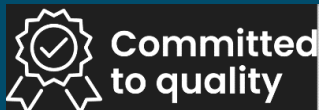


Helpline enquires to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2024 – March 31st 2025



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Dr Lester Coleman
Lester@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

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Headlines – Helpline enquiries to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2024 – March 31st 2025

- Between April 1st 2024 and March 31st 2025, we received 228 enquiries to our helpline.
- In October 2024 we changed our helpline to make it easier for service users to either provide 'feedback' or 'look for help'. This means this report is an amalgamation of two datasets (before the change and after the change).
- Enquiries were mostly a combination of feedback through our website (138 people), emails (40), phone call messages (23), and at face-to-face events (20). The remaining were other means such as by post or in person.

The majority of people contacting the helpline were:

- Raising a concern or negative experiences about a service (130 people).
- Requesting information (41 people).
- Making compliments about a service (33 people).
- Raising formal complaints (23 people).
- Whistleblowing (1 person).

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

1. Poor quality of care from a GP (58 people).
2. Poor hospital care including ambulance waiting times, treatment waiting times, A&E, and poor communication of cancelled appointments (52).
3. Lack of an NHS dentist including emergency dental care (25).
4. Poor access to a GP appointment, including waiting times for appointments (23).
5. Social care such as care at home and in care homes (18).

Compared to 2023-24, the top 4 concerns were almost identical with poor GP care and poor hospital care persisting as the main areas of concern. The main area of difference was concerns raised about social care which was more evident this past year.

As a positive outcome from using the helpline, (64%) said it was 'somewhat helpful', 'very helpful' or 'extremely helpful' (22% 'very helpful' or 'extremely helpful') and a total of 79 people (32%) were signposted for further advice and support.

37% or 51 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 161 people¹ who answered these questions, not from the total number of enquiries²):
 - Of those contacting the helpline, and who provided their demographic data, most self-described themselves as women (93 or 60%), of a White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh background (98 or 82%), and between the age of 50 and 64 years (52 or 34%).
 - Just over one-half (66 or 56%) had a disability, with 15 people said it was limiting their day-to-day activities 'a lot' and 9 by 'a little'.
 - The majority said their sex was the same as that assigned at birth (114 or 98%) and 71 or 76% said they were heterosexual. 15 (14%) people were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.

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

² Percentages do not include 'prefer not to say'.

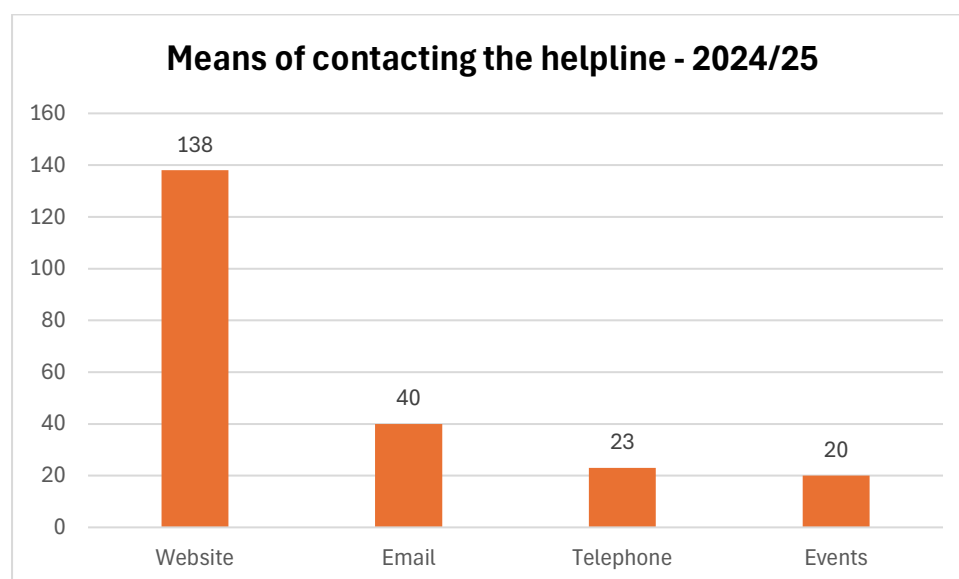
Main report – Helpline enquiries to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2024 – March 31st 2025

Between April 1st 2024 and March 31st 2025, we received 228 enquiries to our helpline (a decrease from 365 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 (138 people), email (40), phone (23) or through sharing their experiences at face-to-face events (20). The remaining were through other means such as by post or in person. All enquiries are handled by two experienced, trained and DBS checked Healthwatch volunteers, with support given by Healthwatch staff.

In October 2024, we the changed way of contacting Healthwatch Brighton and Hove to provide feedback on services or access our helpline. All feedback and information from the helpline is stored together in the same online database.

This means that this report is an amalgamation of two datasets (before the change and after the change). For the purposes of this report, we refer to the term 'helpline' for all enquiries.



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

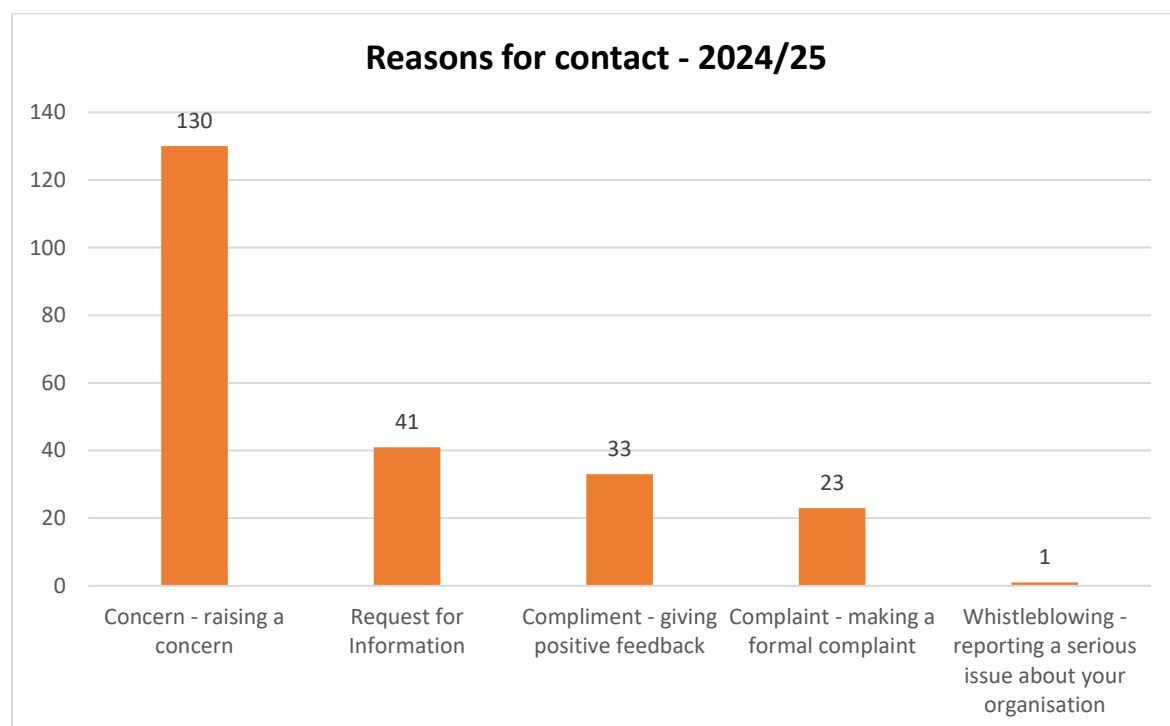
profile (for those that offered this information), and whether people were 'seldom heard'³.

1. Reasons why people contacted the helpline

The majority of people contacting the helpline were raising a concern about a service (130). 'Concerns' were people reporting negative experiences such as difficulties in accessing a GP or a poor experience at a hospital. These were distinct to the 23 people who raised formal complaints, which included detail on how to make a complaint, or following up the process of making a complaint – usually to the University Hospitals Sussex [Patient Advice and Liaison Service](#) (PALS).

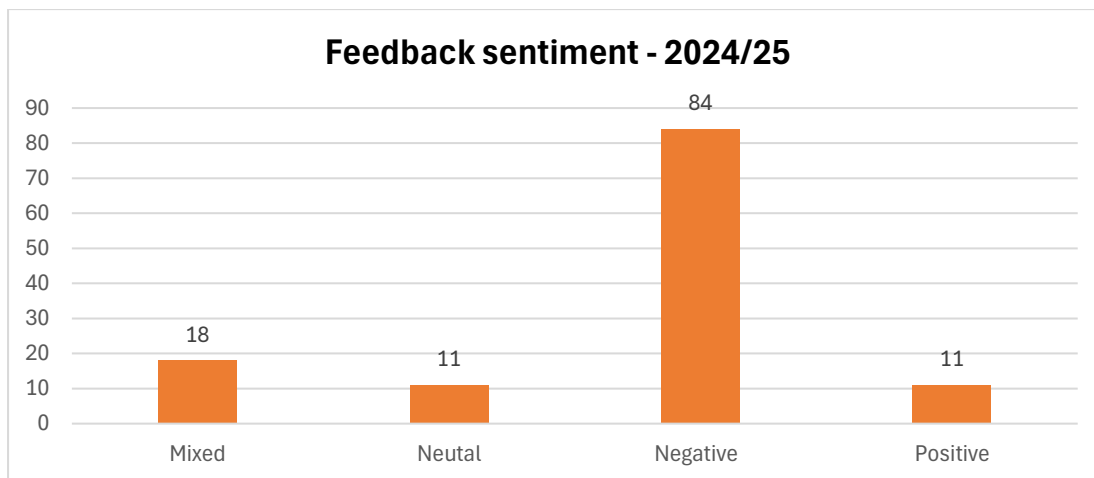
A total of 41 people requested information and were sign-posted accordingly.

Some people (33) took the time to raise compliments about a service.



³ 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.

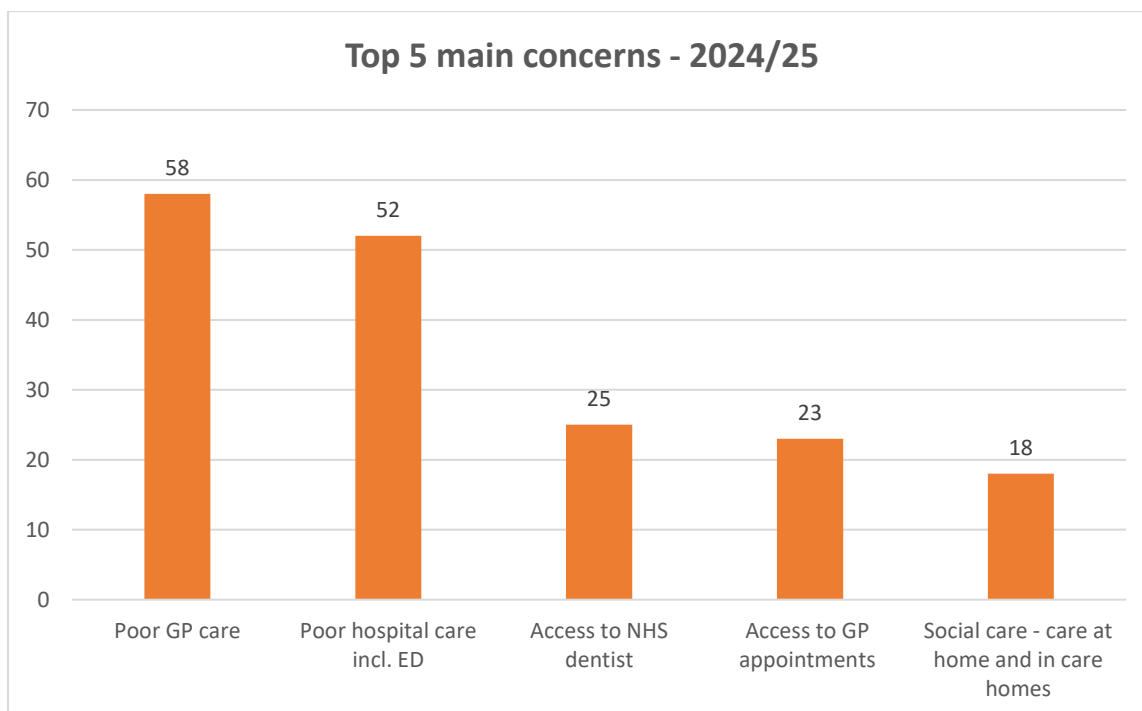
Of those that could be categorised, there were 18 mixed comments, 84 negative comments (in line with the concerns above), 11 neutral, and 11 positive comments.



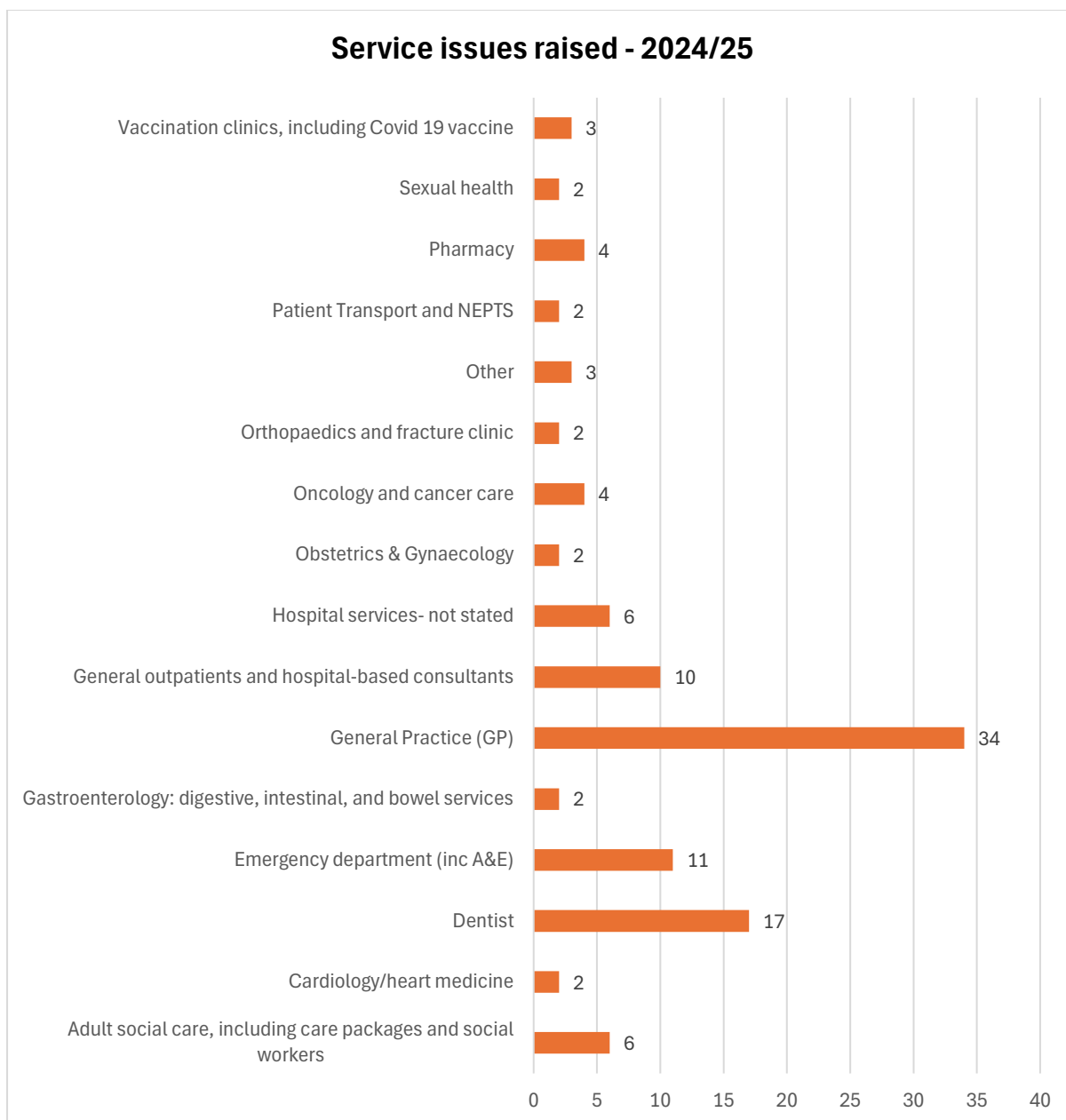
2. The nature of issues raised about NHS services

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 quality of care from a GP – 58 comments.
2. Poor hospital care including ambulance waiting times, treatment waiting times, poor communication of cancelled appointments and the Emergency Department – 52 comments.
3. Lack of an NHS dentist – 25 comments
4. Poor access to a GP appointment including waiting times for appointments – 23 comments.
5. Social care concerns such as care at home and in care homes – 18 comments.



People were given the choice to select one or more services from a possible 73 which related to their enquiry. The following shows those selected by at least 2 people. It demonstrates the range of services where people were sharing feedback or seeking help. 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, below are some direct quotes that relate to the services where most comments were received.

a) Poor quality of care from a GP (58 comments):



"I want to complain about the treatment I experienced at my GP. I had been experiencing abdominal pain and contacted my GP for an appointment. When I arrived, I discovered that I hadn't been booked to see a GP at all but would be seen by a paramedic. I had not been advised of this. He examined me and told me it could be

appendicitis, but he couldn't be sure. He could only offer me advice to go to A&E if I was worried or go home and see if things got worse. This felt entirely unsatisfactory, and I feel that the care I received fell well below the standard of good care I should expect."

"My family & I keep being prescribed medication at hospitals such as King's College & The Maudsley, which are meant to be managed locally by our GP. However, when asked the GP won't prescribe the items, even though a consultant at a higher level within the NHS has written to them to ask for this to happen."

"I wanted to raise my concerns about this practice in Brighton [...] I had a blood test, and the results were due in the same week. I found the results online, but not a single follow-up from the practice to go over the results despite trying to contact them."

b) Hospital care (52 comments):



"I've been messed around for years by the podiatry department at Brighton General. One minute telling me I have arthritis then saying I don't. Getting angry with me for not following the treatment plan they gave me then admitting they never gave me one without any apology. I'm in agony a lot of the time and don't know what to do about it."

"I'm in desperate need of help from the Royal Sussex County Hospital where I currently have a referral and I've been told it could take up to 60 weeks!"

"My husband has been suffering from unexplained chest pain. He was due to go in for an angioplasty but he never had the op in the end, they prepped him up and then at 5pm they told him that they shut the department then and that they had to cancel as they were too busy, so he has to get another appointment. This is appalling given that it concerns his heart, what if he has a stroke or heart attack whilst waiting? The communication was very poor, and we felt a lack of care or compassion."

"I wish to make a complaint about the RSCH. It is impossible to get through to the outpatient booking line. I have spent hours waiting and have been cut off, put through to the incorrect department, even though I have dialled the correct number. The information

sent by mail is incorrect and you end up by going around in circles. This is unacceptable, time wasting and frustrating."

"At the end of September, I was taken by ambulance to A&E. Dreadful experience. Nearly 25 hours on a trolley in a corridor being ignored. Many others in same situation."

c) Lack of an NHS dentist including emergency dental care (25 comments):



"There are not enough dentists working for NHS patients."

"I have been unable to find an NHS dentist for the last 10 years...I feel very angry that NHS dental service have been allowed to virtually disappear."

"In Hove and there is no dentist currently accepting new patients. My original dentist is now a private dentist and do not provide NHS services and my mother needs to find a dentist who can provide her dentures asap as she will be going through a procedure by specialists to remove all her teeth."

d) Poor access to a GP appointment – including waiting times for appointments (23 comments):



"The Charter Medical Centre have stopped using the NHS app for booking appointments so you cannot choose which GP to see and it's now hard to book, change and cancel appointments".

"Our main concern is that you can phone dead on 8.30 am to be 20 something in a queue request a call back, only to be told on the call back there are no appointments left!! How can that be it's ridiculous, so in the end you just give up and deal with pain or symptoms."

"I rarely access the GP services, but the one time in the blue moon that I need to, it is almost impossible to try and get through or to get an appointment. How can we be 21st century and we still can't book online?"

"No GP appointments and easier to go to A&E. The system is completely broken and people are dying as a result."

e) Social care issues (18 comments):



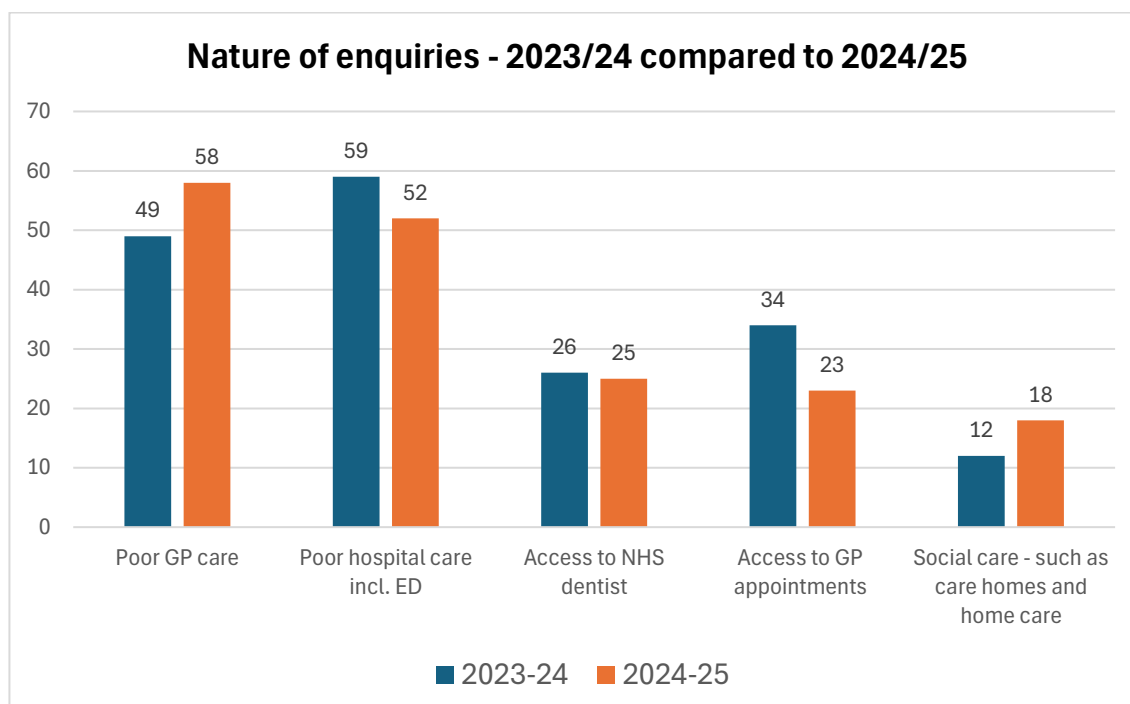
"My brother is still virtually a recluse in his room and barely goes out into the community. This was supposedly to prevent further bed sores. The staff would rather sit around all day drinking tea and coffee and eating."

"I am concerned that my son who is autistic, is being relocated by social services to supported accommodation in Brighton from Lewisham where he currently resides."

"I asked for help to get in the bath to shower. I got no help whatsoever apart from the OH suggested a grab rail to keep me steady but as I couldn't get in the bath in the first place I didn't see the relevance of that...The second one said ask a friend or relative to help me in and out. There's dignity out the window."

4. Trends in issues raised

A year-long portrayal of the helpline can reveal trends over the issues that are raised. Comparing the 2023-24 data to 2024-25, 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 comments about poor access to GP appointments and more concerns raised about social care which was more evident this past year.



5. Requests for information

Requests for information were rarely about the same issue. The exception was information about Covid boosters:

- Request for information about Covid boosters.
- Where to access a Covid booster.
- Access to Covid booster jabs.

Other requests were:

- About a hysterectomy for a young person.
- How to engage patients at the Pulmonary Rehabilitation project (Sussex Community Foundation Trust).
- Making a complaint against two Woodingdean Surgery Doctors.
- Information on NHS dentists.
- Information about an ongoing investigation about the caller's nephew who died in hospital and they still have no information 18 months on.
- A social worker asking how to get their client registered with a GP as the closest GP is not accepting new patients.
- Getting a parent removed from a care home and back into their own accommodation.
- How to access hard copies of government NHS consultations which are all online.
- Day Centre Costs with 1-1 Support.
- Guidance and support concerning the NHS refund for private care.

6. Compliments about a service

There were compliments raised by 33 people.

Compliments were less prevalent than the concerns and complaints. The high quality and positive experiences of health and social care services could be an underestimate as the very nature of the 'helpline' invites more negative than positive sentiment.

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

GP compliments:



"[My] doctor was amazing! I can't thank him enough. He was caring, understanding, he gave me 25 minutes of his valuable time without the slightest hint of a rush or that I was wasting his time. His advice was helpful and he has booked me a follow up appointment. It was wonderful, exactly what I would hope from a GP."

"My GP service is very good. I've been able to get appointment and they will give advice without being pushy."

"I am writing to express my heartfelt gratitude and offer my highest recommendation for a member of staff at Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (SPFT) in addition to my local GP."

Hospital compliments:



"I was very impressed with the overall efficiency and short time frame afforded to my relative."

"I was admitted to RSCH A&E and onto Acute Respiratory Unit for 6 days in November. They and NHS sometimes get terrible reviews, but I had the most wonderful support and care from everyone (with very few exceptions) who dealt with me - from nurses, healthcare support workers, doctors, catering, porters and anyone in-between. They were all so patient, kind - and jolly!"

"Nothing but praise for both my surgery The Charter Medical Centre and my two local hospitals The County Hospital Brighton and Brighton General."

Emergency Department compliments:

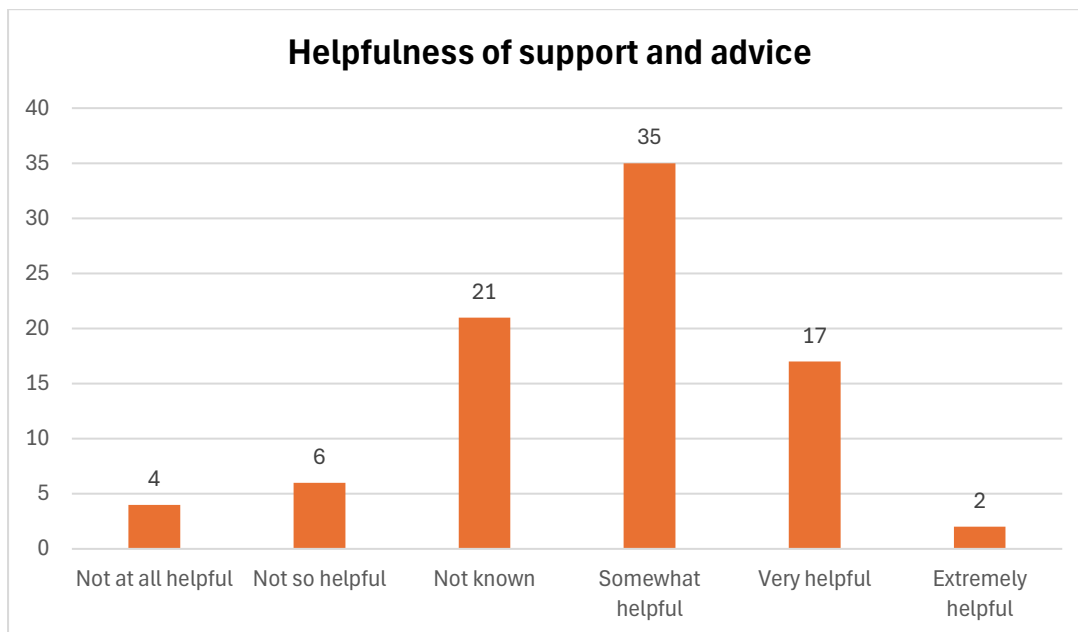


"I wanted to share my experience of ED last week. First off, I want to say how amazing all the staff were, from the receptionist, to the nurses and clinicians, they were all incredibly helpful and caring."

"A+E -what went well? The nurses are absolutely lovely, and are very helpful".

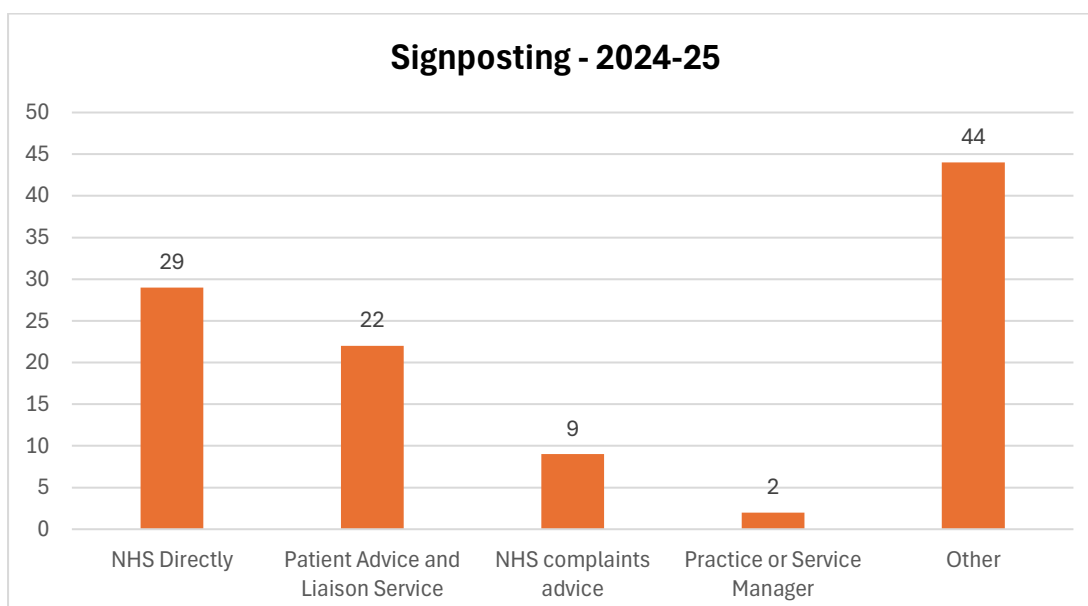
7. Outcomes from using the helpline

People were asked how helpful the support and advice that was provided to them. 85 people replied, with the majority (64%) saying it was 'somewhat helpful', 'very helpful' or 'extremely helpful'. 19 people (22%) rated it as 'very helpful' or 'extremely helpful'.



As a further positive outcome from using the helpline, a total of 79 people (35%) were signposted 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 the CQC Healthwatch Team, MIND, General Medical Council, Age UK and Possability People.

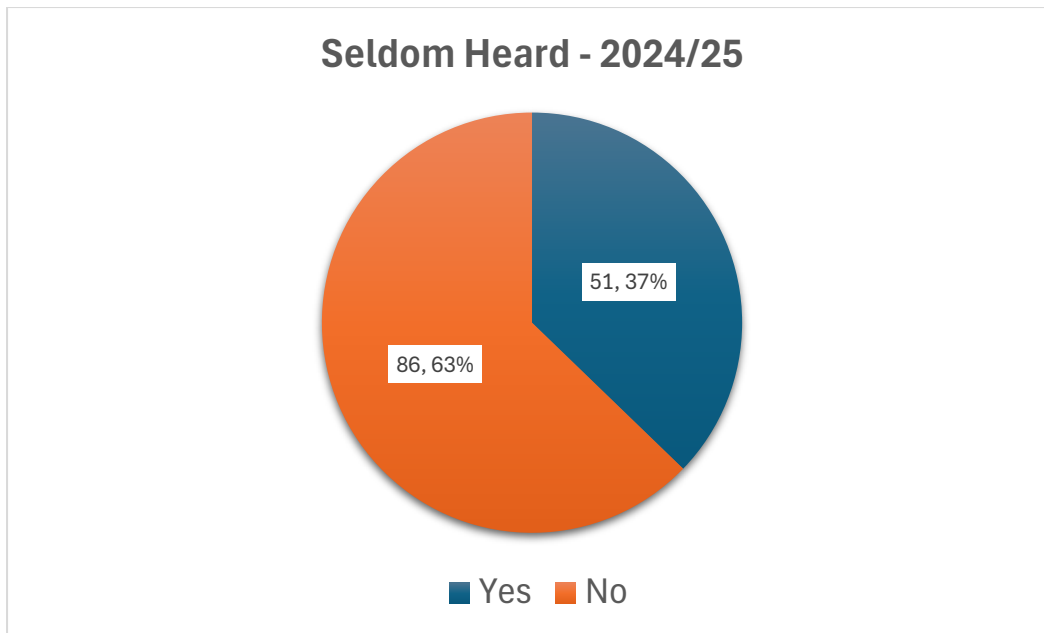
The following two examples show the effectiveness of this signposting:

[Example 1 – From the helpline moderator] *“Caller was concerned re: a treatment plan that her dentist has planned for her. She feels that she is being pressured to have things done that she does not need or cannot afford. I advised the caller to contact the practice manager directly and explain how she feels, ask for a breakdown of why she needs the treatment and the cost. If she is not satisfied with the response and cannot sort it out with them then to get back in touch and we can signpost her to NHS dentist complaints.”*

[Example 2 – From the helpline moderator] *“Caller saw their GP with a minor problem with his finger, but it interferes with everything he tries to do. The GP said to leave it with her, that she would arrange for the lump to be cut out or frozen out as a minor operation. A few days later, he had a letter from the GP saying that no one is available to carry out this treatment and his “best bet” was “to go private”. He cannot afford private treatment and would like to be referred to the dermatology dept in the NHS and wondered if he was entitled to that.”*

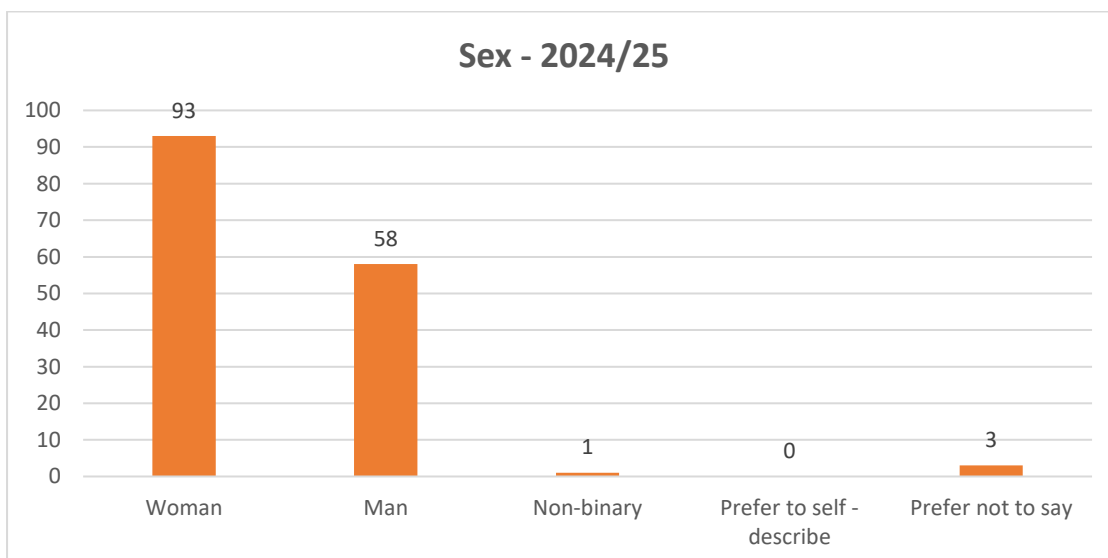
The helpline moderator advised them to email the surgery with a request to be referred to NHS dermatology dept. There is no process to be seen in dermatology with cosmetic issues but for conditions that affect daily activities of living it is possible. If he has no luck with this then he was advised to contact NHS Sussex for them to investigate.

As a further indicator of outcome, the helpline was effective in hearing and responding to those described as seldom-heard. This term was explained earlier but 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 51 of those who provided this information were described as seldom-heard.



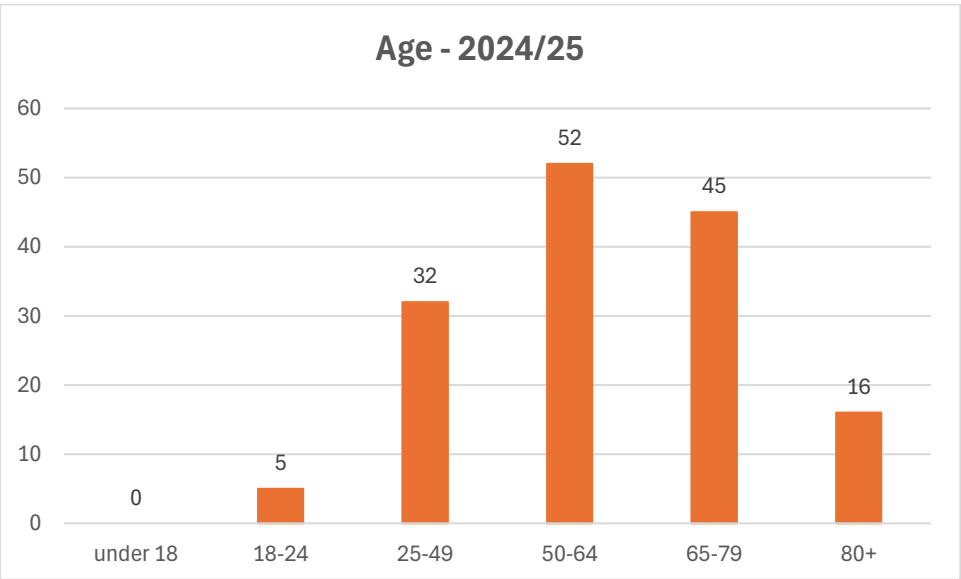
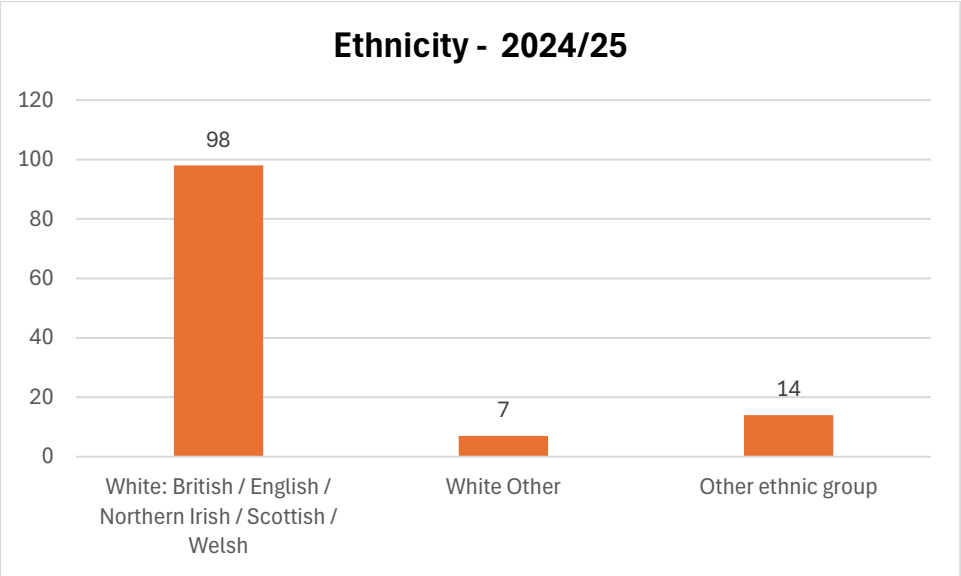
8. Demographic profile of people contacting the helpline

Up to 161 of our enquirers added at least one indicator of their demographic profile⁴ – the most common response was regarding their sex.



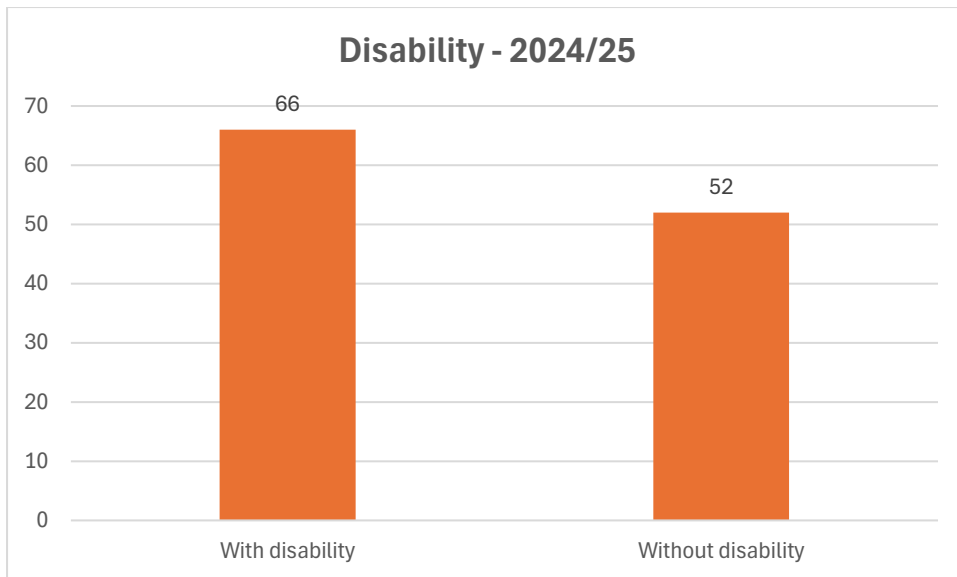
⁴ 161 people responded to the question on their sex, but slightly less responded to the other demographic questions.

Of those contacting the helpline, and who provided their demographic data, most self-described themselves as women (93 or 60%)⁵, of a White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh background (98 or 82%), and between the age of 50 and 64 years (52 or 34%).

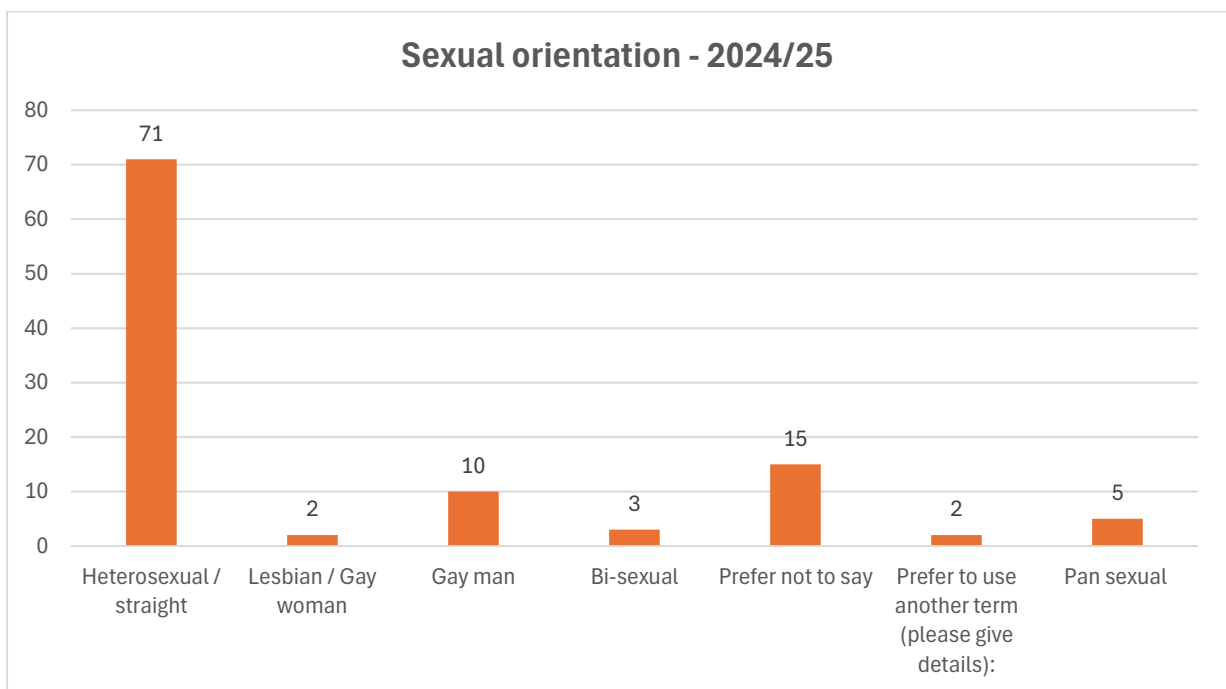


Just over one-half (66 or 56%) had a disability, with 15 people said it was limiting their day-to-day activities ‘a lot’ and 9 by ‘a little’⁶.

⁵ All % are calculated from those that provided an answer to this question and exclude those who preferred not to say
⁶ Distinction in disability introduced with the new changes to the helpline.



The majority said their sex was the same as that assigned at birth (114 or 98%) and 15 or 14% were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.



With the changes in the helpline, a new question on unpaid carers was added – during the period from the end of October 2024 to March 31st 2025, 8 people or 15% who answered the questions were carers.

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