversation.
- It is really hard to get an appointment with GP. Often wait over 30 mins on the phone before being told there are no appointments and to call again the next day. Using eConsult is also difficult - it opens at 8am but seems to close by 8.05am (really small window).

There was positive feedback:

- GP Services are good at the moment, I just want them to stay that way.
- I am caring for an elderly disabled person and rely heavily on quick responses from the doctors.
- Being disabled I rely on these services with are of a great advantage to me.
- My GP is excellent long may it continue, I have an adult daughter with complex needs, and they support us wonderfully.
- GPs are our first line of defence. This is where help is first given and discovered. These people give so much help, as problems here so often lead to mental health problems.
- Knowing help is at hand via a phone call to the local doctor's surgery. I am disabled and a home visit is vital. I don't abuse this wonderful service, but knowing it is at hand is such a comfort.

Section 2: Southampton GP Practices Views on eConsult

After receiving and analysing the responses and feedback from the annual “What Matters Most to You” Survey we wanted to investigate further, to understand challenges with eConsult, our next step was to better understand GP Practices views on the use of eConsult.

In June 2024 we contacted all the practice managers of Southampton GP Services (SO14-SO19) with a brief survey for them to complete about eConsult processes and procedures in their practices. During this time there were some changes to network and structures in primary care and acknowledge this could affect responses.

However we received responses from 8 Practice Managers representing 16 GP practices.

We found that:

- All 8 Practice Managers representing 16 GP practices responded that patients can access eConsult via the practice website.
- 6 out of 16 Practices said that eConsult was open 24/7.
- 6 practices said there were some issues with capacity, and they had a variety of methods of dealing with this.
- 5 practices out of 16 said that capacity with using eConsult was not an issue for them.
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Issues that surgeries have identified with eConsult:

- It is probably not as user-friendly, or GP practice friendly compared to other alternative systems currently on the market.
- Fair amount of sickness requests.
- Patients being able to put urgent/acute issues through.
- We find e-consult to be extremely useful tool. Patients find easy to use and information is all there available for us to Triage.
- Lack of integration into Systm1 (clinical computer system).

The opening times and length of time of access to eConsult varies greatly between individual practices in Southampton. The eConsult triage processes in Southampton vary significantly between being managed by clinical and non – clinical staff. Some practices identify there are no issues with capacity whilst using eConsult however other Southampton practices cannot meet demand and have to cap the requests for example to 50 per day. Practices recognise that it is not user friendly for all patients. Generally, practices like eConsult whilst recognising that small changes to the current programme are needed or using alternative software that is on the market.

Section 3: What You Told Us About Access to GP Services

To further explore the issue of access to GP Services from our What Matters most to you survey in March 2024 the Healthwatch Southampton team conducted a short survey to ask members of the public (SO14-SO19 postcodes) about their experiences in accessing GP services.

The survey was a small sample size (59 responses), relative to size of patient cohort. However, we received feedback about 20 different GP practices in the city.

We asked:

- How easy it is to contact your surgery
- Make an appointment at your surgery
- Use EConsult
- General feedback about your surgery

Negative feedback

- Not easy to use online. Significant changes since Covid. Unable to book appointment for following week let alone same/next day.
- E consult too many questions if you answer some questions, it will tell you to contact 111. Face to Face appointment have to wait at least 2 weeks!

Positive feedback

- Easy to access if you can use eConsult
- I have a great rapport with my doctor's surgery. I know when my doctor is working and am able to either talk person to person or on the phone.
- When I needed a sample bottle for infection went to surgery done sample there within two hours received call to collect antibiotics. Had pain in back phoned given appointment same day collected medication after appointment.

The results of the survey for Southampton residents (SO14-SO19) on access to GP services demonstrate that people experiences vary greatly across the city. There are still many people that struggle to access appointments when needed.

Recommendations

Healthwatch Southampton is keen to support improvements in access to GP services and will do the following:

- A vital way for patients to access information and gain access to services is via GP practice websites we will complete another GP website audit (2022) and feedback to GP practices to support improvements in access to services.
- Another vital component to improve access to services is for GP practices to listen to patient feedback and all practices are required to have patient participation groups. We will bring together GP practices to discuss patient participation groups (PPG's) sharing a network, resources, and training.
- The Healthwatch strategic group (volunteers) will continue to meet as a GP subgroup to further build on our insight and work on this as a priority.
- Healthwatch will continue to promote the work that it does, to hear patient voice, to encourage patient feedback and ensure all practices are sent Healthwatch posters to display to signpost patients to our help.

healthwatch Southampton

Healthwatch Southampton
Southampton Voluntary Services
Kingsland Square
Southampton
SO14 1NW

www.healthwatch.co.uk

t: 023 80216018

e: healthwatch@southamptonvs.org.uk



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