



Healthwatch Insight Report

Quarter Two 2022

What people across southeast London are telling us about their experience of health and care services.

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Introduction

This South East London (SEL) Healthwatch Quarterly Insight report provides an overview of the key themes identified in relation to community feedback for the period 1st April to 30th June 2022. The communities include the southeast London boroughs of Bexley, Bromley, Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham, and Southwark.

In January 2019 the NHS in England published a [10-year plan](#) for the NHS to improve the quality of patient care and health outcomes. The plan set out the areas the NHS wanted to make better. With the passage of the Health and Care Act 2022 and the new statutory arrangements to support integration, all ICSs across England are required to refresh their five-year strategies during 22/23. A key part of the refresh is to take an open and inclusive approach to strategy development and leadership, involving partners, stakeholders and communities, and utilising local data and insights. In order to ensure local insight and voices are central to the strategy, Healthwatch across southeast London continued to report on people's current experiences of the health and care system, compiling current insight across the area and identify any key gaps to be addressed.

What are we hearing?

This report is a summary of the key messages that Healthwatch across southeast London are hearing from people in their areas. This data comes from a range of sources including calls and emails from service users, meetings with groups of service users or advocates, online reviews, and outreach and engagement events.

Dentistry

Dentistry access

Experiences of dental care has been varied across boroughs in southeast London during Q1 2022. Dentist access has attracted national attention, and has been a problem for residents of boroughs such as Southwark and Greenwich who have struggled with dental access issues, particularly those from ethnic minority communities. Service users are often unable to find a dentist accepting NHS patients and with living costs on the rise, health inequalities are widening as people struggle to pay for private dental care.



“My son had an awful fall last night and has pushed 3 of his teeth up into his gum. My dentist won’t see him because their NHS books are full”.



Often, parents have had problems accessing dental services for their children.



“I called all of them and none of them taking on children without their parents being registered there”.



Appointments

For those able to access a dentist, the vast majority reported satisfaction with the care and treatment they received from staff across dental services including the receptionists, dentists, hygienists, and nurses. Experiences of treatment was often described positively by residents, with mention of feeling comfort during dental procedures.

Most were able to book appointments with ease although a few raised issues concerning being able to get through on the telephone, and in particular, having appointments cancelled.



**"...waited 2 weeks for an appointment-
turned up and then got shown the door".**



Pharmacy services

Staff attitudes

Although there was positive feedback in southeast London regarding pharmacy services, there were also a number of concerns raised about the attitudes of staff working in pharmacies in those boroughs.

There have also been instances where people have been unable to get through at all and this resulted in them giving up or seeking help elsewhere.



**"Always feel very unwelcome in this
pharmacy..."**
**"Witnessed the staff being rude to other
patients. They were also rude to me for no reason..."**



Aside from the specific complaints regarding attitudes of some pharmacy staff, more general issues relating to the services offered were noted In Q1 2022. These included lack of training, slow services, and, similar to other health care services, difficulty reaching someone on the phone.



“Nobody at the store was sufficiently trained.”

“Their phone is engaged all day long.”

“Consistently the slowest service of any

pharmacy I’ve ever been to.”



GP services

GP services were one of the most commented upon, and with most negative feedback, during the quarter by southeast London residents.

Access

We continue to hear about GP access issues across the boroughs. Many patients we spoke to experienced difficulties booking appointments via the phone, as well as expressing concerns with the lack of appointment availability in general.



“Can't get through on the phone, waiting time is ridiculous. No appointments available”.

“The appointment system and availabilities are very poor...”

“...The waiting time is ridiculous and no show of efficiency at all.”

“It takes an hour and a half to get someone on the phone. They also rush you off the phone and the advice they give for the online consultation is quite confusing like very unhelpful and brief...”



Staff attitudes

Similar to Issues raised regarding attitudes of some staff in pharmacies, the attitudes of receptionist staff in doctors surgeries was also remarked upon by many residents.



“The attitude of the Receptionists is disgusting...”

“They need to improve on their customer service as it is very unprofessional..”



Since the covid-19 pandemic, staff working in healthcare have been placed on increasing strain and this is being reflected in interactions with patients. It is a key issue to be noted this quarter.

Prescriptions

Finally in relation to GP services, a recurring theme during the quarter was issues with prescriptions including missed prescription requests, delays in patients getting their prescriptions, and changes in the way prescription requests are made.



“I’m constantly having to chase up prescriptions. My mother was hospitalised due to being left with no medication that she urgently needed.”



We’re also hearing that the NHS app, which can be used to request prescriptions, is difficult for those with limited digital literacy. Further, there are instances of service users who contact 111 to access medications because they’ve been unable to register with a GP practice, or their practice has not processed their prescription in a timely manner.

Hospitals

Waiting times

For hospital services, long waiting times were the key issue raised by services users this quarter. Whilst adult service users continue to report long waiting times at A&E, we also heard from parents with unwell infants and toddlers who say they have had long waits to be seen.



“My dad in law had to wait 10 hours (all night – since ambulance took him to hospital) for them to come back with his blood test. After 10 hours they said he's fine and can go home. No common sense or interest for the patient especially if you're foreign”.

“You go to accident and emergency with your infant – with a high temperature, breathing problem, cough and they send you to the ‘normal’ queue – the adults’ line – all waiting hours to get help...”.



Blood testing for potential rape victims

Advocacy cases this quarter highlighted that when potential rape victims seek medical care in hospital settings, blood tests are not taken as a matter of routine. This has important implications because informal advice from the police suggests that chances of conviction may be

affected without the victim's blood test results. SEL Healthwatch is investigating these processes.

Maternity and paediatric services

Pain relief during childbirth

We continue to hear from service users with mixed experiences of giving birth. Among the negative feedback, a small number of women have said that they have been refused epidural pain relief when in labour, despite multiple requests.



“Too many midwives try to talk women out of having epidural when the women are asking for one. Birth pain relief is a personal choice and should be honoured. It

happened to me three weeks ago”.

“One midwife at Queen Elizabeth Hospital was so rude with me when I was in labour and in pain. She said to me if I keep screaming then the doctor won't come and do the epidural for me and even said if I didn't do the gas and air properly she was gonna take it off me”.





There was also dissatisfaction about the outcomes people had following triage questions. Some people felt they did not get what they needed, and the questions asked had been an unnecessary obstruction to getting an appointment with the GP.

Paediatric services

Another key issue we heard was the coordination of care paediatrics. Parents in southeast London want to know if community baby clinics have resumed their services. They say information is not easy to find and given changes to community midwife and health visitor appointments, they don't know which services are available.

We hear from parents who say they don't know or understand who is responsible for providing treatment or support for the health needs of their child. Some say they are passed from one service to another, in a frustrating circle.

 **“The only reason I want to go is because my little one has health issues and has had issues with weight in the past, so I need to keep regular checks on her weight – they knew all this, and I still never got a call back from them either! One appointment at 1 week old and not seen or heard from them since”.** 

Mental health services

We've seen an increase in the number of mental health-related calls for help and support we receive. Many express their frustration at not being able to get adequate support, despite already being in contact with mental health services:



“Been trying to get mental health support and treatment for around 6/7 years. NHS GP give me different kinds of medication. Time to Talk telling they're not able to help me...And on, and on.... Why they don't help but send people here and there? I would like to get help to deal with my problems but it [has been] 7 years”.

“I am still not feeling well [despite being in touch with the Community Mental Health team] ... nothing has happened... I am depressed. I don't know who I should turn to”.

“I am so depressed; I don't know what to do now”.



Many services users are struggling with their mental health, and this is now one of our most common signposting referrals. Key issues raised upon accessing services include 'not feeling listened to' and 'inadequate care and support' by the Community Mental Health Team (CMHT).



“Diagnosis reached based on 10min talk once a week by video link where you are spoken at and told what your symptoms are...”.



Case study: mental health crisis

The following case was escalated to SEL Healthwatch during the quarter.

- Service user A didn't speak English and was in crisis
- Provider Crisis line was contacted by Healthwatch asking them to contact service user
- Healthwatch was told:
 - service user would need to contact 111 first and
 - 111 is responsible for organising an interpreter and the three-way call!
- Provider actions:
 - *Access to interpreter* for crisis line and access for non-English speakers is under review
 - Refresh of website for non-English speakers in crisis.

Covid-19 vaccines

Vaccine status records

Regarding the updating of vaccine status on the NHS app, service users report their vaccination status hasn't been recorded weeks after getting booster shots at local pharmacies.



“Keep getting pestered by NHS to have my fourth jab. It was done a month ago”.



There have also been issues raised in the boroughs regarding booster vaccines for those who are housebound and clinically vulnerable.

David is the primary carer for his 94-year-old mum, June. After having her first booster at home without any difficulty, David has been unable to get her second home visit booster arranged. He has been trying to get the second booster for over 8 weeks now.



“I have been trying to organise this, with no success so far – but, genuinely, with an awful lot of phone calls”.



From the experiences we've seen reported, the process has been okay at vaccination sites but difficulties for those unable to get to those sites.



“My vaccination went very smoothly at the vaccination site. The staff were very polite and very professional.”

“Had to book my vaccine here and it was so easy. The staff were so efficient, timely and polite.”



Support for people with autism and learning difficulties

Finally, we have been receiving feedback about inadequate and unequal services and support in southeast London boroughs for people with autism and learning disabilities. This is a priority area across the system, with focus given to improving the care and support available for children and young people and adults with learning disabilities and autism.

Recommendations

The recommendations made as a result of these findings include:

- Share findings with local partners including Primary Care Commissioners, GP services and hospital services to encourage a review of their administration process in order to provide a more efficient system for patients when booking appointments
- Share the findings with local GP partners to encourage them to reflect on the attitudes of reception staff, as this has been flagged throughout the report as an area that could be improved
- As well as formal meetings, informal meetings take place with partners to discuss issues of concern and identify actions to address them
- Use our social media platforms, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to raise awareness of our organisation and the work that we do
- Continue to engage service users in innovative ways to obtain patient feedback and experience of health and social care services and collect reviews using different methods and actions

Next steps

SEL Healthwatch will share the findings contained within this report at various ICS and NHS South east London ICB boards and committees. Healthwatch across SEL have shared these insights with commissioners, providers in their boroughs. Healthwatch in SEL have also organised a number of informal meetings with partners in order to discuss the issues of concern and identify actions to take forward. We continue to identify opportunities to share our findings within the health and social care system.

References

The Healthwatch reports used in creating this quarterly summary are publicly available on our websites and include:

[PowerPoint Presentation \(healthwatchbromley.co.uk\)](https://www.healthwatchbromley.co.uk)

[April 2022 Feedback Report \(general\)_0.pdf \(healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk\)](https://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk)

[May 2022 Feedback Report \(general\).pdf \(healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk\)](https://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk) [June 2022 feedback report \(General Version\).pdf \(healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk\)](https://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk)

[June 2022 feedback report \(General Version\).pdf \(healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk\)](https://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk)

[Patient Experience Report - Quarter 1 \(2022-23\) | Healthwatch Lewisham](https://www.healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk)

[HWS Q1 Insight Report 2022-23.pdf \(healthwatchsouthwark.org\)](https://www.healthwatchsouthwark.org)



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