



SEL Healthwatch Q3 Insight Report

What people are telling us about their experience of health services

February 2025

healthwatch

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About south east London Healthwatch

The six local Healthwatch organisations in south east London (SEL) 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 January and March 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 October to December 2024, SELHW actively engaged with over 2,490 people. These engagements included groups that are typically underrepresented, such as:

- Residents from Black, Asian, and minority ethnic backgrounds
- Residents living with disabilities or long-term conditions
- Residents with additional linguistic needs.
- Residents residing in the 20% most deprived areas
- Refugees and migrants
- Unpaid carers
- Older adults
- Parents and families
- Adults with mental health conditions
- Hospital patients
- Pharmacy and dental service users

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

The reports collectively highlight challenges and areas for improvement in health and social care services across South East London, particularly focusing on accessibility, communication, and patient-centred care. A recurring theme is the difficulty patients face in accessing GP appointments, which is often compounded by long wait times and inadequate communication systems. These barriers can lead to delays in treatment and increased reliance on emergency services. Additionally, many reports emphasise the need for improved training for healthcare staff to ensure they can meet the diverse needs of patients, especially those with learning disabilities, mental health conditions, and other vulnerable groups. The feedback highlights the importance of providing culturally sensitive care and ensuring that healthcare providers communicate effectively with patients and their families.

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

1. There was an increase in positive reviews since the last quarter for GP services, as reported by patients in Bromley and Lewisham, particularly on online booking systems and telephone consultations.
2. High satisfaction was reported for staff professionalism and attitudes across hospital care, GP practices, dental services, and pharmacies. In Bromley, 90% of hospital staff reviews were positive, while in Lewisham, 80% of patients praised doctors and nurses in GP services. Many highlighted their kindness and dedication.
3. In Bromley, 87% of respondents rated quality of treatment and care received as positive, with maternity services and surgical procedures receiving particular praise. Princess Royal University Hospital (PRUH) and Orpington Hospital received the most reviews. In Greenwich, the Children's department at Queen Elizabeth Hospital received praise for its caring staff.
4. There was an excellent review for Guy's and St Thomas's Hospital, where a patient reported that she and her husband waited 7 weeks for surgery. – "To summarise, I have been so impressed with my treatment and the speed of it at Guy's and St Thomas'." There was

also particular mention for hospital endometriosis and kidney treatment in Lambeth.

Key Themes and Concerns

Appointment availability and access Issues

- Consistently across the six boroughs residents reported difficulties getting GP appointments. In Greenwich, there were reports of patients who struggled to access a GP and were instead referred to a pharmacy, where they were later sent back to their GP, causing frustration. Privacy concerns were also raised, as some patients felt exposed and unsupported when discussing health issues in a public setting. Additionally, some patients reported that they were advised by a pharmacist to buy medication they would have received for free from their GP. “Without direct treatment from a GP, I ended up paying for a medication I should have received for free. If I’d seen the GP first, I wouldn’t have had to pay. I don’t have money to spare, and in the end, it was a waste of money because the pharmacist sent me back to the GP anyway.”
- In Bromley, 57% of reviews were negative for GP appointment availability, a rise from 53% from the previous quarter.
- In Bromley, 61% of reviews were negative about getting through on the phone, an increase from 51% in the last quarter. Long waiting queues at 8:00 AM remain an issue for patients trying to book appointments.
- In Lewisham 72% of negative reviews highlighted difficulty booking an appointment or getting through on the phone. Patients reported that they often waited long periods on hold, only to find no available appointments. Previously, patients expressed that they value the option of a callback to avoid excessive waiting times.
- Research on GP practices in Greenwich, found an average waiting time of 17 minutes to speak to someone, nearly three times longer than in 2021. One GP practice had a wait time of 58 minutes.
- In Lewisham, there were reports of patients being advised by GP receptionists to go to A&E instead of being offered an appointment. More patients than usual reported having difficulties booking blood

tests. In Lambeth, there were also reports of patients going to A&E because they couldn't secure GP appointments – "I spent three hours waiting at urgent care simply because I couldn't secure a GP appointment and didn't know when I would be able to."

- There was feedback in Lewisham that the number of questions asked on the online forms was viewed as a barrier. It was suggested that GP practices should review and streamline the questions in online consultation forms as the large number of questions can create barriers to accessing care. Simplifying the process could encourage greater use of online consultations.
- There were also reports in GP practices in Lambeth of patients unable to see the same GP, which they felt affected continuity of their care.

Long waiting Times for treatment and A&E

- In Lewisham, waiting times at A&E were criticised for being excessive. Linking back to comments about GPs, some people felt a potential cause for the increased waiting time was because of an influx of patients who couldn't get GP appointments.
- Long waits for hospital treatment were a common theme across the region. A patient in Greenwich, reported waiting five months for knee injury treatment at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, requiring multiple follow-ups before being seen. There were also complaints that patients couldn't get timely scans, and a resident reported that the staff in the children's department were okay, but they couldn't get appointments on time.
- In Lambeth, most residents on waiting lists for hospital treatment reported that their health and wellbeing had worsened since being on the waiting list, with respondents' physical fitness, and ability to socialise the most affected. The longer they waited the more likely they were to report a decline in their health and wellbeing. Only a fifth (21%) of respondents were kept updated on the status of their appointment/treatment. Nearly two thirds (63%) of respondents felt they were not given any advice on how to manage their symptoms or condition while waiting. Communication was seen as crucial to the experience of waiting, with responses to a survey showing that a lack of information can make people feel frustrated, worried, and unable to

plan and make decisions.

- In Greenwich there were reports of surgery cancellations disrupting peoples lives - "I had to ask [my employer] to take three months off from work, just for them to cancel my surgery!"

Mental health support

- In Southwark, Black men were found to be overrepresented in acute psychiatric care, with many fearing being sectioned or over-medicated. Stigma, distrust of services, and a lack of awareness about available support, especially for preventive care, were major obstacles. Black men faced the greatest challenges in accessing support due to these barriers. Participants showed a strong interest in non-clinical support options like peer groups, exercise, and creative activities. However, a lack of information about how to access these services continues to be an issue.
- One patient in Southwark waited 8–9 hours in A&E for mental health support but was seen for just 25 minutes. South London and Maudsley Hospital was the only mental health service many participants were aware of, reinforcing a crisis-led approach rather than preventive care.
- In Lambeth, at the Luther King Ward, patients reported poor communication and lack of engagement from staff, feeling unheard and uninvolved in their treatment plans. Many expressed concerns that medication decisions were made without consultation, leaving carers uninformed about prescriptions. Access to food outside set meal times was limited, and daily activities were unclear, they hadn't met their activities co-ordinator. Additionally, the discharge process lacked transparency, leaving patients and families uncertain about their next steps. Changes were made following feedback from Healthwatch Lambeth.

Communication

- Several respondents in Lewisham brought up communication difficulties between GP and hospitals during the referral process. Several people who were not satisfied with appointment availability kept finding their appointments were being rescheduled.

- Lack of communication from the Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust caused concern among patients waiting for surgery, leading some to worry that they may have been removed from the waiting list.
- In Greenwich, patients emphasised the need for clear, personalised information and support on managing conditions before surgery, such as diabetes or cardiovascular disease, to improve recovery outcomes. Generic leaflets were often considered to be irrelevant or unhelpful, failing to consider patients' specific health conditions, cultural practices, or daily realities. For example, a patient from a West African background felt the dietary advice they received did not align with their cultural traditions, making it difficult to follow. Many patients found medical jargon and complex information to be a barrier. Even English-speaking patients struggled with technical health terms, while those with limited English relied on family members for translation, sometimes leading to miscommunication.
- In Lambeth, there were reports of patients that did not know how to formally raise complaints about GP services, particularly regarding appointment availability and administrative issues rather than clinical care. Some patients felt ignored when raising concerns, with no clear follow-up or resolution process. There were instances where complaints were not responded to which made them wonder if their concerns were acknowledged.
- Patients generally tended to favour face-to-face consultations (F2F). Getting F2F appointments was reported to be challenging across the region. In Lewisham, there were reports of patients not find it easy or comfortable to describe their symptoms when they couldn't see a health professional. They valued human interaction when accessing treatment.

Patient Experiences

- 90% of respondents in Bromley rated their dental care experiences positively and 88% of patients were satisfied with dental care in Lewisham.
- In Lewisham 85% praised pharmacy services.
- In Greenwich, positive feedback was received for a befriending project

for adults with complex needs including significant physical and mental health challenges. The cohort were often under the care of Oxleas or were waiting other formal mental health support. Participating adults described how regular contact with their befriender inspired healthier choices, reduced social isolation and stress.

Other Issues

- Patients encountered issues with registering in GP practices without ID. NHS guidelines do not require patient documentation when registering unless access to online facilities is required; despite this, Practices continue to request ID and proof of address as a registration requirement. This was reported in Greenwich for homeless individuals, who also struggled to attend appointments because of transport costs.
- There were concerns about privacy and the public nature of the pharmacy, particularly in Greenwich, with patients feeling “judged, exposed and unsupported.”

People’s Own Voices

Hospital



“There is a very long wait here, there should be a screen that shows us exactly how long we have to wait so we know if we can do something else in the meantime like getting blood tests done or going to the pharmacy.”
(Hospital patient in Lewisham)



GP surgery



“I have a 23-year-old friend at university. For months, she’s tried to see a GP face to face as she has back pain and stomach pain and feels very tired. The GP has only talked to her over the phone. She wants an in-person appointment. Why is it not given to her? She is worried and needs a checkup!” (Lambeth)



GP surgery



“Requested food vouchers nearly 4 months ago. Still waiting. Can’t access food bank without voucher and Citizens Advice says to get from GP. I’m cold and hungry and sick at Xmas. Can’t afford heating. Can’t work due to disability the NHS refused to treat. Once you’re over 50 they want you dead despite the fact you funded the NHS your whole life. Churned up and spat out by the system.” (Lambeth)



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 in SEL has also organised several informal meetings with partners to discuss the issues of concern and identify actions to take forward. We will continue identifying opportunities to share our findings within the health and social care system.

We will also:

- Use our websites and 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:

[Patient Experience Report 2024/2025 Quarter 2 | Healthwatch Bromley](#)

[Creating Connections Evaluating Healthwatch Greenwich Befriending Service | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

[On Hold- GP Telephone Waiting Times in Greenwich | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

[Tackling Health Inequalities in Surgical Care | Healthwatch Greenwich](#)

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

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

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

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

[Enter & View: Luther King Ward | Healthwatch Lambeth](#)

[Q2 Patient Experience Report 2024-25 | Healthwatch Lewisham](#)

[Towards Inclusive Healthcare: Rethinking mental health services for Black African and Caribbean communities in Southwark | Healthwatch Southwark](#)

[Quarterly Monitoring Report - Q3 2024-25 | Healthwatch Southwark](#)

Championing what matters to people – Upcoming Healthwatch Reports–:

- 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

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