



**Integrated  
Care System**  
Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin

**healthwatch**  
Telford and Wrekin



**Shropshire, Telford  
and Wrekin**

Telford and Wrekin  
Health & Wellbeing Board Item 8a  
Thursday 28 November 2024  
[Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin](#)  
GP Access Report 2024

# Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin: GP Access Report 2024 Summary

**November 2024**

# Background

- Independent survey conducted by Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin Aug-Dec 2023
- Driven by resident's feedback expressing difficulties in accessing GP appointments, with some reporting of negative experiences when attending local practices
- This insight was at odds with the NHS England 2023 GP Patient Survey Report and concerns that aggregation of PCN-level data masked negative experiences of some so this discrepancy warranted further investigation
- The survey aimed to explore patient satisfaction at GP practice-level, in the hope that the increased granularity would give a more accurate representation of the experiences of those in our local community



# Method and Response

- Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin developed a written survey to gather quantitative and qualitative feedback, offered via:
  - Directly with patients during Enter and View visits at individual GP practices
  - Promotion of the survey through comms channels at Healthwatch, Telford and Wrekin Council
- The survey consisted of 21 questions exploring: methods for accessing appointments, ease of access, suitability of appointments offered, experiences with, and confidence in clinical and non-clinical staff, general perceptions of general practice and ideas for service improvement
- These were a mixture of closed questions and open freetext
- The survey was available for completion in digital and paper form between late August to late December 2023
- Overall, 9,203 people completed the survey (circa **4%** of our population)
- The response rate across GP practices ranged from 2% to 6%, there was no obvious relationship in response rate related to GP deprivation scores



# Findings: Demographics

- The largest group of people responding was those aged 50 – 64, with 25 – 49 and 65 – 79 the next largest groups.
- Just under a quarter of people responding identified as having a disability.
- Over half of people responding identified as having a long-term health condition.
- Slightly under a fifth of people said they were a carer for someone.
- Ten surgeries all have higher numbers of people identifying as having a disability than the overall response rate of 24.1%
- Ten further surgeries have higher numbers of people identifying as having a LTC than the overall response rate of 56.2%



# Findings: overview

- Over half of respondents - 57.6% described *experience of making their last appointment* poor - either fairly poor (15.6%) or very poor (42.0%)
- Reporting of poor *experience of making their last appointment* ranged from 9% to 84% across GP practices
- There is some association between respondents reporting (fairly / very) poor *experience making their last appointment* and GP deprivation scores - i.e. lower levels of poor experience reported in the 5 least deprived GP practices, but mixed pattern for remaining practices, with a number of practices with the greatest deprivation scores have lower poor experience reported
- The main concerns cited by respondents relate to:
  - barriers to access - with many finding the process exceedingly difficult and not fit for purpose
  - perceived lack of understanding and empathy – which is echoed throughout the report
- High levels of frustration from respondents is clear, however as with the poor *experience making last appointment* summarised above - the survey findings between GP practices vary significantly
- Once the barrier of access is overcome, is generally reported as positive

Counts Analysis % Base % Respondents	Total	Overall, how would you describe your experience of making your last appointment?					
		Very Good	Fairly good	Neither good	Fairly poor	Very poor	Unsure
<b>Base</b>	9201	1739 18.9%	1160 12.6%	956 10.4%	1433 15.6%	3868 42.0%	45 0.5%



# Findings: overview (1)

- **Barriers to accessing appointments**

- Mainly relate to issues with the booking system
  - telephone systems with long queues, having to call early morning for on-the-day appt and appts being fully booked a short time after phone lines have opened
  - difficulties with booking non-urgent and follow up appointments
  - no longer being allowed to book appointments at the reception desk
- Reception staff themselves seen as a barrier
  - people feeling the need to plead or argue their case

- **Negative experiences of 'call-centre-like' booking services**

- Central booking service used by some practices
  - issues due to lack of access to GP notes and reception staff not being aware of relevant medical history
  - People being offered appointments at practices miles from home

- **Continuity of care**

- preference for the old model of GP practice with a traditional 'family doctor'
- concerns over lack of continuity leading to a poorer level of care



# Findings: overview (2)

- **False perceptions negatively impacting experience**

- Incorrect perceptions about GP workload and busyness of the practice
  - Empty waiting rooms and lack of GP contact perceived as 'laziness', leading to frustrations when people are unable to access GP appointments

- **Interactions with non-clinical staff**

- People reporting difficult interactions with non-clinical staff when trying to book appointments
- A belief from some that those booking the appointments are not appropriately qualified to make decisions relating to medical need

- **Inflexibility in the system**

- Some feeling they are unfairly disadvantaged by the system e.g. those who are:
  - working full-time with no access to a phone during working hours
  - lacking digital competence in practices that use an online booking system
- Only offering on-the-day appointments, which do not feel suitable for non-urgent queries

- **Confidence in care professionals**

- Confidence varies by role
- Mounting frustration when people are seen by someone perceived to be underqualified to deal with the issue



# Findings: overview (3)

- **Service capacity**

- A feeling that services (both primary and secondary care) are stretched beyond capacity
  - raises concerns over the level of patient care

- **Difficulties with telephone appointments**

- A wide window for telephone appointment times cause issues for some
  - people feeling that they must put their day on-hold until the doctor calls, for some this is impossible
  - missed calls lead to increased frustration

- **'Passing the book'**

- Many being told to phone 111 or attend A&E if no GP appointment can be made
  - with people feeling that this isn't due to clinical need, but an unwillingness from GP practices to see their patients

- **Perceived lack of change**

- Many felt that nothing was being done by practices to improve the current system





# Work already underway in practices to address access issues.

- Improvements to phone systems, including ways in which practices can manage demand and timeliness of appointments based on clinical need.
- All practices have now installed new digital telephony systems that allow calls to be managed more effectively, particularly at peak times. More work is also planned to improve functionality, including the ability for patients to register their place in the queue and receive a call back.
- We are also encouraging practices to undertake call demand reviews so that they can match their staff capacity to answer calls in response to demand.



# People's suggestions for improvement to access

Over 7,000 people took part in this response

- The single largest suggestion for improvement was to have a better telephone system.
- This was followed with people wanting to be able to book advance appointments
- People then referred to being able to 'drop in' to either wait to be seen or to speak with reception staff face to face
- Empathetic training for staff to overcome perceived rudeness
- More online appointments available
- More staff to support access – not GPs



# Healthwatch Recommendation themes

Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin made a series of **15 recommendations** shaped by the survey response insight, which cover:

- Suggestions on how to tackle barriers to access
- Methods to improve equitable access to services
- Options for increasing the availability and flexibility of appointments
- Developing skills among non-clinical staff
- Community engagement and opportunities for co-production



# Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin Next Steps

## Phase 2

Production of individual report for each GP surgery and include full details of all peoples comments.

## Follow on Phase 3

Proposal to work with each GP Surgery and their PPG (Patient Participation Group) to address the findings of their individual report to develop an action plan to address Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin recommendations.

Where there isn't an active PPG Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin will offer to support the creation of one.





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**Thank you**