



Healthwatch Insight Report

Quarter 3, October – December 2022

What people across southeast London are telling us
about their experience of 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 October to 31st December 2022**. 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.

Local Healthwatch in south east London

Local Healthwatch is the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We exist to ensure that people are at the heart of care. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved, and we share their views with those with the power to make change happen. We also help people find the information they need about services in their area. We have the power to ensure that the government and those running services hear people's voices. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them. Our sole purpose is to help make care better for people. In south east London there are six independent Healthwatch which are coterminous with the six boroughs. They are Healthwatch Bexley, Healthwatch Bromley, Healthwatch Greenwich, Healthwatch Lewisham and Healthwatch Southwark.

With the passage of the Health and Care Act 2022 and the statutory arrangements to support integration, [South East London ICS \(Integrated Care System\)](#) is required to publish, strategic priorities, a strategy and a five-year forward view. A key part of this is to take an open and inclusive approach to strategy development, involving partners, stakeholders and communities, and utilising local data and insights. To support this process and ensure local insight and voices are central to the strategy, Healthwatch across southeast London continue to report on people's current experiences of the health and care system, compiling current insight across the area and identifying any key gaps to be addressed.

This report will be shared across the ICS and at NHS South east London ICB boards and committees. Healthwatch across SEL have shared these insights with the relevant providers and commissioners, in their boroughs, and have also organised informal meetings with partners to discuss peoples' concerns and identify actions to take forward.

Dentistry

Access

Access to dental services has been an issue across all quarters during 2022, including quarter 3. It was raised as a concern during the quarter by residents in Lambeth and in particular this included difficulty accessing NHS dentistry services, problems with registration, and difficulty accessing community dentistry at home for people with mental health concerns.



“You can’t get a dental appointment. Basic dental care is not available. The service is very expensive. Before you were able to have an examination, Xrays and a clean. The government talks about children’s dental health. What about the dental clinics. There used to be clinics where children got an understanding about dental hygiene.”



Understanding dental access issues in minority communities will be one of Healthwatch Southwark’s top priorities for the upcoming year (2023-2024).

NHS England have written to Healthwatch to provide and update on the planning and commissioning of NHS dentistry, updating on plans for a Phase 3 following two previously unsuccessful rounds of commissioning. The plan aims to attract dentists to apply for NHS contracts in defined areas of need.

To explore further the experiences and challenges of communities Healthwatch Southwark has launched a local survey – [Your feedback on NHS Dental Services Access](#).

GP Services

GP services remain one of the most commented upon services across southeast London during Q3 of 2022. Of particular concern for a number of residents was access to doctors and appointment booking difficulties.

Access

The most frequent comments received were about access to GP services. Some residents in the borough describe positive experiences in this respect:

“Very good GP Practice. The receptionists have always been polite. The Doctors try their best. If you phone at 8am you will get a telephone call back from a GP on that day. I feel very lucky to have this surgery. I appreciate everyone. Thank you for supporting me.”

“Great GP. They always will do their best to help you get a same day appointment if you urgently need help. Kind staff and attentive doctors. I lived in many places, by far this is the best GP Practice.”

However, many describe issues with NHS GP access:



“The waiting time to get an appointment is too long, up to 3 weeks.”

You can never get an appointment! Which leaves you feeling vulnerable. Most of the receptionists are unhelpful, abrupt and make you feel like you're expecting too much. Most of the time there's a phone issue. I've called multiple times within the last 26 minutes and can't even get through”.



The inability to obtain an appointment with a GP has left some feeling they have no choice but to pay for private treatment:



“I had to wait one year for my diabetes prescription. I had to use my private insurance to find a solution...”

“My 5 years old daughter [was] diagnosed with chickenpox via telephone. We found out after paying lots of money to a private GP that it was staph infection”.



Further, residents of Greenwich expressed frustration at ‘going around in circles’ when trying to obtain an appointment. They told us that they can’t get face to face GP appointments when calling reception; the GP practice tells them to go to Queen Elizabeth Hospital or to contact 111. The hospital or 111 operators then advises that they contact their GP:



Rang at 8.30. 1 hour 55 mins to get through. For my other half. Told no urgent calls for treatment for ulcers on tonsils. Advised to call 111. Did that. They made a referral back to the GP for treatment. Called surgery again, 2hrs on phone got cut off. On the phone again now for another hour. So gone full circle.”

“It’s an absolute joke calling the practice for any queries. I have called them couple of times for my 1 year old daughter. They don’t care regarding the age or any severity. They just end the call, saying call 111. And the funny part is, 111 advises you to call back your GP again.”

Doesn’t matter when I call, or if I use the DR.IQ [app] somehow they hardly ever have available appointments now ... but then when I did get one ... a face to face one, there wasn’t anyone else waiting other than me in the waiting area - but yet they don’t have appointments? It’s getting much worse and they advised me to go to Queen Elizabeth. I’ve gone there before and they just sent me back to my own GP.... it’s a vicious cycle and absolutely ridiculous now.”



Access to face-to-face appointments

People also expressed frustration once again (as they did last quarter) at the inability to see a doctor for face-to-face appointments. They told us the delay in getting a face-to-face GP appointment results in feelings of health deteriorating and long-term conditions getting worse. Some feel 'forced' to use private healthcare as they can't access timely face to face NHS GP appointments.



"The chance of getting an appointment booked face to face is equal to the chance to win the Jackpot on National Lottery. Even a telephone appointment is a good fortune to get booked. Tried for two weeks to book an appointment to see the GP for several accumulated issues, but no luck."

"I have an issue that has been ongoing for 3 years. And in this time, I have only been able to see "my" GP once ... I am going private to deal with my health problems..."



Staff attitudes

The attitudes of staff in GP practices were a theme this quarter with the feedback from people mixed, similar to Q2:



I spoke to the receptionist who went above and beyond to help mum out and was very reassuring that the doctor was going to phone. She was very friendly and helpful. I wondered if mum may have a UTI [so] the receptionist said to get a sample for the doctor to dip test to rule out infection and to save time as it's three days before Christmas. She was locking up [the surgery] but she waited for me to get there and still took time to talk to me even though she was going home.... a very kind and thoughtful receptionist"

"Reception staff go above and beyond to help get appointments booked...they listen and try and work around certain times and appointments. I called this morning but missed all of the emergency

appointments – instead of just telling me to call back in the morning (which I understand is the advice) one of the kind ladies went above and beyond to check when a medic would be around to discuss the prescription I need and managed to book me in for the following week. Thank you to the staff for always being so polite, kind and caring”



There were also reports of poor experiences of communication with frontline practice staff:

“I’d like to say that [practice name] located in Lambeth is the worst GP service ever. I haven’t seen a place who has the most lazy people like this. Inefficient and not caring about anything. I am really sad about this.”

“I do an Econsult at this surgery (Greenwich) to bypass the receptionist when I can.”



There were several reports in Lambeth of people complaining about the quality of care. Some callers reporting that serious health conditions were not picked up by their doctors or not being able to discuss more than one issue during a GP consultation.

““My GP didn’t allow me to mention all my issues. I wanted to tell her about an important problem but she interrupted me to say only one issue at a time.”



Similar to last quarter, people also fed back that the complaints process in some GP practices was not working as it should:

“I went into the practice and asked the receptionist for the complaints process. She told me that they didn’t have one! I looked on their website and there is no complaints process or contact details for complaint information.”



Hospitals

People also shared their experiences of hospital services during October to December 2022, with long waiting times again being a key cause for concern.

Treatment

There were mixed reviews regarding treatment experienced in hospitals. Staff were praised for the levels of care delivered despite being extremely busy:



“Nurses were amazing... they looked after me very well”

“There was a long wait for a bed, however [the] level of care, compassion, kindness, and communication was excellent despite the department being completely full. Staff [were] extremely busy and never standing still. Every member of staff introduced themselves and kept us fully informed regarding her results, treatment and bed wait.”

“Big thank you to Nursing staff across all the areas but also a special mention for the Orthopaedic teams who were amazing. They came to update early morning, late night and at routine ward round times to review and update. One Dr took extra time to actually come back, pull up a chair and spend quality time sitting and explaining the procedure to reassure my daughter as she was extremely anxious and upset. This action by the Dr was hugely beneficial, effective and greatly appreciated.”



Particular praise was also given to dermatology and gynaecology staff within one of Greenwich’s hospitals:



“My husband had a dermatology appointment this morning. We arrived at 10.15 and were seen within 15 minutes and offered removal of growth on face. Had to wait less than 20 minutes for procedure to

take place. We were back home by 12noon. Grateful thanks to the whole team for caring, kind and professional service.”

“Fantastic experience in the Gynae department for a scan and referral. Friendly & caring staff & very reassuring. Exceeded expectations.”



However, not all service users were happy with the quality of care received in a hospital setting:

“I am a Lambeth resident and have a complaint about care issues with [hospital name] which has been messing up with my appointments and scans causing unreasonable delays in care which is becoming very concerning to me and PALS despite my issues to resolve the issue informally. When I asked to raise a formal complaint, PALS has been very dismissive.”



Waiting times

As noted above, long waiting times were again a key issue raised by people attending hospitals.

“I’ve been waiting here [A&E Queen Elizabeth Hospital] for 13 hours and counting.”

“Complete chaos in A&E. My husband was brought in by ambulance. No beds available. We waited 12hrs to be seen and my husband had another seizure in the waiting area. I was told my husband was not a priority case by one of the nurses after having had a major seizure and having heart problems.”



Mental Health Services

Mental health services

Finally, a number of service users of mental health services noted that it has been difficult to access sufficient support. In Lambeth, there was a report of difficulties accessing adequate psychological support for someone receiving cancer treatment. The resident has now given up requesting additional support. In Greenwich, the following was also raised:



"I was referred to therapy and was assessed but never heard back. That was a year ago!"

"I am homeless and sleep on the street. Even though my GP 2 registered me without a fixed address, I had to wait for a month to get a mental health assessment."



References

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

[October 2022 HWG Feedback Report_0.pdf \(healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk\)](#)

[November 22 Feedback Report \(general\).pdf \(healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk\)](#)

[December 22 final.pdf \(healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk\)](#)

[Your Feedback to Healthwatch Lambeth | Healthwatch Lambeth](#)

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