

September 2022 Monthly Feedback report



Healthwatch Greenwich volunteers Allison and Nia at the Migrant Hub with Sandra from the Lewisham Refugee and Migrant Network.

The feedback presented in this report represents 325 responses from the following:

- Calls and emails to Healthwatch Greenwich from Greenwich residents and service users
- Meetings between Healthwatch Greenwich and groups of Greenwich service users or advocates
- Outreach and engagement events by Healthwatch Greenwich
- Conversations as seen on social media, and on community and neighbourhood sites
- Online reviews of services

Primary care

Getting a GP appointment

Service users can't get a face to face or telephone GP appointment when they need to¹. They try different ways of booking an appointment:

- Over the phone
- In person
- Online

But find challenges with each method – causing frustration.

Booking an appointment by phone

In need of an appointment, service users call the surgery at 8am to book. They report long waits to get through and often find all appointment slots have been taken. *“I've made so many calls to try and get through to them on a Monday morning from 8 o'clock”*

“I have been with this doctor [surgery] for 15 years and never had a problem with them, the only issue is trying to get an appointment. I have just tried calling them like I do almost every day to get an appointment. It's ridiculous that I have just tried calling them so many times before I even get through to the options then I finally get through and all the appointments have gone”

Trying to get through to change previously booked appointments is also difficult: *“I have been on hold for 71 mins to [try to] change a booked appointment”*

¹ We raised this issue in previous reports:

Booking an appointment in person

Unable to get an appointment by phone, service users go in person, with some queueing up outside their GP practice before it opens: ***“We’ve had to resort to going down there every time as they never answer the phone”***

“When I last spoke to them on the phone they said it’s best to get down there first thing in morning as all appointments go so you have to try and be there to be in a queue by the time they open”

“I’ve been there at 7.10am to be told the appointments have gone”

Booking an appointment online

Unreliable and complex websites make finding information or booking appointments online difficult: ***“The reason why this place is bad now is because when you have a problem, and you ring up to see a doctor they refer you to the website which doesn’t work and is almost always down”***

“Absolutely ridiculous. You can’t make appointment by phone call... Unfortunately, even online you can’t make an appointment. There are suggestions and [a] helpline but no appointment option. Website is so complicated”

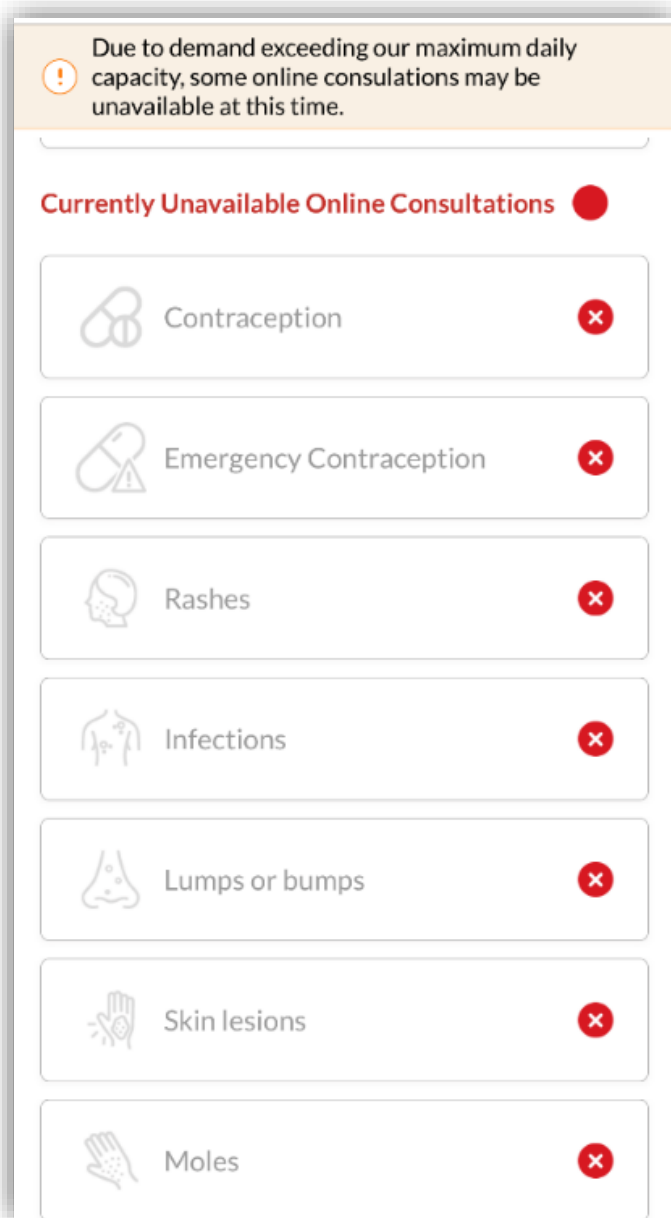
Booking an appointment using apps

Dr.IQ is one of the apps used by some GP practices in Greenwich. Dr. IQ restricts options and service users can’t book appointments or submit queries: ***“Their ‘Dr.IQ’ app is a joke, every request I’ve submitted for medication has been denied despite a record of it. The app has no actual appointments function for either telephone or in person and everything that might be what you need is blanked out as not available ALWAYS”***

“There are no options or appointments available with Dr.IQ”

“Dr.IQ app says call practice for appointment. Telephone queues are over an hour, receptionist says try again using the app tomorrow”

An example of blanked out options on the Dr.IQ app²



Unable to get an appointment, some try pharmacies instead:

“Need an accurate weight measurement of my child for children’s hospital... it’s a hassle to get anything out of the GP, so I’m looking for a pharmacy that can do it”

² X denotes that the service isn’t available

Telephone consultations

While many value the convenience of telephone consultations, some service users need or want face to face appointments, but can't get them:

“My husband and I have been trying for a year to be seen face to face by a doctor for very concerning health issues without success”

“I don't understand why they don't offer face to face appointments anymore. Lockdown was over years ago”

“I haven't seen my doctor in over three years... I've only had phone appointments”

“In the event you are lucky enough to book an appointment, it will only be telephonic with a GP”

Telephone call-backs

Service users are frustrated that their GP practice will only call once or twice and, if they miss these calls, they must re-start the booking process. *“When you miss one phone call from the GP - that's it - you are back to square one in trying to get the next appointment”*

“I have made it clear in each eConsult form that I work certain hours and cannot take calls until after a certain time and this is ignored every time... then I have to chase to get another appointment”

Quality of care

While most service users receive exemplary care and speak highly of healthcare professionals, some have less than satisfactory experiences³:

“One doctor in particular has been extremely dismissive of my concerns and did not listen to me when I was clearly very anxious about a health issue I was facing. I am going to ask next time that I am given another

³ <https://www.england.nhs.uk/publication/compassion-in-practice-evidencing-the-impact/>

doctor to speak to as this has been consistently upsetting for me and I dread when I hear him phone me”

“There is no compassion or patient care shown at all. Each time we speak with them, we always hit a brick wall and it's almost like speaking with automated services - impervious and unwilling to be flexible and consider individual circumstance”

Maternity care:

Rosie's experience – "I'm traumatised. I can't believe what's happened"

Rosie, a young mother of three children, fell pregnant with her fourth child in February this year. Rosie went to QEH for regular pregnancy check-ups.

"When they did the standard checks, I noticed that they were measuring the back of the neck and the fluid. I asked them why they kept on measuring this. They said that they were standard checks. This pregnancy felt different. I started to get an inkling there was something wrong when they asked if I was going to get a screening for Downs Syndrome"

At three months pregnant, after being told her baby needed further tests, QEH sent Rosie to Kings College Hospital to see a specialist and for the baby to have a cardiac scan.

After the tests, Rosie was told her daughter had a major genetic abnormality and she was advised to terminate the pregnancy. Rosie was in shock and upset at the news. She wasn't offered any information, support, or someone to talk through how she was feeling or her options.

Following the advice to terminate her pregnancy, Rosie was surprised to that no one from either Kings or QEH contacted her for two and a half months. ***"They diagnosed Edwards Syndrome, but I never got a letter to confirm it. All I got was a cc'd email from Kings to QEH, from one hospital to another, it wasn't even addressed to me – it felt cold and impersonal."***

This communication didn't suggest any sources of support or any information about the termination procedure. Rosie's pregnancy continued and she began to feel the baby moving inside her, strengthening her connection and bond with her daughter. ***"I didn't know who or where to reach out to know what was happening...I felt helpless...It felt like Kings thought that QEH were responsible... in their eyes, they'd passed me onto QEH and QEH thought Kings were responsible. It was like they were both passing the buck."***

After waiting for two and a half months, Rosie was finally called back to QEH. Rosie said the nurse who spoke to her was dismissive and abrupt, she wasn't kind to Rosie. She told Rosie she had two options for the termination: surgical or medical. If Rosie opted for the medical option, she'd have to go to a private hospital, but the NHS would pay for it. ***"The nurse didn't give me the full picture, she didn't explain how it would be done or what choices I had for funeral arrangements or where I could get any support. I feel like I was forced to make the decision to have the medical procedure and I wasn't well informed for the procedure I had chosen – I had no idea that this meant I might not have a proper funeral. I was given no information about support groups or organisations I could contact to help me with my decision and emotionally support me during this difficult time for me and my family"***

Feeling traumatised, confused, and anxious, Rosie was given the details for the private hospital and told to contact them and sort everything out herself. The nurse did not offer to help her or check that Rosie felt capable of doing this herself, or if she had family or a friend that could help her.

"At the time, I didn't know what was standard and what wasn't – I thought this must be the way QEH always do it, standard – just expect you to do it all yourself, alone, with no support. I was upset and confused, at a really low point, I was over 5 months pregnant, this was my baby, my daughter and they just sent me away and basically said 'termination – sort it out yourself'. it's only now that I'm going over and over everything and picking it apart, I realise that I shouldn't have had to self-refer and organise the procedure and everything myself."

5.5 months pregnant, Rosie went to the private hospital for the termination (paid for by the NHS). Her husband was not allowed into the procedure room and had to wait in the public waiting area. Rosie went in to see the nurses alone.

"When I got there, they said they would like to scan me. But, when they found out that I was 5.5 months pregnant, they were shocked, they said I was too far gone and that it would be too distressing for me to see her.... They were so surprised that I was five and a half months pregnant, and"

they had to phone Kings to double check this was happening at such a late stage in the pregnancy, they just couldn't believe it"

The staff in the clinic gave Rosie medication to start the process and sent her to wait with her husband in the public waiting area. They forgot to bring her back into the private clinic area in time and the termination started to happen in the waiting room, in front of other service users. ***"I had to go to the toilet to clean myself up. The cleaner went into the toilets afterwards and said 'it stinks in here'. I felt humiliated"***

In the waiting area, Rosie saw information on the notice board about burials and cremations. Not receiving any information before and not knowing what her options were, Rosie asked staff for more information. Rosie and her partner were told that they had ten minutes to decide what they wanted to do. ***"The way that they spoke about my daughter was really insensitive. It was like they didn't have a heart. They said something like, 'we can dispose of IT here or you can take IT with you". I lost trust in the staff completely. I didn't think that they would treat my daughter with dignity or respect, no one told me they could keep her in the mortuary or liaise with funeral directors, so I decided to take her home so I could look after her and make sure she was treated with respect. Again, I wasn't given any support, advice or any details of any organisations that could help me make the best decision for me and my daughter. And what's more, I felt like I was forced to make this huge decision in just ten minutes"***

Rosie was given her daughter in a cardboard box, which was still warm. ***"The nurse said 'you can put IT in the freezer when you get home'. She said the box wasn't waterproof, so I'd have to find a waterproof box and transfer her before she went in the freezer at home. I remember the nurse said to me, "I suppose you'll need a carrier bag for THAT" like she was talking about a random package or something you buy in a shop. I feel really upset and angry. If I knew that I could have had a proper funeral, it would have completely changed things. What hurts is that I can't go back and change things. I wasn't given my options properly and now I regret decisions I made.... I now carry this sense of guilt that I made the wrong decision for my daughter"***

Rosie put her daughter's remains in her mother's freezer for several days until she felt able to take her to the funeral directors. The funeral director said that they "had never seen anything like it". Rosie, wanting to see her baby, looked inside the box. ***"I wasn't told to not look in the box – there was no warning. No one prepared me for what was inside, what I might see, or told me not to look – if they'd have told me not to look and why, I wouldn't be as traumatised as I am. I feel like no one cared. You'd think they'd have more of a heart"***

Rosie had a few months of bereavement counselling. ***"The bereavement counselling was always over the phone – they were short check-in phone calls. It felt like the counsellor didn't know what to say and was in shock herself – she was surprised herself that this had happened to me."***

After three months, Rosie was discharged from bereavement counselling. ***"I felt like I never opened up with my counsellor. The calls were really short and felt like she was ticking boxes. When I went back to work, she assumed I was fine and discharged me very quickly. She didn't ask me what I wanted or needed, she just said – oh, you're back to work, you're OK now"***

Rosie feels damaged by her experience and how she was treated. She is struggling to eat or sleep and keeps running the experience over, and over again in her mind. Her GP has referred her to mental health services. Rosie's children and partner are also struggling to come to terms with what happened. ***"It's difficult for my children to see me the way I am. I'm trying to get through this day by day but I'm finding it really hard. I started crying because I saw a pram on the bus...now I avoid buses because of the prams – I avoid big supermarkets where they sell baby clothes and anywhere that I might see a baby – I'm frightened to go out"***

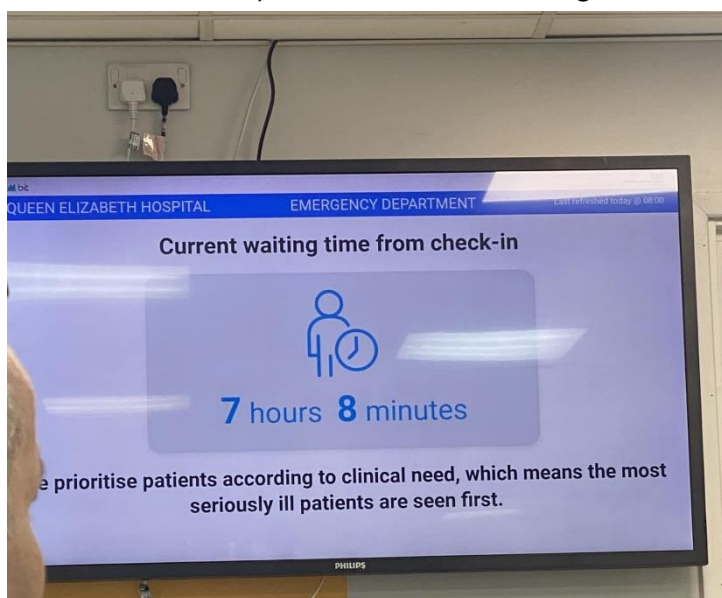
Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust

A&E Waiting times

Service users have long wait times at QEH A&E – national data suggests that A&E waiting times at QEH are amongst the longest in the country⁴

“It was 12 hours I waited... I think you’re better off going to a different hospital”

A service user’s picture of the waiting time, taken in September 2022:



A&E Quality of care

We heard positive feedback about the quality of care at A&E this month.

“A&E seems more organised than before – staff were great too”

“Well after being in here, I must say how well I have been treated & how clean this place is”

⁴ [NHS tracker postcode search: See how your local trust is performing through the year | UK News | Sky News.](#)

Urgent care: Hareem's experience - "The NHS have wasted a lot of time and resources for something that could have been so simple"

Hareem's 6-year-old daughter, Kailey was in a lot of pain due to an infected ear piercing. Hareem, knowing that her GP and local hospital (QEH) were busy, went to her local pharmacy to get some advice. ***"I wanted to avoid going to the GP – I didn't want to take up their time or take someone else's appointment, so I went to a pharmacy as my first port of call"***

The pharmacist looked at Kailey's infected ear and advised that she would need a round of antibiotics. Her GP responded quickly with a telephone consultation and prescribed antibiotics to clear the infection, so the piercing could be taken out. After two weeks, the antibiotics hadn't cleared the infection, she couldn't take the ear stud out, and her daughter was in pain. ***"I tried to take the piercing out myself with numbing gel and hot baths but my daughter was screaming in pain"***

Hareem phoned her GP practice at 8am, waited over 30mins to get through and was offered another telephone appointment. Hareem insisted that she needed to be seen face to face. ***"I was very pleased that I managed to get a same day face to face appointment. The GP said, "I can see she's in real pain...can't you take the stud out?" It felt like the GP kept on putting the ball back in my court and was asking me for advice on what to do/how to take the stud out"***

The GP prescribed more numbing gel and, at home, Hareem tried to take the piercing out again. Again, it didn't work, and her daughter was crying in pain. As a last resort, Hareem went to A&E at Queen Elizabeth Hospital the following day. They arrived at A&E at 9.30am. ***"We checked in at A&E reception and were guided to follow the footprints to the Urgent Care unit where there were already about 70 patients waiting! There were some really unwell people waiting, but I only saw a few members of staff, so I expected a long wait"***

At 11am Kailey was triaged by a nurse and asked to wait. Nearly 4 hours after arriving at QEH, they were seen by a doctor. ***“The doctor at the Urgent Care centre was confused as to why we were there. They told me that we should have been sent to ENT (Ears, Nose and Throat). So, I asked if we could go to ENT only to be told that there isn’t an ENT department at Queen Elizabeth”.***

Frustrated – she didn’t want to be sent home again with Kailey still in pain and unable to take the stud out. ***“I told the doctor that my daughter had been in pain for weeks – and this had to be sorted”.*** The Urgent Care doctor put more numbing cream on, suggesting it would be stronger than the ones they had tried before and asked them to wait for an hour – for the cream to work. The doctor didn’t call them in an hour later. ***“I was concerned that the numbing cream would have lost its effectiveness as they were late to call us in”***

Asking Hareem to hold the ear, the doctor tried to take the piercing out. But Kailey screamed in pain. Unsuccessful, the doctor said it would have to be removed at ENT and phoned Lewisham Hospital (as he’d said there was no ENT department at Queen Elizabeth). Lewisham Hospital said they couldn’t help as there weren’t any doctors in ENT available and they’d have to wait for a future appointment. ***“I was fuming – if I had been triaged correctly, I could have been sent straight to Lewisham Hospital and seen the correct doctor. She was in so much pain. I was really worried that the infection might get serious....so, again, we were sent home with my daughter in pain and the stud still in place”***

Communication

Lewisham and Greenwich NHS Trust often rely on Royal Mail to deliver important letters to patients. ***“Thanks to the Royal Mail taking nearly a week to deliver a 1st Class letter from Queen Elizabeth Hospital, I missed an appointment yesterday with the Oncology Consultant who is dealing with my prostate cancer. The hospital is trying to rearrange my appointment ASAP....this sort of thing is more than just annoying when your health is at risk. It’s not a great way for a hospital to arrange something this important with such short notice”***

Using multiple methods to notify service users of appointments would reduce the possibility of missed appointments.

COVID-19 Vaccination Appointments

Despite having a booked appointment for a specified time, service users queue for over an hour at QEH: ***“Don’t book the QEH for your covid vaccine! You have timed slots, but they are irrelevant. I waited about 1hr 45 minutes after my booked slot!”***

“Staff are expected to wait in the queue for vaccinations too... it isn’t practical”

In contrast, service users getting vaccinated at local pharmacies have positive experiences: ***“No queue at all, no other people waiting, just straight in and out”***

“I got my COVID booster done at the chemist... [I] was early seen straight away - no waiting”

Dental Care

Access to NHS dental care is a national issue⁵. Greenwich residents can't find a dentist willing to take new NHS patients: *"I've been trying to register with a dentist locally since I moved here in March but I've had no luck. I need a tooth removed and a check up but the only options available are private and I can't afford the rates"*.

Service users with NHS dentists are positive about their experiences: *"I can't thank my dentist enough - exceptional service! I'm [a] very nervous person when it comes to dentist appointments as I was traumatised when I was child. He was so friendly, compassionate, professional and skilful. I felt safe in his care and trust him completely! He informed me of every move"*

"...They are so friendly and kind"

⁵ <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/response/2022-07-19/nhs-acts-your-feedback-improve-dental-care>

Children's centres: Alice's experience - "there is a huge lack of information"

Alice, mother of new baby Ada recently moved to Greenwich. After using the health visiting service before (in another London borough with her eldest child) she was surprised at the difference in Greenwich. The health visitor didn't make an appointment and just turned up one day. Luckily, Alice was home with Ada. Checking the telephone details the health visitor had, Alice noticed they'd **"missed out a digit, so I gave them the correct number"**.

Alice asked where the children's centres were in Greenwich. **"I was really surprised, she said she didn't know...I even asked my GP and the GP receptionist but they said they didn't know, and they didn't give me any suggestions of how to find out. I did try and look online, but I couldn't find anything. I was really disappointed, my eldest had benefitted so much from children's centres and I wanted the same for Ada"**

The health visitor turned up for the second visit, again without making an appointment. **"When I checked the telephone number she had, it was wrong – again. They hadn't corrected it from the first visit. This visit felt really disorganised. I felt like Ada and I were just a process to be done as quickly as possible and you can tell in their mind they're already rushing off to the next visit before they've even finished with you. When I had my first baby – not in Greenwich – my health visitor told me straight away about the children's centres. She said I could go down there and get her weighed. She organised a date and time for the weighing. She was compassionate – I felt like more of an individual rather than a number. I don't understand why it's so much worse in Greenwich"**

When Ada was 5 months old, Alice discovered the children's centres in Greenwich. Upset that neither her health visitor or her GP seemed to know or give her any information about them, Alice said: **"This delay meant that Ada missed out for 5 months on all the services and facilities available and I missed out on making contacts and friends with other mums with young babies"**

Visiting the children's centres Alice found the range of activities limited, and often with unwashed toys being passed from baby to baby. *"The number and quality of toys available is really poor. I'd expected more sensory toys and educational activities -like ABC songs that mums and babies can join in with but they just have the same pop songs repeated over and over again. Before moving to Greenwich, when I had my eldest, the children's centres offered baby massage courses and activities that were designed to bring us mums together... I felt like I was more involved in the community, it's a shame they don't do that in Greenwich"*

Alice is still waiting for an appointment to have her daughter weighed. *"The only thing in her little red book are her immunisations. I should have her weight in there by now too"*

Next Steps

We follow up on all concerns or issues raised. We will work with commissioners, providers, and service users to understand where services are working well and where further development may be needed.

Contact Us

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