



Patient Participation Group Young Healthwatch Mystery Shopper Report

September 2024

YOUNG
healthwatch
Central Bedfordshire

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Project Summary

Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB) commissioned The Denny Review; A Rapid Evidence Review of the Health Inequalities Experienced by the Local Communities of Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes' in April 2022. It aimed to improve its understanding of health inequalities in its local communities and good practice to address them. It identified priorities for areas of focus for engagement and co-production with individuals and communities to the agree actions to reduce inequalities.

https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/The-Denny-Report_23.09.11_13.45_ac.pdf



In March 2024, Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB) was commissioned by BLMK ICB to advance efforts in addressing health inequalities. This initiative focused on establishing and expanding Patient Participation Groups (PPGs), with a particular emphasis on increasing engagement among underrepresented young people aged 16-25. The aim is to ensure that their voices are heard in shaping and improving healthcare services.

Patient Participation Groups are: ***'A Patient Participation Group (PPG) is a group of volunteer patients, carers and GP practice staff who meet regularly to discuss and support the running of their GP practice. PPGs look at the services the practice offers, patient experience and how improvements can be made for the benefit of patients and the practice. Each PPG is different, but they all have the aim of making sure that the GP practice puts the patient, and improving health, at the heart of everything it does.'***

At Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (HWCB), we value the unique perspectives of our Young Healthwatch group. Although some volunteers are below the minimum age of 16 required to join a Patient Participation Group (PPG), we specifically sought their involvement to gain firsthand insights. In September 2024, we invited the group to share their views on how young people were treated when expressing interest in joining a PPG in Central Bedfordshire, as well as on the quality of the information provided. This collaboration with our Project Lead was essential to understanding and enhancing the experience for young people in our community.

Following our discussion on gathering feedback regarding the recruitment of young people to Patient Participation Groups (PPGs), the Young Healthwatch team, in collaboration with the Project Lead, chose to undertake a 'Mystery Shopping' exercise. Seven young volunteers participated, providing detailed oral and written feedback after contacting eight GP practices. Their responses have been carefully summarised and are included in the report.



Summary of Contact

The mystery shopping exercise conducted by our Young Healthwatch volunteers revealed significant inconsistencies in how GP surgeries communicate about Patient Participation Groups (PPGs).

While some practices provided clear and detailed responses regarding age requirements, meeting frequency, and joining procedures, others offered vague or incomplete information.

In several cases, front-line staff appeared unsure or unprepared, with responses ranging from directing callers to online resources without follow-up to requiring registration before sharing any further details.

This variability has created confusion and may act as a barrier for young people interested in participating in PPGs.



Young Healthwatch volunteers at one of their monthly meetings

Methodology

Each young Healthwatch participant was assigned a specific GP surgery to contact.

They were instructed to engage with the allocated practice via telephone, email, or an in-person visit to the reception desk.

During these interactions, participants asked a standardised set of questions to ensure consistency across all sites, as follows:

1. Is there a Patient Participation Group (PPG) available for me to join?
2. If the answer was yes: What is the minimum age requirement for joining?
3. How frequently are the meetings held?
4. At what time and in which format are the meetings conducted (e.g., online or in-person)?

This structured approach allowed us to collect comparable data on PPG availability and accessibility from each GP surgery.

The young volunteers provided their feedback through multiple channels. Some submitted written feedback via WhatsApp or email to HWCB's Youth Engagement and Volunteer Officer, while others shared their insights verbally during the monthly Young Healthwatch Meeting.

This blended approach ensured a comprehensive collection of both individual and group perspectives.

Young Healthwatch Mystery Shopping Task

1. Contact your allocated GP Surgery, either call, email or visit the reception in person and ask, "is there a patient participation group here that I can join?"
2. If yes, "how old do I need to be to join?"
3. Then ask, "how often do you have meetings?"
4. Finally ask, "what time are they usually held at and where do you have them?" (are they online or in-person).

WhatsApp or Email me your answers at:
anna.baillie@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk



Feedback – Young Healthwatch volunteers

The feedback provided by Young Healthwatch volunteers is as follows:

Khyem, aged 18

Contacted Salisbury House Surgery by telephone on 26th of September 2024 and reported as follows:

"She seemed clueless on the phone. I asked how old you needed to be, she said any age, I asked how often you have meetings, she said she doesn't know, and then I asked what time they are usually held and where do you have them and she said, that I have to go online to have a look, because she doesn't know. But she said that there is a PPG, but she made it really difficult to try and join, and she said that I have to go into the surgery to pick up a registration form if I would like to join, she had no idea when they were, or what time they were at, she just seemed really annoyed that I was calling."

Olivia, aged 18

Contacted Marston GP Surgery on 26th of September 2024 and reported as follows:

"I called them, and they said that there is a Patient Participation Group. They said you need to be 18 or above to participate and with how often the person says she's not sure and that would be told upon joining. And they are usually online and from what seems like they are quite flexible."

Afifa, aged 15

Contacted Bassett Road Surgery by telephone on 26th of September 2024 and reported as follows:

"Not informed, not sure about if there is one or not, doesn't know how I can join or have any info to help. Gave me an email to try because doesn't have any idea - bassett.road@nhs.net."

Grace, aged 17

Contacted Houghton Close Surgery by telephone on 3rd of October 2024 and reported as follows:

"They said there was no age limit, but they are top-heavy, with an older demographic of people. So, they are looking for younger people. She was keen to take my details. They hold their meetings four times a year, saying they are held every quarter of a financial year. Their next meeting is in the next 4-5 weeks, they are trying to put together a meeting which are usually in the evening."

Grace, aged 17 and Khyem, aged 18

Both volunteers contacted Larksfield and Arlesey Medical Practice together by telephone on 3rd October 2024 and reported as follows:

"When we called them, they asked for our date of birth. They said they did have a PPG, and we were welcome to join, then asked for our registration but as we weren't registered with the surgery we couldn't get any more information."

They also contacted Kingsbury Court Surgery together on 3rd October 2024 and reported as follows:

"They were good. She said that there is a PPG, I can be any age to join, they meet once a month, on a weekday, in the morning. The times can change. They want to make sure you are registered at the surgery before they give you more information."

Syeda, aged 18

Contacted Greensands Medical Practice by telephone on 4th October 2024 and reported as follows:

"Yes, there is a PPG, but they're in the process of revising it at the moment, there is no age limit, and they meet monthly in-person."

Batool, aged 18

Contacted Eastgate Surgery by telephone on 4th October 2024 and reported as follows:

"I called but they told me to email so I did, but they just replied, saying that the participation group is only for registered patients without any other information."



Conclusion

The feedback clearly indicates that the current approach to communicating about PPGs is inconsistent across GP surgeries. These inconsistencies not only impact the clarity of information available to potential young members but also risks discouraging engagement from those who could benefit from participation.

Ensuring that all young people have access to accurate and comprehensive information is essential for effective community involvement and feedback.



Young Healthwatch volunteers at another monthly meeting



Recommendations

1

Standardise Communication:

Develop and distribute standardised information packets or FAQs for all GP surgeries, covering key details such as age requirements, meeting frequency, and joining procedures. This will help ensure consistency across practices.

2

Enhance Staff Training:

Implement regular training sessions for reception and administrative staff to ensure they are well-versed in PPG details and can confidently answer queries from young people.

3

Improve Accessibility of Information:

Make sure that up-to-date and clear information about PPGs is available on multiple platforms (e.g., phone, email, websites, and in-person at the reception) so that prospective members can easily access it.

4

Streamline the Registration Process:

Consider revising the requirement for registration before sharing initial PPG information. Allowing potential participants to receive preliminary details without being registered could facilitate easier access.

5

Engage Directly with Young People:

Establish a feedback loop with young people to continuously assess and improve the communication and accessibility of PPGs. Their insights can guide further refinements in the process.

Implementing these recommendations should help create a more welcoming and transparent process for young individuals interested in participating in PPGs, ultimately enhancing community engagement and service delivery.

Advice & Support

Do you live in Bedfordshire or Luton and are a young person that might benefit from joining their PPG?

If you have any questions about your Patient Participation Group available in Bedfordshire, Milton Keynes and Luton, please contact your GP practice directly. Alternatively, contact Anna Bailie and Annette Brown using the details below:

Telephone: **0300 303 8554**

Email: anna.bailie@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

Email: annette.brown@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk

The website for Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire is below:

<https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/>

References

<https://northeastlondon.icb.nhs.uk/get-involved/patient-participation-groups/>

Resources

<https://www.mefirst.org.uk/>





Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire (YHWCB) exists to make health and social care services work for the people that use them, especially young people.

Our role is to ensure that local decision makers and health and care services put the experiences of young people at the heart of their work.

We believe no one should be afraid to speak up because our opinion is as good as anyone else's.

Our volunteers have received appropriate 'Enter & View' training and are actively putting their learning into practice by visiting health and social care services such as hospital wards, surgeries and care homes. The young people will then be able to report their findings from their unique perspective. If you would like a group of YHWCB volunteers to visit your service please contact us.

A lot more information can be found on the Young Healthwatch website, here <https://healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk/young-healthwatch>, including one volunteer who was successful in applying for nursing college after detailing her experience as a Young Healthwatch volunteer. She explains how pivotal being a volunteer with YHWCB was in supporting her application, showcasing the work she was involved in through YHWCB activities and projects.

If you are under 25, why not consider becoming a member of Young Healthwatch Central Bedfordshire? Get in touch for more information, email anna.bailie@healthwatch-centralbedfordshire.org.uk or call **0300 303 8554**.





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@YoungHWatch



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