

April 2021 Feedback Report



The feedback presented in this report represents 156 responses from the following sources:

- Calls and emails to Healthwatch Greenwich from Greenwich residents and service users
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and community representatives or leaders
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service users
- Conversations as seen on Twitter and local community Facebook groups
- Online reviews of services

**COVID-19 Vaccination**

Overall, service users report positive experience of getting vaccinated saying the process at vaccination centres is smooth, efficient, and well organised.

However - we are hearing some service users have not been contacted for their second vaccination dose after the mandated twelve weeks and are finding it difficult to contact practices or get any information.

*“My mother was not invited for her second vaccine and it has been 12 weeks today since her first jab. Her GP practice has a recorded message saying don’t contact them about the vaccine. I can’t find a phone number online to call if someone has been ‘lost’ in the system”.*

And contacting a practice does not always provide information or resolution, raising anxiety and putting patients at risk.

*“I have been ringing them for 3 weeks as my bed bound father is overdue for this second dose of the vaccine. They keep telling me that the practice manager will ring us back - but nothing in 3 weeks, after I have phoned them 12 times. It's a disgrace that a high risk disabled person with mental health issues has been made to suffer by this GP practice”*

In addition, we've heard from Greenwich residents - not registered with a GP - who are unclear if and how they can get vaccinated.

## GP services

### Booking appointments

Many service users report telephone consultations (introduced due to COVID restrictions) have improved access. However, others complain of long waits to get through to practices on the telephone, or being held 'waiting' on the phone, calls going unanswered, and waiting weeks to get an appointment<sup>1</sup>.

*“I have always had good experiences but now I can't get an appointment. I have been with this surgery since I was born. I am 67 and nobody is there for me now. What's happening?”*

*“Why it's so difficult to book appointment? It's been 1 week, I am trying but they always say they are busy and fully booked. They keep on saying call around 8 in the morning and when I call it's always busy. My medicine has now finished and the GP had asked me to book an appointment but there's no sign of getting one. I am really disappointed”.*

*“I'm amazed it's legal to operate such a system, because you really have to persevere to speak to a doctor”.*

Service users increasingly feel 'let down' by the system which is not giving them access to the support and care they need. Even processes in place for patients with urgent needs don't always work.

*‘Emergency appointments’ are what you need to book if you want to see someone sooner than in 3 weeks. They have an accident and emergency system in place for emergency medical issues which leaves it highly unlikely that any of these appointments are ‘emergencies’*

In addition to creating frustration and stress, long waits after getting through on the telephone - on hold - create financial burdens for those on low incomes.

*“I have been hold on many times for 30 mins or more. I'm a pensioner and my bill goes sky high”*

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<sup>1</sup> Difficulty in getting appointments is reported across GP practices

Others report not receiving calls even when booking appointments on the app or on the telephone.

*“Multiple times I ended up filling out the online form and then get a confirmation that a doctor will call me, but the doctor never calls”.*

*“Last time I contacted the GP they said their doctor will call me. He did not and its been a week now”*

### **Interaction with receptionists**

Receptionists are often the first point of contact for service users. The quality of interaction between reception staff and service users often dictates levels of over-all satisfaction with a practice. “Kind” and “patient” reception staff are particularly valued by service users.

*“The receptionist was friendly, courteous and very helpful when speaking on the phone. She was very professional and treated me with respect and turned my day around. It was really nice speaking to someone who truly cared.”*

More frequently we hear that reception staff:

- Don't have adequate information or are ill-informed
- Have telephone communication styles that are experienced as abrupt or rude
- Offer medical advice
- Are unsympathetic

*“Horribly rude receptionists that don't know what they are talking about. I explained to them that I am pregnant, but they still tried to dismiss anything I said until I asked for a manager and only then did she start to look into my inquiry”*

Poor interactions with reception staff have significant impact.

*“Receptionist preceded to berate me for half an hour saying the internet is the only way to get the medication. This receptionist has decided to be the barrier between me and life saving medication and said [to me] if the link don't work you don't get the medication. I am also considering giving up blood pressure medication because it feels like whatever benefit I get from getting the medication goes away when I have to deal with this surgery”*

### **A&E as a substitute for GP Services**

Inability to access services at local practices encourages use of hospital services as a substitute.

*“I have been trying for weeks and it's impossible to get an appointment. By the time I have the appointment, my condition can become very severe. This is basically forcing me to go to A&E, which I don't want to because it should only be used for emergency”*

*“I am on asthma medication which is vital during springtime. I am unable to get my prescription was told by the surgery that I should call 111. I will need to go to A&E if I don’t get this medication and put on a machine to breathe. If I could find a way to fix myself on my own, I would. These people don’t care at all about other people.”*

One service user told us they are *“having to call 111 every 5 days to get an emergency prescription”* as their local practice is not making it easy for them to register as a new patient.

### *Face to Face appointments*

While some service users are happy with the ease of telephone appointments, many who come to Healthwatch are not, and tell a return to *“face to face has to happen”*.

Service users report difficulty communicating their symptoms and concerns adequately on the telephone, and don’t always trust the efficacy of diagnosis using this method.

*“If you find a doctor that can effectively diagnose a skin infection over the phone then let me know.”*

While apps allow service users to upload photos, to aid consultations, some feel anxious receiving medical advice from doctors and healthcare professionals who have not (physically) examined them. In addition, not all service users have the digital skills to upload pictures.

### *Digital access*

Service users, comfortable and confident using digital tools, welcome the shift to on-line access:

*“The Dr iQ application made it easy for me to request support, the medical team came back to me promptly and professionally - this is how a GP/NHS of the 21st Century should be run! No more waiting in a busy GP Surgery - waiting for the queue of patients before you, sharing God knows what germs with other patients, freeing up the surgeries for more urgent cases”*

However, even for this cohort of digitally savvy service users, the system does not always work as well as it could. In particular:

- not getting a call back after requesting one on econsult
- not being able to access services because of broken links on the website or the online system being “down”
- no email access to practices or emails bouncing back

*“A broken link in an email cannot be an arbitrator to receive life saving medication.”*

*“I contacted My GP through econsult to get a call back I have an infection in my leg I had to contact them three times before I got a reply. I was so disappointed with the way I was treated. I think somebody should look into the way things are run at the practice.”*

### **Dental care**

Despite contacting multiple dental practices service users continue to report inability to get non-emergency dental care. Some report resorting to DIY measures to take care of their dental issues.

*“A large filling of my left lower molar tooth fell out three days ago and I will need to have that fixed. I used a dental repair kit [myself] to put a temporary filling in the cavity but because of the size of it, the temporary filling only lasted for a day”*

### **Contact Us**

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