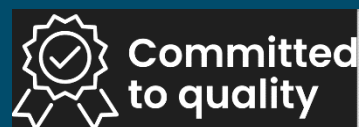


How your stories have helped to improve services

How Healthwatch uses your feedback

December 2023



We would like to extend our warmest thanks to everyone who has shared their story with us.

All feedback matters. Sometimes a single story can result in change.

If you have a story, experience, please share it with us:

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Telephone: 01273 234040

Facebook: @healthwatchbrightonandhove

Twitter: @HealthwatchBH

Website: www.healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

1. Summary

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove collects patient stories, experiences, concerns and ideas about health and social care all year round on a wide range of topics.

In this report, we describe what we have been doing with some of your feedback this year. It's through your feedback that we are empowered to act and to seek changes and improvements to services.

What we achieve on your behalf is delivered by 6 staff members and over 30 volunteers. It's also thanks to other local organisations who we work with, including [Switchboard](#), [Sussex Interpreting Services](#), [Friends, Families and Travellers](#), [Bridging Change](#), the [Trust for Developing Communities](#) and many more. And it's also thanks to our colleagues in [Healthwatch West Sussex](#) and [Healthwatch East Sussex](#), our partners at local hospitals, [NHS Sussex](#) and [Healthwatch England](#).

We've gathered your feedback by attending public and partner events, such as the [Brunswick Festival](#) and [Ageing Well festival](#), through surveys, face-to-face and telephone interviews, focus groups, deliberative engagement workshops, social media and via our Helpline which is available online and over the phone.

Between 1st April to 31st December 2023 our patient engagement has included:

- we received nearly 300 enquiries to our helpline (phone calls, feedback through our website and emails). The majority of people were raising a concern or complaint about a service but people also sought advice and guidance about health and social care services.

- we spoke with 50 people at the [Brunswick Festival](#) (August 19th 2023), explaining more about what we do, and hearing about people's 'burning issues'.
- 13 people attended our Ageing Well event and shared their experiences of using services with us.
- we spoke to 11 people about maternity services, interviewed 45 about dementia services and 127 people about Direct Payments.
- we heard from over 40 people at an event exploring Patient Participation Groups (which are groups of patients who support GP practices, ensuring they hear from patients).
- we have interviewed people about their experiences of pharmacy services, maternity, and the Lousia Martindale Building.
- we have spoken to over 100 people about the home care they receive.
- we were invited to attend and present at the Older Peoples' Council and local Osteoporosis Meeting.
- And much more.

Within this report, we refer to a number of organisations who we have shared your stories with. To help you understand who they are, and how they use your feedback, we have provided some definitions and descriptions below:

Commissioners and [commissioning](#). Commissioning is the process of planning, agreeing and monitoring health and social care services. Commissioning is undertaken by a range of organisations who make decisions based on the health-needs of local people which is informed by your experiences. Commissioners are employed to gather intelligence, make decisions, award contracts and monitor performance. Services can be commissioned for a few thousand people, while for rare disorders, services are secured nationally. Find out more about [who commissions NHS services](#).

Providers. The NHS is made up of a wide range of organisations specialising in delivering different types of services for patients. Providers include GPs, Dentists, NHS Trusts, Local Authorities and many more. We share your experiences directly with providers.

[Integrated Care System \(ICS\)](#) ICS's came into force on 1 July 2022, replacing Clinical Commissioning Groups. For Sussex, the ICS is called Sussex Health and Care which serves a population of more than 1.7 million people. Our ICS works in [partnership](#) across Sussex, as well as within and across the populations of Brighton and Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex. Our ICS's ambition is to bring more integrated and joined-up services to people, to ensure they receive the best

possible experience and are supported to maintain their health. We attend many meetings run by our ICS where we use your feedback to support decisions.

NHS Sussex. The ICS includes a new Integrated Care Board called [NHS Sussex](#) that aims to improve the way the NHS plan and pay for local services, and to better support local NHS organisations to give people the care they need. We routinely meet with colleagues at NHS Sussex where we discuss your concerns and identify projects to explore these in more detail.

Primary Care. Primary care services provide the first point of contact in the healthcare system, acting as the ‘front door’ of the NHS. Primary care includes general practice (GPs), community or high street pharmacy, dental services, and optometry (eye health) services.

Primary Care Network. A PCN is where a group of GP practices work together with community, mental health, social care, pharmacy, hospital and voluntary services in their area to meet the needs of local people.

Patient Participation Group. A PPG consists of patients who wish to be involved in a local GP practice, taking an active role in developing local health services.

2. Some of the impacts that your stories have had

GPs (doctors)

In September, we attended the St Peter’s Patient Participation Group (PPG) event, which was a special meeting to discuss the opening of a new building in spring 2024. This will see the St Peter’s and Albion Street practices start to operate from a single premises. The two GP Practices formally merged in October 2021.



As well as hearing patient’s concerns and questions about the merger, we learnt about recent British Medical Association (BMA) guidelines to GPs which say that GPs should not be seeing more than 25 patients per session.

What has happened?

We approached those who are responsible for commissioning and managing primary care services, which includes GP practice. We asked them what the BMA guidelines will mean for patients who are already having problems getting GP

appointments. We also flagged this with Healthwatch England who have agreed to monitor it.

What next?

We are continuing to work with NHS Sussex to understand more about changes to general practice. Our chief concern is that patient access is improved as a result, not made worse. We will share any useful information that we receive on our website and newsletter.

Separately, we have already formed a good work relationship with staff at St Peters Surgery and will work closely with them on the opening of the new practice premises and how this is communicated to patients.

[Read our report following our visit to St Peter's PPG](#)


We continue to collate your feedback about GP services across the city

and use this to flag concerns or questions to those who are responsible for overseeing changes to Primary Care across the city. We monitor reports published by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to look for any local practices which have received poorer ratings and we share your feedback with CQC to help them conduct their inspections.

What has happened?

In April, patients began to contact us with their concerns about WellBN Medical Practice following its merger with Benfield Valley Healthcare Hub, (which took place in October 2022). Patients told us about their difficulties booking appointments and getting repeat prescriptions. We shared these with Primary Care Leads who agreed to speak with the practice. We also shared your stories with the CQC who carried out an inspection of the practice in May, and we were pleased to see that the practice was rated as 'Good'. We continue to monitor the practice but have noted that patient feedback has started to improve.

People told us:



"From 2012 to circa April 2023, I had been a patient of WellBN. I have switched to Charter Medical Centre. What was once a good practice seems to have steadily declined."

In September, we asked questions about The Broadway Surgery which was recently rated as "Requires Improvement" by the CQC and received assurances from Primary Care Commissioners that the practice was receiving the support it needs to help it put in place actions to make improvements.

What next?

We will continue to listen to your concerns and raise these with those who are responsible for overseeing changes to Primary Care across the city and CQC, so please do share your feedback on GPs with us.

You can visit our website to read recent reports published by the Care Quality Commission, who have inspected local GP practices, including:

- [**Regency Surgery \(rated as "Good"\)**](#)
- [**The Broadway Surgery \(rates as "Requires Improvement"\)**](#)
- [**Well BN Medical Practice \(rated as "Good"\)**](#)

Earlier this year, we held a workshop with local people to help Primary Care Networks (PCNs) engage better with their local populations.

What has happened?

Our event in May brought together local people with representatives from PCNs, PPGs, local voluntary groups such as Sussex Interpreting Services, Possability People, East Brighton Food Cooperative, Hangleton and Knoll, The Carers Centre for Brighton & Hove, The Trust for Developing Communities, Switchboard and NHS Sussex to co-design best practice for PCNs working with communities. The event was attended by 40 people. The event included guest speakers talking about the importance of working with people and communities in primary care and how patients and the public are represented and involved in their care.

What next?

The event included several table discussions, and the notes were collated and findings shared with NHS Sussex. These are being used to create a resource pack for GP Practices and PCNs to support patient engagement. Healthwatch is supporting NHS Sussex to produce this resource pack which will include case studies from Brighton and Hove which reflect the work of PCNs who are already successfully engaging with their local population. We will also monitor the uptake of the resources by GPs and whether this improves patient engagement.

[Read our summary report of the PCN event](#)

If you have any questions, stories – good or bad – about your local GP service, please let us know by contacting info@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Outpatient services

Healthwatch recently completed a project to understand people's views about various changes that are being made to the way in which outpatient services across Sussex are delivered. Four initiatives were discussed: [Advice and Guidance](#), Utilising System Capacity (which involves offering patients an alternative hospital to be treated at which may enable them to be seen quicker); [Patient Initiated Follow-up](#) (PIFU); and reducing Do No Attends (which is where patients fail to turn up for appointments without any notice).

What has happened?

We organised four workshops with 31 Sussex participants. We used a deliberative engagement methodology which involved giving people time to consider and discuss an issue in depth before they came to a considered view. This approach increased knowledge and helped to create outpatient "experts".



People told us:

"I did enjoy the deliberative engagement process. It is even better if ordinary service users can have some influence on how services are designed."

Our findings will deliver long-term change helping patients to engage with these initiatives and make them a success, which in turn should improve outpatients' services. For example, NHS Sussex are one of three systems in the UK who are piloting an expanded version of the NHS App that will provide patients with better information, more options and support about their outpatient appointment. This should address some of the workshop feedback around DNAs, where patients sometimes did not

know that an appointment had been booked for them, or were unable to change it if inconvenient, and were unable to find out where they were on the waiting list.

Also, as a direct result of workshop feedback on DNA letters, NHS Sussex are looking to incorporate maps and other visual aids and include links to hospital websites with additional information to simplify and shorten letters.

What next?

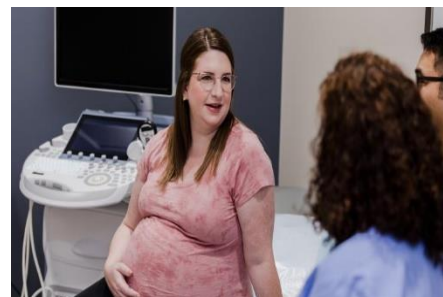
We will continue to work with NHS Sussex to learn how people's views and our findings are being used to raise awareness of changes to outpatient services, and what impact this is having.

[Read our outpatients report and the impact this is having](#)

If you have any questions, or wish to share your own story, please let us know by contacting Michelle at michelle@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Maternity

Last winter, we interviewed five women (four mothers and one partner) about their emotional wellbeing during pregnancy, during birth and the post birth period. We shared these in-depth stories with Healthwatch England who combined them with stories shared by other local Healthwatch teams to produce a series of blogs highlighting concerns and demanding changes:



1. [A new NHS delivery plan promises improved maternal mental health support.](#)
2. [Maternal mental health: The changes your feedback made possible](#)
3. [Continuity of carer is crucial to addressing perinatal mental health.](#)
4. [Stories from new mothers: the importance of good communication](#)

Patient's stories revealed poor experiences of GP check-ups which are meant to happen 6-8 weeks after birth. We were told that these either did not happen or that these checks focus on the physical health of baby and not the Mum or their emotional health.

People told us:

"It isn't usually during the immediate post-natal period that the mother needs support, as you are just dealing with the baby, it is often months' later, and there is rarely any follow-up."

What has happened?

In September, we heard about the Government's [strategy action plan](#) to address suicide and self-harm which also confirms plans for NHS England to work with the Royal College of GPs to develop new guidance for doctors on the six-to-eight-week-postnatal check. Healthwatch has called for improvements to these checks after [our research](#) found that many women weren't asked about their mental health when being seen by GPs after giving birth. Our calls also influenced the national maternity plan published earlier this year.

What next?

We have produced a report and will be monitoring the work being driven forward by Healthwatch England (that we fed into) to see how your feedback is being used at a national level to deliver change.

[Read more about our interviews on maternity](#)

If you have any questions, or wish to share your own story, please let us know by contacting Michelle at michelle@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Dementia services

Funded by NHS Sussex, we wanted to find out people's experiences of using different services available for people with dementia. We interviewed 38 carers and 7 people with a dementia diagnosis. People showed a wide variety of experience in terms of the memory assessment services and the support they received afterwards. For example, some received a detailed care package of support after diagnosis, whereas some received little or no support.



People told us:

"The whole process was really positive, I feel we were really lucky, I cannot think of any improvements as it went so well."

"If you have a broken leg, for example, you get lots of support. If you have a broken mind, no one wants to know...unless you are on the ball it is easy to get lost in the system."

What has happened?

Our report was discussed at the last two Sussex-wide Dementia Programme Steering Group Meetings and our findings were shared with those who Commission memory assessment services and post diagnostic support. The discussions emphasised the need to raise awareness of support options and create more proactive approaches such as check-ins and clearer information on who to contact when needed. Also, to help prevent an overload of information at diagnosis, without time to read and ask questions (which was something said by the people we spoke to), a sub-group are planning to develop some Frequently Asked Questions to provide at the point of diagnosis. Our report has been widely circulated, supported by social media, and most recently is being used by those who Commission overnight nursing provision in Sussex.

What next?

We are continuing to engage with NHS Sussex to understand how your feedback is being used to deliver improvements across dementia services and we will provide further updates as we learn more. We are also engaging with them following an announcement made last December which introduced [temporary changes to Memory Assessment and Dementia Services in Sussex](#). We will be monitoring the impact this change has had for patients and sharing any feedback we receive.

[Read our report on Dementia services](#)

If you have any questions, or wish to share your own story, please let us know by contacting Lester at lester@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Direct payments

Brighton and Hove City Council (BHCC) wanted to hear views and experiences from people who receive Direct Payments. These are payments that help individuals, or someone who is being cared for, to pay for support to meet their care needs. We heard from 127 people and shared their experiences and our recommendations for improvements with the Council.

What has happened?

Since publication, the Commissioning Manager for Health and Adult Social Care at the Council has acknowledged the importance of our report in influencing service change:

"This Healthwatch report is an essential element of Brighton and Hove City Council's commitment to improving access and support for using Direct Payments, as a way of enabling individuals and families to buy (with local authority funding), their own care and support. BHCC has completed a Review of the systems, policy, information, advice, and provision of DP's, of which this survey is critical. We are now moving to an improvement plan, which will include addressing the recommendations within this report."

The study also generated interest for a small group of participants to join Commissioners in an advisory group to ensure that the voice of Direct Payment users is central to improving the local offer – in particular, information and advice, support services (including access to Assessment Services), and increasing access to Personal Assistants.

Also, although this survey invited adults who use Direct Payments to respond, BHCC are also committed to ensuring that the experience of families using these, is imbedded in improving provision. This project is currently underway.

What next?

We are continuing to engage with NHS Sussex to understand how your feedback is being used to deliver improvements to direct payment services and we will provide further updates as we learn more.

[Read our report on Direct Payments](#)

If you have any questions, or wish to share your own story, please let us know by contacting Lester at lester@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Patient Transport

Over a number of years Healthwatch has asked patients for their views on non-emergency patient transport. This is transport which takes people to their hospital appointments and home again. We've fed your views to the organisations who provide the service and those who commission it.

What has happened?

Healthwatch has built effective relationships with the current provider and the Commissioners for the service which has resulted in changes being made to the new contract, which will go live in 2025. These changes are based on patient feedback and includes: better communication and updates for patients about where their transport is (i.e. texts and tracking services), improved patient involvement groups and better signposting to alternatives for those patients who do not qualify for non-emergency transport.

What next?

Healthwatch Brighton and Hove was invited to assess the bids to deliver the new contract meaning that an independent patient body has been involved in determining who gets to run the service in the future. We will ensure that the new provider is putting patients first, not cost savings.

Healthwatch has regular meetings with [South East Coast Ambulance Service \(SECAMB\)](#) who deliver 999 emergency transport and share your thoughts and concerns.

What has happened?

Most recently Healthwatch have worked with SECAMB to support the production of a patient guide to help people understand what happens when they call 999 to help create better understanding and expectations.

What next?

We will publish this guidance as soon as it is ready and will continue to share your feedback about 999 services (including NHS 111) with SECAMB. We understand that they are currently in the process of making a digital booklet and plan to complete this by the end of March 2024.

If you have any questions, or wish to share your own story, please let us know by contacting info@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Home Care services

Our Homecare Check service (previously 'Lay Assessors Scheme') is run in partnership with the local Council. Our volunteers regularly visit and interview local residents who have home care services provided by independent companies, but paid for, either fully or partly, by the council.



People told us:

"They always ask how I am and listen and that really helps."

"It's a mixed bag - some carers are good at housework - others are not."

What has happened?

Our volunteers started in September 2018, but the project was paused during the COVID pandemic and restarted in November 2022. Our findings show that overall, the quality of service provided in our city is high.

People value their carers; having regular familiar faces with time to build friendly relationships and when visits are made at reliable fixed times in the day. When it comes to questions about the helpfulness of office staff,

rota's being provided, and being kept informed of changes in their care the feedback varies greatly across providers.

Since September 2018, **23** Healthwatch volunteers have interviewed 663 service users about their care from **14** different providers. Healthwatch have produced **35** reports.

We have reported our findings to the Council on a monthly basis and they have used them to hold conversations with care providers to assess the quality and safety of services provided and deliver continual improvements. They have been used to support the Council's work in appointing new providers.

What next?

We will continue to run our successful project, visiting more people and collating their feedback.

You can download our latest report [here](#) where you can also watch a video by Jessica Harper, Business & Development Manager (HASC) at Brighton and Hove City Council, explaining why and how the Homecare Check Service was designed and put in place and it's benefits to people.

If you have any questions, stories good or bad, or are interested in volunteering to support this project, please let us know by contacting Will at will@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

Patient Communications

Sometimes, change takes a while to happen. In 2021, Healthwatch led a review of patients' experiences of being referred for an outpatients' appointment. Our report showcased the core standards that patients themselves recommend should be applied to all the communications.

What has happened?

Healthwatch pursued our findings with University Hospitals Sussex NHS Trust who have taken our recommendation to create a patient charter on communications and incorporated this into their [Patient First](#) work. Communication is now one of three key themes which form part of their Patient Experience strategy for 2022-25 but it also forms part of their new self-evaluation toolkit, "*Welcome Standards: Excellence in Patient Services Self Evaluation framework*". This now means that the voice of the patient is directly reflected in how the Trust will assess 'good patient experience'.

What next?

In September 2023, the Trust asked Healthwatch to conduct a validation exercise of their new "Welcome Standards" in the form of mystery shopping to see how they are being implemented by staff at receptions across the hospital to ensure that patients are receiving a positive experience. We will start these visits in early 2024 with the help of our dedicated volunteers.

[Read our report on outpatient communications](#)

If you have any questions, or wish to share your own story, please let us know by contacting info@healthwatchbrightonandhove.co.uk

For more information about our work and impact you can read our six-month Performance Report (April 1st 2023 to September 30th 2023) [here](#)

Contact information



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