

About us

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Royal Borough of Greenwich. We're here to make sure that those running services, put people at the heart of care.



Our volunteers Emmanuel and Grace at the Migrant Hub at Woolwich Community Centre.

What did we hear in March?

We heard from 248 people about their experience of health and care services in Greenwich.

“They have given my elderly mother great care and advice. She is seen promptly by the Dr and given that extra time to explain all her worries and questions, that sadly she needs these days. I use the eConsult system and I have found that when I do so I receive a response pretty quickly and if needs be am seen in person by the Dr. I have found the staff to be patient and kind.

GP Practice

“...I called the practice 7 times, sent email, and completed online forms to no avail.

GP Practice

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Preventive Care

Patient education workshops empower patients to take control of their health by providing them with information and skills to better manage their condition, but not everyone can access these facilities without reasonable adjustments. A BSL interpreter contacted us on behalf of an elderly deaf resident who was not provided with BSL support, despite asking for it, and therefore couldn’t access the session.

“...they refused access to a Deaf patient and said they don’t provide BSL interpreters at these [face-to-face] sessions. They said he could do an online remote course instead – but he can’t, he has no way of accessing this format.”

Provider response

Response from NHS South East London ICB

We have passed this feedback to Xyla Health and Wellbeing who are commissioned nationally to deliver NHS Diabetes Prevention training.

Healthwatch Greenwich is pleased to report that since the initial case study, the service provider has been working in collaboration with the local system to secure an interpreter to support this individual to access the programme. The individual has now been booked into their first appointment with the service.

Primary care

GP services–Practice Mergers

You said practice mergers can make it difficult to access services.

“**Reception does their best to accommodate in arranging appointments, but the merging of practices has sometimes made it tricky for us to get to different locations – Kidbrooke is especially tricky in Ultra Low Emission Zone with an old car and paying for parking. There are no direct buses anyway.**”

GP Practice

GP services–Appointments

You said if you're not online it can be difficult to book appointments, you can't get a face-to-face appointment, even if you ask for one, and missing call backs is not unusual.

“I wasn't able to book online at first and was refused a booking unless I called or went at exact times. You can't book in advance. Had to fill in a lengthy form for them to call me at a time that I could not choose – so I couldn't pick up. Was told they will not be calling me a second time! My mental health was not good to start with, I'm now out of tablets and feeling worse than ever.”

GP Practice

“Impossible to get a proper (in-person) appointment, on the phone only and prescribed pain killers, ended up as an emergency at Queen Elizabeth Hospital”

GP Practice

GP services–Econsult

You said it's frustrating that you can only use Econsult during fixed times in the day.

“This GP's eConsult hours are never the same and are very narrow in availability. It was bad enough when they only took eConsult between 8-10, which is difficult for working people, but this morning I went on at 8:44 and it wasn't taking any eConsult.”

GP Practice

“It is nearly impossible to get an appointment, they do not pick up the phone and the online eConsult system is only available at very limited hours”

GP Practice

GP Services–Men’s Health

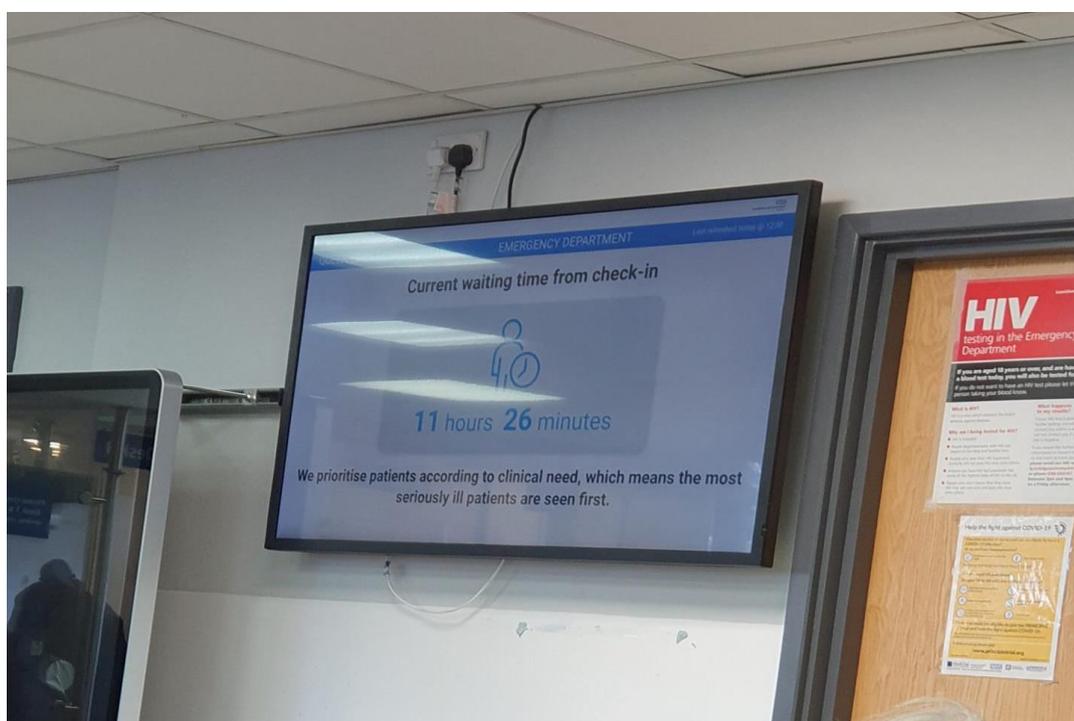
You said you wanted to know how to get PSA/DRE tests (to check for prostate cancer).

“Before the doctor just ticked the PSA box when I had a blood test for other stuff. Now, it's like breaking into Fort Knox to try and get anything seen to.”

“My GP practice, or rather the receptionist, said they wouldn't normally offer it unless you are symptomatic or stressed about it”

Response from NHS South East London ICB

We are sorry to hear about the negative experiences fed back to Healthwatch. We cannot comment on individual cases without knowing the details but we have passed on the feedback to the surgeries listed. We realise that getting access to appointments can be frustrating for patients. Primary care services remain under a great deal of pressure nationally and the Greenwich teams are working extremely hard to meet the increase in demand they face. We continue to work with our GP surgeries to try and improve access.



Queen Elizabeth Hospital

Emergency Department

You told us about long and uncomfortable waits in the Emergency Department.

“Have been sitting for 4 hours, do not know when my turn will come, no water provided, poor ventilation, no one is available for information”

“I was at the A&E for 16 hours a week ago—absolute nightmare.”

“While I was sitting in line, there were a lot of elderly people, small children, people with blood on their heads, there were people who vomited right in the waiting room next to me, who also sat waiting for 5–6 hours.”

“My husband had chest pain and waited 9 hours.”

Pharmacy

You said the absence of a 24x7 pharmacy in the hospital can mean a return trip to collect medication.

“By the time I saw the doctor after waiting for over five hours, the pharmacy was closed, and I had to come back the next day to pick up my prescription since the prescription only works in their pharmacy.”

Phlebotomy services

You praised the efficiency of the phlebotomy service and told us how kind and considerate the staff are.

“Excellent service. I have a great dislike of needles, mainly as the vein is prominent but difficult to get. My nurse (who was in training) was gentle and purposeful, resulting in a pain free blood test/collection. And it’s not the first time I’ve had this service here. Blood collection team have always been good. And zero wait time for my scheduled appointment.”

Parking

You said disabled patients receive fines, even when blue badges are displayed.

“We got fined when I was rushed to A&E with kidney infection...We were in a disabled bay with the right time on our badge but still got a ticket because we didn’t log in on the reception desk!”

“It’s crazy that we park in designated blue badge space. Display a blue badge but still get fined. So wrong.”

Pharmacy



Awaiting stock

Utrogestan 100mg capsules (Besins Healthcare (UK) Ltd)

60 capsules

i There is an issue with this item and our pharmacists are currently reviewing this.

An update on this item will be available on **Saturday 18th March 2023**

You said pharmacies in Greenwich had run out of HRT medication.

“I am after prescribed Utrogestan tablets and have phoned many local chemist and no one seems to have any stock and don’t know when they will have them back in stock”

“Chemists are out of stock for Utrogestan long term with no date availability, so is the alternative as well.”

Response from NHS South East London ICB

We are sorry that some patients experienced issues receiving Ustrogestan and other Hormone Replacement Therapy medication. There are many reasons why pharmacies are not always able to get certain medicines. Shortages of medicines can occur for different reasons. For example, manufacturers of medicines can have problems with making the medicine, transporting the medicines, or have problems with ingredients for medicines. Sometimes when lots of people are suddenly prescribed a medicine this can use up the available supply. There has been a growing number of medicine supply issues for a combination of reasons, particularly in the first half of 2022. Pharmacy teams are spending an increasing amount of time trying to get medicines for their patients including regular updates to GP practices on drugs in shortage with

alternatives and working with wholesalers to avoid stockpiling or part dispensing. The community pharmacy sector is working with Government and others to address disruptions in the supply of medicines and to put measures in place to mitigate these issues, where possible.

Circle MSK

You said you're not given enough time for assessment at your consultation.

"I had waited a long time to get an appointment and then last June I was seen by a specialist. I was in and out in five minutes! I was not offered an X-ray or any follow on... Then another 4 months passed and I was still in pain had to wait to be referred again. Luckily this time I saw a doctor that actually cared, and she sent me for an MRI scan. Turns out I have a fractured hip and other hip issues. That first appointment has set me back by nearly a year."

Response from Circle MSK

We are sorry to hear of this experience – it does not reflect the level of care we aim to offer to our patients. We would urge any patients having issues with the service please to contact our main admin team in the first instance, by emailing msk.greenwich@circlehealthgroup.co.uk or calling 020 3893 8382; however, if you need further support or wish to make a complaint, the easiest way of contacting our PALS team is by email:

Youopinioncounts@circlehealthgroup.co.uk. It is always helpful for us to have feedback like this (ideally with details of specific cases, so that we can investigate fully) so that we can learn from these situations, and make improvements wherever possible.

Case study – She said my little boy was never going to get better

Concerned, Janine took her son Luke to the GP¹ for an appointment after he had been unwell. Luke, at primary school, has autism and Global Developmental Delay. Janine says he has **“very little speech. He says a few words and some sentences, but I mostly do the talking for him”**. Luke was on Janine’s lap while she described Luke’s symptoms of feeling unwell and explained that his autism made examinations difficult. The GP said she would need to take his temperature and would need to see his ear. **“Luke hates anything put in his ears and became really upset and emotional. He didn’t have a temperature but the doctor said she wanted to see his ears again, but Luke was getting more and more upset and anxious, it was frightening for him. I had to hold his legs and hands so he would keep still”**. Janine said the doctor wasn’t sympathetic or patient and didn’t ask Janine how to make the consultation less frightening for Luke.

After failing to get a good look in Luke’s ears (because Luke kept moving) Janine said the doctor slapped her hands down on the desk and said **“if I don’t look in his ears he is never going to get better”**. Janine said she was shocked by the doctor’s reaction and started to feel worried that Luke was very seriously ill. **“It was just total discrimination because he is autistic, and the doctor didn’t want to deal with him. There was nothing that needed dealing with –he wasn’t on the floor crying or screaming. He wasn’t kicking or punching. ”**

Janine says the experience was traumatic for her and Luke, and she doesn’t feel safe being registered at the practice. **“I think they’ll look at me and say that’s the girl who complained and I and my kids won’t get the right care. Now Luke says doctors are bad, they are mean and horrible. So if he needs to see the doctor in the future it will be really difficult. If a doctor can be that dismissive, I’m not hopeful. His autism diagnosis is on his file. If only she had taken a bit more time and been patient with him or asked me how to make the situation**

less frightening for Luke. To me, it felt like as soon as I mentioned autism, her temperament completely changed.”

We spoke to a number of parents of children with autism and special needs. Many shared similar examples of Janine’s experience when visiting local GP practices. Parents told us:

- There is a lack of support and empathy to meet the needs of those with autism and other disabilities.
- Not all practices are equipped with specialist training and tools to provide compassionate care for all, regardless of their unique needs.
- Not all practices offer personalised care and support for families with special needs children.
- There is a lack of recognition of the need to improve communication with parents, including seeking their advice on how to best make appointments less frightening and anxiety provoking for children with autism and special needs.

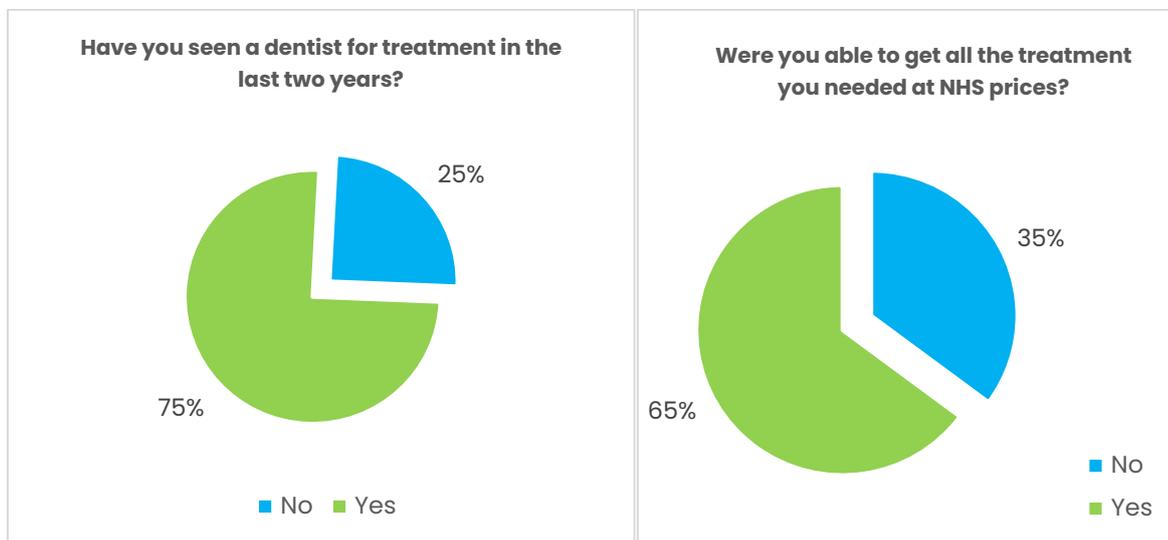
Care Homes

You said care of your loved ones was poor.

My mother in law was put in there to have assessments after being discharged from QE hospital. They needed her bed as she was not medically ill so didn’t need to be in hospital but she wasn’t safe to go back to her own home...For the 2 weeks she was there it was awful, we had to go in every day to do her personal hygiene and take her some decent food in.

Care Home

Dental



We asked 120 Greenwich residents about dental care in the last 2 years – since the pandemic.

While most people we spoke to had received a dental appointment in the past two years, more than a third had to pay privately for treatment. You told us whilst the booking process was easy, it was still difficult to get appointment.

“Personally, found the booking process very easy. Very easy in terms of the online form as it was straightforward and it didn't need to many details.”

“It was very difficult to get an appointment—it takes 3 months!”

“I find it extremely difficult. I work for 16 hours a day as a carer so very hard to find an appointment on time. They keep saying they are full and not registering now I have been in person to three different practices.”

“I see someone privately when I go back to my home country. It's hard to see someone here because of the cost of dental care in UK. Not all clinics are NHS, and many clinics are not taking NHS patients.”

You said one dental practice was especially helpful and you thanked them for the extra care and support offered.

“I took my granddaughter to have a root canal done on her front tooth (she’d broken it) she’s a fainter but the dentist and the dental nurse were so good she was laughing when she came out and her front tooth looks great.”

“I was so nervous I was sweating, and my jumper was stuck to me. The receptionist made me a hot drink. The dentist came out chatted to me. Explained what he was going to do and did it all at my pace.”

“They’re great with autistic patients of all ages”

Dental Clinic

Case study– The appointment was a waste of time

Vivian has cerebral palsy and has care workers assist him at home. Vivian finds it difficult to speak and relies on the written word to communicate. After experiencing pain in his ears, his GP referred him to the hospital.

“My GP² said he would speak with the audiology department I was referred to. He said he would tell them how my spasms resulting from Cerebral Palsy prevented ear suctioning, which is why I was referred to ENT. “

“Sadly, the appointment went badly wrong at Lewisham Hospital. After scrolling through my medical record via my NHS app, I noticed that my doctor tried and failed to phone the ENT department. No one followed up or made me aware of this, so the appointment was a waste of time.”

Unhappy, Vivian wanted to make a complaint, but he couldn’t find the email address for the manager of the GP practice. **“I can’t phone the GP surgery due to my speech difficulty. I rely on care agency staff who can’t help with phone calls as they don’t understand my speech patterns. I would submit an administrative eConsult but my GP surgery has limited the number of submissions they receive each day – meaning that I am always too late to submit one.”** Vivian says the complaints system doesn’t take into account the needs of those like him and limits their access.

Case study – Staff made it the best experience it could be.

Helen, a retired professional, had an appointment at the colonoscopy department at Queen Elizabeth Hospital. Nervous about attending, she wasn't sure what to expect. **"I felt a bit apprehensive – it's not a very pleasant procedure and you hear all these stories about people getting stuck in hospital for hours waiting to be seen, so I was worried."**

On arrival, Helen was seen straight away. **"I barely had time to sit down in the waiting room. I was called through in less than 5 minutes. The staff were amazing- everyone from the receptionist to the technicians were kind and professional. The clinical staff kept me informed about the procedure every step of the way, so I always knew what was going on."**

Staff went out of their way to make sure she was comfortable after the procedure. **"I was very hungry because you have to fast before the procedure. The clinician asked me how I was feeling afterwards, and I told her (jokingly) I could really go for an egg and cress sandwich. I didn't expect anything of it, but she actually went and brought me one from the canteen! She didn't have to do that, I know all the staff at the hospital are very busy, so that was really lovely of her."**

Impressed by how efficient her appointment was, **"I was in and out of the hospital quite quickly,"** and how she was treated with care and kindness. **"The attitudes of staff really made a difference. I didn't exactly enjoy going to hospital, no one does, but the staff made it the best experience it could be."**

Response from Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

Louise Crosby, Chief Nurse at Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust, said:

"We're a patient focused NHS Trust working hard to improve the experience of our patients, which is at heart of everything we do. Patient feedback is essential to helping us drive forward with improvements."

“We’re absolutely delighted to read the feedback for our phlebotomy team and Helen’s case study in this month’s report. We know that how patients feel about their time in hospital involves so much more than the acute care they receive. Helen’s visit to our Queen Elizabeth Hospital really highlights how important it is that we get this right for patients. Their entire experience, from the moment they are referred to us through to the moment they are discharged, needs to be positive, efficient and delivered with warmth and empathy. It is clear that on this occasion, our teams went above and beyond to ensure that Helen had a comfortable experience, putting her needs at the centre of her care.”

“A huge amount of work is going into improving our patient experience, including consulting with patients to understand how we can improve their time with us, and it is really rewarding for our teams to see this paying off. We have lots left to do, but this positive feedback for two of our key services gives us confidence that we are heading in the right direction.”

“Other issues, such as wait times in A&E and restricted operating hours, are frustrating for patients and we hear this. We are doing all we can to drive improvements in these areas and this level of feedback really helps our improvement action plans.”

“We encourage all patients to come to us directly with any feedback they have on our services so that we can share and investigate as necessary. Greenwich patients can reach us on 020 8836 4592 or pals.qeht@nhs.net.”

Next Steps

We follow up on all concerns or issues raised.

We work with commissioners, providers, regulators, and service users to understand where services are working well and where there needs to be further development.

Contact Us

For more information on our feedback report, contact:

- Telephone: 020 8301 8340
- Email: Info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk
- Website: <http://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk/>
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