

The views of St Helens Residents on the GP Access Survey

April 2025

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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 St Helens GP Access Survey looks closely at how local residents feel about their primary care services. Conducted between October 2024 and March 2025, we gathered feedback from 488 people in St Helens representing different backgrounds. The survey revealed both challenges and successes in how GP services are provided.

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 Cheshire and Merseyside-wide along with individual reports for each Healthwatch area can be found in Appendix 4.

One of the key issues highlighted was that many people found it hard to get appointments. A lot of residents had trouble with the phone systems and online booking. Even though 78% of those surveyed eventually managed to get face-to-face appointments, it often took several tries using different methods to secure them for those who couldn't.

Key findings from our research include:

- **Nearly 74% of respondents mostly used the telephone** to contact their GP, but many experienced long wait times and interruptions. The average ease-of-access rating was 7.6 out of 10, which was the highest among other Healthwatch. **While 95% of those who secured appointments were satisfied with their experience, the process of getting to this point was challenging for many.**
- **Vulnerable groups**, including elderly patients, people with disabilities, and caregivers, **faced barriers to accessing services.** However, when support was available, these groups 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. While these options offered support for some, others found them insufficient for their healthcare needs.
- **Interactions with staff received mixed reviews**, with more than half of the 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 St Helens, 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.



Challenges with Access and Booking

- Patients commonly reported challenges with the 8am booking system, which affected working 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.
- Elderly patients and people without reliable internet access have reported feeling excluded by the growing trend toward online booking systems like PATCHS.
- This 'digital gap' especially affects people or groups who might not have the tools or knowledge to use these platforms easily.



Other Ways to Access Care

- The use of alternative services, such as pharmacies and NHS 111, has also produced mixed results.
- Some people took care of their health issues using these options, but others had to go back to their GPs.
- This was mostly because of a lack of appointments.

1. Introduction

Healthwatch St Helens are the local independent consumer 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 St Helens, 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.

The project ran from **25th October 2024, until 20th March 2025**, delivered and supported by the wider Healthwatch team.

In line with the **Primary Care Access Recovery Plan (PCARP)** priorities for Cheshire and Merseyside, the GP Access survey explored various important aspects of accessing and delivering GP services.

- **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.
- **Support for vulnerable groups:** The survey looked at how GP surgeries support people who need extra help, **such as those with disabilities, language barriers, or unpaid carers**. We asked whether these groups feel 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 can't get a GP appointment—and how well these alternatives support patient needs.

2. Methodology

The survey was created to gather a wide variety of feedback about GP services. It was made to be shared through different ways so that many patients and service users could respond.

The survey was produced in both online and paper-based formats to accommodate different respondent preferences and to increase accessibility.

Healthwatch St Helens 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.



488 responses

collected via a

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)

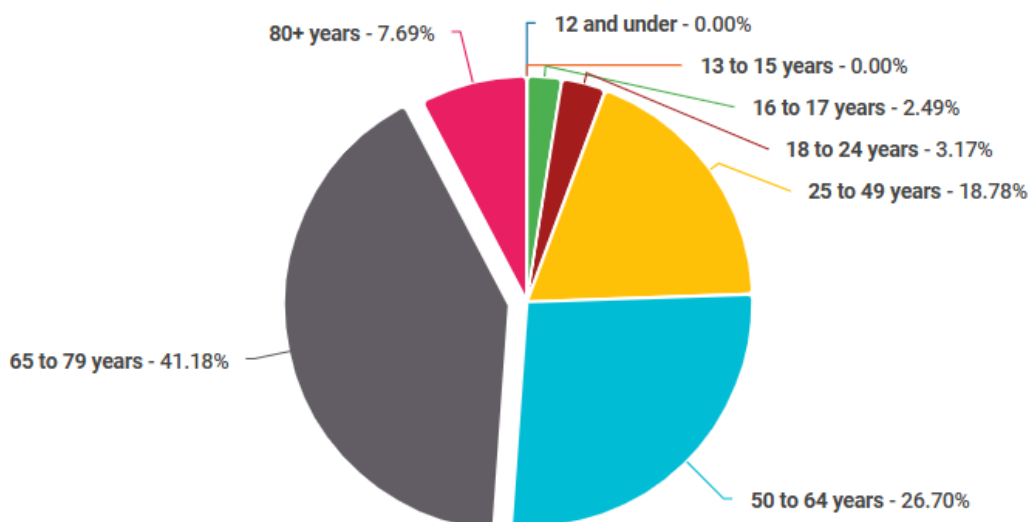
Open Engagement Responses	Gathered through in-person discussions at community hubs, leisure centres, libraries, and market stalls.
Survey Promotion & Distribution	Digital outreach via social media (primarily Facebook), email newsletters, and website links. Printed materials placed in GP surgeries, pharmacies,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

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

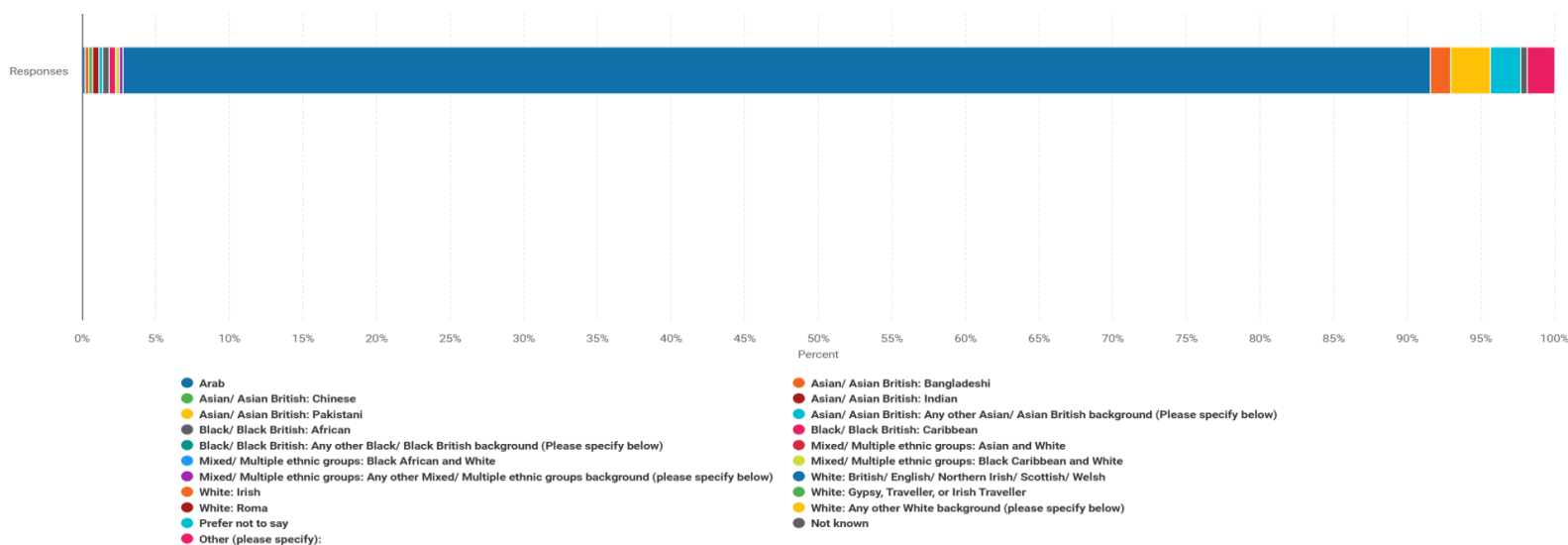
422 responses



- **76% of respondents were aged 50 years and over.** 68% identified as women and 30% as men.
- 96% indicated their gender identity matches their birth sex, and **82% identified as heterosexual/straight.**

3.2 Ethnicity

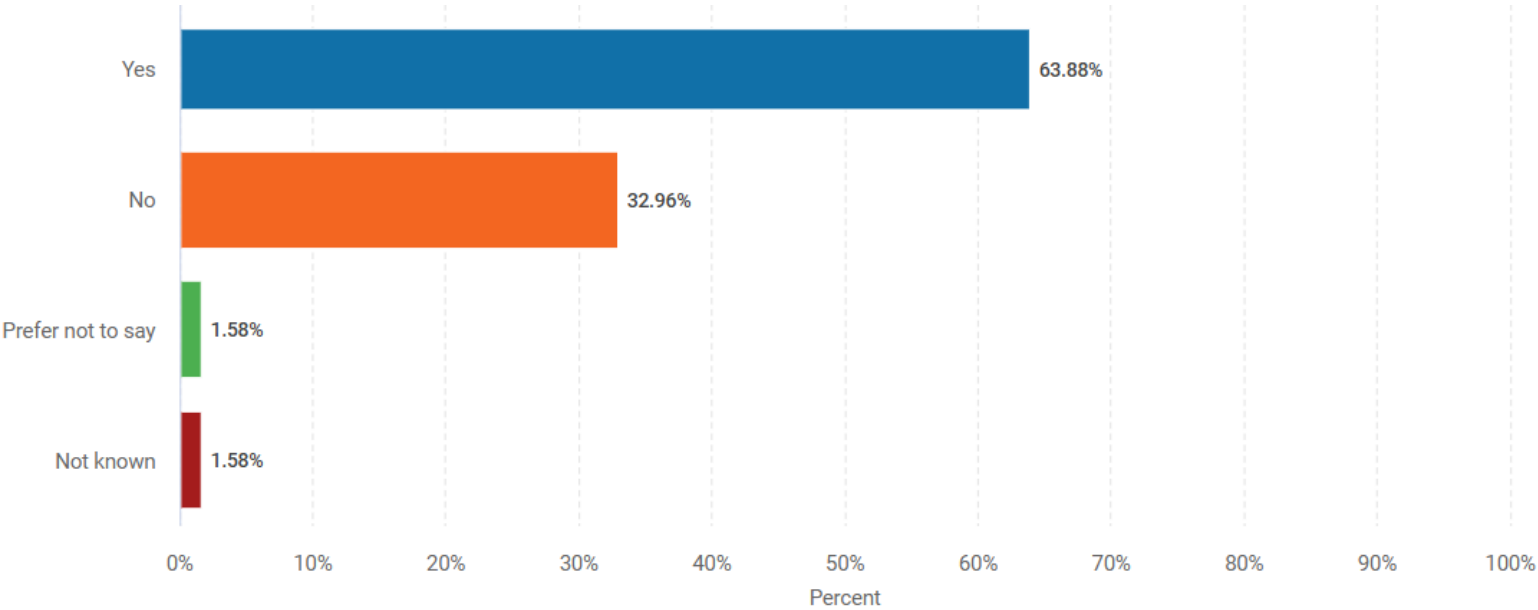
439 responses



- **89% of respondents identified as White British**, with small representation from Asian, Black, and Mixed backgrounds, each below 1%.

3.3 Do you have a long-term health condition?

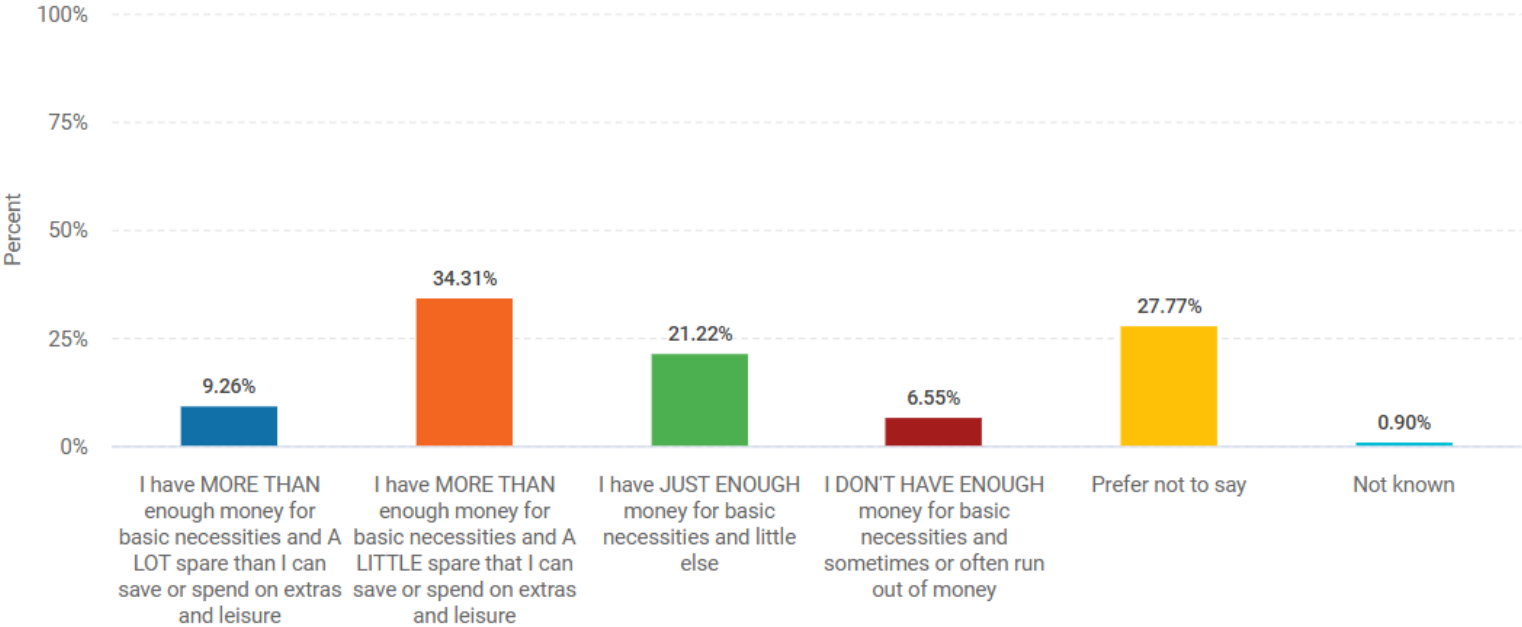
813 responses



- **64% of respondents reported having a long-term health condition**, while 33% said they did not.

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

443 responses



- 64% of people said they have enough money to cover their basic needs. Out of those, 9% feel they have a lot of extra money, while 34% have a bit of extra for saving or leisure activities. However, nearly 1 in 4 people (28%) 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 St Helens, with **long waiting times, difficulties booking appointments, and issues with staff interactions** emerging as key concerns.

While **some patients praised the support received**, others faced **barriers due to limited availability, accessibility issues, and a lack of clear communication**. Many turned to **alternative services such as pharmacies and NHS 111**, but these were not always effective. St. Helen's residents found it the easiest to contact their GPs, among other boroughs across Cheshire and Merseyside, who are part of the overarching GP Access report.

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

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. Most people didn't find it hard to get through, with an average ease-of-access rating of **7.6 out of 10**.

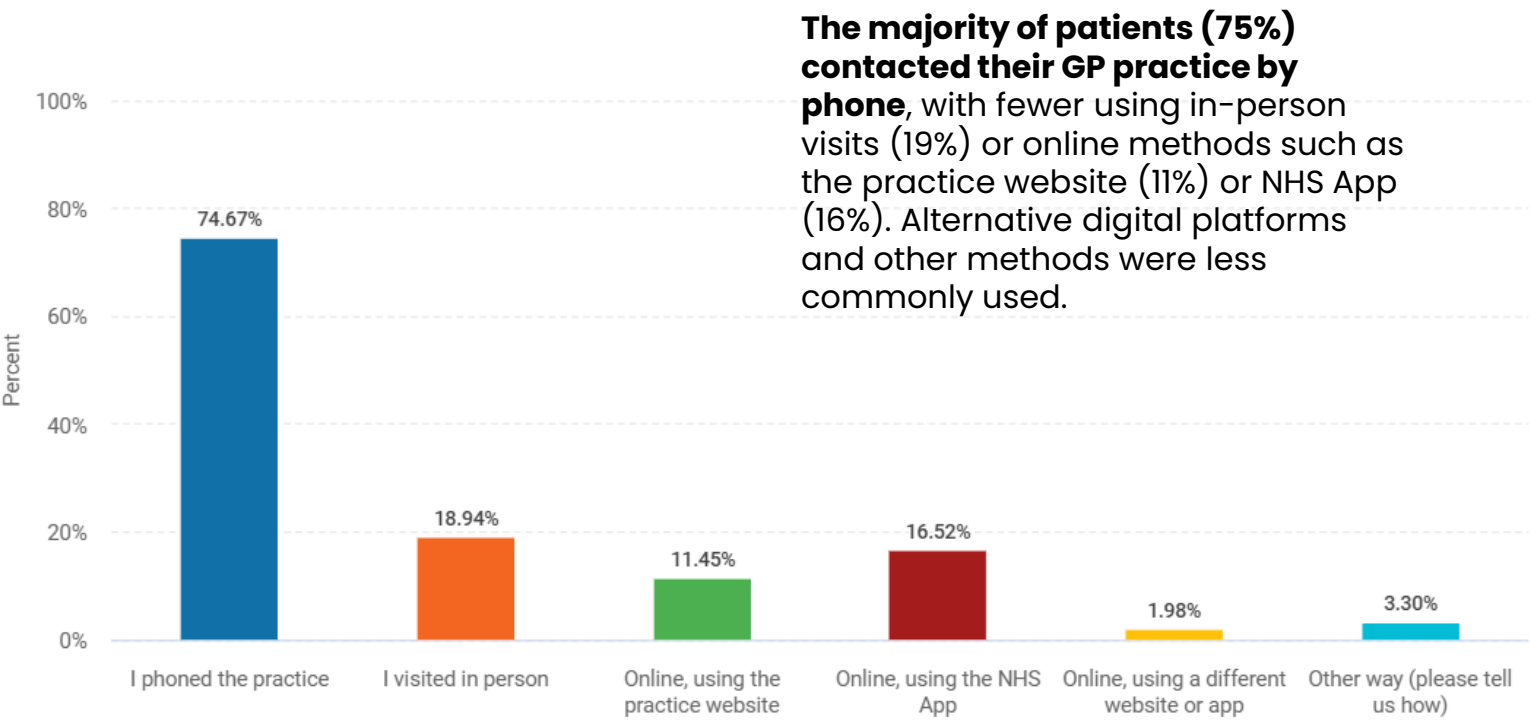
The most common way to contact a GP was by phone, though in-person visits, and online platforms were also used. **Barriers included having to call at 8 am, long wait times, limited appointment slots, and difficulties for those with work commitments, caring responsibilities, or disabilities.** Some patients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

However, some 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.

Which method did you use to contact your GP?

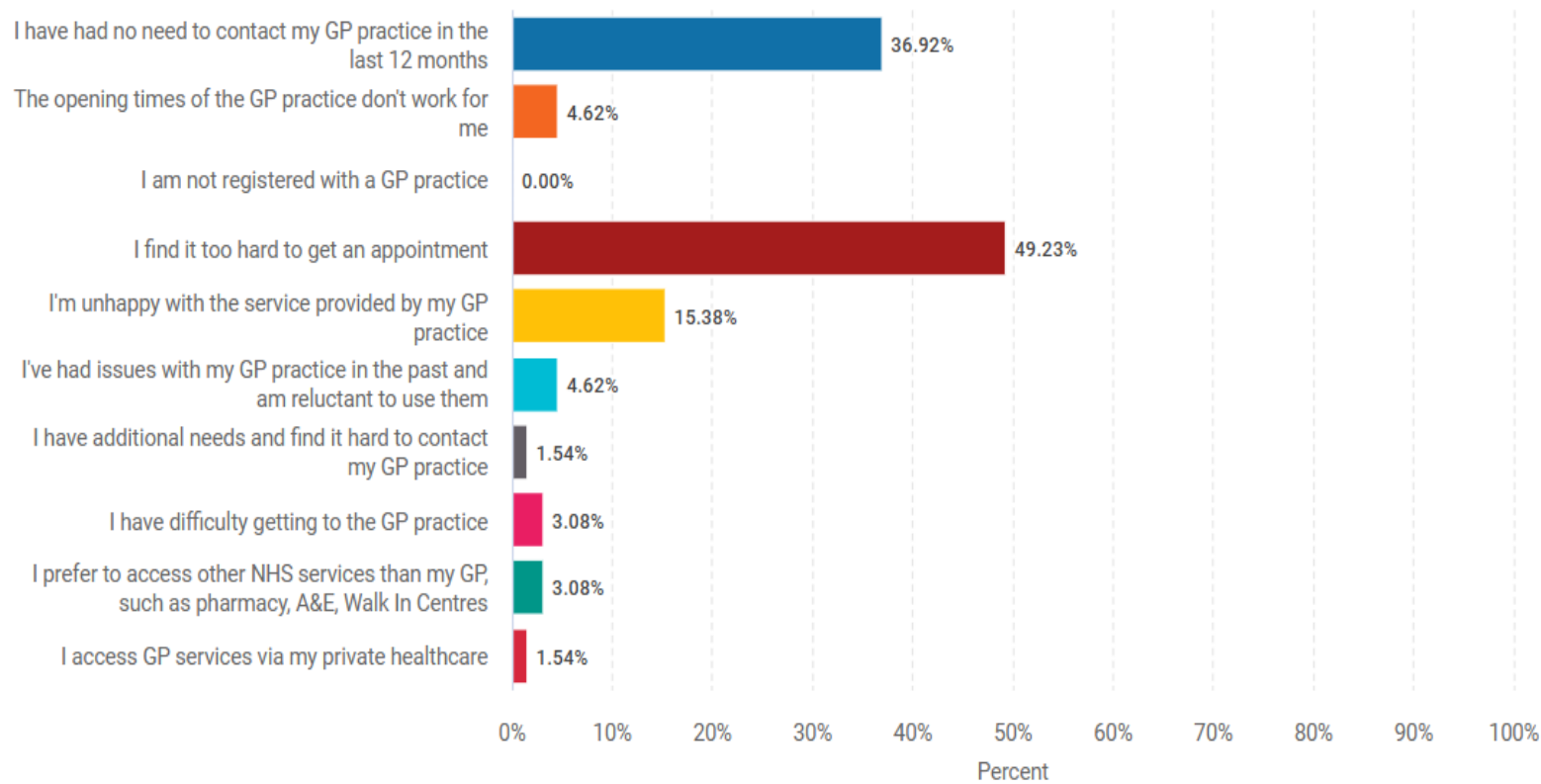
454 responses



Why have you not accessed or tried to access your GP Practice in the last 12 month?

65 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.



1 in 2 people found the main reason why they did not access their GP practice was **difficulty getting an appointment (49%)**, followed by dissatisfaction with the service (15%). Others said inconvenient opening times (5%) or past negative experiences (5%).

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

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. This is a problem for those with early work or school commitments, as they miss out on same-day appointments if they can't get through on time. 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 kids off for school or starting their own workday.

"Phone do not get answered no matter what time you ring. takes an age to be answered. At office reception not private. People queuing all saying could not get answered so come to office to make appointments. Personal matters discussed in public area. Staff are ill mannered and look poorly managed. Such a modern building just not used to potential. Staff can't Ming in later appointments start and run late. Very poor."

"Telephone contact is impossible, with over 1 hour waits regardless of time of day, and that is assuming you can get through to start with to join the queue."

"I used a patches request to seek medical advice which was a good service as I have had difficulty in the past getting an appointment due to having to call in the morning at 8am. I do not have capacity to do this as on my journey to work."

"Depends what time of day it is if it's 8am it's virtually impossible to get through."

"Can ring as lines open be number 2 in que and told no appointments left for that day. Told receptionist my symptoms and told to go to millennium centre or A and E."

"The lack of reliability for GPs to be in attendance the time wasted attempting too contact the receptionist for a appointment Only given a 30 minute window 8 until 8 30 am Also then poor contract with patients when there is a change in hours or some other issues like the policy too change the way you are able too order prescriptions."

Additionally, **some people find it hard to use online systems, either because they don't have internet access or struggle with technology** suggesting the **access is not equal**. This is especially true for elderly patients or those with disabilities, like hearing 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.

"I'm 80 and can use the Internet but it can be confusing hitting various hurdles. I'm about to attend a doctor's appointment for the first time in 3 years. The system only had 1 available appointment with an unknown doctor to me a fortnight hence, with a slot for 10 minutes and had to state symptoms for visit in a box."

"If you can use a computer it is easier but elderly people are not always IT literate. This could lead to discrimination"

"On line access can be difficult for an 80 year old when one has to jump through various hurdles to access the appropriate information."

What did not work?

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

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

The reception desk often feels like a barrier, and staff can come across as rude if you let them. I'm sure many patients feel intimidated, which can discourage them from seeking the care they genuinely need.

"Getting past the receptionist is a battle when you've been told that your own gp wants to see you."

"The receptionist[s] are a law unto themselves."

What worked?

Despite these difficulties, many people also share positive experiences that show the GP practice 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.

"This practice sets the benchmark for GP practices. I have been looked after by the reception staff, nurse practitioners and Doctors. They have all been empathic, friendly, and professional."

"Phone back service is amazing especially first thing in a morning when trying to get an appointment."

"Reception very good. If I can't get an appointment with my GP they will always offer for me to see another Doctor or nurse Practitioner, who are always very professional and helpful."

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 reaching the reception, the long waiting times, and how available appointments really are. **This part 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.**

72% (304)

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

15% (67)

were **unsuccessful** in securing an appointment.

27% (91)

respondents **were able to get an appointment on the same day**, and 144 were seen within a week. This is lowest among the other C&M Healthwatch.

96% (323)

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

45% (184)

respondents tried to treat themselves through self-care before attempting to get an appointment, while 94 sought information on the internet.

A regular theme was **the unavailability of 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 to call back at 8 am repeatedly.

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. Receptionists often refuse to book appointments over the phone or transfer calls without helping. This leaves patients with no choice but to look for care through other means.

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

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.**

I am always told that there are no available appointments it's urgent [to] use out of hours. Also trying to book when you work from 08:30 till 4.30, as I do – I don't have time to sit on the phone from 8am in the morning for over 30 minutes trying to get through to book an appointment. I downloaded the Patient Access APP and it says Haydock offers online booking. When you try and use it it says it is 'not operating an online booking function at the moment' – I have never been able to book online. It is misleading. Its frustrating when I have gone several times in person to ask for an appointment and told there's none available, then I overhear others getting an appointment no problem – it's usually elderly people who aren't time limited to when they can attend.

Many respondents said that when they called, there were **no appointments available or available in three weeks or more.** Some were told to call back at 8am every day, and only emergency appointments were offered in many cases.

"i had blood tests i get a message off the doctors to say i need an appointment with them i have to wait for 3 weeks for one to discus[s] the problem."

"Because they say that there is never appointment available and that's at 8.15am."

"Difficult to contact. Wanted to see a doctor pushed onto a HCA who continued to go to see doctor on my appointment bringing back their questions. Palmed off with second rate service."

"Never seems to be any appointments, even when ringing at 8am like they tell us."

"1 all appointments taken already. 2 no doctor available told to go to hospital A and E. (bleeding from the bowel)."

"I had some problems with stomach ache which lasted a couple of days and reoccurred on a few occasions I was hoping to speak with a GP but unable to arrange a appointment in the end I gave up and treated myself."

"Told the slots for that day had all gone and couldn't prebook for following day. Asked if I could bring urine sample in but told they dont test at surgery any more (too expensive) without doctors request and needed appointment for that which there was none. Just goes round in circles."

"After several attempts at calling to rearrange an appointment that the surgery had booked for me at an inconvenient time I had no option but to email the surgery to cancel the appointment. I did not rebook because couldnt get through."

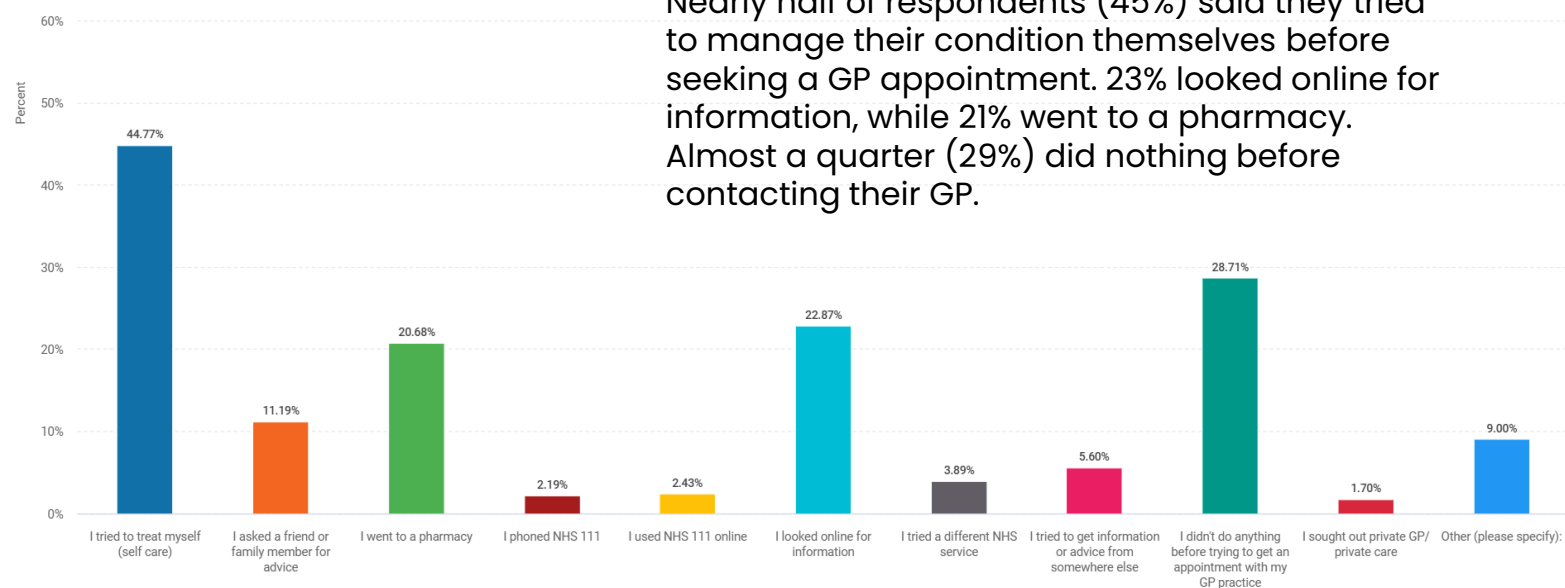
"I was told there was no appointments left and to try again the next day or put an online request through for a routine appointment."

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

411 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.

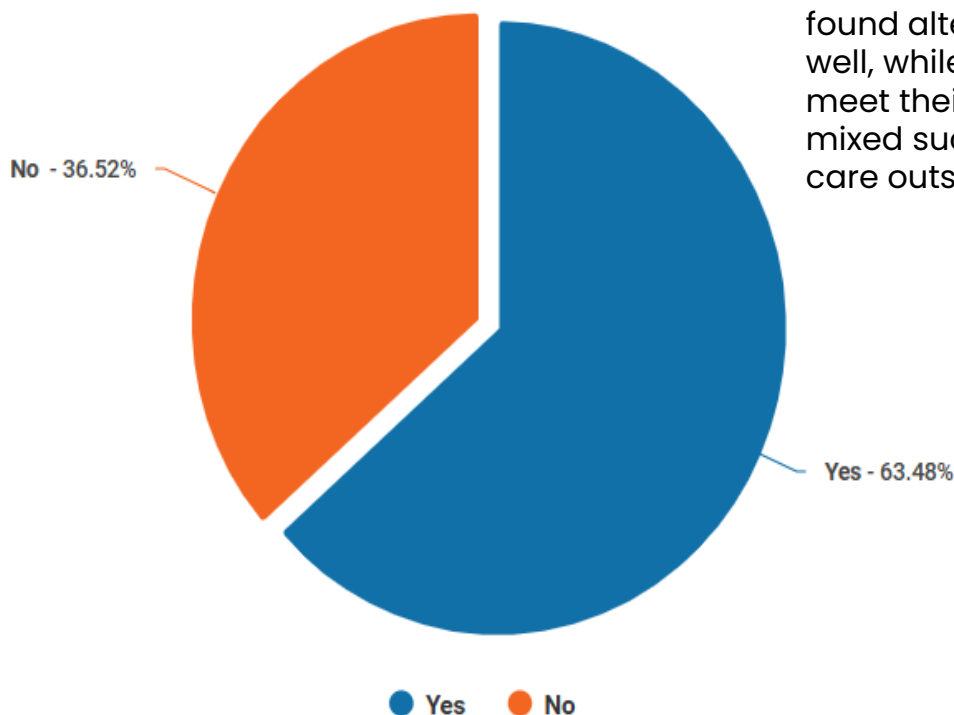
Nearly half of respondents (45%) said they tried to manage their condition themselves before seeking a GP appointment. 23% looked online for information, while 21% went to a pharmacy. Almost a quarter (29%) did nothing before contacting their GP.



- 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.

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

408 responses



More than half respondents (259) found alternative routes worked well, while 37% (149) 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 systems like PATCHS helped them quickly get triaged and receive a diagnosis.

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

"The PATCHS route is the best where you can explain your symptoms online and the GP contacts you back"

"The pharmacy contacted the surgery with the results of tests and I phoned the surgery for a follow-up appointment."

"Was told no one from my practice could take a stitch out and was told to get an appointment with the treatment room they didnt have any appointments for weeks and the stitch had to be taken out in 5-7 days i went to the walk in centre the waiting time was too long so i boiled a pair of scissors and cut the stitch out myself."

"Because I was sent for an ecg and was told that a report would soon be sent to the practise about 2 months ago. I have heard nothing since."

"Rang for about 45 minutes. 100 calls. Gave up as had to go to work."

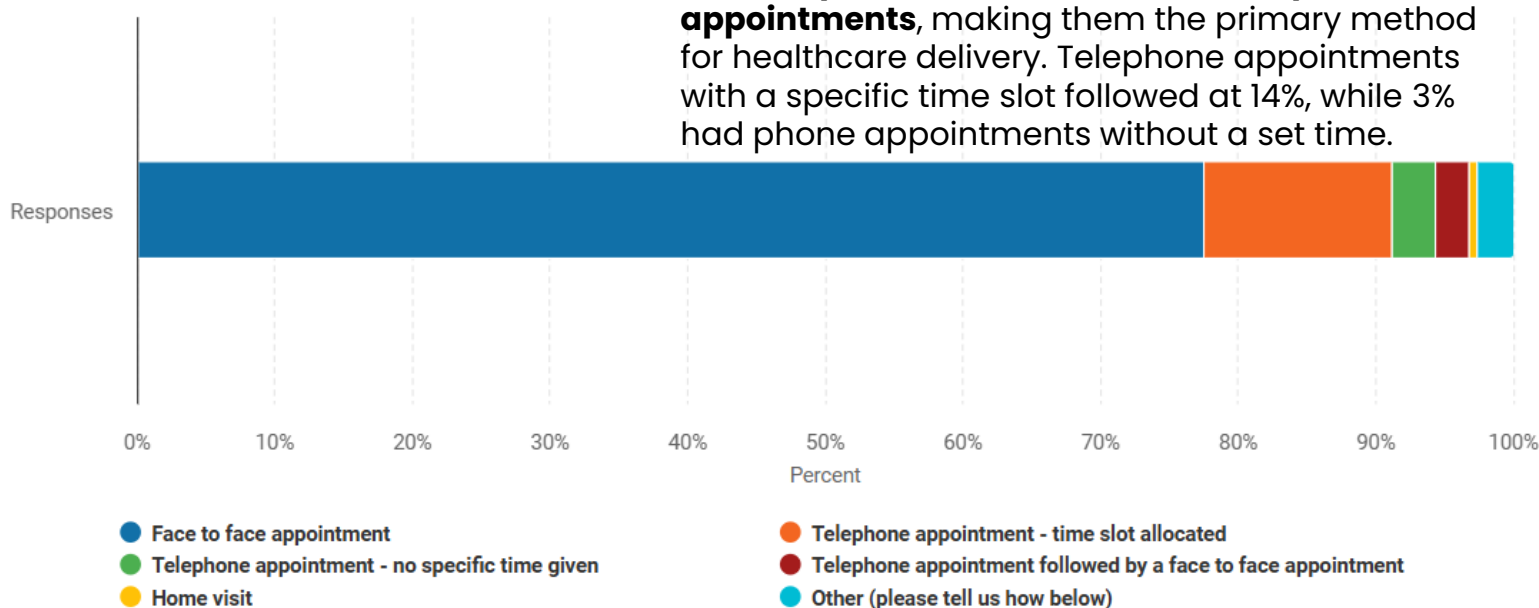
"Mostly. Staff have to determine if a patient is a regular or only comes to the surgery when they have a medical issue. I find you have to be firm, or you get fobbed off. The situation is not ideal, costs time and money."

4.3 Appointment Experience

How was the appointment delivered?

338 responses

Most respondents (77%) attended in-person appointments, making them the primary method for healthcare delivery. Telephone appointments with a specific time slot followed at 14%, while 3% had phone appointments without a set time.



What worked?

Many respondents praised the care they received once they reached a doctor—sharing positive experiences with both GPs and nurse practitioners who were described as empathetic, helpful, and knowledgeable.

"I have seen both doctor and nurse at the surgery and they are friendly, helpful and provide a kind, professional service."

"Medical staff members are always informative on all matters of mine."

"Always have a good experience at the surgery, it is just so difficult to get in there and I need to know why that is.."

"GP took my concern seriously but also put my mind at ease with his compassion and empathy."

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.

"Reduced a referral to [the] pain service. Only given a 14 prescription for pregabalin. I did get a Zapain one off prescription after some difficulty for breakthrough pain. The last box went out of date!"

"Wasn't too happy that the person I saw conducted my appt with his jacket on and lap top over his shoulder, he was ready for leaving when the receptionist told him I had an appt that were running late."

"Although i was happy with my appointment i was angry with the way i was spoken to by the female doctor other symptoms connected with my condition she cut my enquiry short stating that i only have one ailment to ask about having ten minutes per ailment and that i should have booked a 30 minute appointment i did explain that i had waited 25 minutes past my appointment time and not complained yet the waiting room was quite empty she abruptly said that she had other patients to see even though i had stated that the 3 people in the waiting room were there when i came into the waiting room yet none of them were called in before myself."

"For this particular concern, I feel more face-to-face app should be available."

"No access to my personal health records not sent over when changed gp practice."

"Patients need to have face to face appointments. A phone call cannot determine ailments and can lead to time wasting for the patient and misdiagnosis."

"As always you have to wait weeks for appointments yet when you do go to the practice there is never anyone else in there. Just doesn't add up to me."

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.

95% (315)

said they were happy with how their appointment was delivered.

85% (285)

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, and lack of clear information and diagnosis.**

"They didn't know I had stage 4 cancer. They said they needed clarification on a form I needed but would get back to me to tell me either way if it could be done or not. She didn't get back to me but the firm was completed and submitted the next day. She did refer me on to dermatology quickly."

"Nurses are not doctors and the lack of treatment led to me being very ill for a month."

"I felt like my concerns were dismissed, like they couldn't be bothered to talk to me."

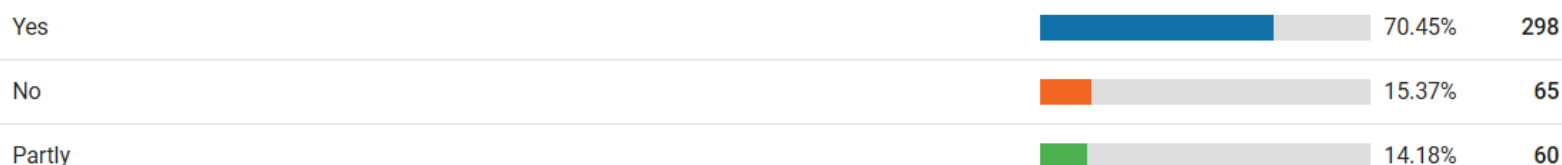
"The Practitioner was not helpful and was rude. I made a complaint. This was followed up by the surgery."

"She was offhand, telling me things I already knew as if I didn't have a clue. Wasn't prepared to listen."

"She was the right person but her attitude towards me was rude, flippant and condescending."

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

423 responses



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.

“Had to insist antibiotics were needed. Only request an appointment when absolutely necessary.”

I'm still awaiting appointment. It's 3 years since I last saw a G.P and such a lot has changed. I feel the patient is no longer central to treatment—more of an afterthought. I speak as part of the older generation when there was a good relationship between doctor and patient and trust at the centre. I now feel that calling for a doctor is something I would only do if I was in dire straits.

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.

“Dismissive behaviour, I am very aware of what is happening with my body and health, the fact that my bloods matched how I was feeling and was still dismissed. I went to a specialist to the point that they shared the GP practice was over medicating me.”

“I felt like I was treated like a number and nothing that I said even registered with my GP. I was given a crisis number and quickly shown out the door instead of trying to find the correct route to go down.”

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 or referrals to specialists.

I was only given half of my prescribed pills for 2 months. Eventually I found out why. I done a blood test and blood pressure check and the surgery said they did not have the blood test readings. I had done the blood pressure reading in the surgery. And I don't know why my blood test hadn't been looked at by the doctor.

GP was unhelpful, failed to undertake a safe, effective, patient centred assessment. Documentation on clinical record was inaccurate. GP failed to actively listen to symptoms, and concerns and addresses these.

What worked?

Many 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.

"Dr was very thorough with listening to my symptoms and examination. She referred me to specialist and also gave me a new prescription for my ailment."

"I did blood test and had a complete discussion about the do's and don'ts for health improvements and in 3 months was contacted by the GP office to repeat my test this made me feel confident in their services/care."

"The doctor at my last appointment was very thorough, went through all my options and told me what he recommended but was happy to go with my preference."

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.

"My last appointment was with the physio who was excellent. The appointment before this was with the nurse and she was very thorough, following up something that someone else should have followed up earlier."

"Last appointment I had (still awaiting the most recent appointment), worked well and I feel my needs were met."

"The GP I saw was very understanding and kind. He told me that the tests had revealed that I had advanced prostate cancer and referred me in to the hospital urology department. Within an hour of me getting home the hospital had contacted me with a series of appointments for consultations, further tests and treatment."

4.4 Practice Staff

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

414 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>	3.62%	15
2	<div><div></div></div>	4.59%	19
3	<div><div></div></div>	11.59%	48
4	<div><div></div></div>	18.60%	77
5	<div><div></div></div>	61.59%	255

Over half (62%) of the respondents rated their experience 5 stars, while 19% gave 4 stars. The remaining responses were more evenly split, with 12% rating 3 stars, 5% rating 2 stars, and 4% giving 1 star.

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

409 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>	72.13%	295
Well	<div><div></div></div>	17.60%	72
Ok	<div><div></div></div>	6.85%	28
Poor	<div><div></div></div>	3.42%	14

However, those with additional needs reported varying experiences. **Of the 114 people with additional needs**, 63% said they were well supported, 24% indicated they were okay, and 12% expressed poor support. The answers suggested that there is further opportunity for improvement in awareness and tailored support for people with specific requirements. **St Helens had the highest proportion of people who reported highest satisfaction.**

What did not work?

Some people felt their specific needs were ignored by staff, which made them feel unsupported. Additionally, negative feedback was given regarding reception staff, with some patients feeling dismissed or given medical advice by unhelpful receptionists, which affected their experience.

"I have a disability and am unable to go into the GP office because of health issues. They are not understanding and I have spent a significant amount of time trying to explain why I was not well enough to go in."

"There's no care given for people who are working, not technically disabled but living with multiple chronic conditions."

"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."

What worked?

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

"My husband was in hospital in December, when he came home I needed to speak to a doctor on a couple of occasions. There was no problem arranging this and I was more than happy with the response from the doctor."

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

"Daughter is T1D so they always help and listen. I am very grateful for the team."

5. Summary of GP Access Survey Findings Against PCARP Objectives

PCARP Question	Yes/No/Partly	Explanation
Feel valued and important/understood from first contact	Yes	62% respondents rated staff attitude as 5 stars, the overall ease-of-access rating was 7.6/10, which is the highest across Cheshire and Merseyside HWs.
Feel confident when calling GP practices	No	75% contacted their GP by phone, with 72% reporting waiting in queues. Many lacked confidence in calling due to long queues, unhelpful reception staff, and difficulty in securing an appointment. Just about 1 in 2 of the respondents tried self-care before.
Accommodating the needs of carers	N/A	Out of 93 who identified as carers, responses around carer needs weren't enough.
Able to make/manage appointments through phone, online, or in person	No	Phone was the most used method (75%), and only 26% secured same-day appointments with the unavailable appointments. Online booking was used by only 31% of respondents. It excluded digitally disadvantaged groups. In-person booking was rare and often required prior appointments.
Understand the process/system for apps and technology	No	Only 29% of respondents tried online methods. While some found online tools convenient, others (especially the elderly) struggled with confusing systems like PATCHS 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	95% were satisfied with the delivery method, many reported difficulty specifically getting face-to-face appointments.
Clear appointment details – time and doctor	Yes	96% of respondents found their appointment time convenient.
Clear appointment details – why	Yes	85% of respondents agreed that the person they had their appointment with was the right person to speak to. 95% were happy with how the appointment was delivered.
Set times for online consultations rather than open-ended wait	No	14% (of 339) 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: The survey

Appendix 2: 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: Cross-section of places we engaged

Appendix 4: Link to the Cheshire and Merseyside wide report and other local reports





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