

# Access to general practice

December 2021

# Background

- There has been significant local and national concern about access to general practitioners, especially on a face-to-face basis, during the pandemic
- When the country first began to realise the severity of Covid-19, general practitioners rapidly implemented new ways of working to ensure that patients and staff were kept safe. The use of “total triage” was mandated by NHS England (slide 3)
- During the lockdown, public campaigns also encouraged patients to contact their GP, as concerns emerged that patients were delaying or avoiding seeking help for serious conditions
- Concerns have also been expressed that A&E attendances increased as a result of difficulties accessing general practice

# Total triage – NHS England’s definition

- Total triage means that every patient contacting the practice first provides some information on the reasons for contact and is triaged before making an appointment. It is possible to do this entirely by telephone but using an online consultation system is likely to leverage further efficiency and benefit. Total triage is important to reduce avoidable footfall in practices and protect patients and staff from the risks of infection.
- Practices should continue to provide remote consultations (online, phone, video) alongside face to face care for those that need it. The approach should be tailored to the person, the circumstance and their needs.
- Information for patients about how they can access services should be clear; with explanation of triage, the modes of communication available to them and reassurance that face to face care always remains available when clinically appropriate and provided in line with the standard operating procedure to keep patients and staff safe.

# Why look at this topic?

- Despite the media coverage of fewer face to face appointments, data for Southend GPs shows that the number of such appointments is increasing, with more and more on the day of ringing to make an appointment. We think it's important that our community is reassured that face to face appointments are available
- We have also looked at the GP Patient Survey results to try and see how they reflected public opinion. Overall, the levels of satisfaction with general practice remain high. However, there are issues of access which deserve attention by the NHS and its partners to address inequalities
- We focus on ease of access by telephone, as this is the first point of contact with a general practice

# What does the data tell us? Activity

- The number of face-to-face appointments booked with a GP has increased from 9125 in May 2021 to 21570 in October 2021 – an increase of 236% - whilst the number of phone consultations has fallen by 9%
- GP appointments on the same day of booking have increased in the same period by 6%
- Despite the calls for face-to-face appointments, 506 patients failed to attend their appointment with a GP in October 2021
- The most significant change is the number of DNAs for those waiting 8-14 days between booking and the appointment – an increase of 114% between October 2020 and October 2021

# What does the data tell us? Patient views

- Overall experience remains high within Southend, with good/very good ratings of around 80%,
- Positive experience of making an appointment and getting through on the phone stood at 60%, leaving 40% of patients who were not satisfied
- Satisfaction with the response from receptionists has been 89% for the last three years
- 79% of patients said that they were satisfied with the appointment offered
- When patients did not get an appointment, only 7% of respondents went to A&E
- We compared a couple of responses to those in NHS Bury CCG and found poorer performance in Southend despite the populations being largely the same; this CCG is one of a group used by NHS England as a comparator

# What does the data tell us? Inequalities

- 16-34 year olds find phone access easier than 35-54 year olds. After this age group, satisfaction increases, but we see that over 85 year olds found it harder to get through by phone in 2021
- Working age men find it slightly easier to access general practice by phone than working age women; at all ages, men show slightly more satisfaction
- Respondents identifying as gay/lesbian/bisexual/other report higher levels of satisfaction with phone access than heterosexual patients
- Patients with a long-term conditions report poorer access; noticeable decreases emerge for those with a mental health condition, or a diagnosis/treatment of cancer over the four years examined
- 62% of patients who are not carers were satisfied with access, compared to 54% of carers (providing >1 hour of care) in 2021
- All ethnic groups are 61% satisfied with access in 2021

# Conclusions

- We acknowledge the immense pressures on general practice during the pandemic, and applaud the efforts made to keep patients and staff safe
- Although respondents to the annual GP Patient Survey are largely satisfied with services provided, there is still too much variance within the Survey results
- We can see that more and more face to face appointments with GPs are taking place, and this needs to be recognised
- We understand that patients and their carers may be more anxious and frustrated about access to general practice, but we deplore any attacks on staff working within general practice during the pandemic
- We understand that NHS Southend CCG is working with its member practices to improve access, especially following the publication of the NHS England/Improvement *Plan for improving access for patients and supporting general practice* in October 2021. We hope this report is helpful



# Recommendations

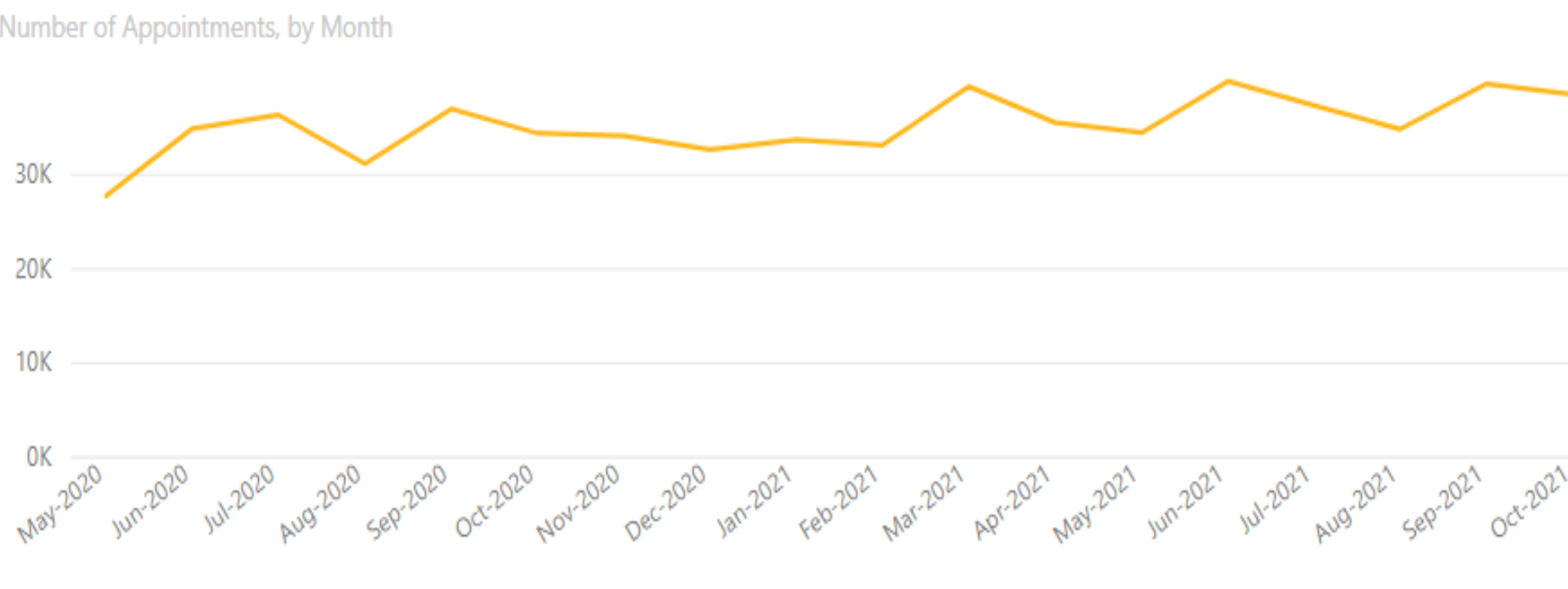
1. Practices need to use shared decision-making principles with a patient when agreeing the best way of conducting a consultation, taking a whole-person view of the patient
2. Recognising that digital solutions do not work for everyone, more publicity should be given to the restoration of online booking and online consultation platforms
  - i. Linked to this should be ways of making it easier to cancel appointments
3. Support must be given to practices to improve the degree of satisfaction with telephone access, and reduce the disparity between practices
4. Work needs to be undertaken to understand why certain groups report poorer satisfaction with access; learning from similar CCGs in other parts of England is encouraged
5. Solutions to improve access must be co-designed with patients

# GP Activity Data

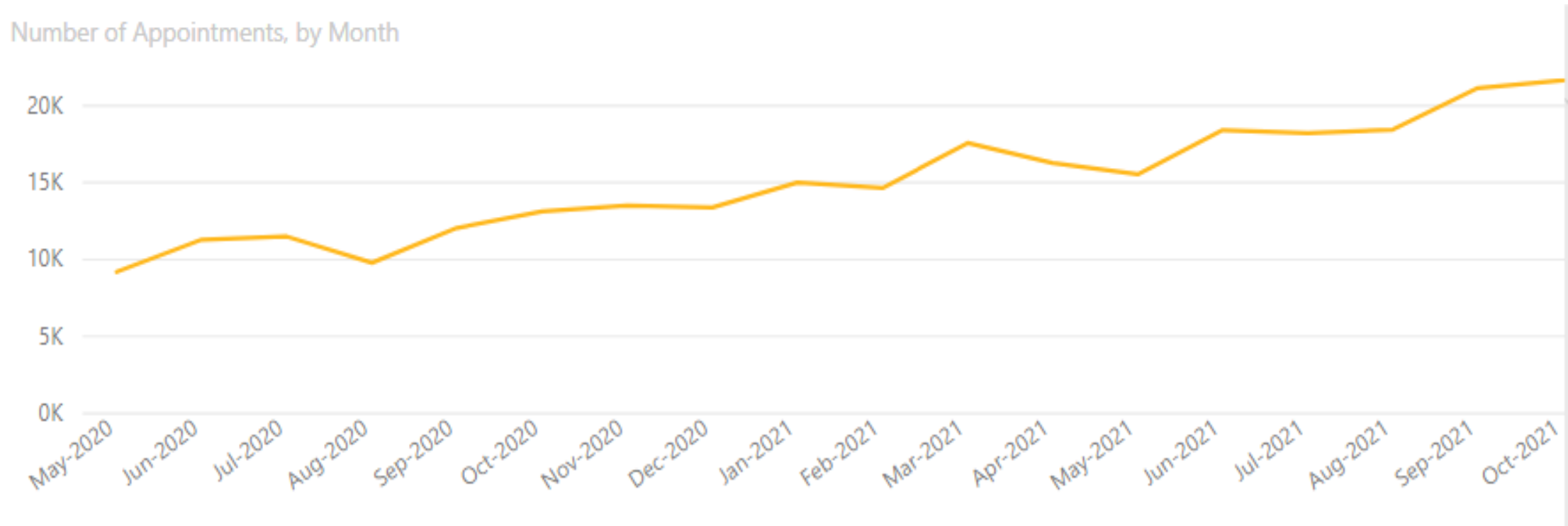
To October 2021

# All GP appointments booked

Number of Appointments, by Month

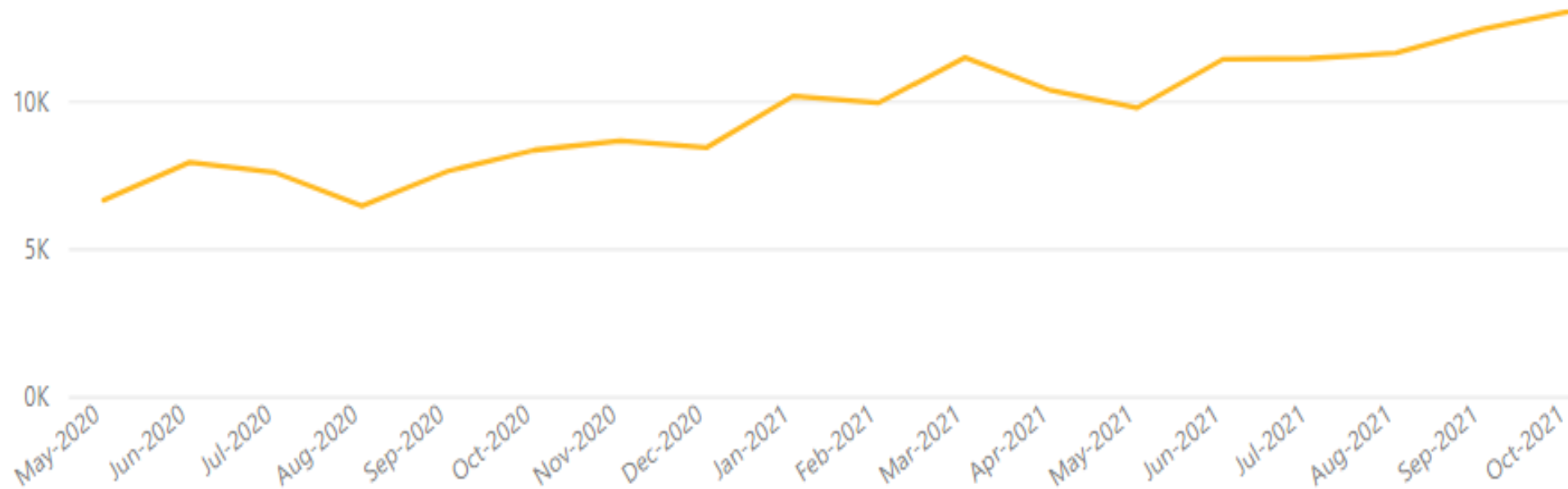


# Face-to-face consultations with a GP



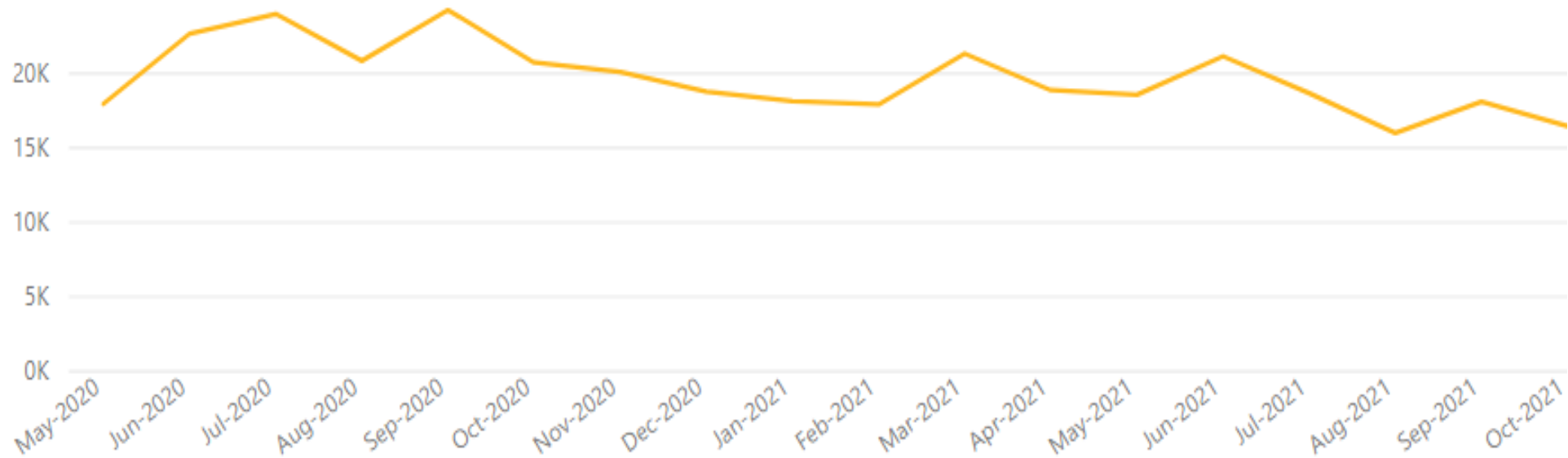
# Same day face-to-face appointments with GPs

Number of Appointments, by Month

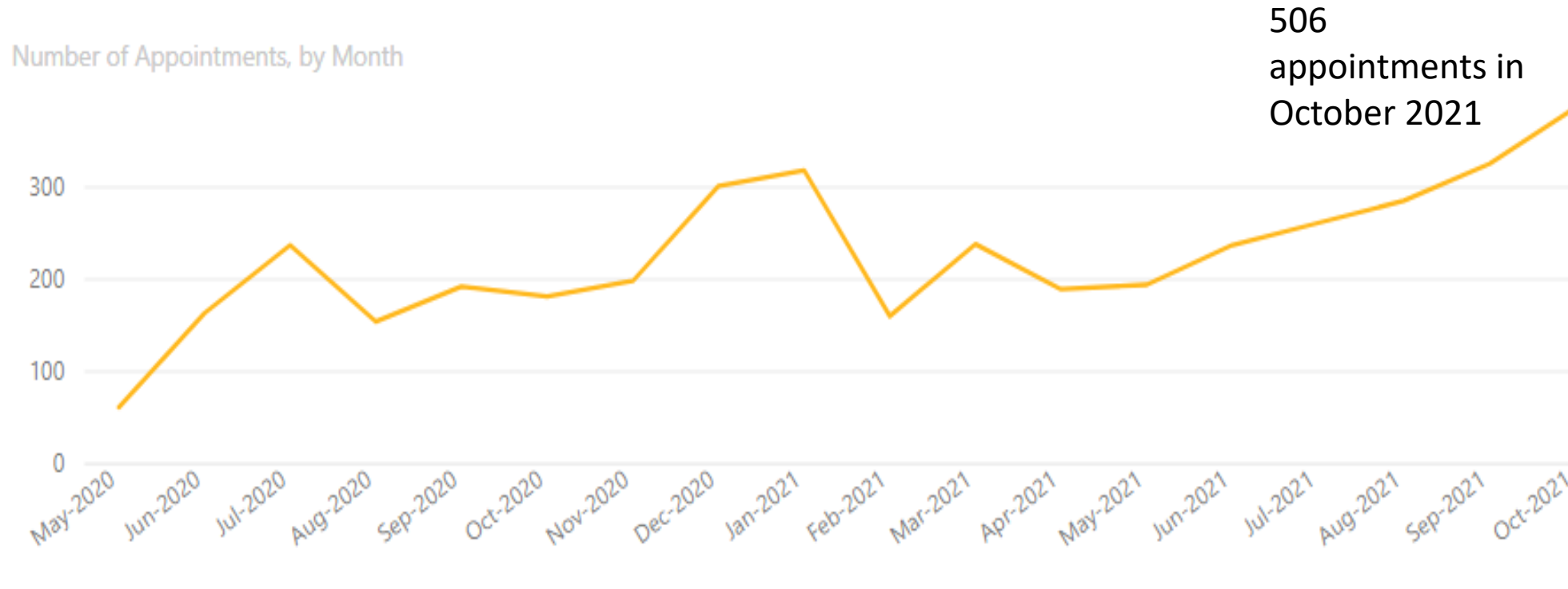


# Phone consultations with a GP

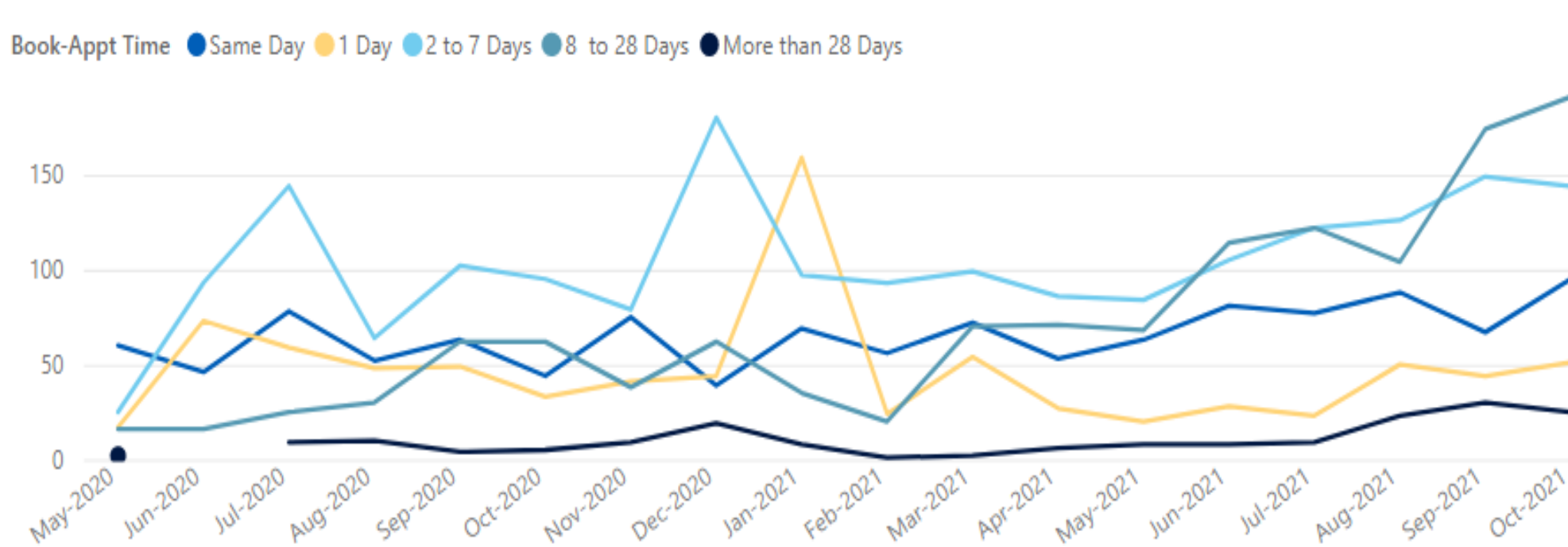
Number of Appointments, by Month



# No of patients who failed to attend a face-to-face appointment with a GP



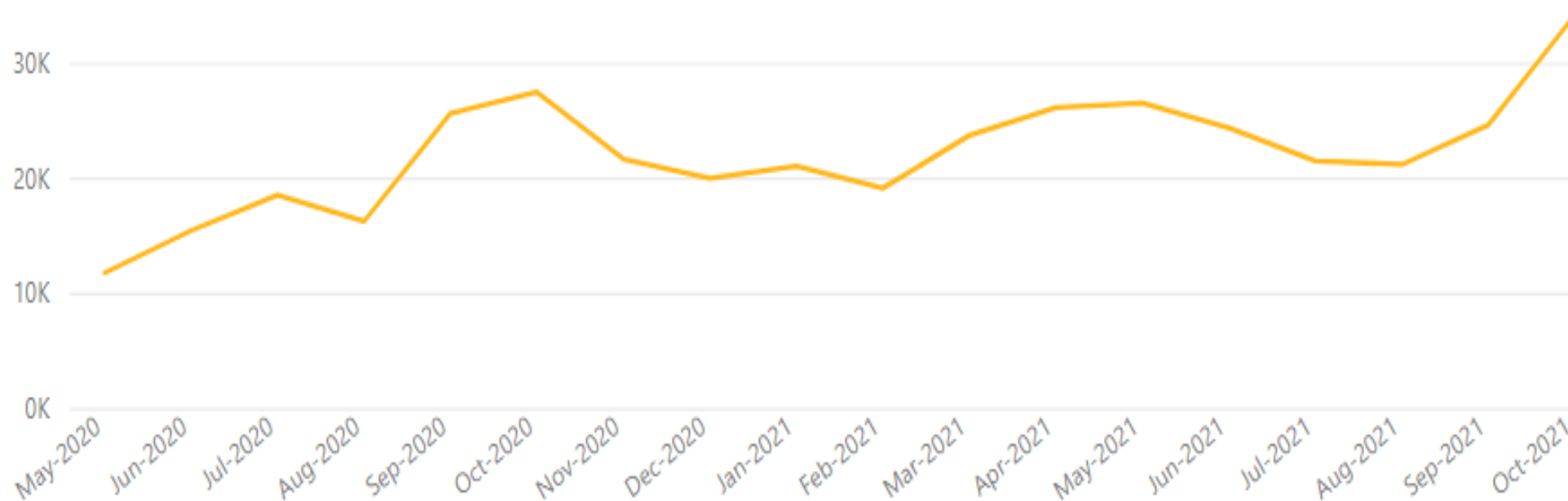
# How long were patients who failed to attend a GP face-to-face appointment meant to wait after booking?





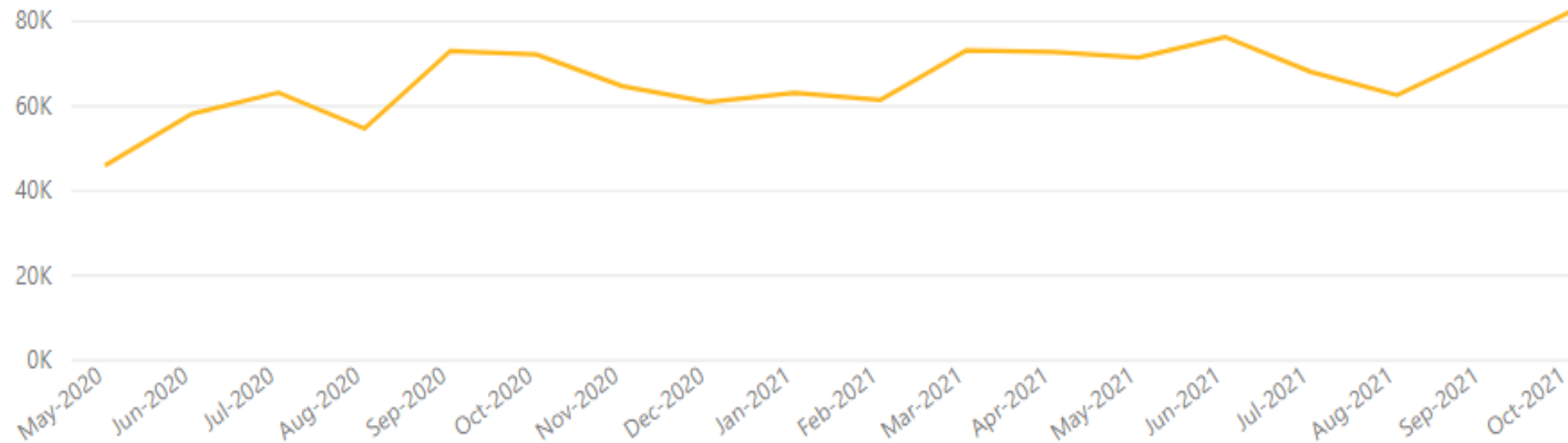
# Other healthcare professional appointments booked

Number of Appointments, by Month



# Appointments booked with all primary care team members

Number of Appointments, by Month



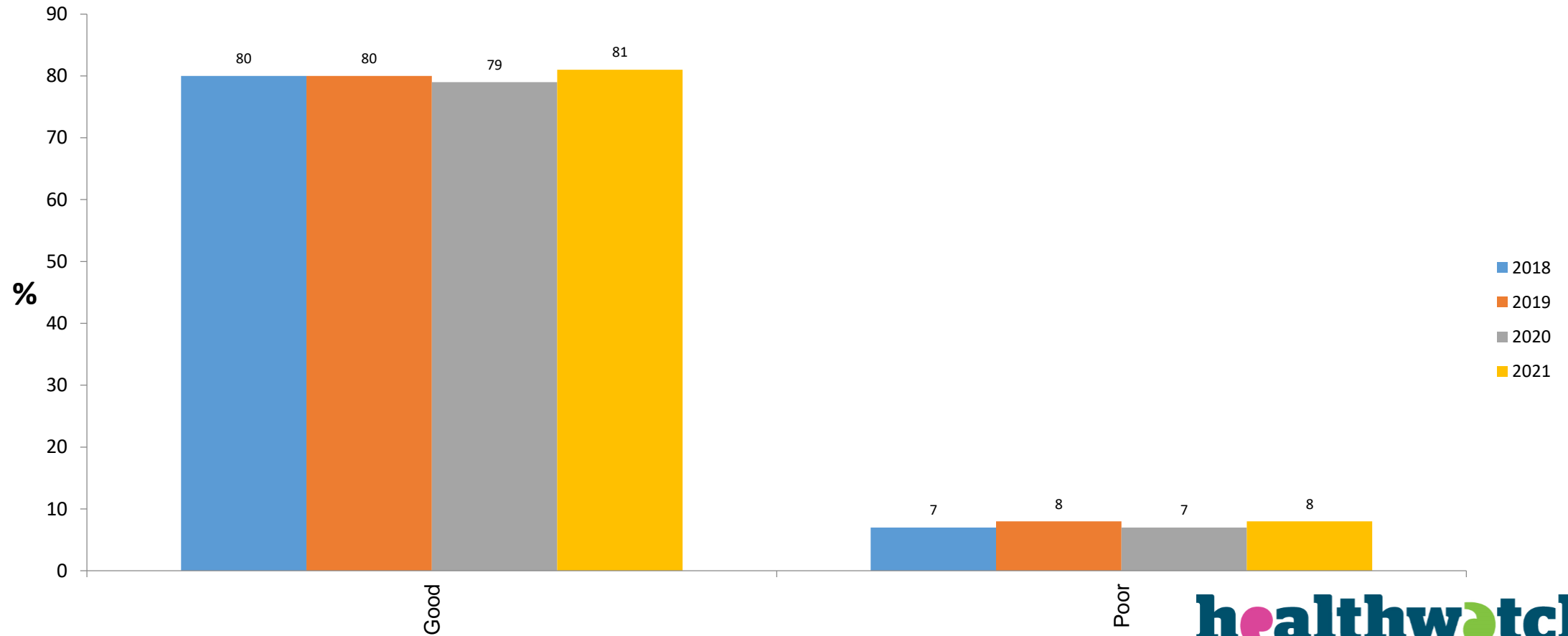
# GP Patient Survey

Released July 2021

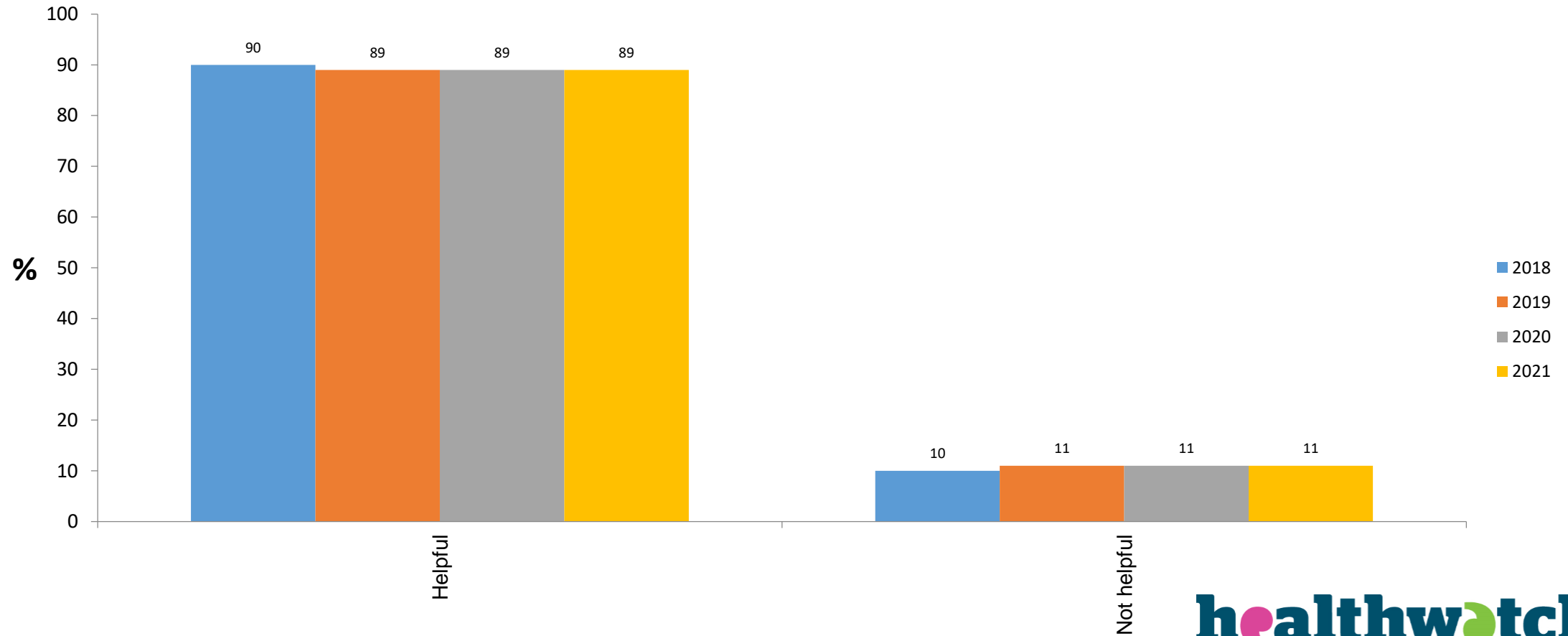
# The GP Patient Survey

- The survey is sent to a random selection from all patients over 16 registered with a GP in England
- About 2 million patients have been selected for the GP Patient Survey this year. Approximately 850,000 responses were received for the 2021 Survey
- Results can be analysed at national, CCG or practice level. We can look at how age, employment status or health conditions affect the results
- We can also look at CCGs with similar populations to make comparisons (slides 32-33)

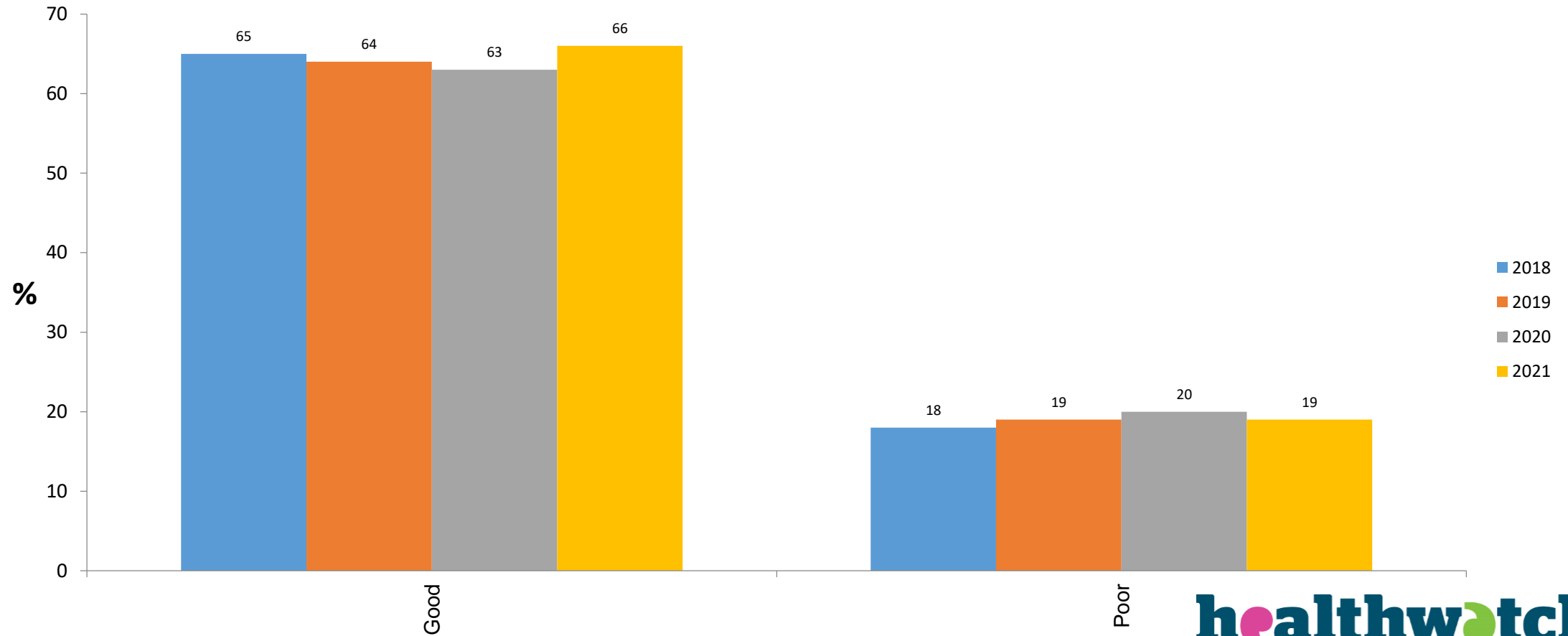
# Overall, how would you describe your experience of your GP practice?



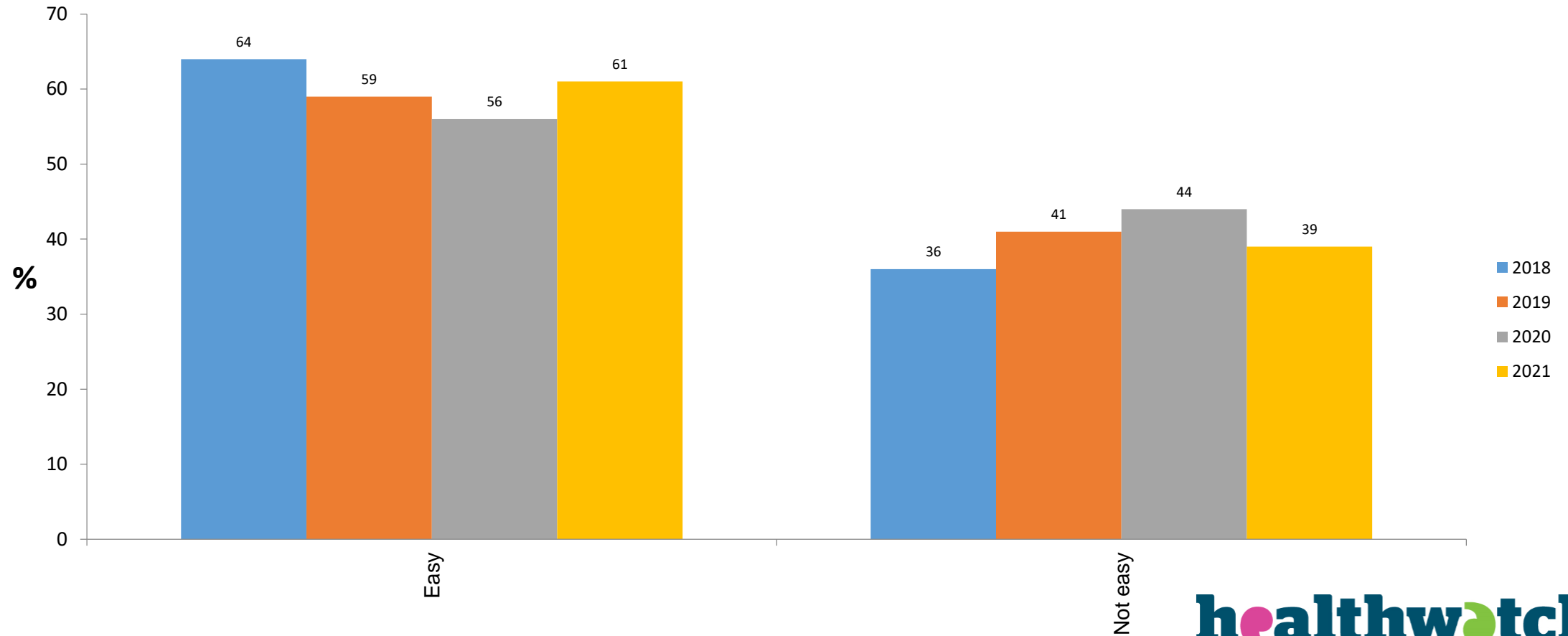
# How helpful do you find the receptionists at your GP practice?



# Overall, how would you describe your experience of making an appointment?

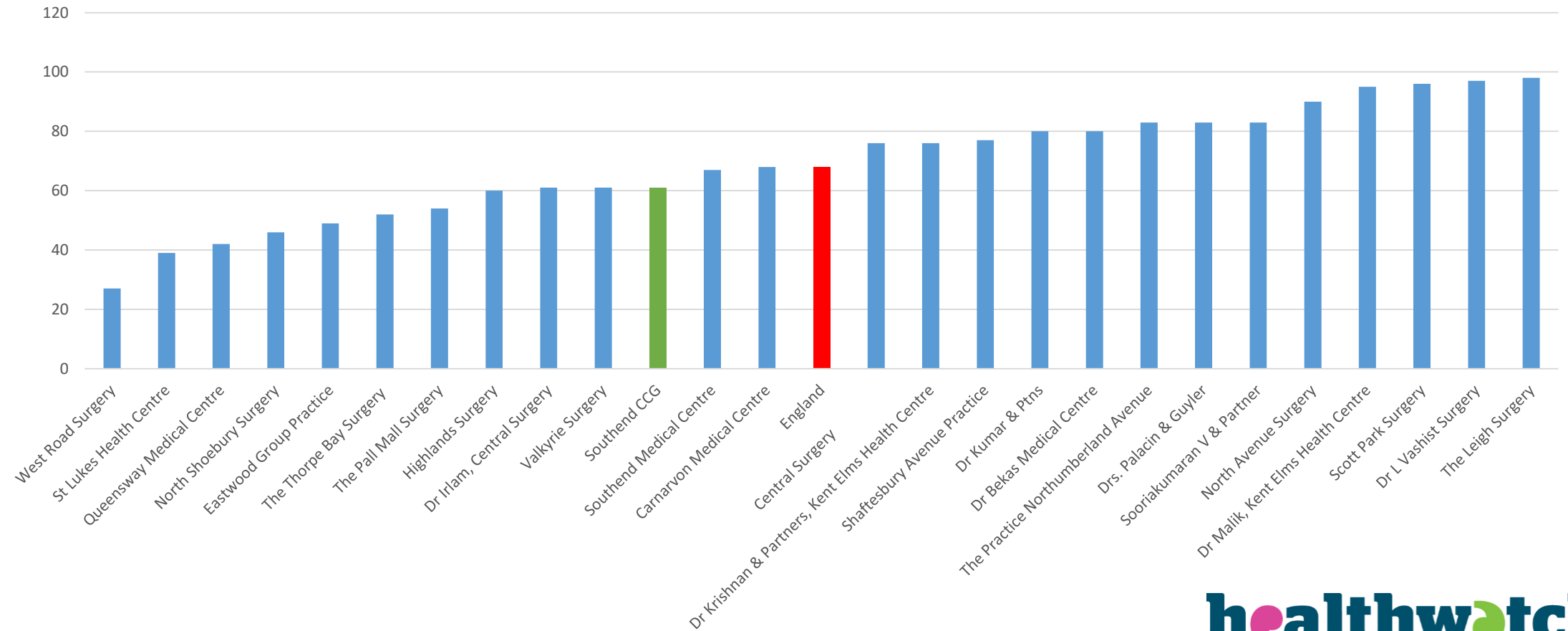


# Generally, how easy is it to get through to someone at your GP practice on the phone?

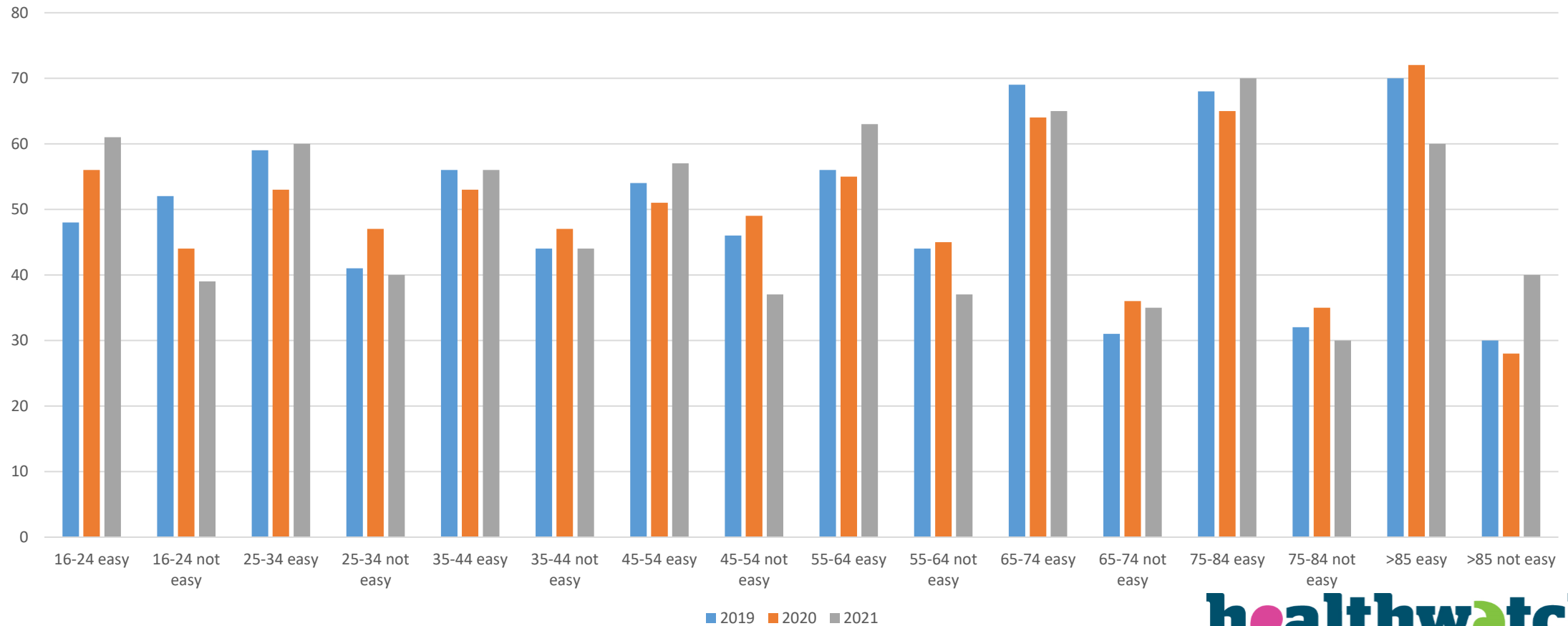




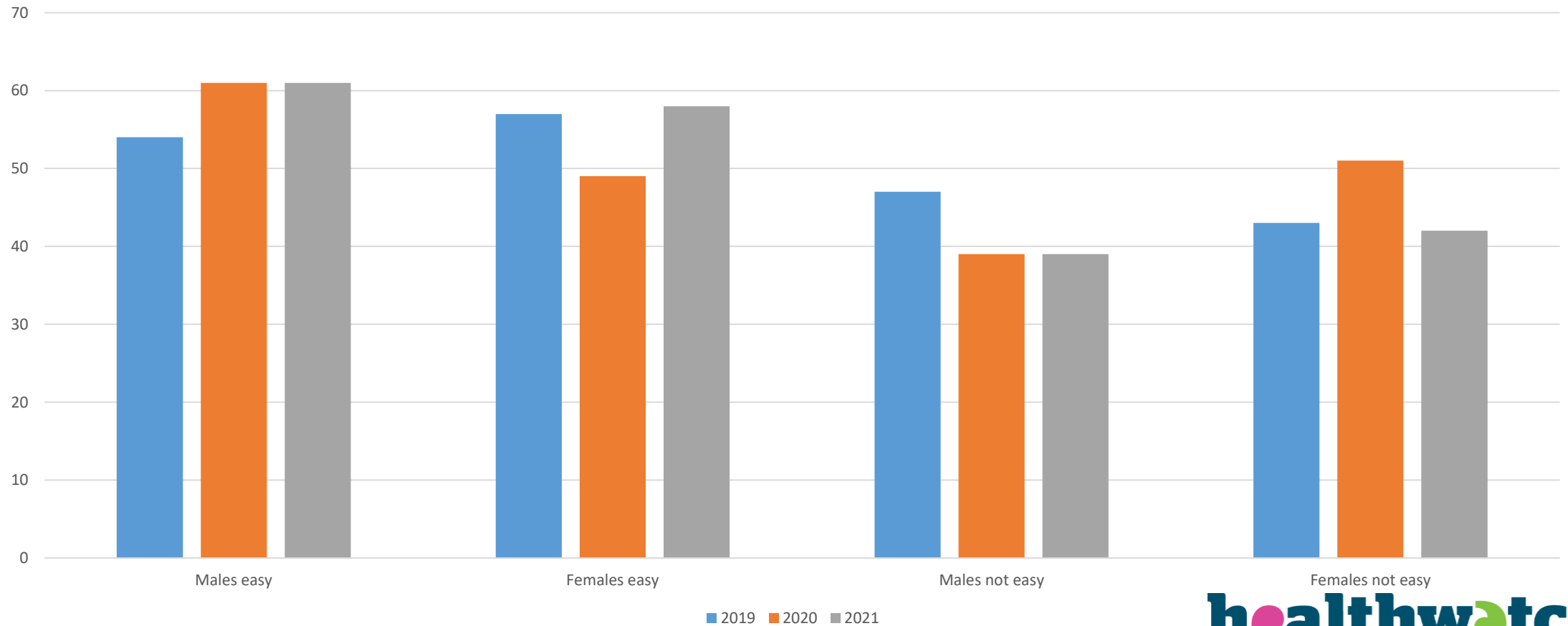
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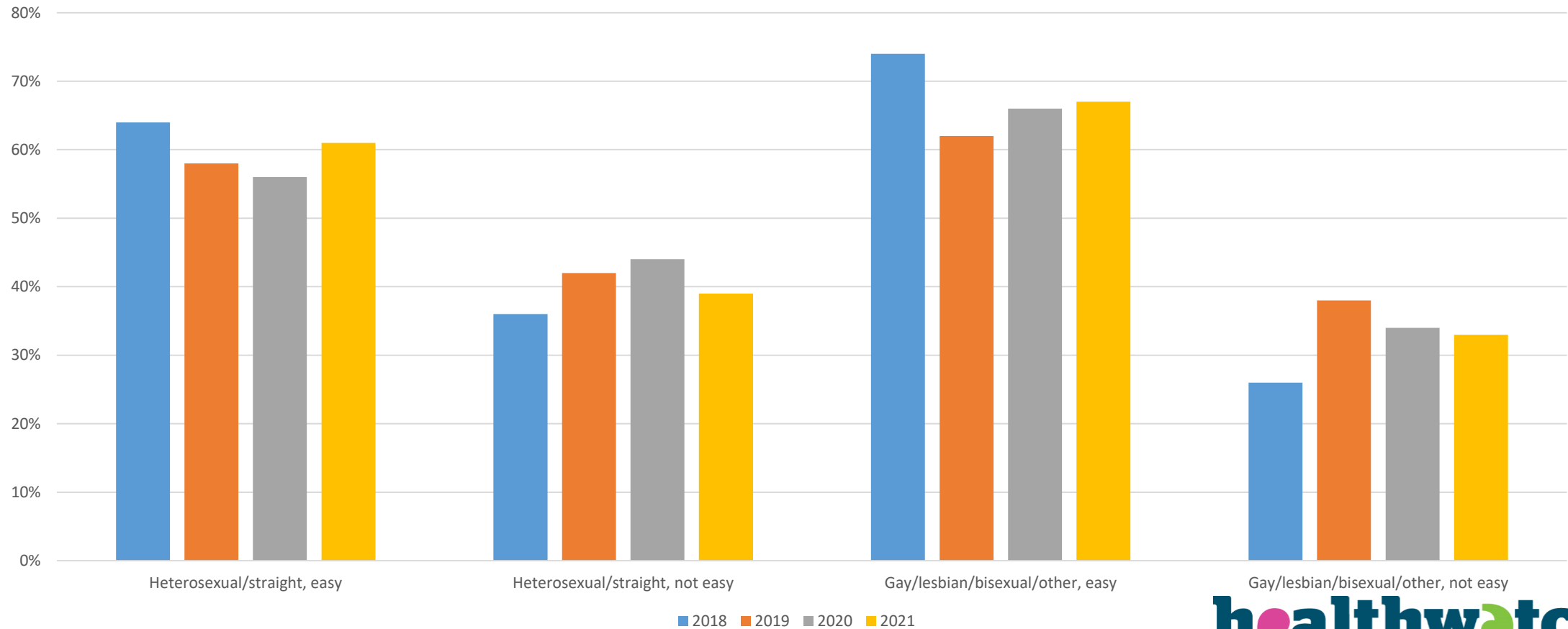
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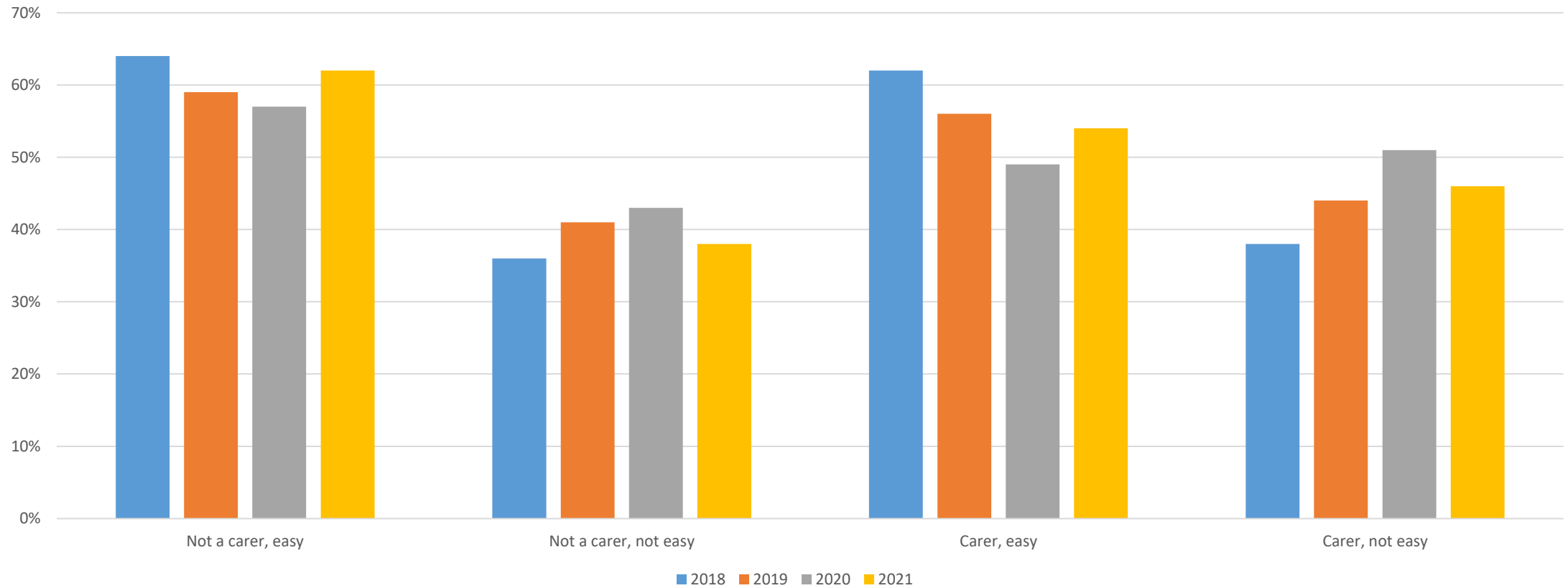
# Generally, how easy is it to get through to someone at your GP practice on the phone? Working age adults/gender



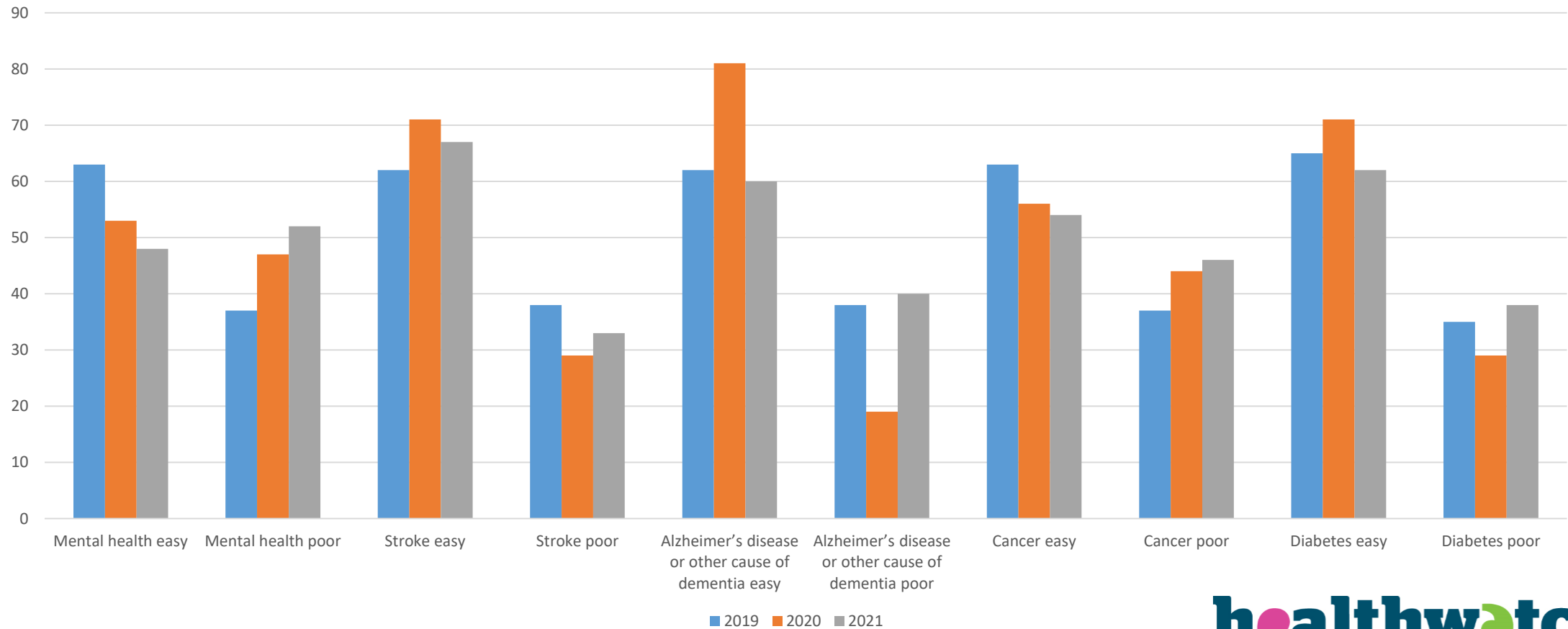
# Generally, how easy is it to get through to someone at your GP practice on the phone? Sexuality



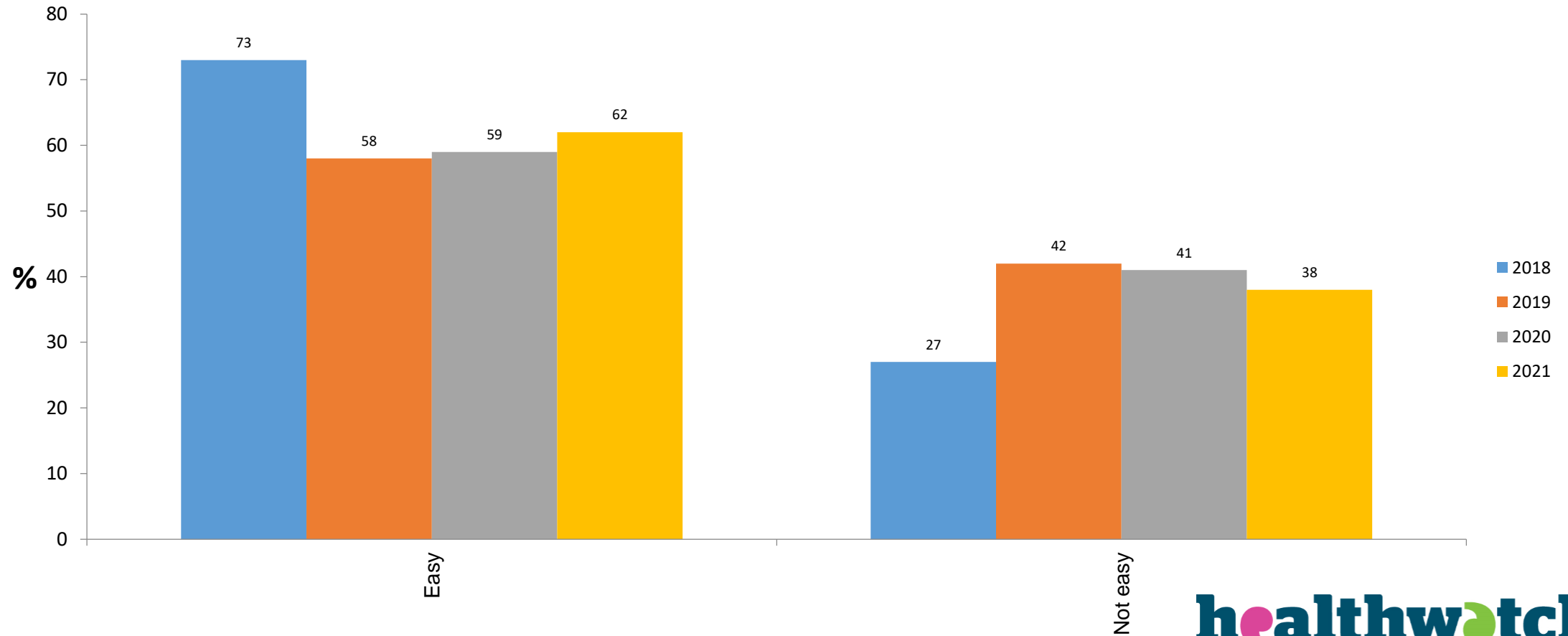
# Generally, how easy is it to get through to someone at your GP practice on the phone? Carers



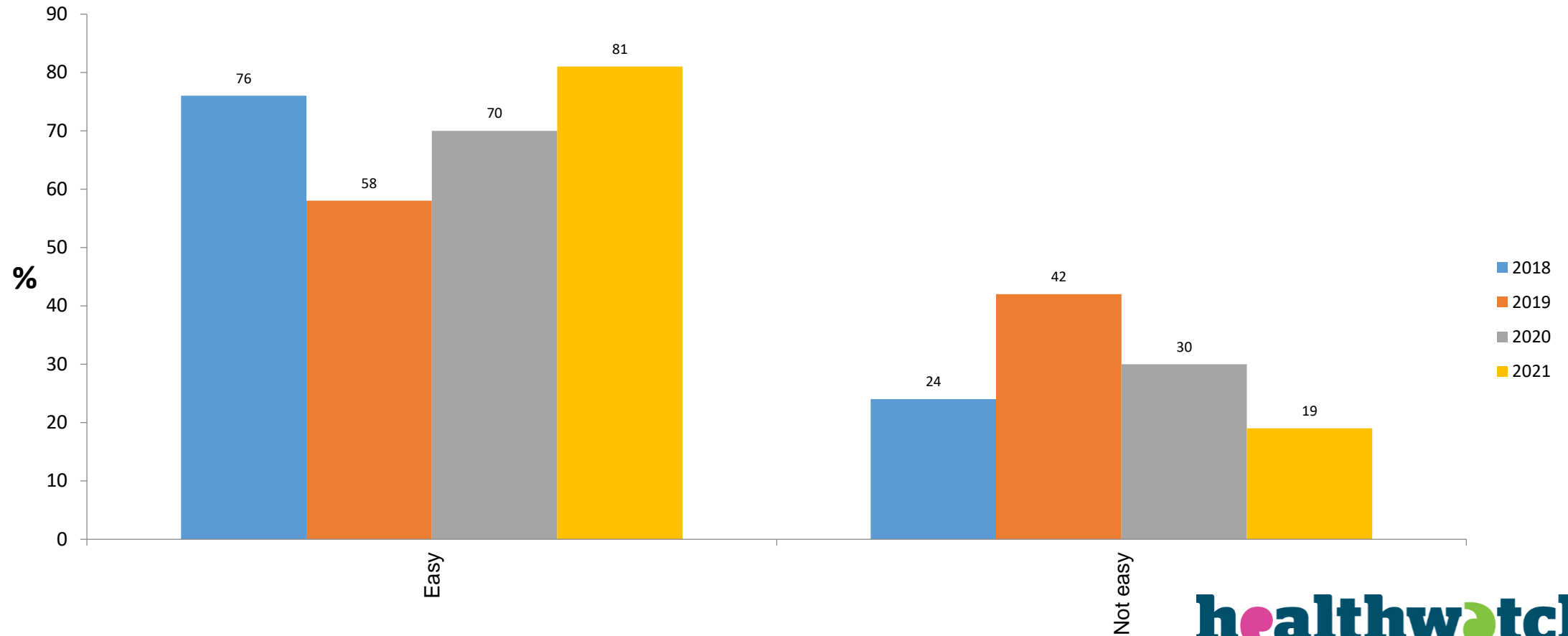
# Generally, how easy is it to get through to someone at your GP practice on the phone? Selected long term conditions



# NHS Bury CCG – respondents with a mental health condition

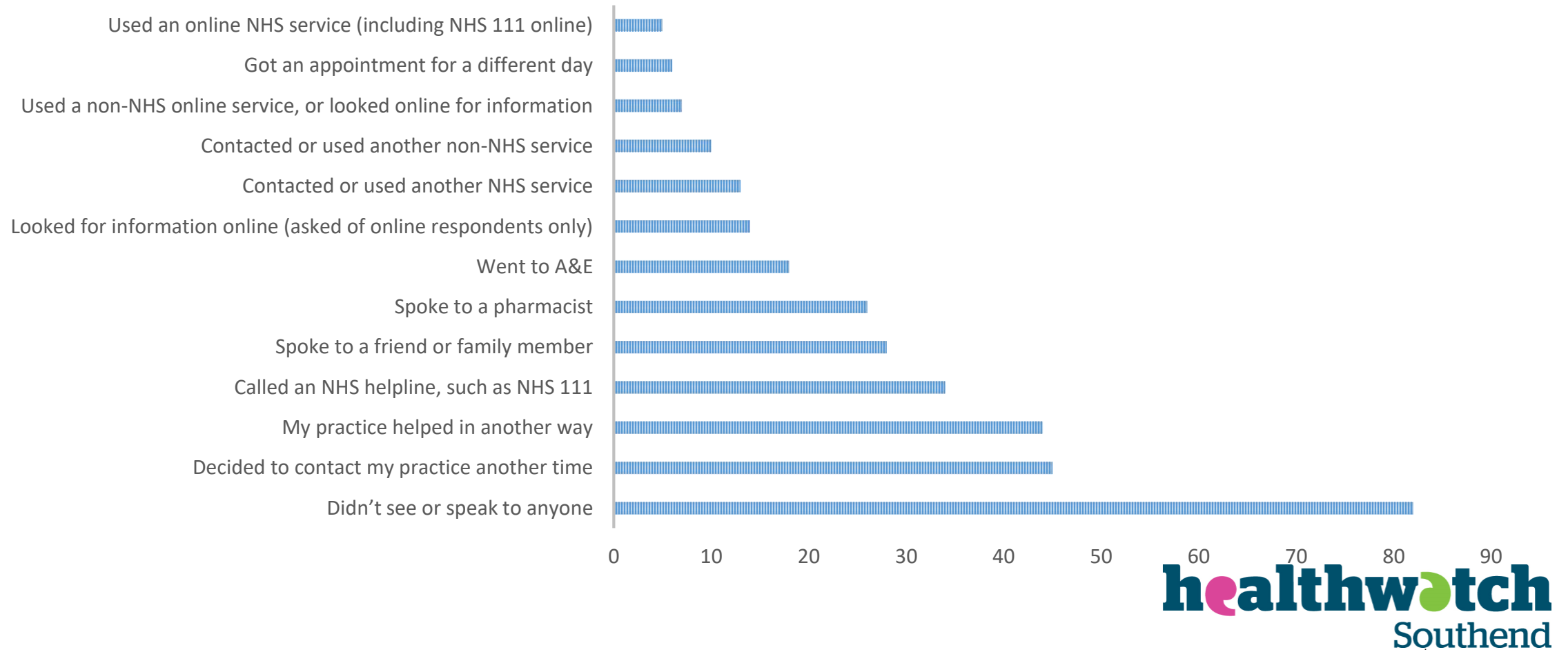


# NHS Bury CCG – patients diagnosed/treated with cancer in past five years





# What did you do when you did not get an appointment? 2021 results



# Data sources

- This report draws on information available to the public
- The data about activity within general practice is taken from <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/appointments-in-general-practice>
- The results of the GP Patient Survey can be found at <https://www.gp-patient.co.uk/practices-search>

# What is Healthwatch Southend?

- Healthwatch Southend is the independent voice of local people who use, or may use, health and social care services
- Our role is to:
  - offer an information/advice/guidance service
  - collect the lived experience of people, to influence the way in which services are delivered
  - hold the NHS and Southend Borough Council to account for the range and quality of services planned, funded and provided
- The NHS Bodies and Local Authorities (Partnership Arrangements, Care Trust, Public Health and Local Healthwatch) Regulations 2012 set out the timescales for recipients of reports like this to respond to us

# Contact details

If you would like to know more about our work, please

- Call us on (01702) 416320
- Email us at [info@healthwatchsouthend.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsouthend.co.uk)
- Visit [www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchsouthend.co.uk)