



SEL Healthwatch Q2 Insight Report

What people are telling us about their experience of health services

November 2024

healthwatch

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About south east London Healthwatch

The six local Healthwatch organisations in south east London serve as independent enablers and champions of public and patient voice in health and care services. We gather knowledge on health inequalities from individuals and diverse communities in the region and official data sources. Together, we form the south east London Healthwatch (SELHW) collaboration, sharing information, expertise, and learning, while maintaining our individual voices at borough level. Work and project priorities within each individual Healthwatch are based on regular monitoring and patient feedback

SELHW utilises our influence and statutory functions to make a difference by encouraging action at all levels within the Integrated Care System (ICS). We focus on addressing health challenges and supporting service transformation in general practice, hospital, dental, pharmacy, optometry, and home-based care. By collecting people's opinions and perspectives and sharing them with decision makers, SELHW ensures that people's views shape and improve the care they receive.

Setting the Stage: Introduction to the Report

This report sheds light on the various health services individuals discussed with south east London Healthwatch between July and September 2024.

The feedback is sourced by SELHW from calls, emails, meetings, online reviews, outreach, and engagement events.

While it is important to note that the feedback received from patients and their carers is presented as shared, it is essential to acknowledge that some feedback may lack detailed information or context. Nonetheless, we highly value patients' and carers' time and effort in sharing their views and experiences with us. This report aims to provide a balanced representation by presenting an overview of both positive and negative feedback, enabling a comprehensive understanding of patient experiences.

The information and patient quotations included in this report have been sourced from previously published borough Healthwatch reports. As part of our commitment to transparency and accountability, we have provided

service providers and commissioners with the opportunity to review and respond to the findings.

For more information about SELHW, please visit [south-east-london-healthwatch](#).

Who we heard from

We have gathered valuable insights from individuals across south east London regarding their experiences with health services. By actively listening to the voices of the community, we have gained a better understanding of their perspectives and the challenges they encounter when accessing healthcare. Listening to feedback from various segments of the community is a top priority for SELHW. This helps us understand the complete picture and provide valuable feedback to service providers, enabling improvement.

From July to September 2024, SELHW actively engaged with over 3000 people. These engagements included groups that are typically underrepresented, such as:

- Parents of children with a learning disability or autism
- Refugees, asylum seekers and migrants
- Residents from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds
- Residents living with disabilities or long-term conditions
- Residents with additional linguistic needs
- Homeless residents
- Elderly residents
- Residents with long term mental health challenges

By actively connecting with these cohorts, SELHW tries to ensure that the voices and perspectives of these community members are included and considered in health service delivery and decision-making processes.

What we are hearing about services

Some highlights of positive feedback received about services in SEL are:

1. Residents in Lewisham reported that waiting times in some GP services have been improved by using a prompt call-back system.
2. The Healthwatch Community Health Ambassadors program in Southwark received positive feedback for its role in providing essential health checks and connecting residents to relevant services. This program was noted for being engaging and effective during community events.
3. The X-Pert Health course in Bexley – a 6-week program aimed at individuals with type 2 diabetes, focusing on education about the condition, weight management strategies, and self-care practices was well received.
4. The majority of people engaged had positive experiences of using mental health community services in Bromley.
5. The quality of treatment was generally rated highly across GP and hospital services.
6. The NHS Vital 5 Health Van in Southwark was mentioned as a positive outreach initiative to address health risk factors (smoking, alcohol use, BMI, mental health, and blood pressure).

Key Themes and Concerns

Waiting times and appointment access

- Long waiting times were frequently mentioned. These tended to be for surgery, GP and hospital appointments. Two thirds of respondents in Lambeth reported a decline in their health and wellbeing since joining the waiting list. The people that received updates whilst waiting were less likely to report a decline in their mental health. There were instances where patients waited two years for surgery in Lewisham. For GP practices in Lewisham, patients gave instances of having to wait a week

to see a GP when ill and there were reports of not being able to get an appointment even when urgently needed. The 8am telephone queue was reported as an issue, particularly for GP services in Bromley. The long waiting list for Queen Elizabeth Hospital was highlighted by Greenwich residents.

- Getting through on the phone for appointments and appointment availability was a reoccurring theme across South East London. In Bromley, 55% of respondents gave negative reviews about booking appointments. There were also reports of difficulties in booking GP appointments in Lewisham.
- The waiting time between GP referrals and hospital appointments was highlighted as a particular issue in Bromley.
- Long waiting times were experienced by those with learning difficulties. In Greenwich, at a hospital that is part of the Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust; one mother, had to wait two years for an ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder) assessment for her non-verbal daughter.
- One in 6 respondents in Lambeth were on multiple waiting lists for treatment.

Communication and information

- In Lambeth, there was a lack of updates for 65% of respondents who were on hospital waiting lists. Those who received updates on appointments and treatment felt more supported.
- Face-face GP appointments were generally regarded as better, although younger people tended to be more satisfied with online consultations as they could more easily fit them into a working day. Missed calls from clinician's were reported as an issue. In Lewisham, the new call back service at some GP surgeries, was reported as helpful.
- There were reports of a lack of communication between different departments at hospital. In Lewisham, MRI and Gynaecology were cited as two services that were not communicating effectively with an impact on appointments and waiting times for patients.
- There was dissatisfaction reported regarding communication between GPs and hospitals in Lewisham, with 42% of comments being negative. This was regarding referrals and appointments.

- People reported that it was difficult to get through on the phone at University College Hospital in Lewisham.
- Aftercare information following discharge was raised as an issue, particularly for residents in Greenwich and Bromley.
- A notable complaint from a patient at Lister GP Practice cited poorly organised patient groups, and unresponsive management.
- 45% of residents surveyed in Bexley were unaware of the X-Per Health Course (managing diabetes). The majority of those that attended found it beneficial.

Digital access

- Digital access for elderly and digitally excluded people was a significant issue across the board. For example, in Southwark, there was difficulty accessing GP appointments for these groups. There were also mention of difficulties by people navigating the online booking system.
- In Lewisham, some elderly residents complained that they were not taken into consideration when systems moved to booking appointments online. It is recommended that a person for booking appointments remains in place to complement online processes.

Barriers for marginalised groups

- Language barriers were identified amongst the Latin American community in Southwark. There is a need for improved translation and navigation in healthcare services, such as GP services.
- Individuals with autism and learning disabilities often struggled to navigate complex healthcare pathways, which are not designed with their specific needs in mind. A lack of training among healthcare providers about the needs of people with autism and learning disabilities often resulted in misunderstandings in care.
- Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust – There are significant delays in services, particularly in accessing autism spectrum disorder (ASD) assessments. For example, one parent reported waiting two years for an assessment for their non-verbal daughter. Even after the assessment, additional support, like speech and language therapy and paediatric

consultations, were delayed. Many children with special needs faced delays in seeing paediatricians, forcing parents to resort to emergency departments for urgent care.

- Feedback in Greenwich, indicated that the healthcare system struggles to cater adequately to non-verbal children. For instance, staff in hospitals were often unaware of the specific needs of non-verbal children, causing additional distress during medical emergencies.
- Shooters Hill Children's Centre in Greenwich was mentioned for previously offering music therapy and other supportive programs, but parents noted a reduction in these regular services and expressed a desire for consistent check-ins.
- For young people transitioning from paediatric to adult services, the lack of integrated transition care disrupts the continuity of support for Southwark residents.
- Homeless residents in Greenwich continue to face barriers to accessing GP support, because they do not have ID documents.

Mental health and community support

- Positive experiences were noted about community mental health services in Bromley. However, there were significant concerns about delays and lack of continuity in care.
- There were significant mental health challenges reported by some homeless residents in Greenwich, with a desire for community-based support.
- Initial research in Southwark has highlighted under-representation of black men in mental health support groups and a need for non-clinical mental health services catering to Black African and Caribbean communities.
- 16% of participants surveyed in Bromley did not adhere to prescribed medications, often due to side effects, lack of support, or doubts about the medication's efficacy. This suggests more support is required explaining the benefits of taking the medication.

Patient Experiences

- The professionalism of staff is often commended in reviews. Staff have been described as “kind, pleasant and supportive”.
- 64% of people surveyed were positive about the availability of dental appointments in Lewisham, with most residents able to get NHS appointments.
- There was an 85% positive rating on prescription communication in Lewisham pharmacies, with praise for clear medication instructions.
- Positive feedback focused on the quality of treatment and staff attitudes at University College Hospital Lewisham.

Other Issues

- Patients encountered issues with registering in primary care without ID. NHS guidelines do not require patient documentation when registering unless access to online facilities is required; despite this, Practises continue to request ID and proof of address as a registration requirement. This was noted for homeless residents of Greenwich
- There were concerns were raised about dental services in Lewisham that there was prioritisation of private patients over NHS appointments, leading to reduced availability for NHS services.
- There was negative feedback on waiting times in pharmacies, with long queues and occasional medicine shortages, reported for Lewisham pharmacy services.

People's Own Voices



"Two years ago, my lung partially collapsed on three separate occasions. After the second one I was out on a waiting list for surgery. The surgery took place 7 weeks later. I was super impressed with the short waiting time. I appreciate it was urgent, but still. My husband was also diagnosed with prostate cancer and had to wait only 7 weeks. In addition, I had pneumonia last year, which caused pleurisy, and I had a range of tests with no wait times. To summarise, I have been so impressed with my treatment and the speed of it at Guy's and St Thomas'."



"There are not enough midwives. I had to wait three days for delivery room to become available when I was induced. There was no information on how long my wait would be."

Hospital in Bromley



"I want to change GP as I am not happy with my practice, even when I call at 8 in the morning to book an appointment it is very difficult, I had to call 3 days in a row. After COVID it went downhill."

GP practice in Greenwich





“My elderly mother had cataract surgery, although the procedure went well and her care in hospital was overall very good, they discharged her with little to no information on the personal aftercare she would have to do, they only told her when her next check-up was”

Hospital in Bexley



Next steps

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

We will also:

- Use our social media platforms, Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to raise awareness of our organisations 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

References

This report draws on the publicly available Healthwatch reports below. You can read them by clicking on each report title:

[Lambeth Pulse: Waiting Lists | Healthwatch Lambeth](#)

[Patient Experience Report 2024/2025 Quarter 1 | Healthwatch Bromley](#)

[Community Mental Health Services Report, Spring 2024 | Healthwatch Bromley](#)

[No Place to Call Home: Homelessness and the Impact on Health and Wellbeing | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

[One Conversation at a Time: How Befriending Reduces Loneliness | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

[What did we hear in September 2024? What action has been taken? | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

[What did we hear in July and August 2024? What action has been taken? | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

[Q1 Patient Experience Report 24-25 | Healthwatch Lewisham](#)

[Q4 Patient Experience Report | Healthwatch Lewisham](#)

[Quarterly Monitoring Report - Q1 2024-5 | Healthwatch Southwark](#)

[Southwark Soundboard Reflection Report 2024 | Healthwatch Southwark](#)

Championing what matters to people - Upcoming Healthwatch Reports-:

- Black mental health project, Healthwatch Southwark
- Luther King Ward (SLaM) Enter and View, Healthwatch Lambeth
- Hospital discharge and aftercare for residents, Healthwatch Bexley
- Maximising Wellbeing and 360 Feedback, Healthwatch Lewisham

- Access to health and social care services for people who have a long-term conditions and are housebound, Healthwatch Bromley
- Young carers' experiences of accessing and using local health and care services, Healthwatch Bromley
- Experiences of homeless people with a dual diagnosis, Healthwatch Lambeth
- Black African and Caribbean service users with Severe Mental Illness (SMI), Healthwatch Lambeth
- In collaboration with Be Well (South London Listens) and Greenwich Public Health, Healthwatch Greenwich is leading 'Be Well Support.'
- Healthwatch Greenwich is leading the evaluation of the Anti-Racism for Health Equity Community of Practice.
- Working with the south-east London Cancer Alliance, Healthwatch Greenwich is delivering a youth-led participatory action project focused on raising HPV vaccination awareness and reducing inequalities in HPV vaccination uptake

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