

Information and Signposting Annual Report

Purpose

This report sets out the background and themes from the information and signposting service from April 2023 – March 2024 and identifies current and potential future challenges.

Key areas

The number of people using the information and signposting service has reduced with more people searching websites themselves for information and NHS websites being improved for the user.

We have seen a significant increase in the feedback coming from engagement events or using our website forms to feed in experiences. The postcards we use are now being designed and produced for specific events ie. Pride events or College talks. These are more impactful and leading to greater involvement and inclusion to encourage people to share their experiences.

Access to primary care services, such as GPs and dentistry, remain the key issues locally.

Action required by the Board

The Board is asked to note the report.

Author

Carole Rose, temporary Information and Research Manager
10/07/2024

Experiences and signposting activity during 2023-24

The enquiries we have received continue to cover a broad variety of services but with a high number of enquiries relating to primary care services such as GPs and dentistry.

From April 2023 to March 2024 we logged 2214 pieces of feedback which is an increase of 6.5% on the previous year. In most cases this represents one person but in some cases one person will give feedback about a few different services. These are logged as different pieces of feedback unless the services are connected.

The Main Themes identified:

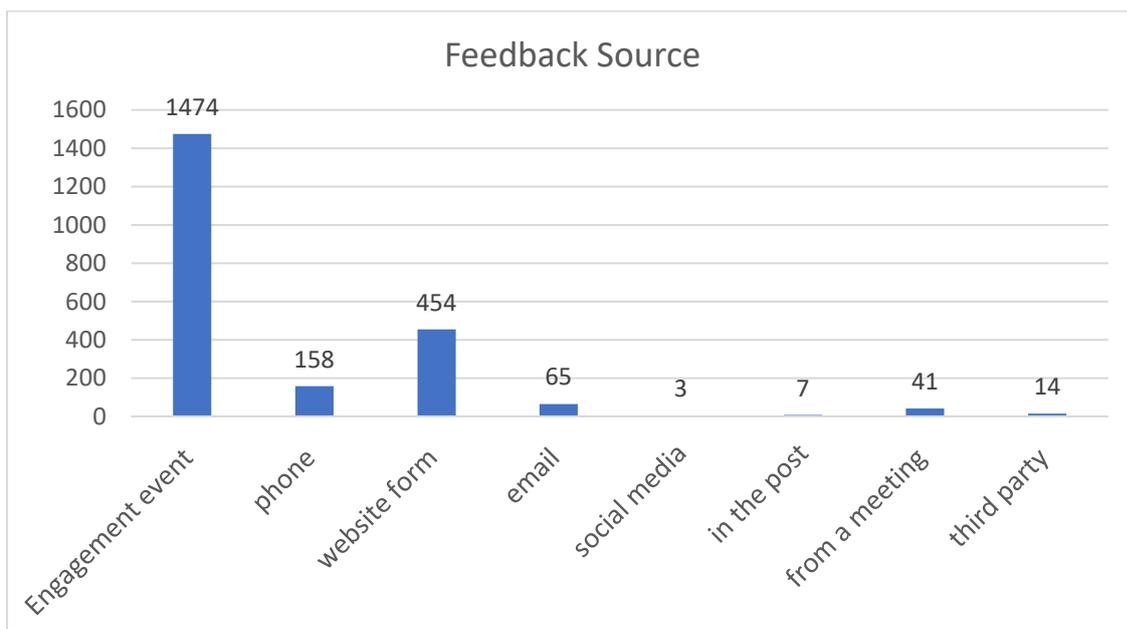
- Difficulty accessing GP appointments: People have reported long delays in being able to get an appointment or being told there are no appointments available. People continue to be offered online or telephone appointments even when expressing their preference for a face-to-face appointment.
 - *"You have to wait a month for a call back from the surgery. As from April, prescriptions need to be ordered online only. A lot of people have no access to computers."*
 - *"Long wait to get through on the phone and then 3 weeks wait to be seen, but once seen an absolutely wonderful service."*
- Difficulty in getting through on the telephone to speak with a GP receptionist: People are placed on hold with no indication of how long they may have to wait or they are being cut off after waiting long periods of time.
- Long waits for referrals to specialists: People have told us they are waiting longer than the advertised time frames for appointments or treatments often with no communication or update about their expected waiting time.
- Long waiting times in Accident & Emergency: Waiting times remain high but people are reporting good service when they are seen –
 - *"Long waiting time in A&E, but excellent care when seen. Very thorough."*

- *“Other than waiting 13 hours in A&E, everything was fine. I had blood tests and x-rays done.”*
- Lack of NHS dentist appointments: This is a known issue and we continue to receive calls from people choosing not to have necessary treatments –
 - *“Dentists want you to go private. They charge too much so I don’t have all the treatment I need”*
 - *“Unable to find an NHS dentist and cannot afford private fees”.*

Of the 2214 pieces of feedback we recorded in this period, 354 resulted in signposts to 108 different organisations. Each signpost has the potential to be to several different organisations in order to assist with the situation. The team have a wide breadth of knowledge across the services in the area as shown by the high number of organisations signposted to.

How people contact us about their experience.

People can get in touch with the information and signposting service through a variety of different methods, illustrated by the graph below.



Completed feedback forms collected through engagement events remain the highest area of experiences logged, although the use of our website form has increased in this period.

Service Areas

People continue to contact us about a wide range of issues. Some are complex cases, involving a range of services. others are more straightforward.

The top services that people gave us feedback about were:

Organisation or Resource	Percentage of the total calls
GP practice	40.5%
Dentistry	15.1%
Accident & Emergency	4.8%
Outpatients'	3.5%
Pharmacy	2.2%
Ophthalmology	1.7%
NHS 111	1.6%
Orthopaedics	1.6%
All other 64 services combined	29.0%

Although we do not undertake casework, we continue to provide support to people when needed or we make direct contact with a service on their behalf, with their consent.

We do this when:

- The situation is particularly urgent.
- The person is needing a bit of extra help to navigate the system and may be unlikely to manage this independently.
- Their issue has not been resolved by the appropriate body.
- More serious system issues are indicated, or issues which could potentially affect more people.

We continue to use our connections and contacts in the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Integrated Care Board, as well as other services, to seek information and answers for people. Since its inception there have been changes to roles and responsibilities within the ICB we are now re-developing connections with Trusts and PALs although more work is needed in this area.

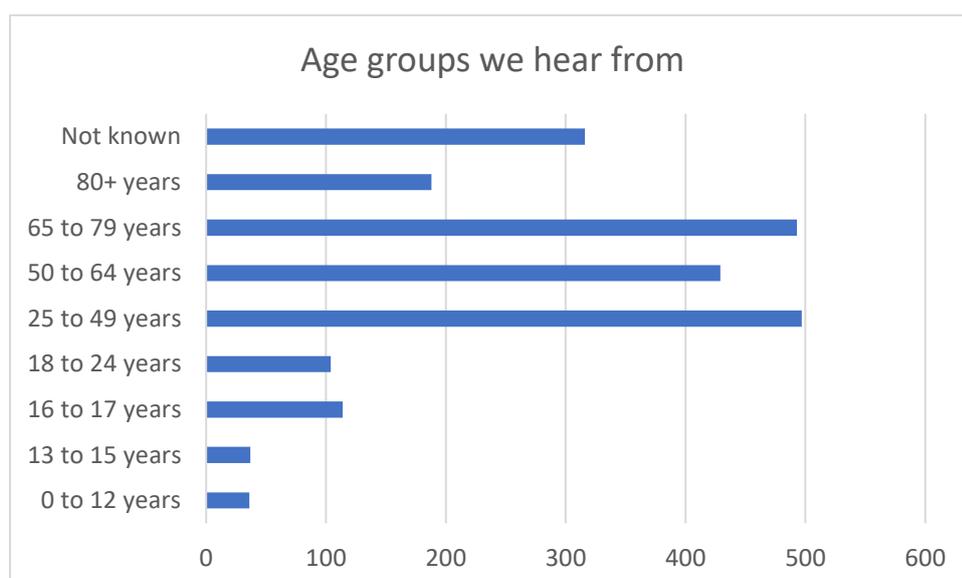
Some of the issues include:

- Registration and appointment issues at GP practices.
- Lack of information around waiting times for hospital appointments and treatments.
- Dental practices having private appointments only.
- Accessibility issues within Primary Care.
- Poor communication.
- Lost, or delayed, referrals.

We are seeing an increase in issues with prescriptions as pharmacies close and the shortages in medicine availability rises.

Who we hear from

We hear from a wide range of people of various age groups and ethnicities as can be seen below.



Ethnicity	Number
Any other ethnic group	62
Arab	12
Asian / Asian British: Any other Asian / Asian British background	33
Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi	5
Asian / Asian British: Chinese	7
Asian / Asian British: Indian	25
Asian / Asian British: Pakistani	42
Black / Black British: African	27
Black / Black British: Any other Black / Black British background	6
Black / Black British: Caribbean	15
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups background	15
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White	5
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White	5
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White	8
Not known	447
White: Any other White background	142
White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh	1323
White: Gypsy, Traveller or Irish Traveller	16
White: Irish	18
White: Roma	1
(blank)	
Grand Total	2214

How did they hear about Healthwatch

Although some people do not state how they know about Healthwatch it is clear that our attendance at events is very effective.

How did you hear about Healthwatch?	number
Engagement Event	1457
Not stated	522
Online/internet	99
Previous contact	67

Another organisation	37
A Friend or relative	21
Publicity materials	5
Health or Care professional	5
Media article	1
.	
Grand Total	2214

Information and signposting articles online

We continue to work closely with our communications team to provide information and advice articles on our two websites. Each website has identical articles although the searches reveal differing needs in the areas.

We had 36,000 users visiting our Cambridgeshire website and 16,000 users visiting the Peterborough website.

For the **Cambridgeshire site**, the most popular information articles were:

Finding an NHS dentist - 7881 visits

Should I see a pharmacist instead of a doctor? - 4,984 views

What the new dental recovery plan means for you - 893 views

For the **Peterborough site**, the most popular information articles were:

Finding an NHS dentist in Peterborough - 7,315 views

Where can I go to get help for my health out of hours? - 1,713 views

Do you need help travelling to NHS services? 527 views

Areas highlighted by the team

Of the 2214 feedback items only 59 (2.7%) of these has been received about social care services rather than healthcare. There are 148 care homes and community care organisations in our area, this figure does not include day care or health visitors so the 2.7% received represents very little feedback about this significant sector.

The increase in external surveys taken out by the engagement team are affecting the feedback being received ie. NHS 111 survey and JSNA survey. People attending events are not interested in completing more than one

survey or form. These surveys are for projects by external organisations which, although necessary for funding, do have a direct impact on the number of feedback forms completed.

The team often has to spend time trying to decipher hand written forms so several I-pads were purchased for the Engagement team to take out to events so that feedback could be uploaded onto a webform. However it is not always practicable for people to use IT, and Wi-Fi isn't always available at events so the Information and Signposting team are not yet seeing the benefit of these devices.

Since October 2023 we have included a feedback option on our emails regarding the quality of our work and whether it has been useful to the enquirer. This has been helpful for the team and is good to know how we have helped or how we can improve.

- *"Heartfelt thanks to you for your advice and help, he (husband) has received your notes and he has changed his GP as well. He is very grateful for your time in helping him."*
- *"I appreciate the promptness of response to my enquiry by all parties involved and I am impressed that within 24 hours there is a plan in place."*

How feedback is used

Meetings attended by our Healthwatch staff allow us to informally share feedback themes, we can keep up to date with important updates in health and social care, and ensure we have the latest information for signposting to services. Involvement in a range of external meetings means we can take patient feedback to the heart of decision making. This also allows us to demonstrate the value of patient feedback in changing services.

We send monthly data downloads to Healthwatch England for use in their reports and to ensure we are assisting in national opinion and change. We also regularly share the feedback we have recorded with stakeholders and with the Integrated Care Board through a report.

Stakeholders include our details on letters to patients around any changes to services, mainly primary care services. By collating themes from feedback, we can help improve communication with patients and improve future procurements.

We share a summary of what we have recorded on CRM with the Healthwatch team. This helps to highlight the kinds of issues and themes we have been hearing about, as well as who we have been hearing from. We hope this helps to organise engagement activities to target people and localities that we hear from less often.

Technical Challenges within the service

CiviCRM is the system used to store all the feedback we receive and it is supplied by Healthwatch England but serviced by Circle Interactive who are contracted by HWE and we pay a monthly fee to them. We are currently on CRM version 7 and in October 2023 Circle upgraded the system to version 10 and rolled this out across the local Healthwatch areas.

Unfortunately we experienced a range of issues with the new version which were unable to be remedied so we reverted back to version 7. We do not know if any feedback that was updated into version 10 whilst we had it for a few weeks were retained once we reverted back.

The technical support for version 7 is due to end in September 24 so it is imperative that we upgrade successfully before then and this will be attempted in July 24. Circle have assured us that the issues have been resolved so we are hoping for a successful upgrade this time.