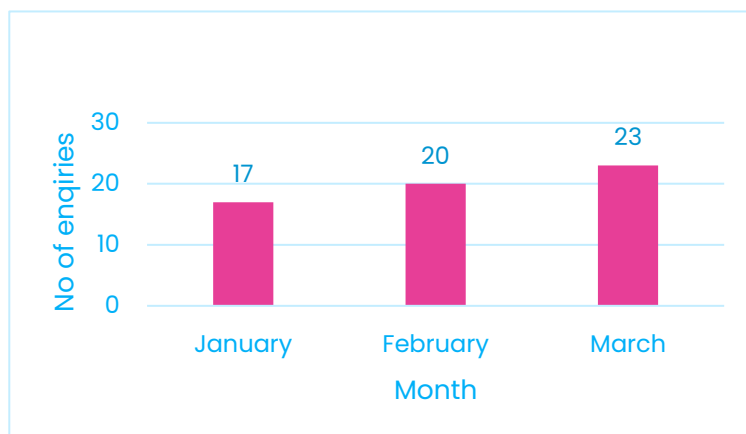


Our helpline service:
Public enquiries during
January – March 2023

The Healthwatch Brighton and Hove helpline service supports people to access the right health or social care service or organisation for their needs. We also offer information if people want to share their experience or make a complaint. Two trained volunteers help to run the service.

This document provides a summary of the enquiries we received between January to March 2023.

Total number of enquiries answered via our helpline January – March 2023:



Method of contact

The most common methods by which people made their enquiry were by email (48), followed by telephone calls (12). Where known, 6 enquiries were from men and 10 from women.

We received enquiries from individuals as well as people acting on their behalf: 46 enquiries were from individuals, 8 from friends, family or carers, 4 from health professionals and 2 'other' contacts.

Enquiry themes

The main enquiry theme we received between January to March related to making a complaint about any health or social care service or treatment, with 30 enquiries.

People's queries often related to several different themes, such as access to dentistry and how to make a complaint, which means that the numbers below add up to more than 60.

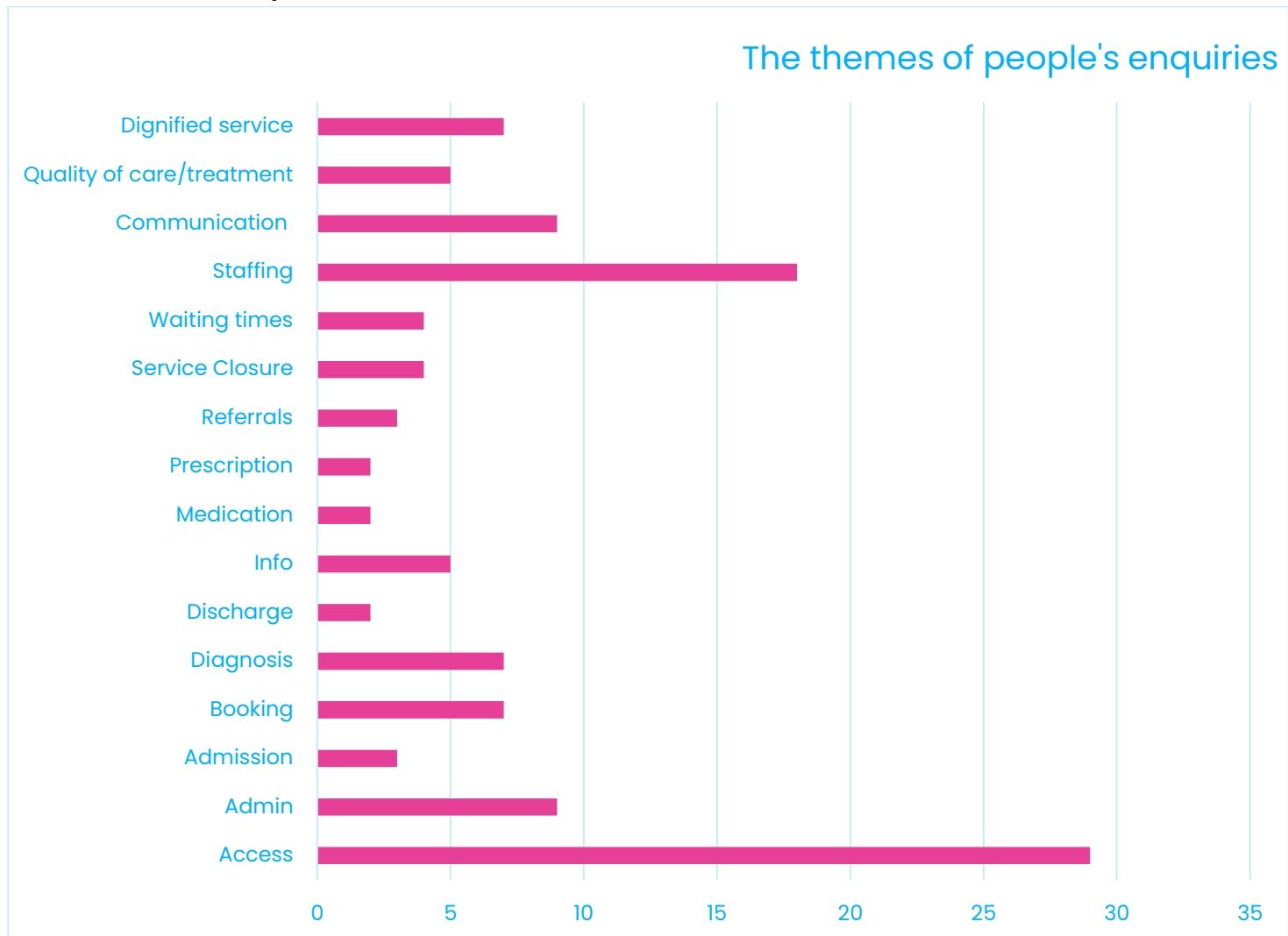
Enquiry theme	Number of enquiries
How to make a complaint about any health or social care service, or treatment	30
Queries about dentists and accessing NHS treatment	14
Complaints specifically about GPs or issues with GPs	12
Complaints about hospital services	10
Concerns regarding closure of public toilets	4
Concerns re IVF/fertility treatment	3
Queries about appointments	2
Queries about housing	2
General queries about GPs	1
Complaints about Mental Health services	1
Complaint about NHS111	1
Queries about pharmacies and related services	1
A query about equipment	1
General queries	4

The sentiment of people's enquiries

Most people (44) who contacted us from January to March shared negative sentiments with us about their experiences of health and social care services, although 16 shared mixed or neutral views.

The themes of people's enquiries

People's enquiries to us covered a range of themes, but the most common one related to access to services (people's enquiries often raised more than one theme).



Complaints about health and social services

Complaints about any NHS health or social service were one of the main reasons why people contacted us between January to March. Patients who contacted us wanted help to make a formal or informal complaint. Issues related to poor treatment or advice, delayed or cancelled procedures and poor communication. Some of the enquiries we received were:



“The doctor referred to us with the wrong name. We tried to tell him several times and he continued. At the end we’re given a prescription for medication for the wrong person.”

“My son has had appointments but his appointments have only come about due to my intense lobbying. The consultant kindly gave him a phone appointment which was changed. Further emails got the next appointment many weeks later. Again a phone appointment. He is about to have a third by phone. I feel that he is treated by the test results number not the entirety of his problems.”

“In 2020, my twin brother nearly died of severe heart failure, but was saved by RSCH. As he was my twin, I was extremely concerned and approached my GP about having a heart checkup, ECG. I was refused, so I spent the next year arguing with them about this, they refused every time, so I had no diagnosis. Consequently, in July 2021, I caught Pneumonia, which triggered heart failure in me.”



Dentists

Dental queries continue to be one of the main reasons why people contacted us. People were concerned about not being able to get an NHS dentist appointment and asked for help to find an NHS dental practice that had availability. Some of the enquiries we received were:



“I have been seeing a local dentist as an NHS patient for at least 20 years. That dentist now no longer does an annual recall / check up. I booked an appointment last month - it's 4 months away - end of April.”

“I have an issue with my wisdom teeth and a private dentist referred me to a specialist for a complicated extraction whereby the root is very close to a nerve. The specialist quoted me £2,000 which I can't afford.”

“My son has to pay £850 privately now to get any treatment, due to his NHS dentist throwing him off his list. He can't pay this on unemployment benefit, and now I have to pay out of my pension and I am 74.”

Other types of queries we received included:



“On Christmas Day, my husband went to the only pharmacy open in the whole of Brighton and Hove that afternoon. Shortly after opening, the queue was to the door. Whilst there, my husband overheard a man who needed an urgent prescription for his wife being told that it was not in stock and that the nearest pharmacies who had the item were either Gatwick Airport or Bexhill. When recounting this experience to friends they are incredulous.”

Public toilets at risk of closure

“I am very concerned about plans to permanently close many of our public toilets across the city. Access to toilets seems to me to be a basic human right. They are essential for those of us with disabilities, those with bowel and bladder conditions, those of us without a home, the elderly, young children, and for anyone who wants to live in a welcoming city. I do appreciate how very tight budget are, but I do think this is a short-sighted move, with public health implications, as well as being an erosion of personal dignity in our city.”



How Healthwatch has helped people via our helpline

1. Escalating patient concerns

We supported a couple who had been refused fertility IVF treatment having been told they were ineligible by a different Hospital because they had not met a residency requirement for Brighton, having lived here less than a year. We liaised with the NHS Sussex Leads and were given accurate advice which contradicted this advice. We were able to share this with the couple who were also being supported to progress their treatment.

2. Public health closure of toilets

We were contacted by several patients about planned closure of public toilets. We used this intelligence and our partnership with Friends, Families and Travellers and [wrote the Council with our concerns](#). We were pleased to read the proposal has been dropped.

3. How our Helpline volunteers help people



A lady emailed us to enquire about Autumn Covid boosters. She's disabled and unable to travel far so was desperate to book a booster vaccine close to home. She followed the recommended steps, the NHS website and 119, but was unable to book a booster closer than 40 miles. She was also unable to book or organise travel and was very confused. With the help of the local booster provider we were able to advise her on planned locations and a local pharmacy. Unfortunately, 3 weeks later, the lady still hasn't received her booster and the case is ongoing with Healthwatch's guidance.



“I received a call from a gentleman who had problems with blood tests that his (under 16-year-old) daughter was having. Two of the samples (in succession) had not been able to be processed at RACH due to technical issues at the laboratory which he found most unsatisfactory and wondered if this was a wider issue for the trust. He felt that it was the GP’s responsibility to investigate this. I advised that it was not their responsibility, theirs was to request the investigation and to look out for the result and follow up etc. He was also concerned that her GP was unable to make a diagnosis without the results but didn’t seem that concerned.

I firstly advised him that he needed to take it up with PALS at RSCH for them to investigate why there had been problems processing his daughters blood tests- he was happy to do that and understood that it was not the GP’s responsibility. I also suggested that he emailed the GP’s practise manager, highlighting his concerns so that they could look not the matter and hopefully get some answers, which he was happy to do.

Signposting people to other services

Between January to March, as well as providing advice and information, we signposted 12 people (20%) to other services or organisations for further support. In several cases, we were able to direct people to information and advice contained on the [Healthwatch Brighton and Hove website](#).

Contact us



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