

The views of Cheshire and Merseyside Residents on the GP Access Survey

June 2025

Healthwatch Cheshire, on behalf of the nine Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside:

healthwatch
Cheshire East

healthwatch
Cheshire West

healthwatch
Halton

healthwatch
Knowsley

healthwatch
Liverpool

healthwatch
Sefton

healthwatch
St Helens

healthwatch
Warrington

healthwatch
Wirral

With special thanks to all residents who shared their views.

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“The nine local Healthwatch continue to be critical friends and champions of the patient voice for NHS Cheshire and Merseyside. They have delivered an important piece of work – gathering thousands of views from residents on how they access and experience GP services across our region.

This survey offers an essential temperature check on how well recent investment and changes to primary care are landing with the public. The findings provide us with rich insight into what’s working and where further improvements are needed to ensure timely, fair, and effective access to GP services.

As always, we are grateful to the Healthwatch network for their support, constructive challenge, and for ensuring we stay grounded in real patient experiences as we plan for the future.”

— Clare Watson, Assistant Chief Executive, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside

Executive Summary

The Healthwatch GP Access Survey looks closely at how local residents feel about their GP services across Cheshire and Merseyside. All 9 local Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside gathered feedback between October 2024 and March 2025 from 6,944 people from diverse communities. The survey responses revealed both successes and challenges in how GP services are provided. **While key themes and challenges remained consistent across the region, the feedback highlighted notable variation between individual GP practices. Some surgeries received largely positive responses, while others faced more critical feedback, suggesting differing experiences depending on the specific practice.**

The main challenge that people face remains securing an appointment and many found the phone and online booking process frustrating. While 71% of those surveyed eventually managed to be seen face-to-face, it often took several attempts using different methods to secure appointments.

Key findings from our research include:

- **Nearly 66% of respondents mostly used the telephone** to contact their GP, but many reported experiencing long waiting times and the need to make repeat calls. The average ease-of-access rating was 6 out of 10, indicating that there is room for improvement in accessibility. The 8am rush to make an appointment was a cause for frustration and a barrier to making appointments. **While 91% of those who secured appointments found the date and time convenient, the process of getting to this point was challenging for many.**
- Some people including elderly patients, disabled people, and unpaid caregivers **faced barriers to accessing services**. However, when support was available, they reported positive experiences, particularly appreciating staff who understood their needs.
- **Alternative service routes, such as pharmacies and other healthcare providers were used** by some patients when they were unable to secure GP appointments or as first point of contact. While these options offered support for some, others found them insufficient for their healthcare needs.
- **Interactions with staff received mixed reviews**, with almost half of respondents rating their experience as excellent (5 stars). However, the other half reported feeling dismissed or not fully heard, especially during their contact with reception staff.

These findings will contribute to future improvements to primary care services across Cheshire and Merseyside, ensuring that patient experiences inform strategic planning and modifications in service delivery.

Key themes and trends

Our analysis identified many themes in patient experiences, emphasising both issues in the system and opportunities for improving GP service delivery. While the main themes and challenges were similar across the region, feedback varied between individual GP practices. Some surgeries were praised, while others received more criticism, showing that people's experiences depended on which practice they used.



Challenges with Access and Booking

- Patients commonly reported challenges with the 8am booking system, which affected working people, parents and those with caregiving responsibilities.
- The 'competition' for same-day appointments often led to multiple call attempts and long waiting times, causing some patients to seek alternative care options or postpone seeking treatment.



Challenges with Digital Services

- Digital services provided convenience for many, but they also created barriers for others.
- Some elderly patients and people without reliable internet access reported feeling excluded by the growing trend toward online booking systems such as PATCHS.
- This 'digital gap' especially affects people who might not have the tools or knowledge to use these platforms easily.



Inconsistent Staff Experiences

- Patient experiences of practice staff were mixed.
- While many praised the professionalism and empathy of the practice staff, some reported frustrations with the reception staff, especially regarding triage decisions and appointment allocation.



Other Ways to Access Care

- The use of alternative services, such as pharmacies and NHS 111, produced mixed results.
- Some people took care of their health issues using alternative options, but others had to go back to their GPs.
- There is still a need to raise awareness of the roles of other health professionals outside of the GP.

1. Introduction (1/2)

Healthwatch* are the local independent advocate for health and care services, forming part of the national network of local Healthwatch across England.

As part of our core activity, we seek the views and experiences of residents of Cheshire and Merseyside, to help inform how health, care and wellbeing services are planned and delivered. The information we gather is then analysed so we can identify and act upon trends, presenting our findings to decision-makers to improve the services people use. We also share people's views locally with Healthwatch England who strive to ensure that the government puts people at the heart of care nationally.

In Spring 2024, national plans were introduced to improve patient access to primary care services through the Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP). To understand the real-world impact of these changes and ensure that the patient voice is central to any future developments, all 9 Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside ran a joint ICB-commissioned project to hear directly from residents.

The survey ran from **25th October 2024, until 20th March 2025**, delivered and supported by the wider Healthwatch team. Individual reports for each Healthwatch area can be found in Appendix 1.

*Local Cheshire & Merseyside Healthwatch:

Cheshire East
Cheshire West
Halton
Knowsley
Liverpool
Sefton
St Helens
Warrington
Wirral.

1. Introduction (2/2)

In line with the **Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP) priorities** for Cheshire and Merseyside, the GP Access survey explored improvements felt by patients who accessed GP services after the PCARP initiatives were introduced.

- **Patient contact methods:** We asked people how they book GP appointments—**by phone, online, or in person**—and whether these options are **simple, accessible, and reliable**. The survey also looked at whether patients get **clear and friendly information from their first contact**, ensuring **fewer barriers, quicker access, and a better overall experience**.
- **Appointment availability and delivery:** We explored **waiting times for appointments**, what type of consultations people are offered, and whether these **options meet their needs**. We also checked if patients receive clear appointment details, including who they will see and why, with an understanding of different roles within practices.
- **Support for all patients:** The survey looked at how GP services ensure access for all, for example, **disabled people, those with language barriers, or unpaid carers**. We asked whether they felt listened to and whether practices are making reasonable adjustments to improve access.
- **Technology and alternative healthcare routes:** We explored whether patients are aware of and comfortable using **digital tools like online booking systems, NHS apps, and virtual consultations**. The survey also looked at whether patients understand when and how to use these tools, and **what alternatives are available if they cannot access digital options**. Additionally, we examined whether **people turn to pharmacies, private healthcare, or urgent care services** when they cannot get a GP appointment—and how well these alternatives support patient needs.

2. Methodology (1/3)

In October 2024, all nine local Healthwatch—Cheshire East, Cheshire West, Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St Helens, Warrington, and Wirral—came together to develop a shared survey exploring people’s recent experiences of accessing GP services. The questions were created to evaluate the impact of PCARP on local communities. People were also invited to share additional information about their experiences. By using the same questions and timeframe, we ensured consistency in approach, allowing for local insights as well as a wider view across the Integrated Care System (ICS).

This collaborative effort was designed to:


- Capture the voices of people across all boroughs, including those who may face additional barriers to care.
- Identify gaps, highlight good practice, and support the NHS in designing services that work for everyone.
- Evaluate whether changes introduced through the PCARP are being felt by patients.
- Feed into local and regional planning by providing clear, actionable insights to commissioners and decision-makers.

Ensuring everyone in Cheshire and Merseyside has the opportunity to shape their local services is critical. Whether people had a positive or negative experience, every response helps build a clearer picture of what is working and where improvements are needed.

The survey was promoted online and offline, with paper copies and accessible formats available to make it as inclusive as possible.

2. Methodology (2/3)

Healthwatch would like to thank all the people who participated in this project – for generously sharing their experiences and time to help inform future strategies and services.



6,944 online responses
collected via digital survey link

and **paper responses**
gathered through physical distribution and collection points.

Cross section of places we engaged

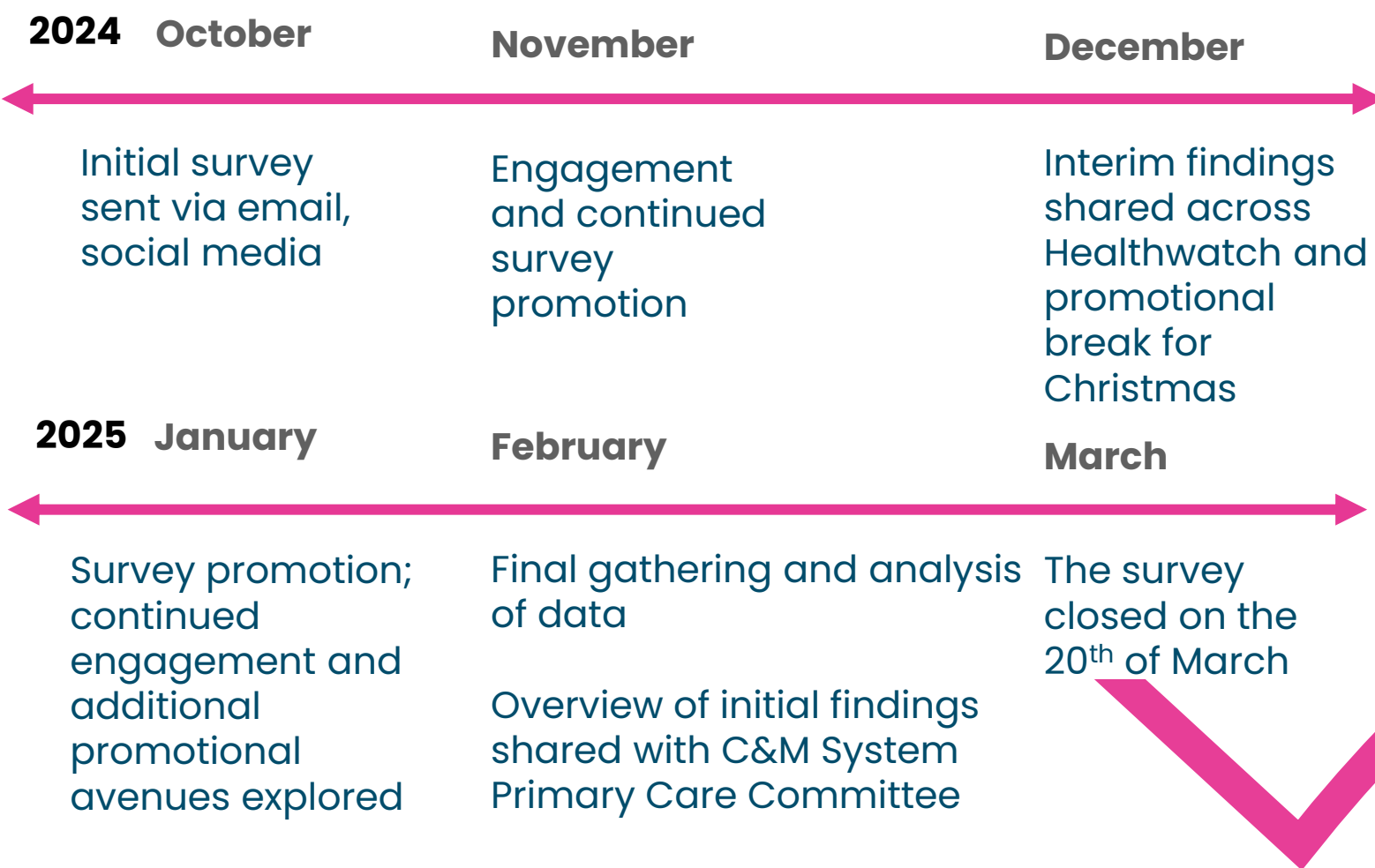
(See Appendix 3 for a complete list)

| | |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Open Engagement Responses | Gathered through in-person discussions at locations including community hubs, leisure centres, libraries, and market stalls. |
| Survey Promotion and Distribution | Digital outreach via social media (primarily Facebook, X, NextDoor, Instagram), email newsletters, and website links and more. Printed materials placed in locations including GP surgeries, pharmacies, and public spaces. |
| Partner Organisations | Supported by NHS Trusts, ICBs, local councils, and third-sector organisations to extend survey reach. |

Each Healthwatch circulated the survey through a variety of methods, receiving different response rates. Knowsley, Cheshire East and Cheshire West constitute the highest number of responses received among the nine Healthwatch. This is reflected in their individual reports.

2. Methodology (3/3)

Timeline



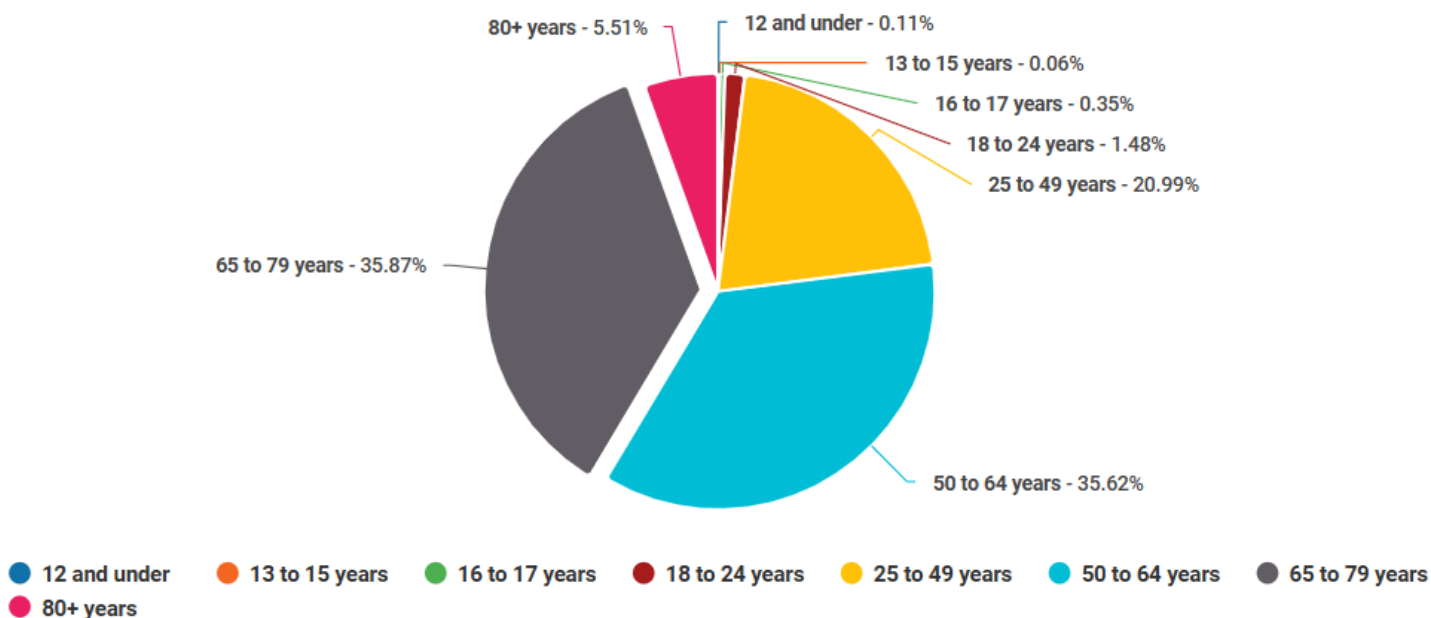
Healthwatch provided a verbal update to the System Primary Care Committee on the Access Improvement Patient Experience survey, highlighting several key points. A detailed report was scheduled for June, ahead of a summary for the Integrated Care Board.

3. Who did we hear from?

The survey gave respondents the opportunity to complete demographic information should they wish to disclose it.

3.1 Age

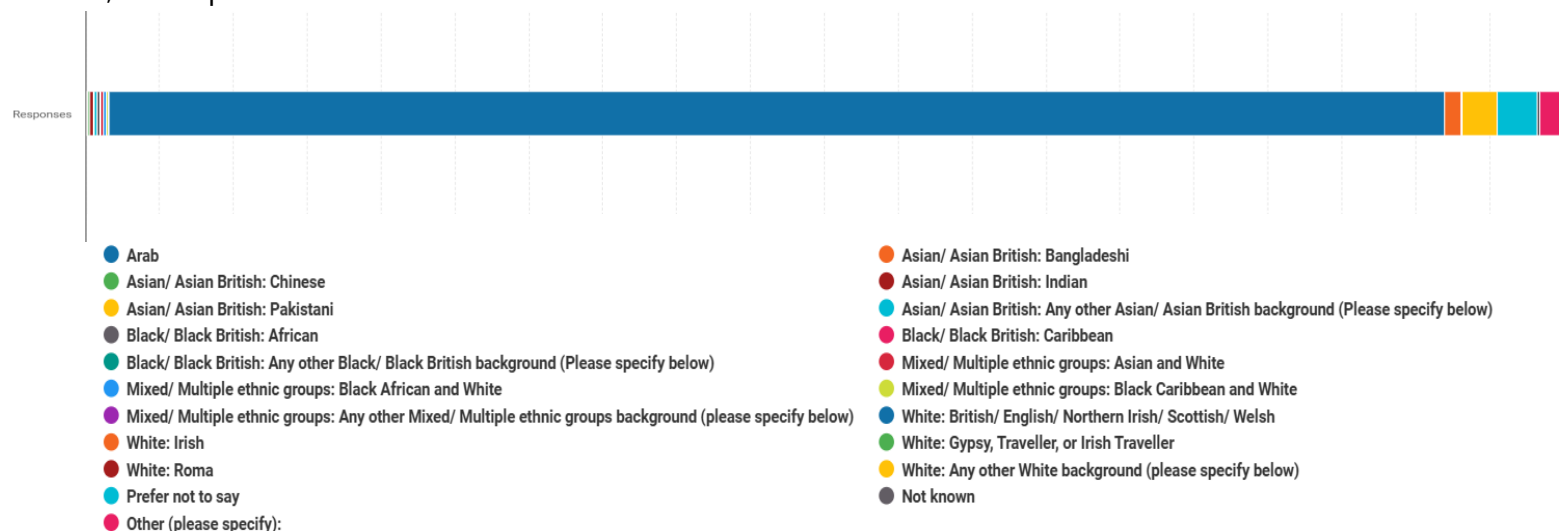
6,275 responses



- **78% of respondents were aged 50 years and over.** 73% identified as women and 26% as men.
- 96% indicated their gender identity matches their birth sex, and **84% identified as heterosexual/straight.**

3.2 Ethnicity

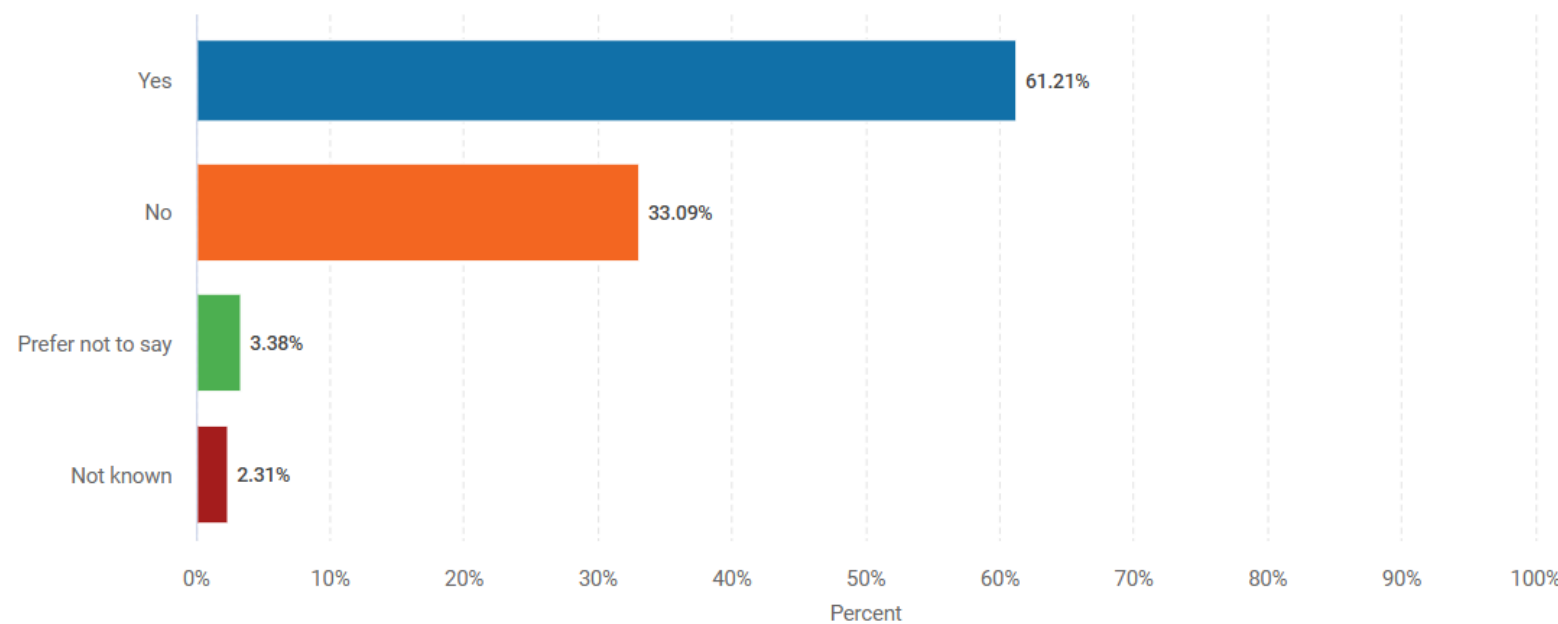
6,240 responses



- **90% of respondents identified as White British**, with small representation from Asian, Black, and Mixed backgrounds, each below 3%.

3.3 Do you have a long-term health condition?

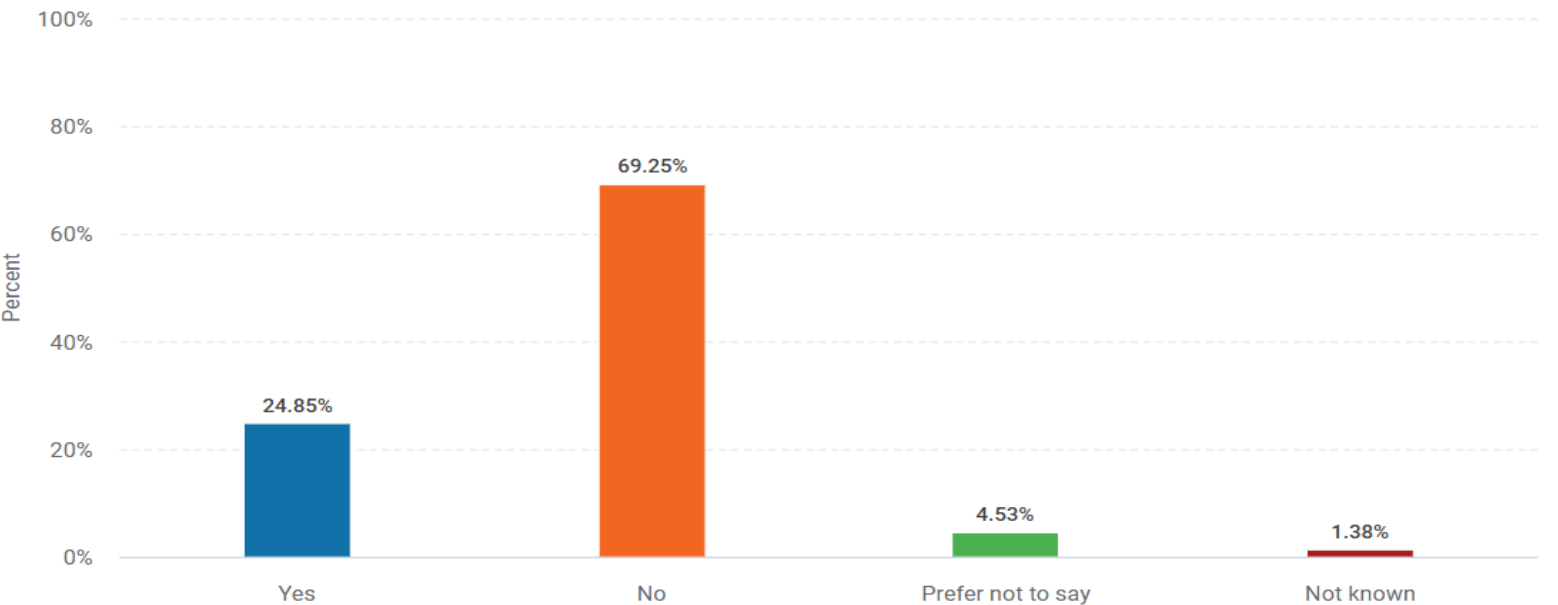
6,234 responses



- **61% of respondents reported having a long-term health condition**, while 33% said they did not.

3.4 Do you have a disability?

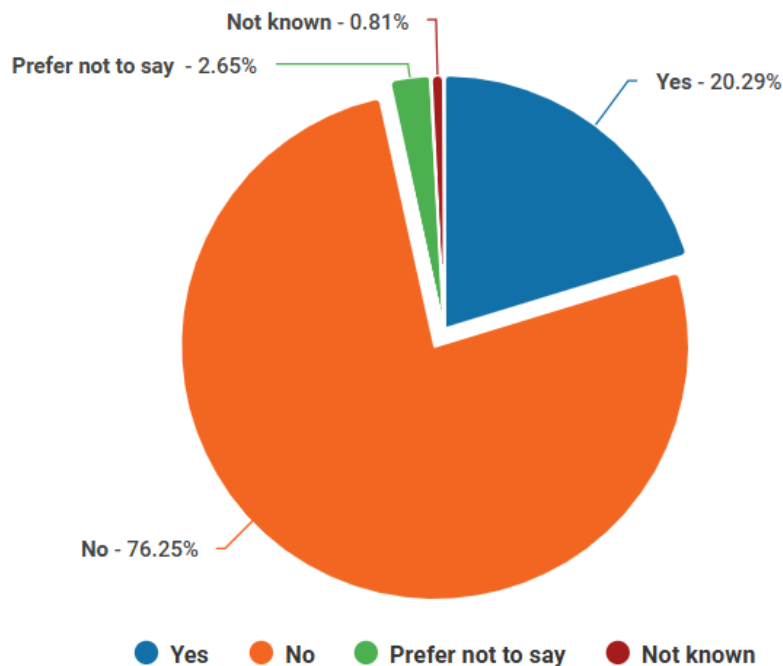
6,254 responses



- **The majority of respondents (69%) reported not having a disability**, while just under a quarter (25%) said they do.

3.5 Do you consider yourself to be a carer?

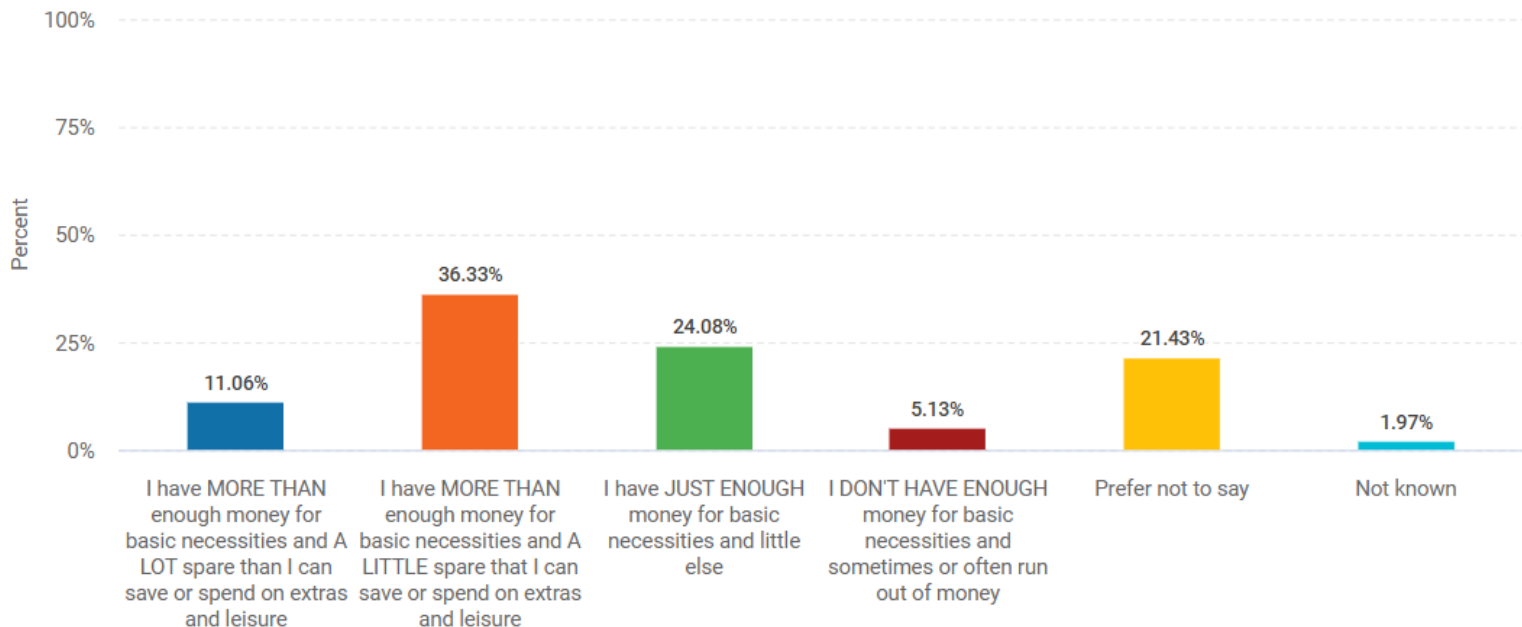
6,263 responses



- Around one in five respondents (20%) consider themselves to be a carer.

3.6 Which of the following best describes your current financial position?

6,201 responses



- **47% of people said they have enough money to cover their basic needs.** Out of those, 11% feel they have a lot of extra money, while 36% have a bit of extra for saving or leisure activities. However, **nearly 1 in 4 people (24%) indicated that they only have just enough or not enough money to meet their basic needs.**

4. Findings

Our survey highlights important challenges in accessing GP services in Cheshire and Merseyside, with **long waiting times, difficulties booking appointments, and staff interactions** emerging as key concerns.

While **some patients praised the support received**, others faced **barriers due to limited appointment availability, methods of accessing appointments, and a lack of clear communication from the surgery staff**. Many turned to **alternative services such as pharmacies and NHS 111**, but these were not always effective.

The findings in this section provide a deeper insight into the experiences of patients and the impact of these issues on their health and wellbeing.

The comments, views and accounts of all our respondents can be found in Appendix 2.



4.1 GP Access – reasons, barriers, channels and ease of access

Many people needed to contact their GP practice multiple times in the last year, mainly for advice or treatment of new or existing health issues. A significant number of people found it difficult to get through to the receptionist, with an average ease-of-access rating of **6 out of 10**.

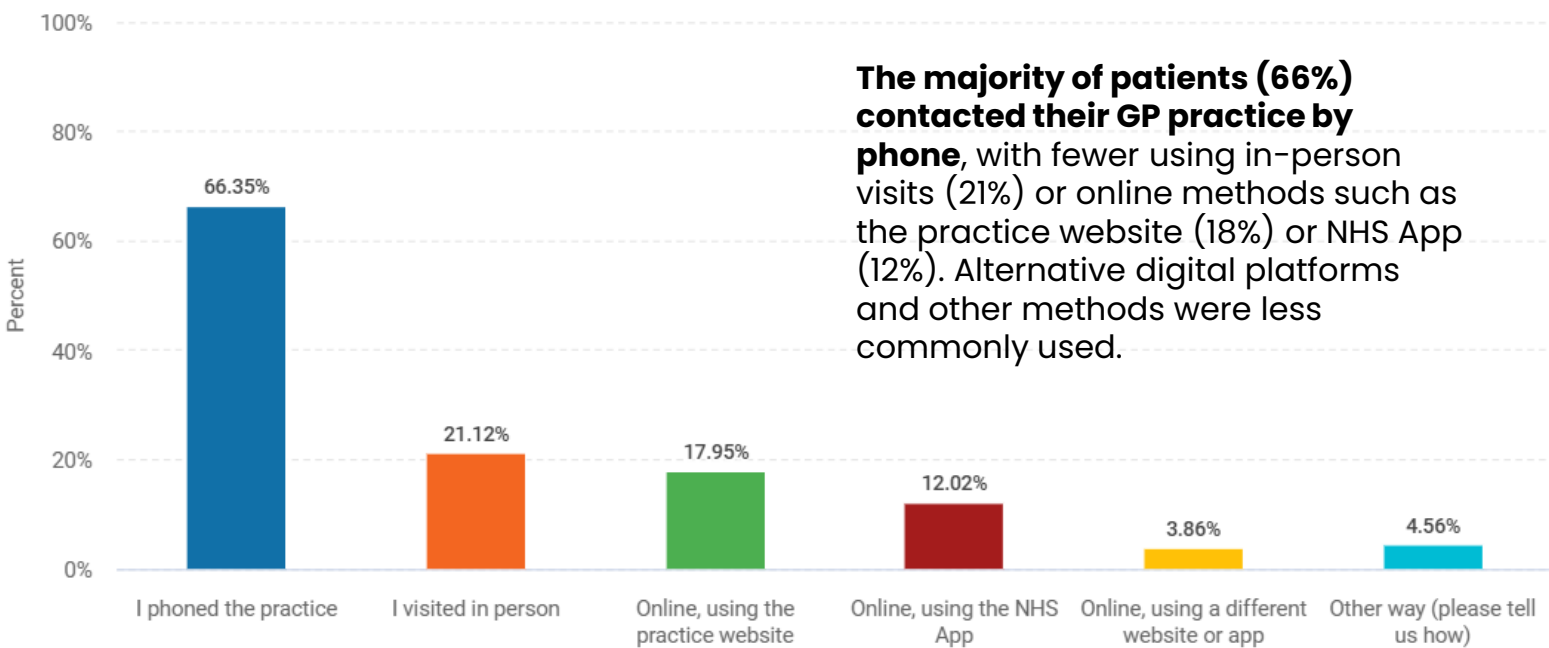
The most common way to contact a GP practice was by phone, though in-person visits, and online platforms were also used. **Barriers included having to call at 8 am, long waiting times, limited appointment slots, and difficulties for those with work commitments, caring responsibilities, or disabilities.** Some patients felt frustrated by reception staff, appointment availability, and lack of continuity in care. Others found online systems confusing or unreliable.

However, many patients had **positive experiences, appreciating helpful reception staff, efficient booking processes, and the availability of online options.** Those who successfully accessed care often found their GP practice responsive and supportive.

A small group avoided contacting their GP due to previous negative experiences or dissatisfaction with the service. Most people who don't use the service said they don't try to get care because it's hard to make an appointment.

When you last contacted your GP practice, which method did you use? Please tick all that apply.

6,573 responses

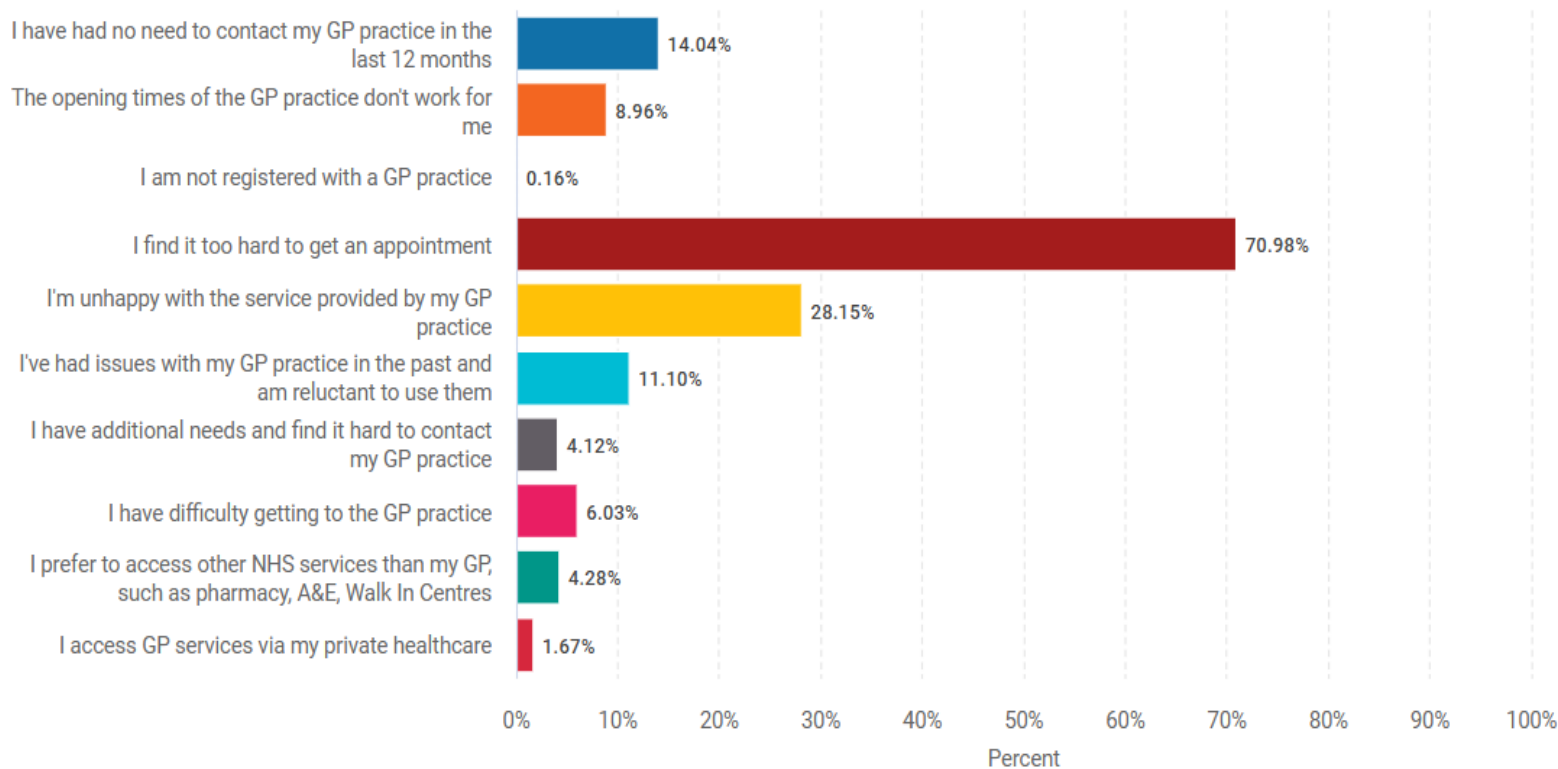


Cheshire East had the highest percentage of people using the practice website to contact their GPs (34%) compared to other areas.

Why have you not accessed or tried to access your GP Practice in the last 12 months? (Tick all that apply)

1,261 responses

We asked people why they had not accessed their GP practice in the past 12 months. The question explored whether this was due to personal circumstances, service-related challenges, or a preference for alternative healthcare options.



The main reason people did not access their GP practice was **difficulty getting an appointment (71%)**, followed by dissatisfaction with the service (28%). Others said inconvenient opening times (9%) or past negative experiences (11%).

The concern was especially prominent in **Halton**, where 79% of people expressed dissatisfaction with appointment availability at their GP practices.

In **Cheshire East**, the figure was somewhat lower at 66%, and in **St Helens**, it was 50%. An above-average number of people in these areas selected 'I am unhappy with the services provided by my GP practice' as another major reason for not accessing or trying to access services.

This report further explores alternative care pathways for those who found it difficult to access GP services.

What worked?

Despite these difficulties, many people also shared positive experiences that show the GP practice team is trying to support everyone. Many carers, for example, have mentioned that the practice is very kind and understanding when arranging appointments, especially for those caring for family members with conditions like Alzheimer's or autism. **Some patients have reported that, although there may be delays or busy times, the reception staff are usually able to help when they finally answer the phone.** Others appreciate the extra support given their caring responsibilities and are happy with the assistance they receive when calling to book an appointment.

"You may have to wait for reception to answer the phone, especially first thing in the morning but they can usually help you out."

"Caring responsibilities; but the GP practice is aware of this and always helps to fit me in."

"I care for my husband who has Alzheimer's and vascular dementia, and they are very kind and understanding about appointments."

What did not work?

Another barrier to accessing GP services is that people feel **some receptionists and staff** are not always helpful or understanding, **not providing patient-centred care.**

For disabled people or those with chronic health conditions, accessing healthcare can be especially challenging. They report finding it physically hard to get to the surgery or feel that the GP doesn't fully understand their condition because of rushed phone consultations.

"Their attitude when you phone, [is] so bad that once my disabled husband died 16 months ago, I stopped using phone contact altogether. I've paid taxes since 1967, I shouldn't be made to feel that someone is doing me a massively charitable favour simply by answering the phone in what's supposed to be a public service."

"I suffer with lower back pain which is made worse standing in a queue outside to try and get an appointment."

"The receptionist asking questions they have no knowledge of. Can never get an appointment. Nearly 10 days for a prescription to be authorised. Never helpful on the phone."

What did not work?

In line with ensuring fair and timely access to appointments, a common issue is the **difficulty of reaching the practice by phone, especially at 8 am when the lines are busy**. People who work full-time or are parents often find it hard to balance calling at 8 am with their other responsibilities, such as dropping children off for school or starting their own workday. As a result, they miss out on same-day appointments if they can't get through on time.

"It's hard to call at 8am for an appointment when you need to be in work and children need to be at school. Online appointments are for weeks in advance. If you can't call at 8am then appointments for that day are usually gone. If you want an appointment and get through at 4pm then it's usually about 2/3 week wait."

"I suppose the only issue for me is trying to get through at 8am for an appointment at the same time I start work. I use a mobile phone, but emphasis for those that have disabilities or the elderly that can't keep calling the GP 100 times a minute to get in the phone queue at 8am. For me, this makes it hard to plan to work as there are no pre-bookable appointments ever. So, I end up having to have a day off every time I need to speak to a GP because the only appointments are available are those you can book at 8am on the day. However at least I get to access treatment by doing so."

"I have to take my daughter to school of a morning before going to work full time - she is 4. I have to get her ready / fed etc. That's hard to do when trying to call doctors at 8am as soon as lines open and trying the number 80 times or more to a busy line to get through to find no appointments left."

"The time of day we have to call is challenging. For many people, including myself I am juggling working or getting young children ready for school at 8am. On occasions I have rung over 100 times before getting through."

Additionally, **some people find it hard to use online systems, either because they don't have internet access or struggle with technology**, suggesting that **access is not equal**. This is especially true for elderly patients or those with disabilities, such as visual impairments, or mental health issues, who might not feel comfortable or capable of using the internet. The online system also doesn't always work when they need it.

"The triage system that is [in] place makes it almost impossible to see or speak to a GP. It closes early, it's an unfit system for people who are not tech-savvy or have limited access to the internet. The vast majority of patients are unable to or restricted [from] getting in touch with the GP."

"Yes I have very bad arthritis. I am 73. There are never any appointments on the My GP app and you can't get through on the phone lines."

"[The] Internet is not always reliable. If it cuts out, I have to start again."

4.2 Making an Appointment

We talked to people about their experiences when trying to make an appointment with their doctors and how quickly they could get care. Their responses showed the difficulties in getting through to the reception, the long waiting times, and how available appointments really are. **This section also looks at how easy it is to schedule an appointment and if other options like going to a pharmacy or using NHS 111 services were explored. The questions were based on the last time the respondent tried to contact their GP Practice.**

67% (3,864)

of respondents reported **waiting in a queue** to have their call answered when trying to reach their GP practice.

27% (1,845)

were **unsuccessful** in securing an appointment.

41% (1,670)

were **able to get an appointment on the same day**, and 32% (1,285) were seen within a week.

91% (3,685)

found the **date and time of their appointment convenient**, indicating that most respondents were satisfied with the scheduling once appointments were secured.

44% (2,649)

of respondents **tried to treat themselves through self-care before** attempting to get an appointment, while **1,765 sought information online.**

A regular theme was **the lack of available appointments**—many respondents reported that when they called, all slots were already booked or only emergency appointments were offered, forcing them to either wait weeks or be told repeatedly to call back at 8 am.

Additionally, several noted **issues with the online triage system**, which either prevented booking in advance or redirected them away from receiving a proper appointment. Poor communication and strict booking rules make it hard for patients to get care. People were often not given the choice in how to book their appointments and were directed to online systems as their only option.

Could you tell us more about why you didn't get an appointment?

1,261 responses

Many respondents said that when they called, there were **no appointments available, or they would have to wait for three weeks or more**. Some were told to call back at 8am every day, and others were told only emergency appointments were available.

"Practice staff refused appointment. Said not urgent enough."

"It's very strict criteria, I can't book in advance and I have to call at 8am for anything to happen, but only if it's urgent."

"They said there were no pre-bookable appointments available for the next month. Told I could ring back at 8am next day to try for an emergency appt. But I didn't do this as not an emergency. Tried to get at least a phone call via Patchs but just got a text instead."

Some respondents reported problems with the online **triage system** – that it **often did not work properly and stopped them from booking appointments in advance. The system required using an online form, which was not easy for everyone to use.**

"The whole system is ableist. I am a reasonably intelligent professional and adept with IT, if you have any needs, then with this system in place, I can't access health care due to the system and those staff managing the system how on earth would someone with any needs manage? My parents have been into the surgery and said they couldn't manage the form and asked if the reception can book them a space in the triage, but they were even refused this as it is mandatory to use the form."

This issue was the most prominent in Wirral where people were asked to fill out the PATCHS form when they phoned their GPs for appointments.

"Was told I needed to use the link that doesn't work. Eventually had a message despite being told I'd be called back telling me to fill out a form for a referral. Still not been seen by a doctor and referral not been processed."

"Not offered over the phone. You have to use GP online triage system. Neither can you book appointments using NHS app."

"There were only 'emergency' appointments available. I did not want to take someone else's 'emergency' appointment with my complaint which did need a Doctors opinion but NOT urgently."

"There were no appointments available for weeks, I have had a problem with my knee, I ended up paying for physio and to see a consultant and get a cortisone injection."

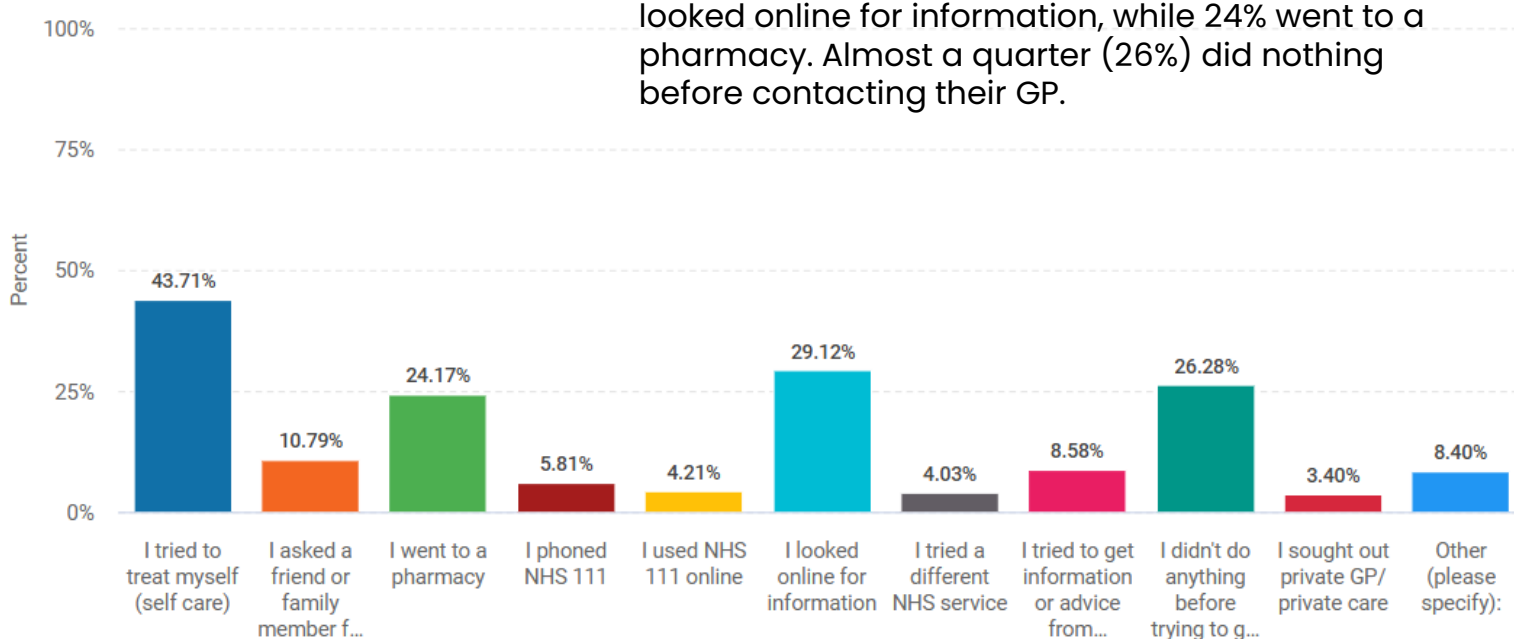
"I requested an appointment with a female GP but was told there wasn't a female GP on duty that day. I said it wasn't an urgent matter and could I therefore make an appointment for the next available time when a female GP was available and was told I couldn't forward book an appointment and to ring at 8am the following day. I didn't ring again. Too frustrating."

Thinking of the last time you tried to get an appointment; did you try any of these alternative routes first?

6,061 responses

We asked respondents whether they tried any alternative routes before attempting to book a GP appointment. This included self-care, asking family or friends for advice, visiting a pharmacy, calling or using NHS 111 online, looking up health information online, or seeking help from another NHS service. We also asked if they sought private care, tried to get advice elsewhere, or if they went straight to their GP without trying anything else.

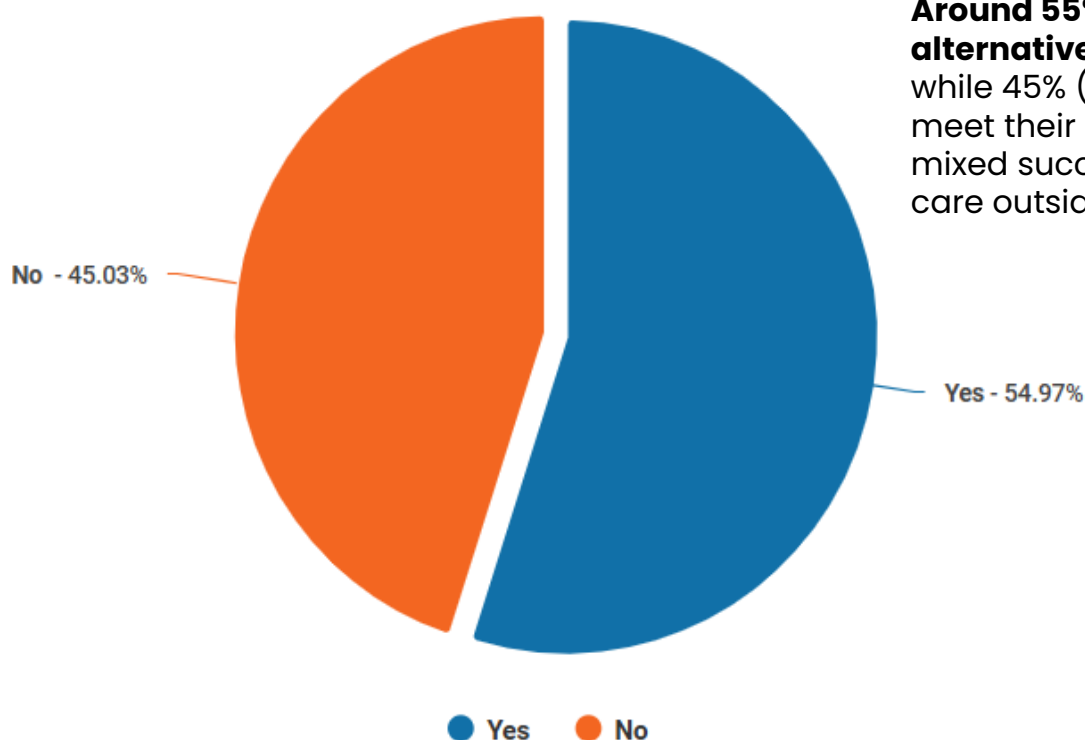
Nearly half of respondents (44%) said they tried to manage their condition themselves before seeking a GP appointment. About a third (29%) looked online for information, while 24% went to a pharmacy. Almost a quarter (26%) did nothing before contacting their GP.



- **Some people depended on their own medical knowledge** or consulted healthcare professionals they knew, while others had pre-arranged follow-ups or long-term conditions requiring GP involvement.
- **A few mentioned frustration with the system**, stating they had either given up trying to book appointments or sought private care when NHS options weren't available.
- Some people felt alternative routes like pharmacies or NHS 111 **weren't suitable for their needs**, while others noted that specific treatments, such as injections or repeat prescriptions, required direct GP access.
- **Participants from Halton were less likely to rely on self-care and showed the lowest engagement with online resources.** Only 28% of people in Halton attempted to treat themselves before visiting a GP, compared to 48% in Cheshire West.

Did you find the alternative route(s) worked well for you?

5,816 responses



Around 55% (3,197) found alternative routes worked well, while 45% (2,619) felt they didn't meet their needs, suggesting mixed success in finding suitable care outside GP appointments.

Some respondents found **that alternative routes worked well**. They reported receiving same-day appointments via NHS 111 or the NHS app and using systems like PATCHS helped them quickly get triaged and receive a diagnosis.

"NHS [111] is an amazing service. I used [NHS 111] after the knee operation for a separate request, as a haemophiliac. Professionally triaged and saw a doctor within two hours. Amazing service."

"The pharmacist was very concerned and helpful. Told me to insist on an appointment if possible. I still feel the GP should have been the first port of call, but she was wonderful once I got past all the red tape. Referred me straight away."

However, many **mentioned long waiting times, having to give up on appointments**, or even choosing private consultations because the online system was too slow or unresponsive.

"Relatively, until I was asked to do tests which need repeating, and 'somebody' didn't do all the repeat tests for raised issues and therefore I had to wait another 10 days to repeat the repeat test and get a result."

"I usually try most things to avoid attending a GP practice."

"Had to wait nearly 3 weeks to get an appointment after going to the hospital. I was told at the hospital I needed medication but ended up waiting for an appointment"

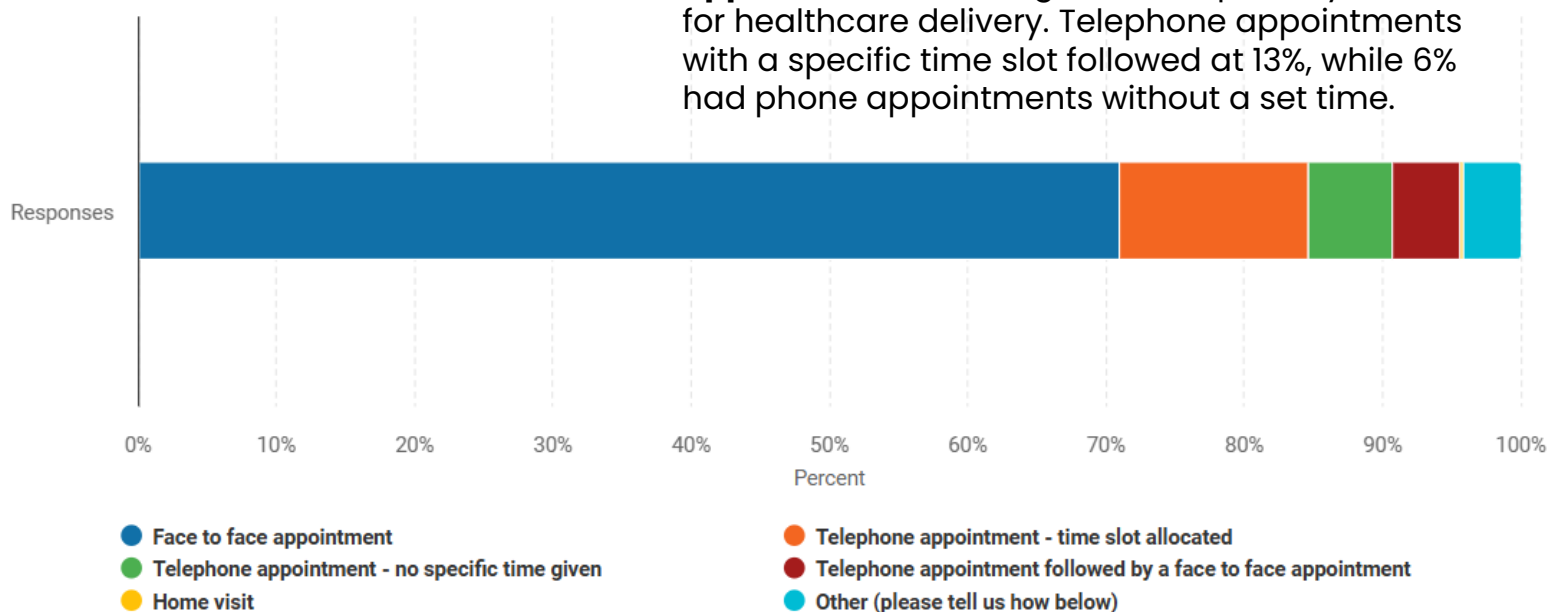
"It took 3 weeks before a doctor decided to see me, instead they had just been issuing a prescription for my condition, when I was eventually seen the doctors looked shocked at how bad it was."

4.3 Appointment Experience

How was the appointment delivered?

4,059 responses

Most respondents (71%) attended face-to-face appointments, making them the primary method for healthcare delivery. Telephone appointments with a specific time slot followed at 13%, while 6% had phone appointments without a set time.



What worked?

Many respondents praised the care they received once they attended, sharing positive experiences with both GPs and nurse practitioners who were described as empathetic, helpful, and knowledgeable. People understood the resource constraints of the NHS and considered these challenges in their feedback.

"I take into account work levels, demands and stresses on the NHS. I'm aware of other people's needs. The surgery is always nice and clean. Staff try to direct you to the right place. Lots of patient information available in the surgery."

"I managed to get an emergency appointment and was dealt with wonderfully by the doctor that I saw, she was helpful, thorough and sympathetic, she referred me for follow-up tests."

"When I actually saw the doctor, they were very understanding of my need. A lot of stress was added to me from my experience before I saw a lovely doctor."

"I have nothing but praise for the surgery now and in the past. When my mum was alive and unwell, they were very supportive."

"I feel my GP helps me arrive at the correct diagnosis rather than tell me what is wrong with me and helps me come up with the best treatment plan rather than dictate."

"GP was extremely patient and understanding even though the issue was sensitive and of a specialist nature."

What did not work?

Respondents reported long waits for face-to-face consultations, **confusing telephone triage** that sometimes led to unnecessary extra appointments, and **difficulties with online booking methods that excluded some patients**. Some people are worried that impersonal reception practices and policy decisions are getting in the way of providing patient-centred care.

"I find patients are discriminated against not being able to use the internet. Getting past the receptionist is the hard part. I needed a blood test to be done and was told to go on the internet and book one - I said I can't use this method and was told she was not allowed to book this for me."

"Practice always empty Dr says he has about 6 phone calls to give then he's full it's not right. Please share GPs' daily workloads then maybe we can say yes you are a busy practice or no you need to be doing more. Also evidence said calls are taking place."

"I never say no to an appointment offered to me but do find it hard that it often is not convenient and you cannot plan for an appointment."

"A warning of wait times for certain services would be useful e.g. 3-week wait to see menopause nurse but didn't know this until I couldn't get an appointment for medication."

"Patient constantly compromising and having to wait 3-4 weeks for an appt - I was referred to minor surgery clinic in early Nov 24 - have had 3 appts all by letter -only one of which was convenient - turned up to GP for appt only to be told it had been cancelled!!"

Were you satisfied with the way your appointment was delivered, and did you feel that the person you saw was the right one to speak to?

We asked people if they were happy with how their appointment was delivered and if they felt they spoke to the right person. The answers show that the majority of people were happy, but a few had some concerns.

92% (3,620)

said they were happy with how their appointment was delivered.

85% (3,424)

agreed when we asked if they felt the person they saw was the right one to speak to.

Respondents who were not happy with their healthcare experience complained about the professionalism of the staff, poor communication, and the overall quality of care. Key issues included **lack of follow-ups, rushed consultations (more prominent in Wirral), and technical problems during virtual appointments.**

"What I was not happy with was the way I was dealt with when I got there. The doctor didn't know what treatment to give me so she consulted a senior colleague who did not bother to see me but told the first doctor to send me to A&E."

"Eventually It would have been quicker to have walked the 4 miles from where I live to get an appointment than use the internet and phone."

"What can I do if the surgery offers a phone call appointment and not a face to face? I will take it but it's not always easy to present the doctor with my symptoms when I'm on a phone call."


"Trying to be available all day for a call whilst in work is very hard. Trying to explain concerns over the phone is worrying and my weight/blood pressure is not checked which is apparently required for the medication."

"Appointment itself was faultless. It was very difficult, I had to really push for it, took 3 weeks from requesting the appointment to actually having it, that's much too long."

"Had to have 3 appointments before given medication for ear infections. Due to delay in medication, symptoms were really bad and affected my work/home life."

Thinking of the reason for your last appointment, did you feel your needs were met?

6,120 responses

| | | | |
|--------|---|--------|-------|
| Yes |  | 60.31% | 3,691 |
| No |  | 21.49% | 1,315 |
| Partly |  | 18.20% | 1,114 |

What worked?

Most people felt well cared for, highlighting that doctors and nurses took the time to listen, provide clear guidance, and act on their concerns. Some appreciated that their GP had already reviewed their medical history before the appointment, making the consultation more useful. Others mentioned being referred for further tests quickly.

"My doctor was totally understanding and had obviously checked my medical history prior to my visit. He was understanding and offered good advice and a treatment plan."

"My last appointment was about a month ago and the Doctor I saw was happy to listen and I didn't feel I had to rush my appt. A definite improvement."

"I was treat[ed] with dignity and respect, and my needs were met."

Some patients were pleased with how quickly they could get an appointment. They appreciated quick responses from their GP or nurse, which helped address their health concerns without long delays. Phone consultations and online services were also mentioned as useful in getting timely advice.

"Got an appointment within 4 hours of contacting the practice and issue dealt with to my satisfaction."

"Dr [name] spoke to me on the phone within 20 mins of me ringing reception. I was then invited down the same day for an ear exam."

"Once you get an appointment, the care and advice and kind attitude of the team at the surgery is exemplary."

"My appointments were on time, and I was listened to and issues resolved."

What did not work?

Many people expressed difficulty in obtaining **timely GP appointments**. They reported experiencing long wait times, repeated cancellations, and sometimes being unable to secure an appointment at all. The booking system is frequently described as “frustrating”, leading some patients to either give up or resort to emergency alternatives like A&E. **This sentiment was consistent across all Healthwatch boroughs.**

“Never got the appointment, so I gave up against the advice of support workers.”

“But the 3 weeks waiting for appt for medication was unacceptable.”

“Didn't get appointment when I needed it so gave up, though know I should try again.”

Many patients have reported **negative experiences with their GP interactions, particularly concerning poor communication and a lack of empathy**. Some patients feel ignored or belittled during their doctor visits. They report that doctors do not listen to their concerns or are dismissive of the treatment options available.

“Unfortunately, I got a GP [who] didn't give me chance to tell him anything cause he cut me off and said that “Suicide makes HIM feel uncomfortable!!” I had never gone in to actually talk about how it had made me feel cause I'm usually a get on with it kind of person but his attitude really angered me at the lack of compassion he was showing a patient [the daughter attempted suicide] who was clearly struggling.”

“The Practitioner was not helpful and was rude. I made a complaint. This was followed up by the surgery.”

A common theme in patient feedback is the **delay or inaccuracies in diagnoses and treatment plans**. Some patients feel that their medical concerns were not thoroughly investigated, resulting in delayed or incorrect diagnoses. This has led to ongoing issues or worsened conditions, with several patients reporting that they had to advocate for further investigations, such as blood tests, X-rays, or referrals to specialists.

“I was misdiagnosed several time, I wasn't checked where I needed to be checked, I was told it was one thing, until I went to Dr Google and figured out what it was. Months and months of pain I had and no one listened!”

“Over the years I don't trust the doctors, one particular one who misdiagnosed me. I'm thinking of moving GP's.”

“I got referred for loads of tests but no real follow up on anything. I could do with making an appointment as still ongoing issues but it's too much hassle.”

4.4 Practice Staff

How would you rate the attitude of the people you spoke to?

6,089 responses

We asked respondents to rate the attitude of the practice staff they interacted with, considering factors such as friendliness, kindness, professionalism, helpfulness, and respect. Participants rated their experience on a scale from 1 to 5 stars, with 5 stars indicating an excellent or highly positive attitude and 1 star reflecting a poor or negative experience.

| Star Rating | Responses | | |
|-------------|------------------------|--------|-------|
| 1 | <div><div></div></div> | 8.33% | 507 |
| 2 | <div><div></div></div> | 6.68% | 407 |
| 3 | <div><div></div></div> | 15.57% | 948 |
| 4 | <div><div></div></div> | 20.00% | 1,218 |
| 5 | <div><div></div></div> | 49.42% | 3,009 |

Just about half (49%) of the respondents rated their experience 5 stars, while 20% gave 4 stars. The remaining responses were more evenly split, with 16% rating 3 stars, 7% rating 2 stars, and 8% giving 1 star.

On average, around 50% of respondents across all nine Healthwatch rated the attitude of the people they spoke to with 5 stars.

If you have additional needs how well were you supported by the practice staff?

5,845 responses

We asked people how well the practice staff supported patients with additional needs, such as being an informal carer, having a disability, hearing difficulties, or requiring language support. **Responses were mixed**, with a majority of patients indicating they had no additional needs (73%).

| | | | |
|----------------------------|------------------------|--------|-------|
| I have no additional needs | <div><div></div></div> | 72.78% | 4,254 |
| Well | <div><div></div></div> | 11.22% | 656 |
| Ok | <div><div></div></div> | 10.23% | 598 |
| Poor | <div><div></div></div> | 5.77% | 337 |

However, those with additional needs reported varying experiences. **Of the 1591 people with additional needs**, 41% said they were well supported, 38% indicated they were okay, and 21% expressed poor support. The answers suggested that there is further opportunity for improvement in awareness and tailored support for people with specific requirements.

What worked?

Some respondents were thankful that the practice staff helped meet their needs, such as changing appointment times for those with mobility or hearing issues. Others appreciated the flexibility in scheduling for carers.

"My daughter has a disability and learning needs and she has been treated with respect and communicated with in a kind and caring way. As a carer I feel well supported by the practice."

"The doctor was aware of my ongoing disability, and interacted with me appropriately, which helped me in the consultation."

"I always feel well supported in having my needs met by the practice staff. From the routine to the urgent, they are always friendly, approachable, Responsive and often creative in finding the best solution."

What did not work?

Negative feedback was given regarding practice staff, with some people feeling dismissed or receiving 'inappropriate or unhelpful' advice about their care.

"Receptionist was very helpful and very polite. Doctor was difficult to understand on the phone and lacked understanding of my situation and almost seemed like he was reading from a script."

"I have anxiety and hearing difficulties. I don't want to call the GP but I'm forced to do that. I told that to the reception and was told "oh ok, please call again tomorrow"

"My mother has additional needs as she is profoundly deaf and partially sighted. I am her carer and also have my own issues, the majority of admin staff (who you rarely get past) just don't care."

5. Summary of GP Access Survey Findings Against PCARP Objectives

The nine Heathwatch believe the following summarises whether respondents feel improvements have been made to GP Services as a result of the introduction of PCARP initiatives.

| PCARP Question | Yes/No/Partly | Explanation |
|--|---------------|--|
| Feel valued and important/understood from first contact | Partly | Half the patients praised staff for being friendly and helpful, but 40% of respondents faced hurdles such as long waiting times, difficulty booking, and poor communication from receptionists, leading to frustration. |
| Feel confident when calling GP practices | Partly | Many lacked confidence in calling due to long queues, unhelpful reception staff, and difficulty in securing an appointment. |
| Accommodating the needs of carers | Partly | Half of unpaid carers reported feeling unheard or dismissed when booking on behalf of others. |
| Able to make/manage appointments through phone, online, or in person | No | Phone was the most used method, but 60% struggled with long waiting times and the 8 am rush. Online booking was useful for some but excluded digitally disadvantaged groups. In-person booking was rare and often required prior appointments. |
| Understand the process/system for apps and technology | No | A digital divide was evident with only 36% trying online methods. While some found online tools convenient, others (especially the elderly) struggled with confusing systems and a lack of clear alternatives. |

5. Summary of GP Access Survey Findings Against PCARP Objectives

| PCARP Question | Yes/No/Partly | Explanation |
|--|---------------------|--|
| Assurance that language & translation services are effective | Inconclusive | There was little mention of translation services or language barriers meaning we were unable to classify. |
| Choice of appointment types (face-to-face vs. online) | Yes | 92% were satisfied with the delivery method, many reported difficulty specifically getting face-to-face appointments. |
| Clear appointment details – time and doctor | Yes | 91% of respondents found their appointment time convenient; some were unclear about who they were seeing and why. |
| Clear appointment details – why | Yes | 85% of respondents agreed that the person they had their appointment with was the right person to speak to. 91% were happy with how the appointment was delivered. |
| Set times for online consultations rather than open-ended wait | No | Only 6% (of 4000 respondents) said that they received a specific time for phone/video appointments. Most of them had face-to-face appointments. |

6. Next Steps

Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside will continue to listen to the experiences of local people in accessing GP services and encourage residents to share their feedback with their local Healthwatch through their online Feedback Centres.

- [Healthwatch Cheshire East](#)
- [Healthwatch Cheshire West](#)
- [Healthwatch Halton](#)
- [Healthwatch Knowsley](#)
- [Healthwatch Liverpool](#)
- [Healthwatch Sefton](#)
- [Healthwatch St Helens](#)
- [Healthwatch Warrington](#)
- [Healthwatch Wirral](#)

The findings of this joint report highlight what is working well and identify where improvements can still be made. It will be shared with the Integrated Care Board (ICB), and partners across Cheshire and Merseyside to help inform the development and delivery of GP primary care services.

Each local Healthwatch will also share their individual reports and findings with their respective Place Leads, Primary Care Networks, Local Authority and VCSFE system partners to support discussions and improvements in access to primary care.

Local Healthwatch will monitor the impact of the actions and activity that is generated as a result of these findings through our independent engagement and feedback gathering activities.

We will provide regular updates to the ICB System Primary Care Committee to ensure that patient insight and intelligence continues to inform and shape future services.



7. Appendices

(Click the underlined phrases to access the files)

Appendix 1: Links to individual Healthwatch C&M reports

Appendix 2: The comments, views and accounts of all our respondents can be found here. This includes feedback from our online survey.

Appendix 3: Cross-section of places we engaged

Appendix 4: The survey



Appendix 1 – Local Reports

All 9 individual reports

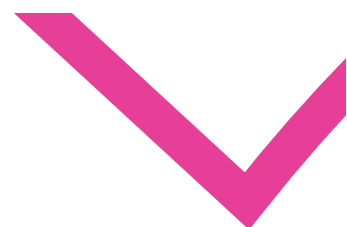
Appendix 2 – Responses

The comments, views and accounts of all our respondents can be found here. This includes feedback from our online survey.

[Comments on the spreadsheet can be filtered by Place (Q3)]

Appendix 3 – Distribution List

Cross-section of places we engaged



Appendix 4 – Survey

Access to GPs survey

Healthwatch act as an independent voice for local people to help shape and improve health and care services. The nine Healthwatch organisations across Cheshire and Merseyside have come together to find out people's experiences of accessing their local GP Services. The information gathered will help inform and shape future primary care services across Cheshire and Merseyside.

We'd like to hear your experiences of using, or attempting to use GP services in the past 12 months.

The survey is open to all residents who live in, work in or use services in the Cheshire and Merseyside area. It will take approx. 5 to 10 minutes to complete and information will be collected anonymously.

1. Name of your GP Practice

2. Please share the first part of your postcode

3. Please tell us what borough you live in?

- ☐ Cheshire East
- ☐ Cheshire West
- ☐ Halton
- ☐ Knowsley
- ☐ Liverpool
- ☐ Sefton
- ☐ St Helens
- ☐ Warrington
- ☐ Wirral
- ☐ Other

4. Have you accessed or tried to access your GP practice in the last 12 months?

- ☐ No
- ☐ Yes (once in the last 12 months) (Skip to Q6)
- ☐ Yes (2 to 4 times in the last 12 months) (Skip to Q6)
- ☐ Yes (5 or more times in the last 12 months) (Skip to Q6)

5. If you answered 'No' to Q4, why have you not accessed or tried to access your GP Practice in the last 12 months? Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ I have had no need to contact my GP practice in the last 12 months
- ☐ The opening times of the GP practice don't work for me
- ☐ I am not registered with a GP practice
- ☐ I find it too hard to get an appointment
- ☐ I'm unhappy with the service provided by my GP practice
- ☐ I've had issues with my GP practice in the past and am reluctant to use them
- ☐ I have additional needs and find it hard to contact my GP practice
- ☐ I have difficulty getting to the GP practice
- ☐ I prefer to access other NHS services than my GP, such as pharmacy, A&E, Walk In Centres
- ☐ I access GP services via my private healthcare

After Q5 please go to Q22

6. Why did you last try to contact your GP practice? If more than one of these applies to you, please choose the main one only.

- ☐ For advice or treatment for a new health issue
- ☐ For advice or treatment from a healthcare professional for an existing health issue
- ☐ To order a prescription
- ☐ For test results
- ☐ To ask for help with an administrative request (for example, getting a fit/sick note or updating contact details)
- ☐ To discuss a referral for specialist care
- ☐ To register with the practice as a new patient
- ☐ For help with an online digital issue (for example eConsult/ NHS App)
- ☐ Other (please specify):

7. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being difficult and 10 being easy, how easy is it to contact your GP practice

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐ 6 ☐ 7 ☐ 8 ☐ 9 ☐ 10

Is there anything else you would like to share?

8. Does anything make it more difficult for you to contact your GP practice?
For example, caring responsibilities, a disability or phone/internet access.

9. When you last contacted your GP practice, how did you do it? Please tick all that apply.

- ☐ I phoned the practice
☐ I visited in person
☐ Online, using the practice website
☐ Online, using the NHS App
☐ Online, using a different website or app
☐ Other way (please tell us how)

Is there anything else you would like to share?

10. If you telephoned your GP practice, what happened next?

- ☐ My call was answered straight away
☐ My call was held in a queue and I waited until someone answered
☐ My call was held in a queue and I asked for a call back through an automated system
☐ My call was held in a queue so i decided to end the call
☐ My call was cut off by the practice
☐ My call wasn't answered
☐ Other (please tell us):

11. If you wanted an appointment, did you get one?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No (skip to Q17)
☐ I didn't want an appointment

If you answered 'No', could you tell us more about why you didn't get an appointment?

12. Was the appointment....

- ☐ On the same day
☐ Within a week
☐ Within 2 weeks
☐ Longer than 2 weeks

13. Was the date and time of the appointment convenient for you?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

14. How was the appointment delivered?

- ☐ Face to face appointment
☐ Telephone appointment - time slot allocated
☐ Telephone appointment - no specific time given
☐ Telephone appointment followed by a face to face appointment
☐ Home visit
☐ Other (please tell us how below)

Is there anything else you would like to share?

15. Were you happy with the way your appointment was delivered?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No - I'd have preferred a face to face appointment

Is there anything else you would like to share?

16. Did you feel that the person you had your appointment with was the right person to speak to?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

Is there anything else you would like to share?

17. Thinking of the last time you tried to get an appointment, did you try any of these alternative routes first? Please choose all that apply

- ☐ I tried to treat myself (self care)
- ☐ I asked a friend or family member for advice
- ☐ I went to a pharmacy
- ☐ I phoned NHS 111
- ☐ I used NHS 111 online
- ☐ I looked online for information
- ☐ I tried a different NHS service
- ☐ I tried to get information or advice from somewhere else
- ☐ I didn't do anything before trying to get an appointment with my GP practice
- ☐ I sought out private GP/ private care
- ☐ Other (please specify):

18. Did you find the route(s) worked well for you?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Please tell us more about this

19. Thinking of the reason for your last appointment, did you feel your needs were met?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Partly

Please tell us more about this

20. How would you rate the attitude of the people you spoke to?

For example, were they friendly, kind, professional, helpful and treated you with respect?

- ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

Choosing 5 stars represents excellent or positive attitude, and 1 star indicates poor or negative attitude

21. If you have additional needs (for example as an informal carer, are living with a disability, have hearing difficulties or need language support), how well were you supported by the practice staff?

- ☐ I have no additional needs
- ☐ Well
- ☐ Ok
- ☐ Poor

Please tell us more about this

Some questions about you

22. What age group are you in?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 12 and under | <input type="checkbox"/> 25 to 49 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 13 to 15 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 50 to 64 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16 to 17 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 65 to 79 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 to 24 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 80+ years |

23. Are you?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> A woman | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |
| <input type="checkbox"/> A man | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-binary | <input type="checkbox"/> self-describe (please specify): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say | |

26. How would you describe your ethnic group?

- ☐ Arab
- ☐ Asian/ Asian British: Bangladeshi
- ☐ Asian/ Asian British: Chinese
- ☐ Asian/ Asian British: Indian
- ☐ Asian/ Asian British: Pakistani
- ☐ Asian/ Asian British: Any other Asian/ Asian British background (Please specify below)
- ☐ Black/ Black British: African
- ☐ Black/ Black British: Caribbean
- ☐ Black/ Black British: Any other Black/ Black British background (Please specify below)
- ☐ Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White
- ☐ Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White

27. Do you have a disability?

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |

28. Do you have a long-term health condition?

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |

29. Do you consider yourself to be a carer?

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |

24. Is your gender identity the same as your sex recorded at birth:

- | | |
|------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |

25. What is your sexual orientation?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Pansexual |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bisexual | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer not to say |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gay man | <input type="checkbox"/> Not known |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Heterosexual/ Straight | <input type="checkbox"/> Prefer to self-describe (please specify): |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lesbian/ Gay woman | |

- ☐ Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White
- ☐ Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups: Any other Mixed/ Multiple ethnic groups background (please specify below)
- ☐ White: British/ English/ Northern Irish/ Scottish/ Welsh
- ☐ White: Irish
- ☐ White: Gypsy, Traveller, or Irish Traveller
- ☐ White: Roma
- ☐ White: Any other White background (please specify below)
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Not known
- ☐ Other (please specify):

30. Which of the following best describes your current financial position?

- ☐ I have MORE THAN enough money for basic necessities and A LOT spare than I can save or spend on extras and leisure
- ☐ I have MORE THAN enough money for basic necessities and A LITTLE spare that I can save or spend on extras and leisure
- ☐ I have JUST ENOUGH money for basic necessities and little else
- ☐ I DON'T HAVE ENOUGH money for basic necessities and sometimes or often run out of money
- ☐ Prefer not to say
- ☐ Not known

Thank you for completing the survey

Healthwatch Cheshire, on behalf of the nine Healthwatch across Cheshire and Merseyside:



With special thanks to all residents who shared their views.



healthwatch

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