

# The views of Halton 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

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The Healthwatch Halton 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 767 people in Halton 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 72% 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 72% 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 ~6 out of 10, indicating that there is room for improvement in accessibility. **While 94% 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 less than 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 Halton, 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.



## Inconsistent Staff Experiences

- Patient experiences with practice staff were mixed.
- While many praised the professionalism and empathy of the clinical staff, some reported challenges 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, 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.
- People tried other ways of care mostly because of a lack of appointments.

# 1. Introduction

Healthwatch Halton is the local independent health and social care champion for people in Halton, 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 Halton, 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 **25<sup>th</sup> October 2024, until 20<sup>th</sup> 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 Halton 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.



**768 responses**

collected via digital survey link including

**240 paper responses**

gathered through physical distribution and collection points.

## Cross-section of places we engaged

(See Appendix 3 for a complete list)

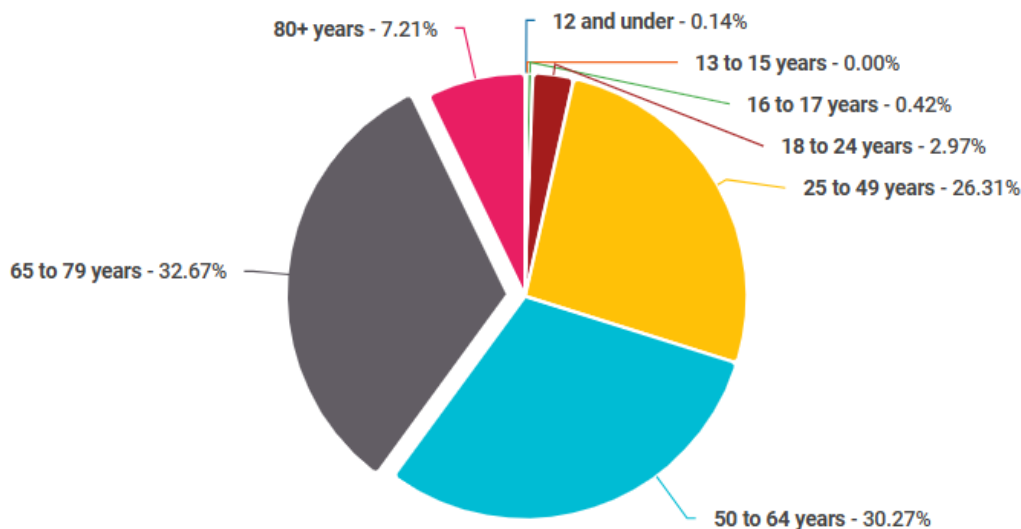
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|--|---|
| <b>Open Engagement Responses</b>           | Gathered through in-person discussions at GP practices, community centres, libraries, and market stalls.  |
| <b>Survey Promotion &amp; Distribution</b> | Digital outreach via social media (primarily Facebook and X), email newsletters, and website links.<br><br>Printed materials placed in GP surgeries, and public spaces. |
| <b>Partner Organisations</b>               | 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

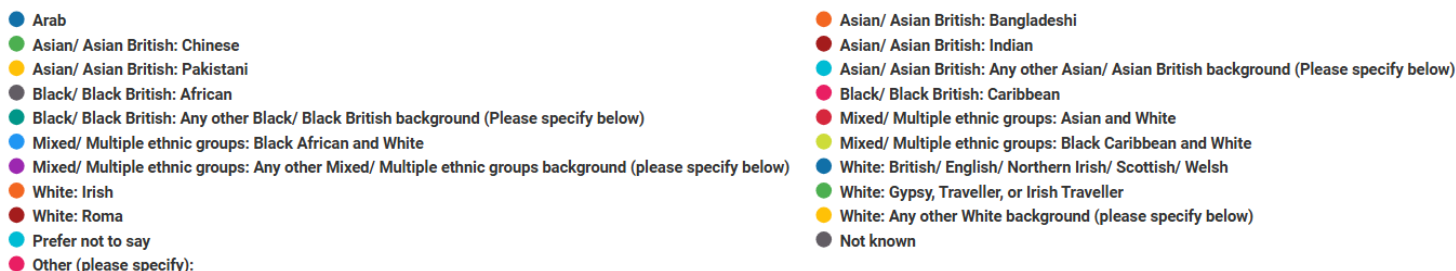
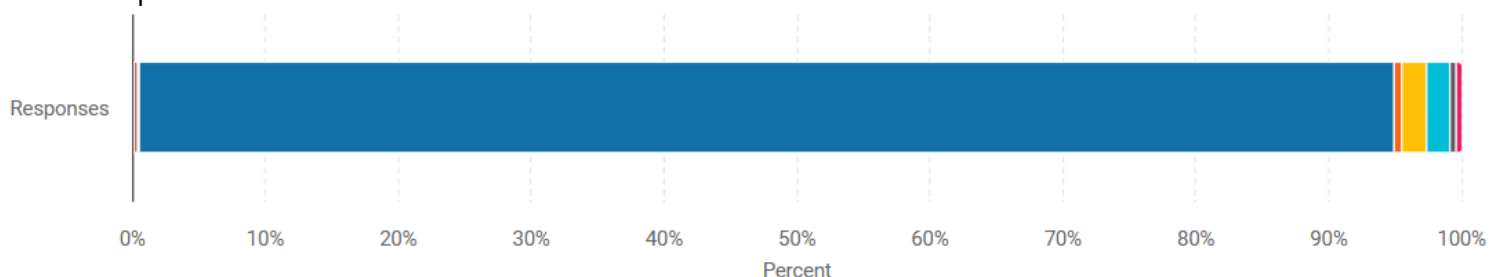
707 responses



- **About 70% of respondents were aged 50 years and over.** 71% identified as women and 26% as men.
- 84% indicated their gender identity matches their birth sex, and **77% identified as heterosexual/straight.** Many reported as not known – what do we do about that?

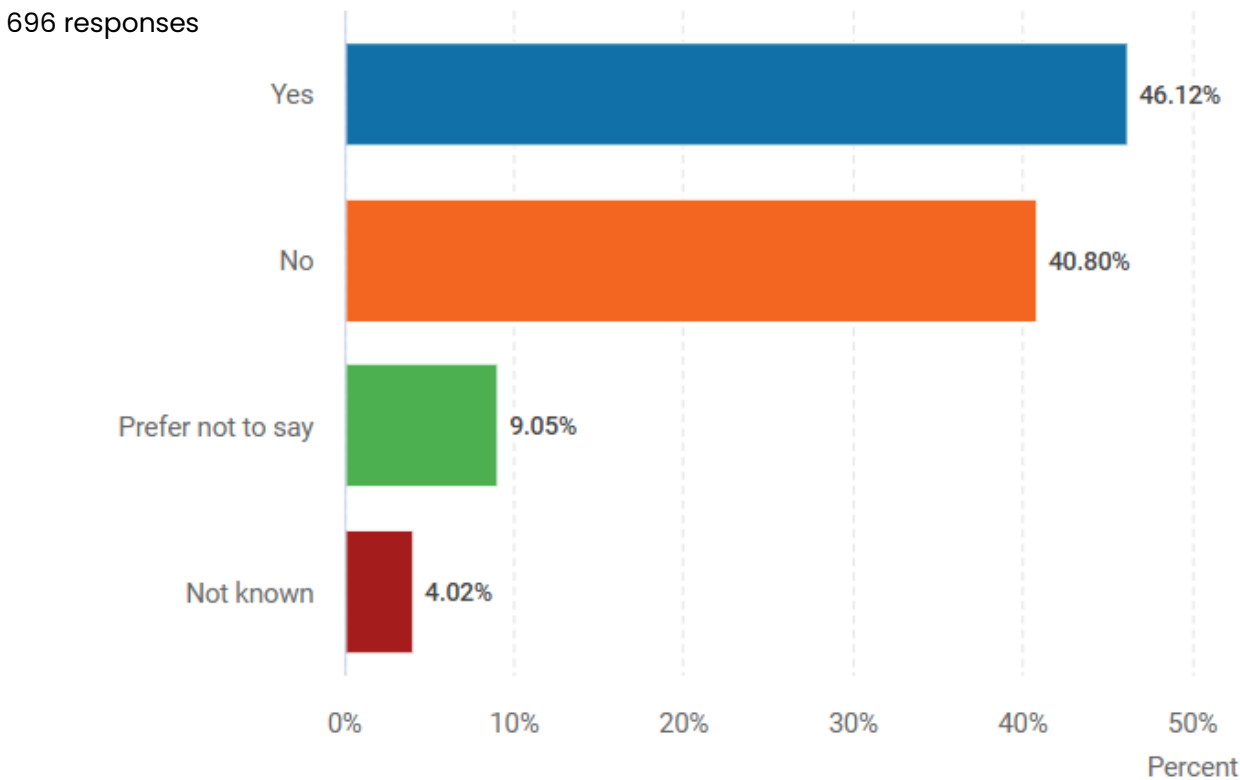
## 3.2 Ethnicity

710 responses



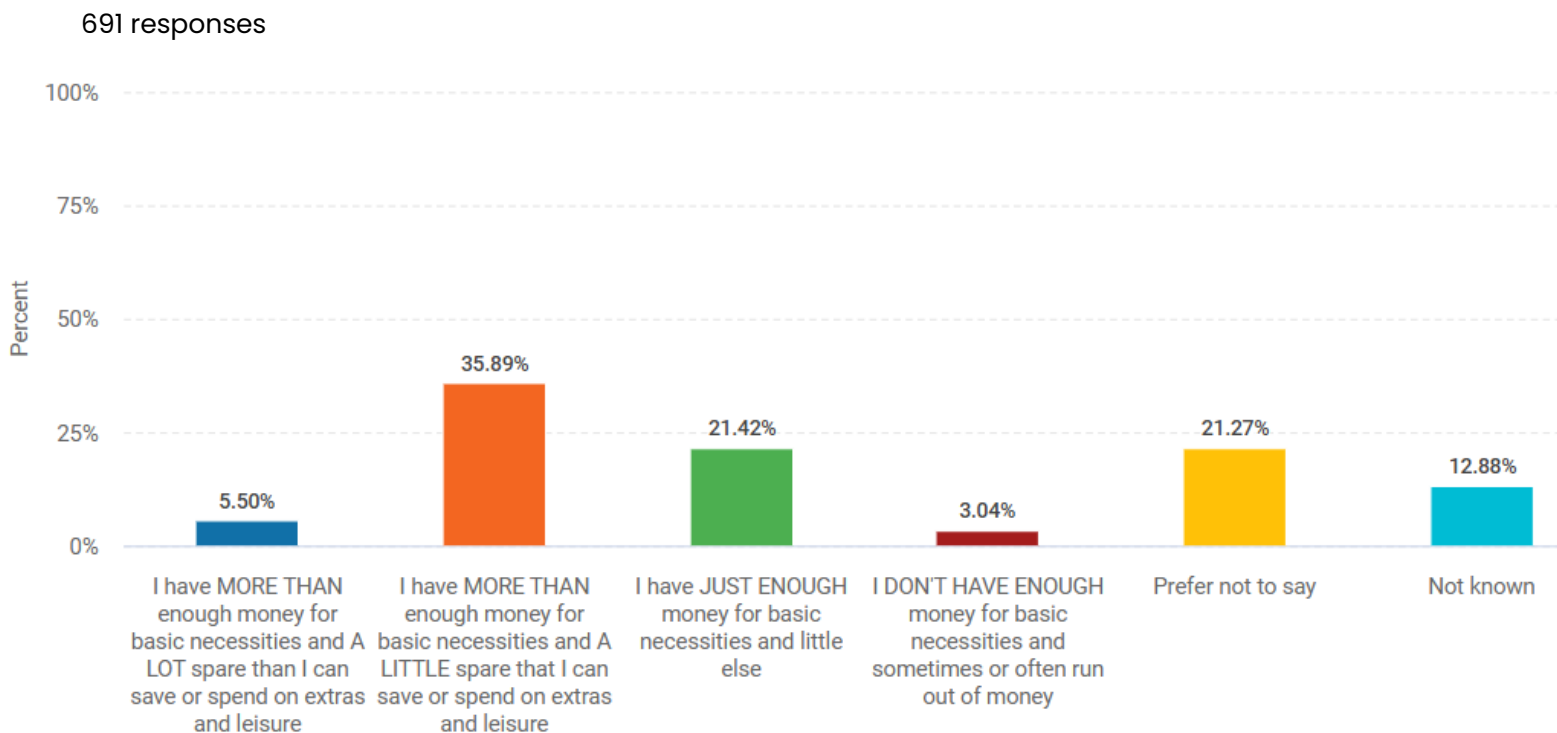
- **94% of respondents identified as White British**, with a small representation from other white backgrounds (Chinese, Indian and African also featured with each below 1%).

### 3.3 Do you have a long-term health condition?



- **46% of respondents reported having a long-term health condition**, while 41% said they did not.

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



- **42% of people said they have enough money to cover their basic needs.** Out of those, 6% feel they have a lot of extra money, while 35% 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 Halton with **long wait 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.

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. A lot of people found it difficult to get through, with an average ease-of-access rating of **5.94 out of 10**.

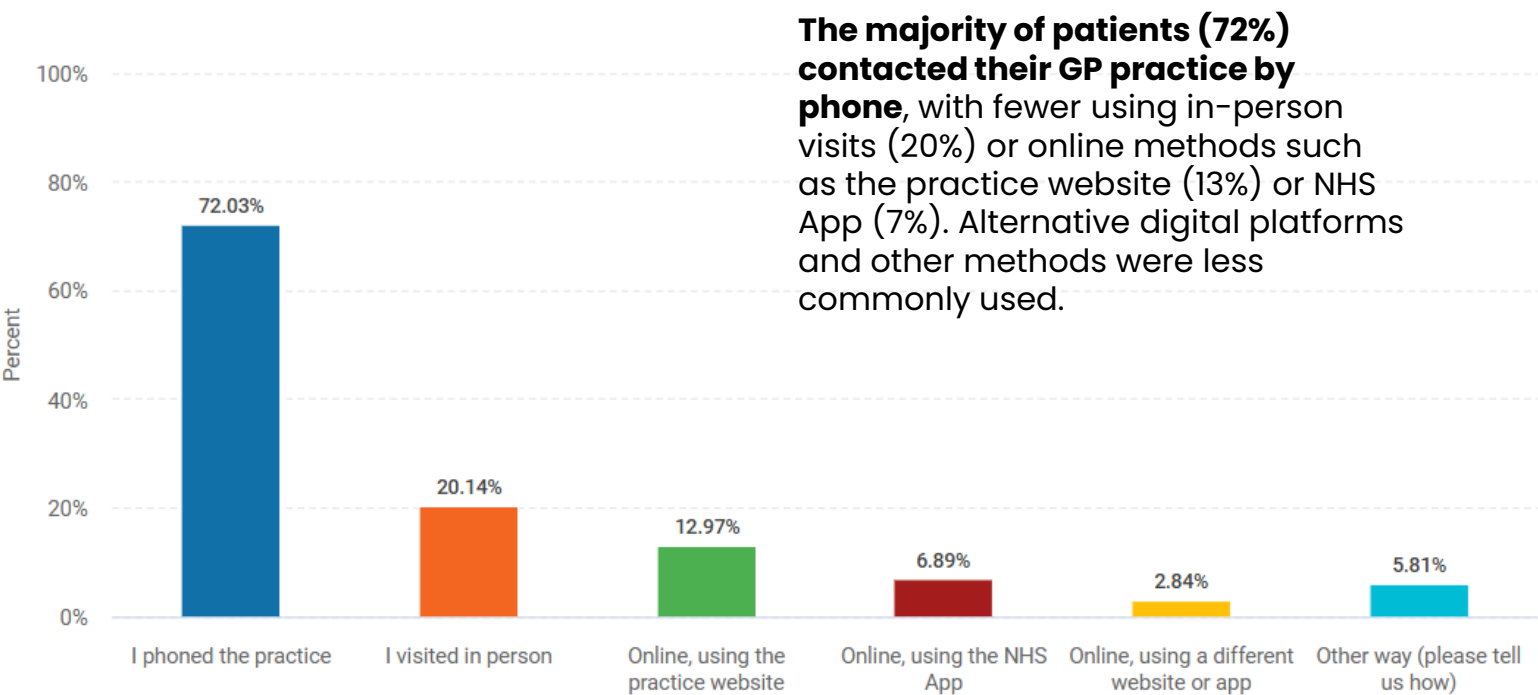
The most common way to contact a GP was by phone, though in-person visits, and online platforms were also used. **Barriers included having to call at 8am, long wait times, limited appointment slots, and difficulties for those with work commitments, caring responsibilities, or disabilities.** Some patients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

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?

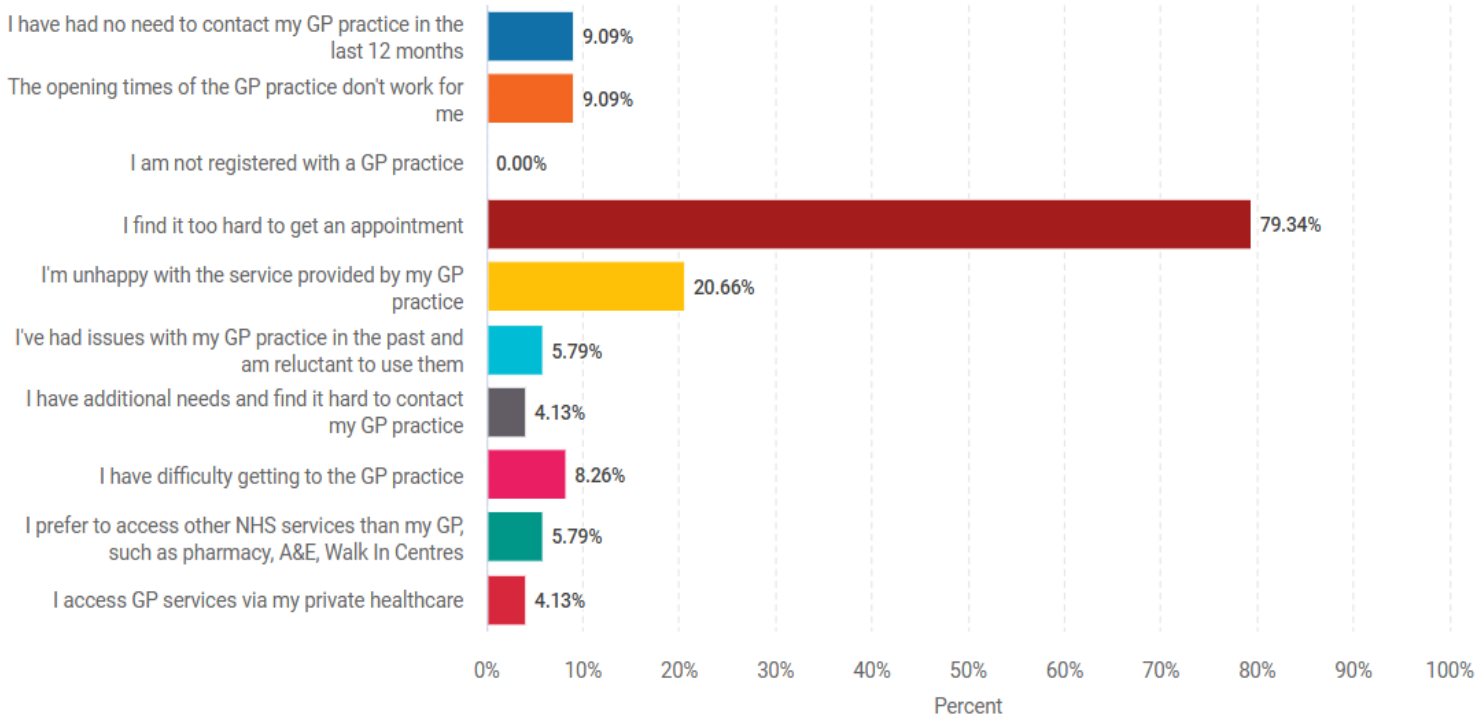
740 responses



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

121 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 (79%)**, followed by dissatisfaction with the service (21%). Others said inconvenient opening times (9%) or there was no need for them to contact the GP practice (9%).

The concern was especially prominent in Halton, among other Healthwatch, where the highest number of people expressed dissatisfaction with appointment availability at their GP practices.

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, or lack of appointment availability once connected**. Many people had called time and time again to be told there were no appointments left when they eventually got through. This was not exclusive to phone access as some shared experiences of lack of access and appointments via online routes too. Time constraints impacted people requesting appointments at 8am due to work and childcare commitments.

*"Because after over an hour (125 phone calls) the line was still busy, and I basically lost the will to live."*

*"Can't get an appointment with GP only get to talk to a nurse. I have only come in today as they gave me the wrong form for the pharmacy and I need to get it sorted out.."*

*"I just can't get appointments. I don't think GP's meet patients needs and I sometimes feel intimidated by GP's as they talk down to you."*

*"Impossible to get through, 113 connected calls to an engaged tone after listening to a two minute IVM selection (that costs a phone call x 113). Signposted to pharmacy, 111, or walk in if you do manage to get through to reception – never any on the day appointments available."*

*"Apparently there was no future appointments- I received a letter asking me to book my child's 6-8 week appointment and apparently there wasn't any. My child is now 9 weeks and still hasn't been seen."*

*"Yes, I can I was told to ring at 8am the next day. I said it wasn't urgent then told there was none available for 2 weeks and just keep trying."*

*Was told to ring the next day at 8am I did! They said to 'ring tomorrow at 8am'. I had already used the chemist. I was having symptoms of high BP. I went and had my BP checked which was 97/100, so I knew I needed medication.*

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 those with disabilities, like dementia or mental health issues, who might not feel comfortable or capable of using the internet. Some mentioned that their GP Practice had moved to online only so felt excluded.

*"I can't use the online system. When you ring I would like to get through quicker. I have to get a taxi as to get public transport I have to walk up a hill and I can't – I struggle."*

*"I get by with basics but my wife can't use the systems. Don't know what she would do if I couldn't do it. They say they will help you, but not asked yet. I only have a small tablet and my phone only has calls not text I do keep telling them this but don't think anything is done about it."*

## 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.

*"Can get through to surgery just cannot get passed the receptionist, know they have to have an idea what is wrong, but then they say, you will have to go to the pharmacy or walk in centre, they are not medically trained."*

*"I have autism and talking on the phone is difficult but the length of time you have to wait is crazy. Years ago people just answered the phone it has gone far worse now."*

*"The receptionist need to go on a customer service course to learn how to speak with patients with respect. They also need to learn that not everybody can be so flexible with appointments due to work or life commitments and they need to be more understanding of this."*

## 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. **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.

*"When you contact the surgery it sometimes takes longer for your call to be answered as you are in a queue, however once you speak to a member of staff on answering the phone I have found them very helpful and supportive."*

*"Phone lines can be busy. Patches system greatly helps with contacting the practice."*

*"They are really good with me, I'm a nurse so I only request when I need it mainly telephone triage."*

*"Very impressed with help I received when my late husband was end of life above & beyond."*

## 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.**

**76% (483)**

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

**23% (173)**

were **unsuccessful** in securing an appointment.

**47% (249)**

respondents **were able to get an appointment on the same day**, and 145 were seen within a week.

**89% (474)**

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

**28% (196)**

**respondents tried to treat themselves through self-care before attempting to get an appointment, while 134 sought information online.**

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?

Of the 162 respondents, the vast majority said that when they called, there were **no appointments available**.

Many were told to call back at 8 am the next day and were still unable to get an appointment.

*"Apparently, you now have to fill in an assessment form at 7.30 am."*

*"I was referred to the walk-in clinic as the GP had no appointments, despite phoning at the specified 8.00 as laid down by the practice."*

*"Never answered phone and when they eventually did there was no appointments. Left very frustrated."*

*"I started to ring at 8.00 3 days in a row. Each day I redialled between 85 and 97 times, but each day I was told that there were no appointments."*

*"No appointments for over a month."*

*"If I get through before 9 am I can get an appointment otherwise I am too late. This is not the fault of the receptionists but a consequence of under resourcing."*

*"Because they aren't released until about 2 weeks before they are required. I wanted to arrange to see a doctor for a follow up in a month's time."*

*"Surgery cancelled last 2 appointments on me. I've been unable to schedule another appointment."*

*"Availability of appointments is a problem - to the point where we give up and end up paying private. It's a constant 'call back tomorrow' to see if there's any appointments."*

Some respondents said an alternative solution was given, or they were referred to an alternative service or practitioner, which wasn't always their preferred or the most effective course of action.

*"I was worried about medication I had been given. According to prescription leaflet it was wrong for me. Was told I couldn't see or speak to GP and query would be passed to practice pharmacist who would ring me. Later got a message saying pharmacist was too busy and just to take the medication I had been prescribed. I have never taken it as I believe it would be dangerous to do so."*

*"I was triaged and prescribed a change in medication because the first medication did not work and the new prescription was sent to [the pharmacy]. They haven't delivered it so I haven't got anything."*

*"Text message sent by the practice instead to say no action needed in their opinion based on the online consult. My condition deteriorated and I required an emergency out of hours GP appointment. Out of hours GP was horrified that I hadn't been seen in person as my BP was so high."*

*"Can't get an appointment with the GP - only get to talk to a nurse. I have only come in today as they gave me the wrong form for the pharmacy and I need to get it sorted out."*

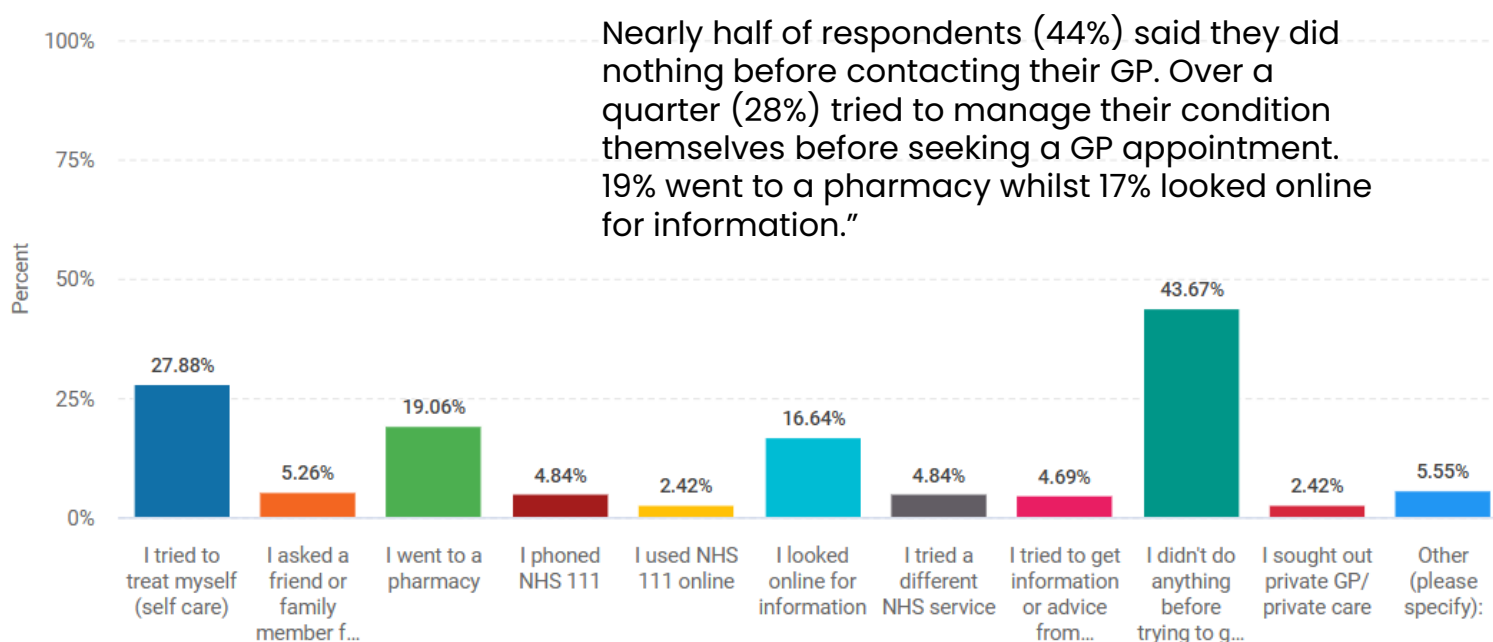
*"They ether tell you to go somewhere else like the hospital or a walk in centre."*



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

703 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.

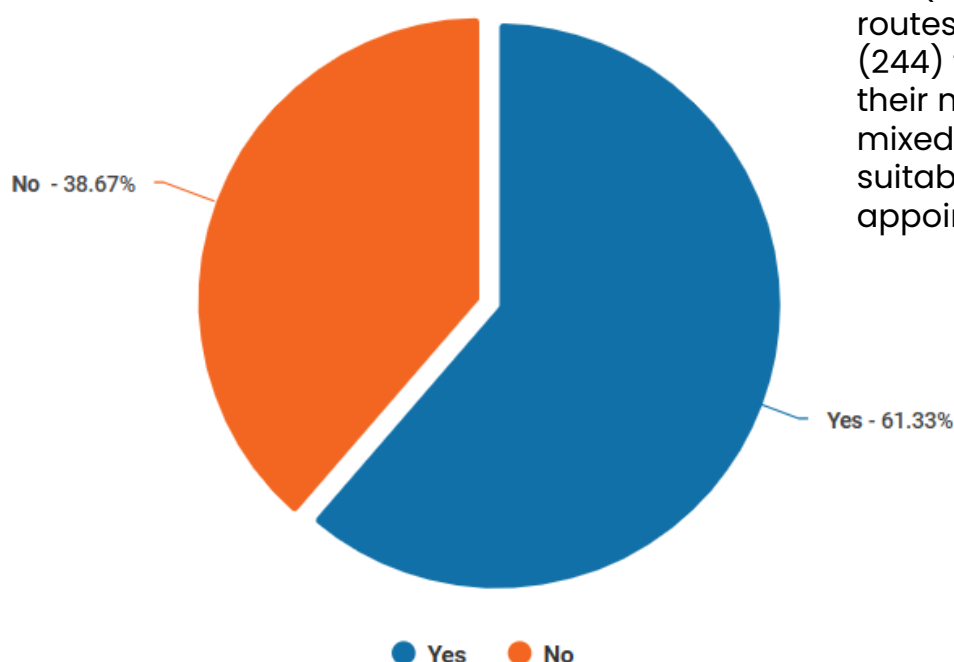


- Some people said they had a long-term health condition or recurring health issues which were being monitored by the GP so this was the preferred route.
- A few mentioned frustration with the system, stating they had given up trying to book appointments so went directly to alternative services such as walk in centres, A&E or paid privately.
- Others noted that specific treatments, such as injections or blood tests, 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.



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

631 responses



61% (387) found alternative routes worked well, while 39% (244) 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 found NHS 111 gave clear advice and some found pharmacies met their needs. However, there were examples of people being referred back to their GP Practice as the route they chose initially was unable to meet their needs. .

Many referred back to the **inability to get GP appointments**, hence the need to go elsewhere, rather than it being an active choice to try alternative services.

*"111 - I have used this service in recent months on more than one occasion and feel that over the last couple of years it has shown consistent improvement. Staff are thorough, give clear sensible advice and make sure you understand what action is needed."*

*"Pharmacy care is excellent."*

*"Pharmacy very helpful, however advised me to attend GP."*

*"Pharmacy care is excellent."*

*"Yes, it's much easier to get treatment via my private GP. Phones answered very quickly and no barriers."*

*"As I couldn't get an appointment when I rang, I went to the Urgent Treatment Centre, and they then booked an appointment with the GP for me."*

*"The remedy suggested didn't work for me this time. Would have helped if a pharmacist could have given me antibiotics."*

*"None. Was advised via 111 online that I would receive a call back. I woke to a missed call the following morning which had been made at 2.20am. A sick person is unlikely to be awake at that time unless in extreme pain and unable to sleep. I felt like that was just a tick box call."*

*"I needed to see a GP sooner and symptoms may have been eased or illness wouldn't have got worse."*

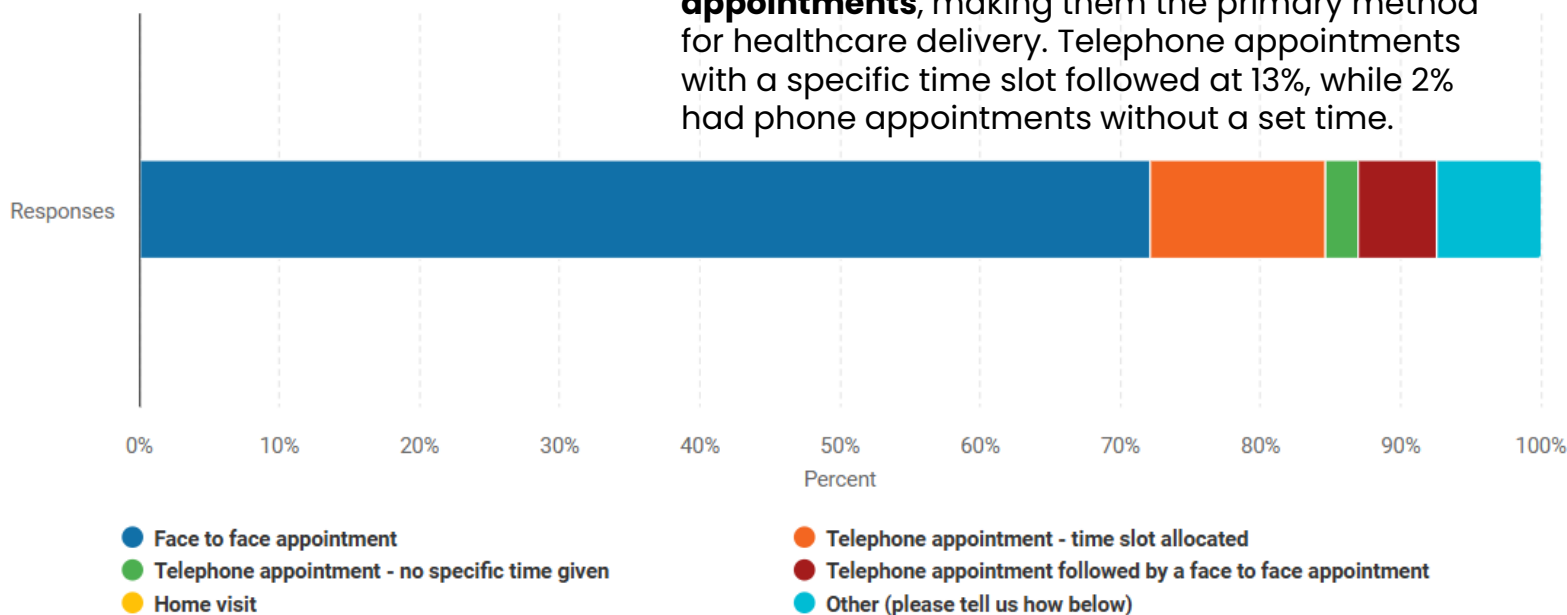
*"I found information relating to my symptoms and all advice suggested the need to be examined by a GP with likely referral for ultrasound. I was unable to get an appointment after trying for several weeks so I arranged a private GP appointment. I was then referred for a scan by the private GP."*

## 4.3 Appointment Experience

### How was the appointment delivered?

528 responses

**Most respondents (78%) attended in-person appointments**, making them the primary method for healthcare delivery. Telephone appointments with a specific time slot followed at 13%, while 2% had phone appointments without a set time.



### What worked?

Many respondents praised the staff and particularly the care they received once they reached a doctor or medical practitioner. The ability to connect to their GP Practice online was seen as a positive change, however, many still preferred seeing practitioners face to face.

*"Love the surgery. Staff are brilliant. GP's brilliant. Called into surgery in the afternoon and they gave me a face to face straight away."*

*"I think the surgery is excellent, they do try and get you in."*

*"I think it's wonderful, everybody is friendly and helpful once you get past reception."*

*"Difficult to get an appointment when you need one. Once you do, they are good."*

*"Not everyone is happy with phone consultations, I can't take in what people are saying I like face to face or Zoom."*

*"Very easy to get an appointment today. I booked using the online system."*

*"Yes, very easy to get the appointment. I got a text message for my flu jab and booked in. Past appointments I have used the online system been telephone triaged same day."*

*"Easy. I used online patient access and got pre-booked last week for today."*

*"Much easier to get an appointment since they went online."*

## What did not work?

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Some respondents reported that the attitude of receptionists impacted them and their experience of interacting with their GP Practice.

Whilst face to face was predominantly the preferred option, some people wanted the choice of having a telephone appointment instead, particularly if they had additional needs.

*"The practice on numerous occasions lost records for my husband. The practice rarely do what they say they will -i.e. phone back. The majority (not all) of reception are not welcoming."*

*"Attitude of receptionist and some doctors, no compassion in this surgery. Nothing is ever going to change in this surgery."*

*"Receptionists can be abrupt, can't always get an appointment. Some doctors can't give you any diagnosis."*

*"Nothing seems to work. No teamwork or communication. Receptionists think they are doctors deciding who goes through and who not."*

*"I'd have preferred a telephone appointment in this scenario, because I was vomiting a lot, so leaving the house was challenging. However, the receptionist said all the phone appointments had been filled so I had to come in."*

*"No - it was a telephone appointment and GP diagnosed my son over the phone for antibiotics. Not happy."*

*"Appointments for normal GP you can't get through. Can't walk in because they tell you to call at 8am the next day. Won't let you pre-book, you get told to go away and try at 8am next day. Not everyone can do that, they need more flexibility."*

*"Can't get an actual face to face appointment and feel fobbed off all the time."*

*"I can't cope with phone calls. I need face to face as I'm autistic."*

*"I had to come out of work for this appointment. These things need to be taken into account."*

## 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.

**94%** (486)

said they were happy with how their appointment was delivered.

**88%** (460)

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 **lack of continuity of care** and wanted a **more person-centred approach** when speaking to a medical practitioner.

*"Doctor seemed rushed and stated only had 10 minutes.*

*Spent the whole time typing on the computer and I felt like they weren't really listening."*

*"There is no continuity of care due to the process being used.*

*I have very complex auto immune disease."*

*"Feel the doctor should read up on medical history and be more person centred.*

*I left the practice upset and I'd travelled from the town centre. The walk and bus stop had impacted my health and disabilities."*

*"Too many tick boxes in the NHS now. There's not one size fits all.*

*Everyone is different with different needs, but it seems people just get lumped together now."*

*"Don't see my own GP anymore who knows my history, just some random doctors now*

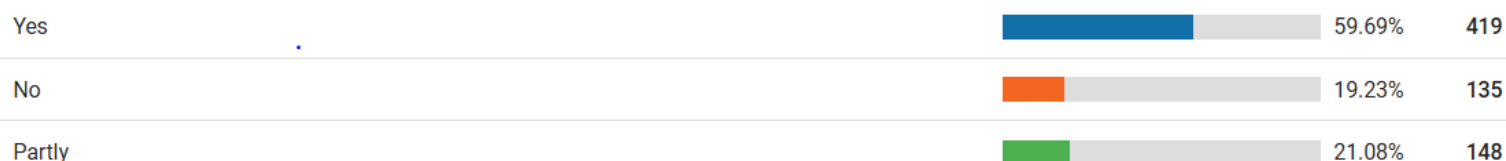
*Really impersonal."*

*"I was surprised how little information health professionals know about you.*

*Years ago people knew your history and problems that you had in the past, so would be able to link things up."*

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

702 responses



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.

*"I had a blood test 2 weeks ago and no one rang me. I telephoned this morning and they said I needed to come in."*

*"Can't get appointments with GP's or consultants when referred. Appointments take far too long."*

*"It's getting impossible to see a doctor."*

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

## What did not work?

Many patients reported **negative experiences with their GP interactions, feeling like they were not listened to and the GP or Practitioner didn't understand their needs**. 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.

*"It's not the systems, it's the GP's in general, not thorough enough. Don't think they listen to or believe patients explanations and conditions."*

*"Flippancy of GP's attitudes have led to both me and my daughter being admitted to hospital because they wouldn't prescribe antibiotics."*

*"GP's don't listen to patients. I suffer with anxiety and know when I need support."*

*"I was told to go to A&E when I definitely didn't need to. Just support your patients and patients needs."*

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.

*"The doctor said she would refer me to a gynaecologist which never happened."*

*"So, I saw another GP in the same practice and she said she would refer me for a CT scan and that never happened, so I still have the original problem."*

*"I have been waiting for an ENT referral for 12 months. Was hoping the GP could expedite my appointment but she was unable to do so."*

*"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."*

## What worked?

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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.

*"Brilliant surgery can't fault it. I have lots of different health conditions and they really look after me."*

*"They're always very helpful and kind staff always really friendly."*

*"I had a kidney infection; tests were done and antibiotics provided. Doctor rang me to see if they worked after I had recovered. Which was very much appreciated."*

*"GP awaited advice from specialist and contacted me out of hours with the important information I needed. Excellent care."*

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 helpful in getting timely advice.

*"Staff very professional give good advice and I don't usually have problems getting appointments."*

*"I received a text so called the surgery it was a couple of weeks ago but I had to re-schedule and got another appointment. It was easy to get an appointment with the nurse for my son's vaccine."*

*"My needs were met by my GP as a good treatment was given via Patches very quickly. Within an hour of sending a request a prescription was sent to my pharmacy and this was on a Friday afternoon."*

# 4.4 Practice Staff

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

702 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> | 7.55%  | 53  |
| 2           | <div><div></div></div> | 5.70%  | 40  |
| 3           | <div><div></div></div> | 21.08% | 148 |
| 4           | <div><div></div></div> | 25.78% | 181 |
| 5           | <div><div></div></div> | 39.89% | 280 |

**40% of the respondents rated their experience 5 stars, while 26% gave 4 stars.** The remaining responses were more evenly split, with 21% rating 3 stars, 6% rating 2 stars, and 8% giving 1 star. Halton had the most equitable spread across the middle and older age groups.

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

667 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 (72%).

|                            |                        |        |     |
|----------------------------|------------------------|--------|-----|
| I have no additional needs | <div><div></div></div> | 72.41% | 483 |
| Well                       | <div><div></div></div> | 9.75%  | 65  |
| Ok                         | <div><div></div></div> | 11.54% | 77  |
| Poor                       | <div><div></div></div> | 6.30%  | 42  |

However, those with additional needs reported varying experiences. **Of the 184 people with additional needs**, 35% said they were well supported, 41% indicated they were okay, and 22% 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.

*"All the surgery areas are wheelchair-accessible by the person for whom I am sole carer."*

*"It depends who you speak to."*

*Some staff are very friendly and helpful and other staff try to speak over you or try to finish your sentences without listening."*

*"Practice staff were very kind and empathetic with me being pregnant."*

*"Staff are always lovely and helpful even when you can tell they're overworked/stressed."*

## 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.

*"There is absolutely no recognition that I am a full time carer for my husband who has dementia and is visually impaired and that I have my own health issues and disabilities."*

*There needs to be some sort of marker on their computer system that highlights these issues."*

*"As a carer, I am not offered any addition service by the surgery."*

*"No regards for me as a carer."*

*"I don't understand stuff that is told to me but because I have a hidden disability people think I can cope."*

*"Sometimes staff aren't autism friendly. Hard to get appointments through e consult and on the phone."*

*"I am hearing impaired and a carer. No consideration or compassion from staff."*

*"I usually feel that I am causing a fuss over an issue which is not important in their view."*



## 5. Summary of GP Access Survey Findings Against PCARP Objectives

| PCARP Question   | Yes/No/Partly | Explanation   |
|--|---------------|---|
| Feel valued and important/understood from first contact              | <b>Partly</b> | Only 40% of respondents rated staff attitude as 5 stars; the overall ease-of-access rating was only 5.9/10, with many reporting difficulties at initial contact.  |
| Feel confident when calling GP practices                             | <b>Partly</b> | 72% contacted their GP by phone, with 69% reporting waiting in queues. Many lacked confidence in calling due to long queues, unhelpful reception staff, and difficulty in securing an appointment. 28% of the respondents tried self-care before contacting the GP. |
| Accommodating the needs of carers                                    | <b>No</b>     | Out of 127 who identified as carers, 6 responses around carer needs suggested negative experiences.   |
| Able to make/manage appointments through phone, online, or in person | <b>Partly</b> | Phone was the most used method (72%), almost 1 in 2 secured same-day appointments with 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                | <b>No</b>     | A digital divide was evident, with only 23% 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   | <b>Inconclusive</b> | 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)          | <b>Yes</b>          | 94% were satisfied with the delivery method, rest reported difficulty specifically getting face-to-face appointments   |
| Clear appointment details – time and doctor                    | <b>Yes</b>          | 89% of respondents found their appointment time convenient, some were unclear about who they were seeing and why.  |
| Clear appointment details – why                                | <b>Yes</b>          | 88% of respondents agreed that the person they had their appointment with was the right person to speak to. 94% were happy with how the appointment was delivered. |
| Set times for online consultations rather than open-ended wait | <b>No</b>           | Only 12% (of 529) 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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