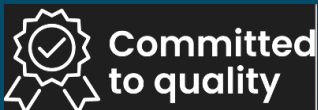


**Helpline enquires to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove:
April 1st 2025 – March 31st 2026**

June 2026



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Headline Findings – Helpline enquiries to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2025 – March 31st 2026

- Between April 1st 2025 and March 31st 2026, we received 202 enquiries to our helpline.
- Enquiries were mostly a combination of feedback through our website (50%), emails (26%), phone call messages (16%) and emails forwarded to us from Healthwatch England and other Healthwatches in Sussex (4%).

The majority of people contacting the helpline were:

- Raising a concern or negative experiences about a service (127 people).
- Requesting information (23 people).
- Making compliments about a service (40 people).
- Raising formal complaints (12 people).

The five leading areas of concerns and related complaints raised, in descending order were:

1. Poor hospital care including ambulance waiting times, poor experiences at A&E, and poor communication of cancelled appointments (32 people).
2. Poor quality of care from a GP (25 people).
3. Poor access to a GP appointment, including waiting times for appointments (12 people).
4. Poor access to Hospital appointments (12 people).
5. Poor dental care (10 people).

Compared to 2024–25 the top 4 concerns were similar, with poor hospital care and poor GP care persisting as the main areas of concern. Concerns about access to GP appointments and poor dental care were also raised. The main area of difference were concerns raised about access to hospital appointments which was more evident in 2025–2026.

As a positive outcome from using the helpline, (78%) said it was ‘somewhat helpful’, ‘very helpful’ or ‘extremely helpful’ and a total of 82 people were signposted for further advice and support. 38% or 33 people were considered to be seldom heard (see full report for definition).

- The helpline invites people to voluntarily add their demographic data (the figures below are from the up to 138 people¹ who answered these questions, not from the total number of enquiries):
 - Of those contacting the helpline, and who provided their demographic data, most self-described themselves as women (80 or 58%), of a White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh background (88 or 76%), and between the age of 50-64 (53 or 43%).
 - 52 people (or 73% of those that answered this question) told us that they had a disability, with 35 people said it was limiting their day-to-day activities 'a lot' and 17 by 'a little'.
 - The majority said their sex was the same as that assigned at birth (115 or 92%) and 72 or 63% said they were heterosexual. 18 (16%) people were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.

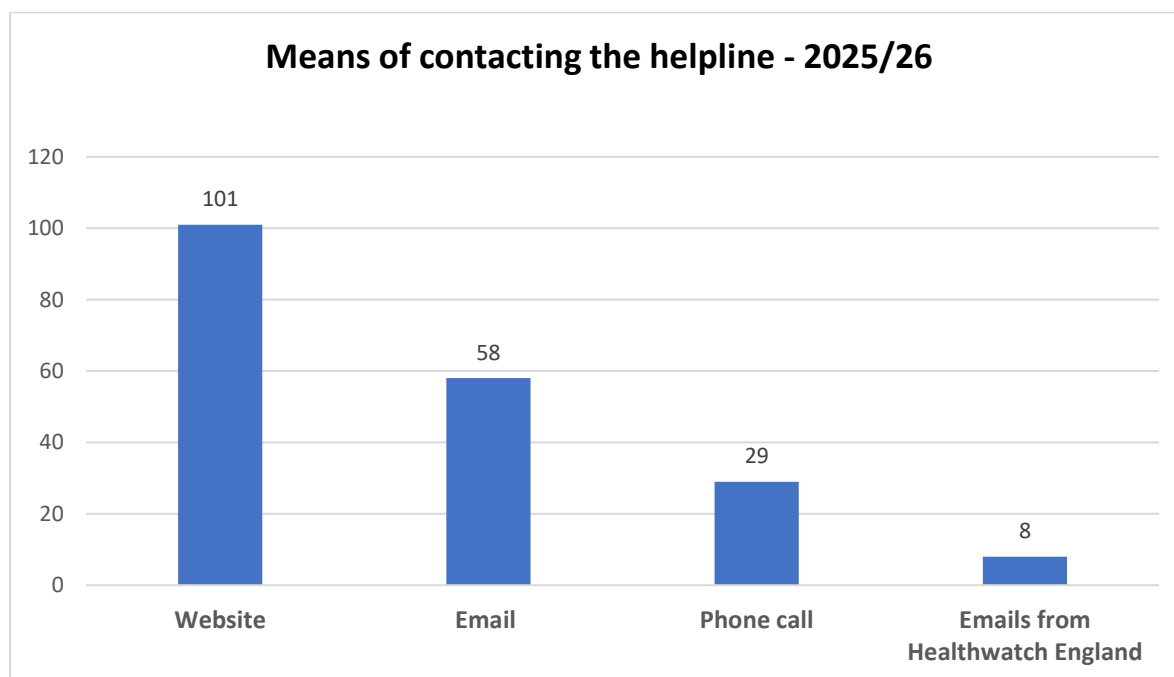
¹ 138 people responded to the question on their sex, but slightly less responded to the other demographic questions.

Main report – Helpline enquiries to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2025 – March 31st 2026

Between April 1st 2025 and March 31st 2026, we received 202 enquiries to our helpline, a slight decrease from 228 last year. We are aware that other Healthwatch teams from across the network have experienced similar dips.

People contacted the helpline mostly via our website (50%), email (26%), phone (16%) or emails forwarded to us from Healthwatch England and other Healthwatch in Sussex (4%). All enquiries are handled by experienced, trained and DBS checked Healthwatch volunteers, with support given by Healthwatch staff.

All feedback and information from the helpline is stored together in the same online database.



In this report, we summarise the variety of concerns, complaints and requests for information. We supplement the data with direct comments from people contacting the helpline. We also present an outline of people’s demographic

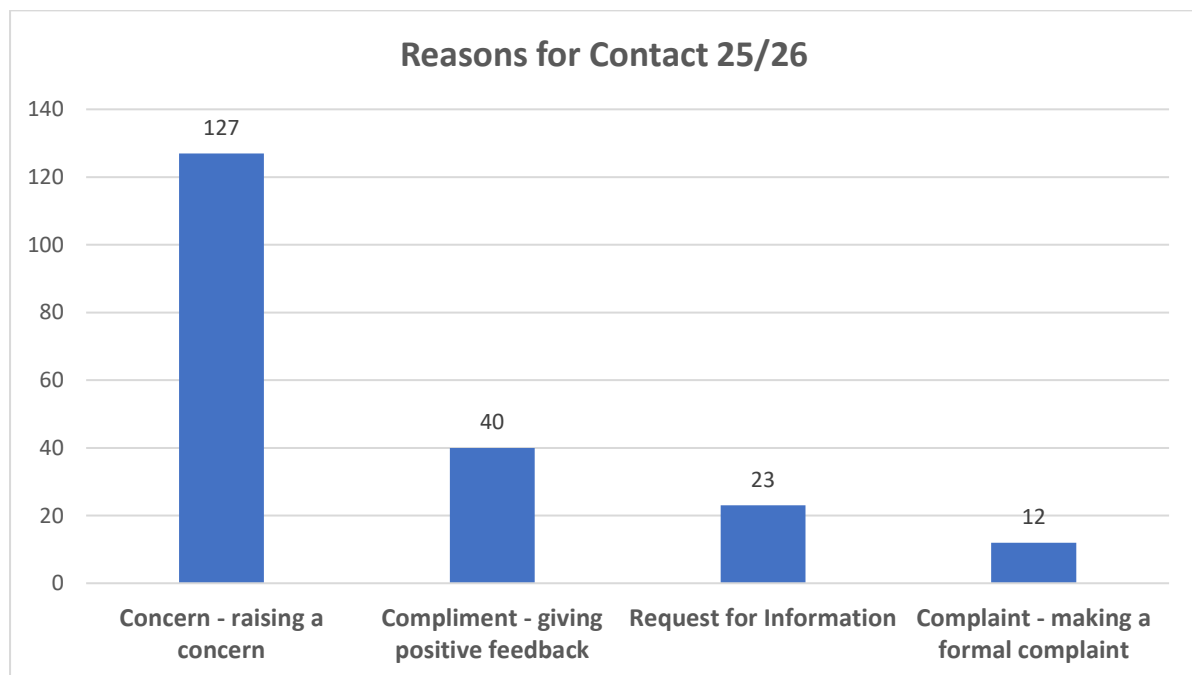
profile (for those that offered this information), and whether people were 'seldom heard'².

1. Reasons why people contacted the helpline

The majority of people contacting the helpline were raising a concern about a service (127). 'Concerns' were people reporting negative experiences for example, difficulties in accessing a GP or a poor experience at a GP surgery or hospital. These concerns were distinct to the 12 people who raised formal complaints, which included detail on how to make a complaint, or following up the process of making a complaint – for example to the University Hospitals Sussex Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS).

A total of 23 people requested information and were sign-posted accordingly.

40 people took the time to share compliments about a service or different services.

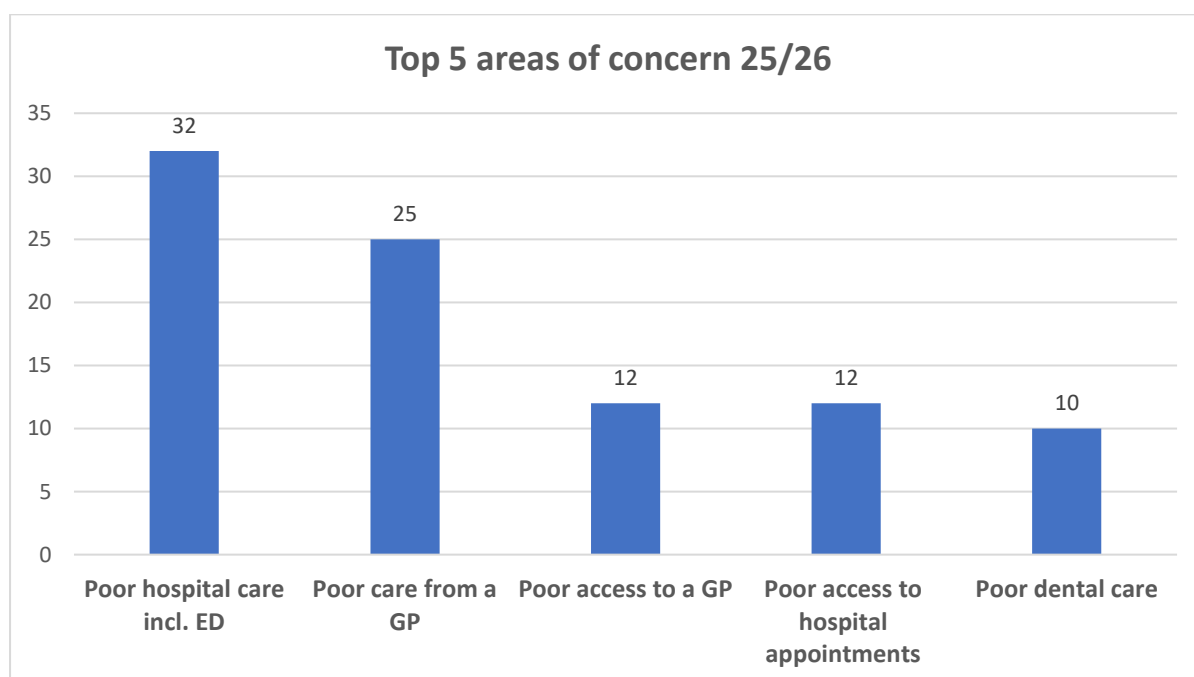


² This term refers to under-represented people who use or might potentially use health or social services and who are less likely to be heard by these service professionals and decision-makers. Seldom heard emphasises the responsibility of agencies to reach out to excluded people, ensuring that they have access to social care services and that their voices can be heard. Examples of seldom heard groups could include: particular ethnic minority groups, carers, people with disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, refugees/asylum seekers, people who are homeless, younger people and people with language barriers.

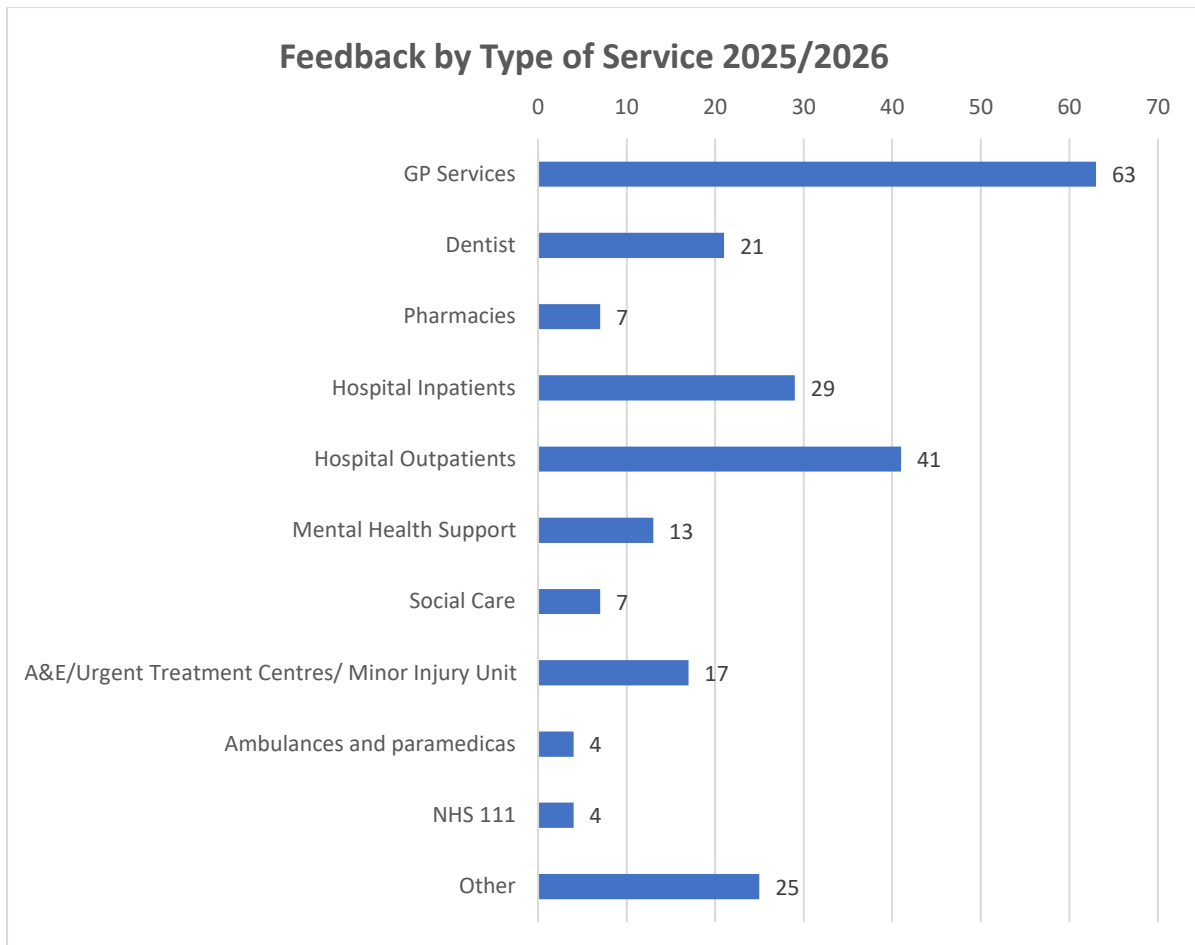
2. The nature of issues raised about NHS services

During the past year, there were concerns or complaints raised in several different areas. The five leading areas of concerns and related complaints raised, in descending order were:

1. **Poor hospital care** including ambulance waiting times, treatment waiting times, poor communication of cancelled appointments and the Emergency Department – 32 comments.
2. **Poor care from a GP** – 25 comments.
3. **Poor access to a GP** including waiting times for appointments – 12 comments.
4. **Poor access to hospital appointments** – 12 comments.
5. **Poor dental care** – 10 comments.



People were given the choice to select one or more services from a possible list of 10 services and an 'other' category (which for example, included comments about the availability of vaccinations, disabled parking at Hospitals/ GP surgery's, Musculoskeletal (MSK) services and menopause support). The following bar chart shows options selected and it demonstrates the range of services where people were sharing feedback on or seeking help about. As this was a check box from a list of services, the figures do not exactly align to the concerns and complaints above. Nonetheless, the main areas checked were about GP services, dentists and hospital concerns including outpatients and the Emergency Department:



3. People’s comments about their concerns

To complement the findings above, some direct quotes are shared below that relate to the services where most comments were received.

a) Poor care from a hospital (32 comments):



“I was admitted to RSCH with a stroke. I was neglected for 24hr. Left continually vomiting, with severe head pressure, some pain, injured from my fall, dehydrated and delirious. I was examined briefly, my injuries were not looked at, I was given medication, but nobody came to see if they were effective. (..) I am traumatised by the totally dreadful experience (..) My treatment was dreadful.”

“Went to A&E several times. Appalling & distressing. Most people being treated in corridors. No privacy, no dignity. Staff very busy & doing their best but seemed overwhelmed.”

"Had surgery on my ankle, went home for a few days then my artery burst. A&E missed it, it was a nurse who noticed it. Got sent to another Hospital for urgent surgery and was dumped in a corridor for the entire evening surrounded by drunks. Eventually had the surgery to cut and tie an artery, and they managed to sever my main nerve in my foot."

"I wanted to share my poor experience of ED care/aftercare. I recently had knee surgery and whilst it was successful, I was experiencing pain, redness, swelling [...] After speaking with my GP, I was advised to go to ED to make sure that it wasn't sepsis. Despite this, and the seriousness of sepsis and how quickly it takes hold, I wasn't prioritised and waited 6 hours. I had an x-ray which showed everything was OK and was finally discharged with advice that it was 'probably' not sepsis and that a prescription for antibiotics would be sent to me. Three days later and nothing! I then had to return to my GP (taking up an unnecessary appointment) to get the antibiotics that I'd been promised by the hospital. This really isn't an acceptable level of care from the hospital."

b) Poor quality of care from a GP (25 comments):



"Nothing went well. Impossible to get a face-to-face appointment with GP. Got a telephone consultation in the end. GP then referred me to incorrect specialist team. It took the specialist team three months to get back to me to advise me of GP's incorrect referral and said I would need to contact GP and start the whole process again. I tried, but was not able to speak to GP, so I wrote him a letter telling him what I had been told and asked him to call me and discuss further. Letter was hand delivered to surgery. Still nothing heard, no response at all from GP, I'm very disappointed in their lack of action, response or care."

"I have been having issues with my GP – I have been to my GP with injuries after a fall – I could not get an appointment and was told to go to A&E as a result and had broken ribs. I then went back to GP after another fall and presented with the same situation however reception staff told this fall is not an A&E matter. The advice given by reception staff seems inconsistent and left feeling confused"

c) Poor access to a GP appointment – including waiting times for appointments (12 comments):



"I have nothing bad to say about our doctors. The huge problem is getting an appointment! The phone lines open at 8.30, always a queue then fully booked by 8.40. As for the online system, I have tried before surgery opens at various time in the day and even during the night, they are always 'at capacity' for both recurring and new conditions. The only way I ever get an appointment is to go to the surgery in person, and even that does not always work".

"The waiting times to see a GP are too long: minimum 3-week wait in my surgery. And, I can't book online through the NHS app (as I used to be able to do) or book my own GP, which is my preference".

"Reception staff and GPs very friendly BUT long waits for GP appointments."

"I called my surgery at 2pm last Tuesday requesting a 'non urgent' appointment, non-urgent in my view means I do not need to see someone that day but soon. I was offered October 17th, the person asked why I wanted to see a GP and I explained and their advice was to call @ 8am the next day as I should see someone sooner, I have been trying this ever since. There is no telephone queue from 8am even though they are open, I was simply told by an automated message that the lines are busy and I was to call back, and then when I did get through @ 9:35 after having been trying since 8am today there was another automated message stating they have reached capacity for urgent appointments - this has been the same for the last four working days."

d) Poor access to Hospital appointments (12 comments):



"I was referred by my GP in August (to the Orthopaedic team at RSCH). It's now February and have been told (..) it's likely to be May or June for me to get an appointment. Waiting lists seem to fail to acknowledge that there is a human being waiting often in pain. My condition has significantly deteriorated since referral but no way to flag that at all. It's affecting all areas of my life."

"I still have not been seen despite waiting a very long time for a first appointment. I got fobbed off despite having 5/6 red flags for colon cancer and having a digestive system which has stopped working. Total cessation of bowel movements, which has had a knock-on effect on worsening my other conditions".

"The caller found out she had gallstones in July 2025, she saw a consultant who told her she needed them removed. Nothing happened. She relapsed in Feb 26, and got acute pancreatitis as a result of the gallstones and had a 2 week stay in RHSC. RSCH told her she needed them out and referred her for robotic surgery at the Princess Royal. She has heard nothing from the Princess Royal. The caller told us she was in massive amounts of pain and had never felt so awful".

e) Poor care from NHS dentists (10 comments):



"A mother contacted us on behalf of her disabled son who has been taken off the books of his dentist (due to illness and being unable to attend a few appointments) even though his mother had called to cancel. She has tried to discuss this with them, but they have not returned her calls."

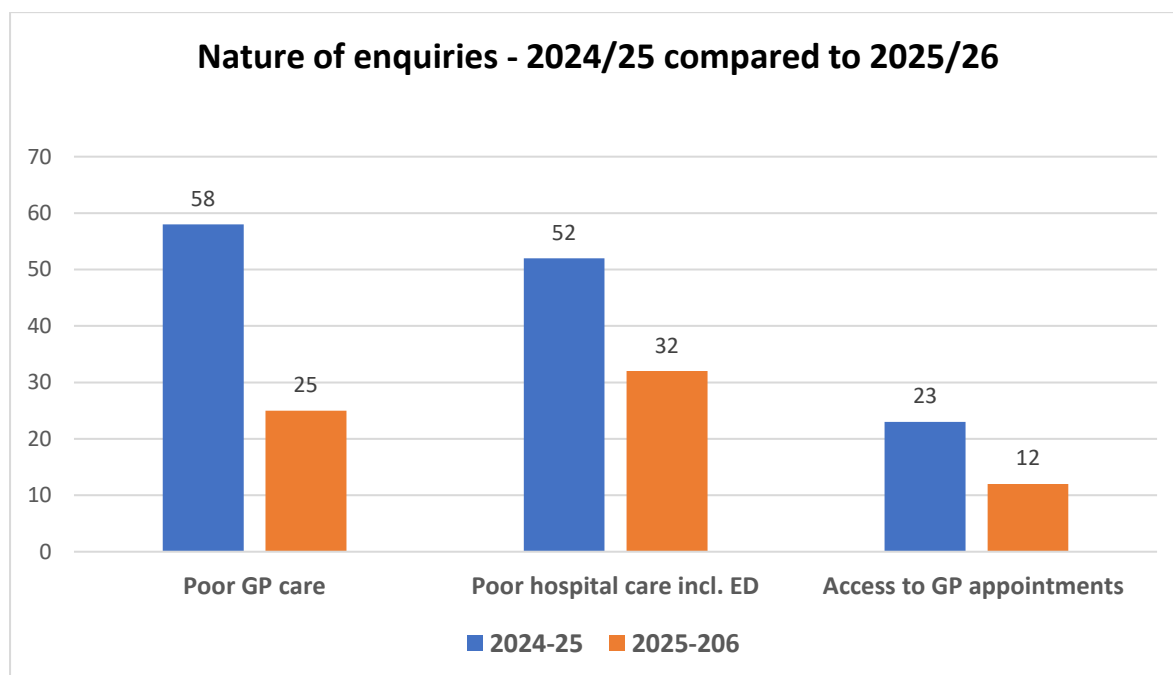
"They are insisting I have certain things done- x rays, hygiene appointments. And threatening that I will be removed from the practice".

"I am chronically ill & neurodivergent. I use a walking stick & find it difficult to climb stairs. (..) I've been registered with this dentist for over 10 years. The dentist will not accommodate me for appointments on the ground floor, I've asked, they just said no & keep making me go upstairs. I asked if I could have appointments in a different branch which has parking & is mostly ground level. I requested this as a reasonable adjustment. (...) I am unsure if they can refuse NHS treatment if my request is due to my disability needs"

4. Trends in issues raised

A year-long portrayal of the helpline reveals trends in the issues that are raised. Comparing the 2024-25 data to 2025-26, the top 5 concerns were similar with poor GP care and poor hospital care persisting as the main areas of concern. The

main area of difference were less concerns raised about social care and more concerns about access to hospital appointments. This may in part be due to receiving slightly less enquires this year.



5. Requests for information

Requests for information were rarely about the same issue. The exceptions were information about where to find NHS dental care and where you can access support for travel costs to get you to hospital appointments. Other requests included:

- A request about how to complain about a dental procedure.
- Information on costs of dental treatment.
- A request about how to access domiciliary dental services for housebound patients.
- Where to find information about after care for surgery.
- Information about where to get Covid Vaccinations.
- Getting support for a family member in a mental health ward.
- Where to get advice on advocacy following surgery.
- Where to access support for completing assessment forms for ADHD/ ASD.
- Information about 'your rights if being removed from a GP surgery'.
- Information about Sunday opening hours for pharmacies.
- A request from the Alzheimer's Society asking if it would be possible for A&E staff to flag dementia patients so that if a dementia patient presents at A&E

and are unable to recall that they have a diagnosis of dementia, that this is made known to staff.

- A request for information about accessing blood platelet treatment via the NHS.
- A request about finding advocacy support for GP appointments for their mother with Alzheimer's.
- A request for information about timeframes for making complaints.

6. Compliments about a service

There were 40 compliments raised by people. Compliments were less prevalent than the concerns however, the high quality and positive experiences of health and social care services could be an underestimate as the very nature of the 'helpline' is that it invites more negative than positive sentiment.

Compliments were most frequently received about GP care and hospital care including the Emergency Department:

GP compliments:



" Got an appointment to see a GP at our local surgery at a time that suited me. My husband has Alzheimer's, so it is difficult to ring at 8.30 and take the chance on getting an appointment at a time when I have a carer booked. However, not only did I get an appointment at a suitable time but the GP gave me time, listening to my concerns, making sensible and helpful suggestions, and she booked me a follow up appointment. It was all good."

"GP was very good at doing the best she could (...). She made me feel like I've been listened to, even though she couldn't speed up the waiting time."

"Wanted to share how impressed I was with my recent GP appointment/outcome. I had been experiencing numbness/tingling sensation down my right side for several weeks and was getting quite concerned that it was not going away. I requested a GP app via their online form and was called back the next day. My GP referred me for bloods and a scan. I received a call the next day to book an appointment at Hove Polyclinic for the Sunday (same week). I received all the results from my scan and bloods the

following week advising me that everything was fine and was then referred to MSK. To date, I have been highly impressed."

Hospital compliments:



"Received excellent care after a double hip operation, couldn't fault it. The wait was long, but the results are worth it!"

"I received treatment for skin cancer at Brighton General Hospital. It was excellent in every way. I was met and treated quickly. All staff were friendly and efficient. I can find no fault at all!"

"Just had a cardiology ablation procedure and I must say the whole experience was superb! Seen on time, all staff incredibly communicative, caring, attentive and skilled. The environment was excellent -although the procedure room was a little chilled. Couldn't fault anything!"

Emergency Department compliments:



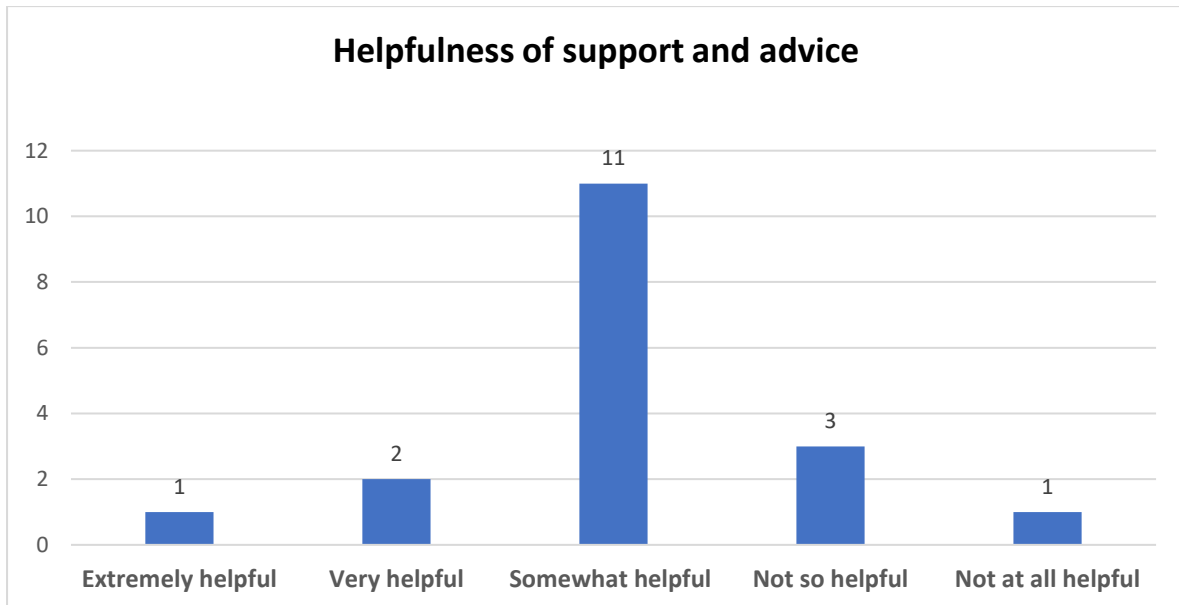
"I experienced severe and sudden pain in my abdomen late in the evening, after calling 999 the ambulance arrived within 30 minutes staffed by 2 polite very helpful paramedics who quickly decided that I needed to go to A and E. On arrival at the A and E blood tests were taken and we were made comfortable. All the staff were very polite, friendly and attentive, during our wait we were offered refreshments and were checked on by the staff. A CT scan was arranged and carried out after which a diagnosis was made. We cannot thank HCA, Nurses and Doctors enough for the care received on an obviously busy night in the department."

"Husband had an arterial bleed, from ambulance to AE to endoscopy dept, all have been excellent, saved my husband's life, forever grateful."

7. Outcomes from using the helpline

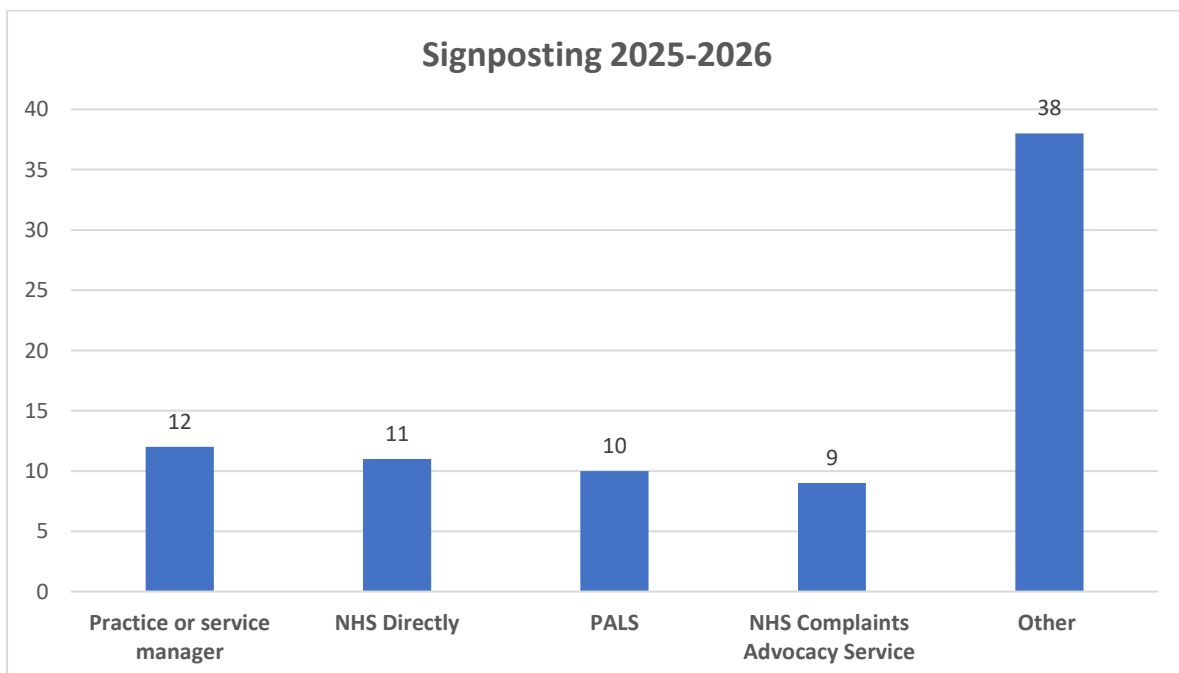
For those that rang the helpline and spoke with a member of our team, people were asked how helpful the support and advice that was provided to them. Of the 18 people who answered this question, the majority (78%) said it was 'somewhat

helpful', 'very helpful' or 'extremely helpful'. 3 people (17%) rated it as 'very helpful' or 'extremely helpful'.



As a further positive outcome from using the helpline, a total of 82 people (41%) were signposted to other organisations for further advice and support.

The chart below shows the number of places signposted (106 in total). It was possible to be signposted to more than one service.



The 'Other' category was varied and included Possibility People, the Dental Council, the Advocacy people, Brighton and Hove Wellbeing Service, and Sussex Integrated Care Board.

The following two examples show the effectiveness of this signposting:

Example 1. The caller found out they had gallstones in July 2025 when they saw a consultant who told them they needed to be removed. They heard nothing from the NHS and the caller relapsed in February 2026, with acute pancreatitis as a result of the gallstones. They had a two week stay in RSCH as a result of the pancreatitis. RSCH told the caller that they needed the gallstones removed and referred them for robotic surgery at the Princess Royal Hospital.

The caller contacted us in distress as they had heard nothing from the Princess Royal and reported losing weight and not being able to eat and being in massive amounts of pain. They told us they had received an appointment for 28th April at the outpatient's department at the RSCH via the NHS app however, there was nothing telling them what this appointment was about or why it was so far away. They told us their mental health was deteriorating and asked if there was anything Healthwatch could do to help?

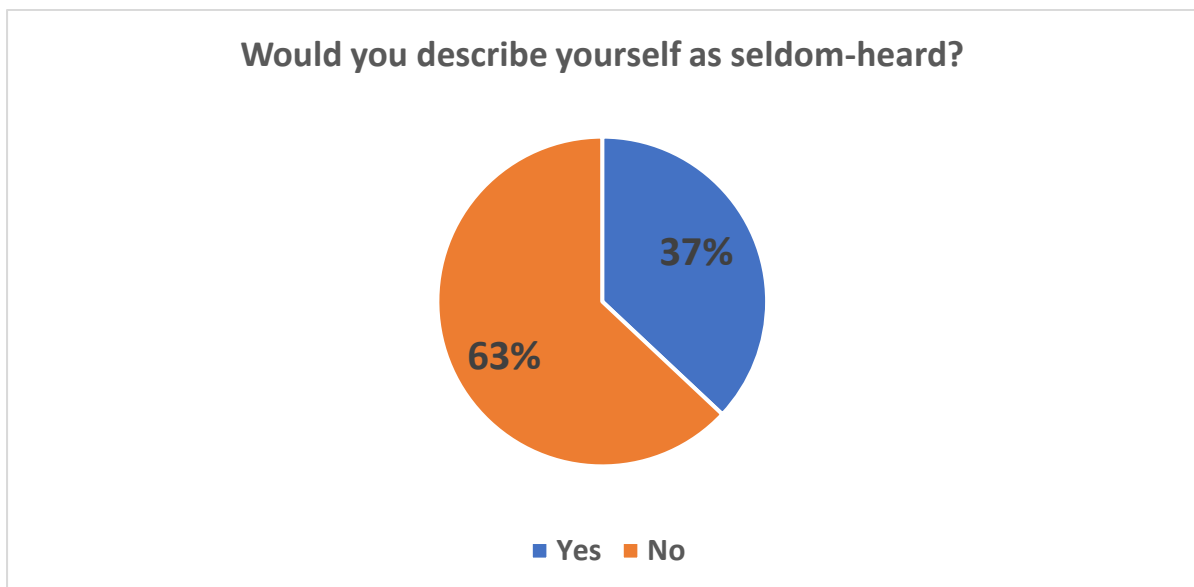
Healthwatch Brighton and Hove were able to contact the PALS team at RSCH and following conversations with the Princess Royal the caller now has an operation date for her gallstones to be removed. The caller was delighted with our help. They were so pleased that their operation is booked and they felt so much better knowing this will be resolved. The caller thanked Healthwatch 'from the bottom of her heart and knows how important Healthwatch is in keeping the NHS to account'.

Example 2. We spoke with a caller who asked for advocacy. They told us that they had been in contact with Advocacy People who were not replying and they told us this was affecting an upcoming court case. They told us they had tried to contact them 20+ times and were getting nothing back. They also told us that their social worker had recently changed and they were distressed about a lack of progress.

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove contacted the commissioners of Advocacy People, Brighton and Hove Council, who followed this case up with the Advocacy people. Advocacy People were able to identify the cause of the delay – related to the change in social worker and the issue was resolved. The caller was able

to access the support they needed. They were very grateful for Healthwatch Brighton and Hove in supporting them 'to get the advocacy they needed'.

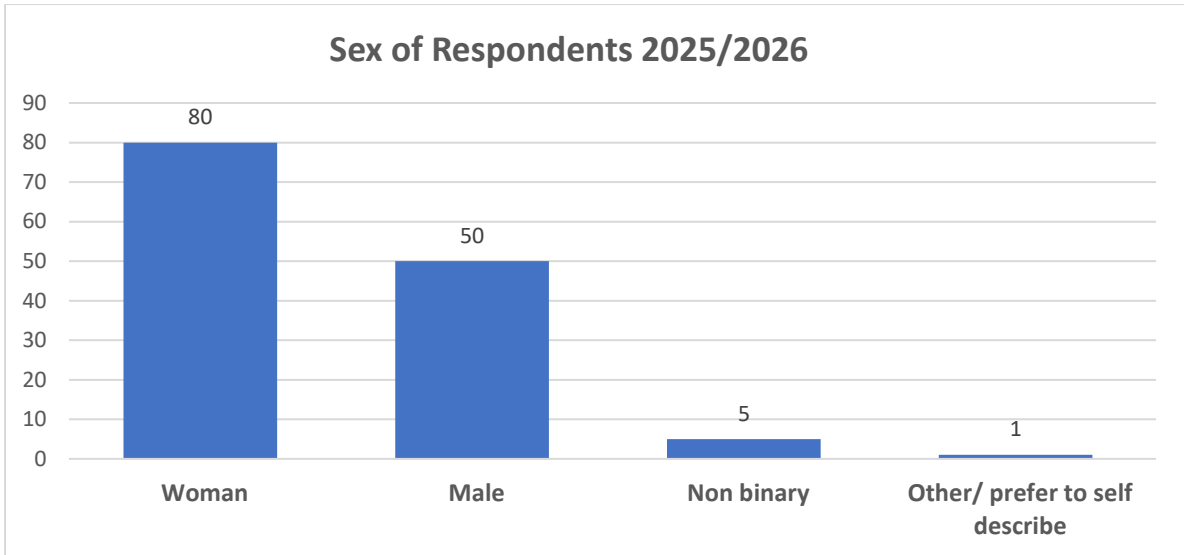
As a further indicator of outcome, the helpline was effective in hearing and responding to those described as seldom heard. This term could include particular ethnic minority groups, carers, people with disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, refugees/asylum seekers, people who are homeless, younger people and people with language barriers. As shown below, 37% or 33 of those who provided this information were described as seldom heard.



8. Demographic profile of people contacting the helpline

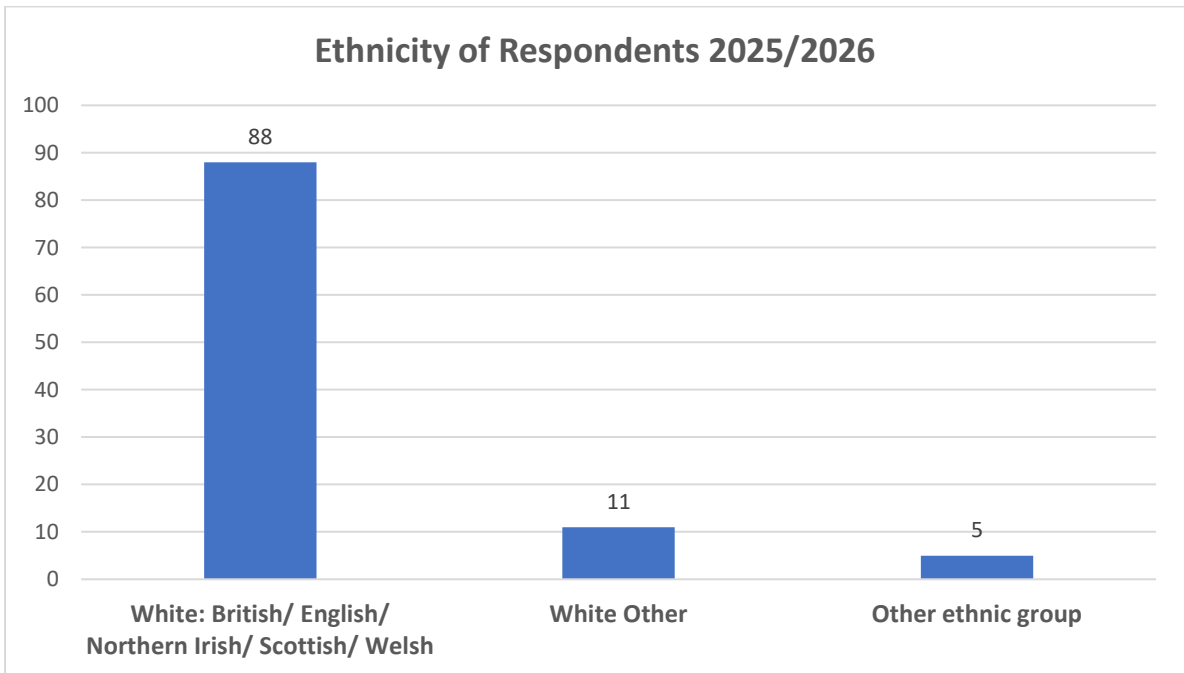
138 of our enquirers provided us with at least one indicator of their demographic profile³ – the most common response was regarding their sex.

³ 138 people responded to the question on their sex, but slightly less responded to the other demographic questions.

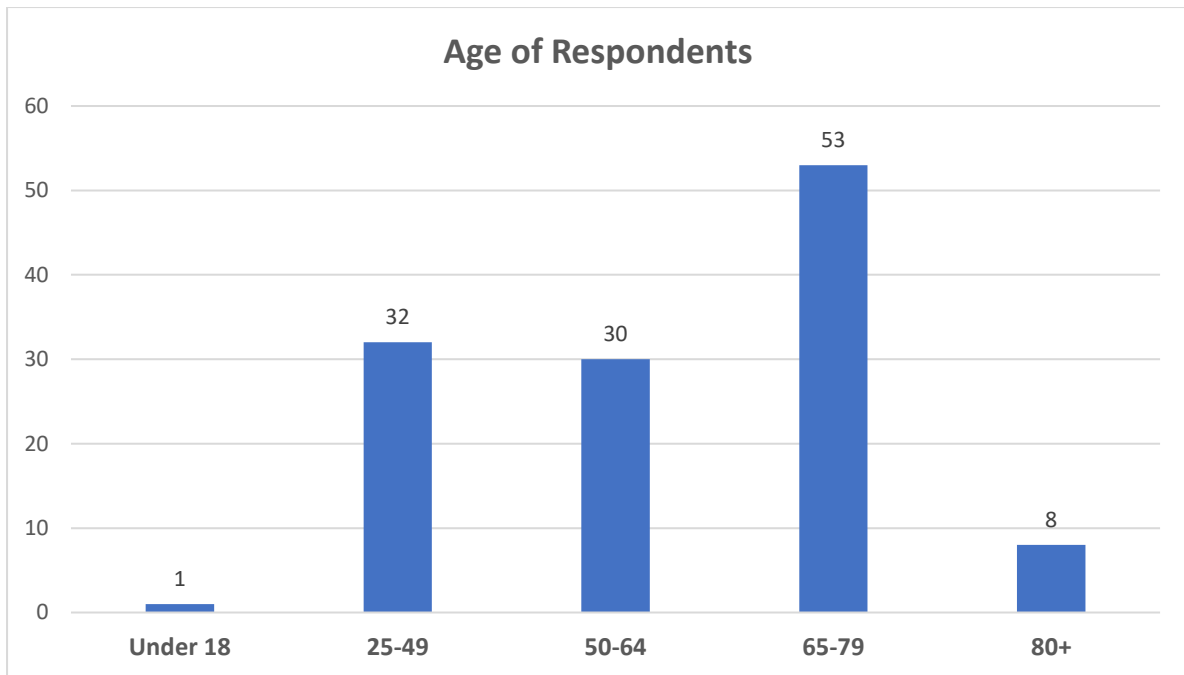


Ethnicity and Age

Of those contacting the helpline, and who provided their demographic data, most self-described themselves as women (80 or 58%)⁴, of a White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh background (88 or 76%), and between the age of 50 and 64 years (53 or 43%)

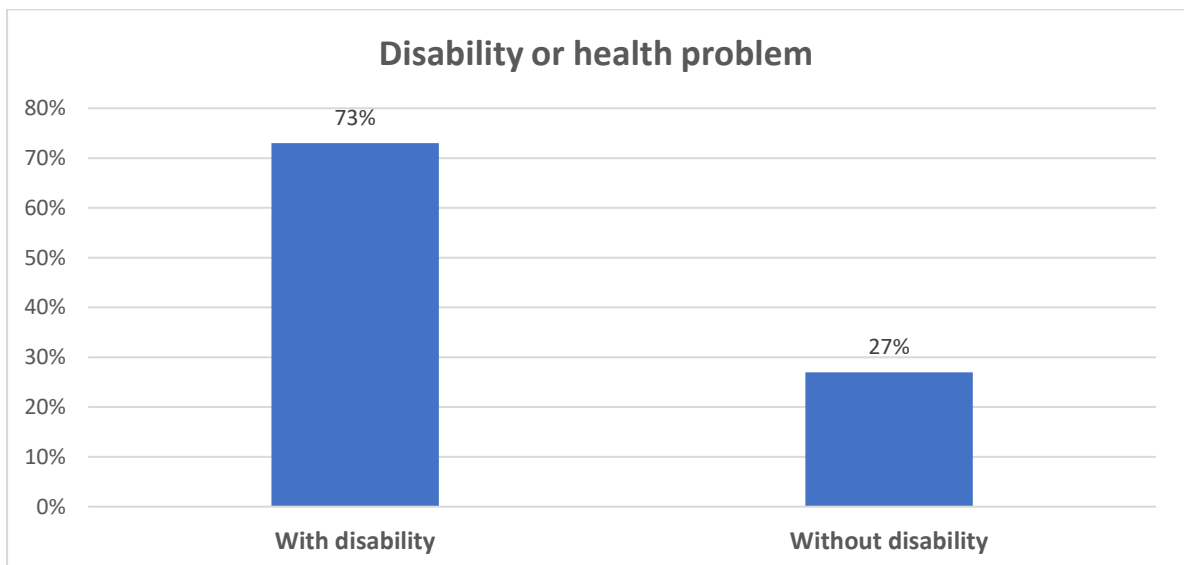


⁴ All % are calculated from those that provided an answer to this question and exclude those who preferred not to say



Disability

From the 77 respondents that answered this question, over 70% (53 people or 73%) had a disability or health problem that has lasted or is expected to last at least 12 months, with 35 people said it was limiting their day-to-day activities 'a lot' and 17 by 'a little'. One person did not specify how much their day-to-day activities were limited.



Sex assigned at birth and sexual orientation

The majority said their sex was the same as that assigned at birth (115 or 92%) and 18 people or 18% were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.



24 people (or 35%) also described them themselves as carers - people who look after or give unpaid support to others because of a long-term conditions or mental health conditions or problems related to old age.

To conclude, Healthwatch Brighton and Hove’s helpline about local health services is beneficial for local residents as it provides access to information, guidance, and support regarding available medical services and resources. It helps individuals find appropriate healthcare providers, understand service options, and navigate a very complex health system. The helpline can also offer advice on urgent care, referrals, and preventive health measures. Overall, the helpline enhances community health literacy and ensures timely assistance for health-related concerns as this report demonstrates.

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove
113 Queens Road,
Brighton
BN1 3XG


www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

01273 234 040

office@hwbh.co.uk

 @HealthwatchBrightonandHove

 @healthwatchbh.bsky.social

 @healthwatchbh

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Brighton and Hove