



Access to GP Services



Healthwatch Doncaster
Engage, Inform, Influence

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Executive Summary

Background

Access to GP services has been a common theme from patient feedback to Healthwatch Doncaster. Anecdotally we have received comments that access to GP practice is an issue for Doncaster patients, however we had very little direct feedback to form an opinion as to why people have difficulty accessing their GP practice and more importantly, why patients do not always attend.

The information received by Healthwatch Doncaster and discussions with various stakeholders led to the development of a survey to ascertain the views and opinions of the local population regarding access to all services provided by their GP Practice.

Planning and Engagement

Healthwatch Doncaster planned and implemented a 2-month engagement programme seeking views on:

- What the is the reality of accessing GP appointments in Doncaster
- What barriers patients perceive or experience in accessing an appointment
- Why patients do not always keep their appointments
- What improvements need to be made to assist making access better and utilising appointment times as best as possible?

Healthwatch Doncaster used a creative approach to engagement for this project to achieve our outcomes. Whilst the focus was to gain as many views as possible from local people, we specifically wanted to target the “working population” who we feel are often excluded from such engagement.

In total, we visited 47 venues spread across the whole of the Borough to capture the views of patients from all the GP Practices. We were successful in our efforts to cover all GP Practices and the working population.

1563 respondents completed the survey.

98% of people that we spoke to had used their GP Practice in the last 12 months.

Findings

- Results demonstrate the variation of services in GP services experienced by local people. 45% of respondents happy with services they receive. However, a large percentage of respondents (55%) are unhappy with aspects of these services.
- In questioning why people use their GP Practices, the survey demonstrated that 50% of respondents access their GP Services to request or collect a prescription.
- 685 responses (nearly 50%) indicate that people went to see their GP or Nurse for another reason along with 558 responses(41%) indicating they accessed their GP

Services because they had symptoms that they were worried about and were not going away. This demonstrates the appropriateness of the majority of access to GP Practices.

- It is very encouraging that 908 (70%) respondents indicated that they got an appointment at a time that was convenient to them or the person that they accompanied. However, the fact that 26% did not is a statistic that drives some of the feedback that we hear.
- It is encouraging that 50% of respondents stated that they were able to receive an appointment with a practitioner of their choice, however 33% of people told us that they did not. Of the 33% who did not get an appointment with the person of their choice, 23% were over 65 years of age.
- The survey shows us that 45% of respondents did not experience any problems accessing their GP Services, which is very positive however, this does mean that over 55% of respondents did experience some problems.
- Of the 634 who said they had problems accessing services
 - 344 wanted an appointment to suit their commitments
 - 42% wanted to see a specific GP or Nurse
 - 73% of the respondents who had problems had difficulty getting through on the telephone
- Low numbers of people are aware of alternative appointments - only 50% are aware of the Same Day Health Centre
- 36% (513) of respondents were aware of Saturday clinics at other practices, meaning that 64% are not. Nearly 40% (562) respondents were not aware of alternative appointments in GP services in the week or at weekends

Themes

- A considerable amount of respondents (over 50%) stated they had difficulties in accessing services from their GP practice
- The most common themes are around difficulties in accessing appointments, difficulties in making contact by telephone with some comments on difficulties requesting prescriptions (20% of the 795 who said they had problems had a prescription that was not ready or incomplete) and the ineffectiveness, inconvenience and lack of knowledge on call-backs.
- 1238 people (85%) stated that they have not missed an appointment and 269(15%) stated they have missed an appointment. The main reasons for this were that they forgot, they were late, the appointment was too far in advance, they were too ill or they were better.

Recommendations

Make patients aware of other health and care provision

Patients need to be more informed of services where they can gain health advice and support, it is evident that many individuals are not aware of the Same Day health Centre and the Extended Access Services.

Keeping patients informed about signposting to the most appropriate clinician or service

People need to understand the concept and the benefits of being signposted to the most appropriate professional who can meet their needs. There needs to be consistent and clear communication for patients and local communities so that people understand that they will be signposted to the most appropriate clinician or service and that this will not always be a GP.

Use of digital and online services to book appointments/request prescriptions

Patients need to be aware of and be able to use digital ways to access appointments, information and services available from GP Practices.

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Introduction

Access to GP services has been a common theme from patient feedback to Healthwatch Doncaster. Whilst it is accepted that there may be many factors as to why patients experience difficulties, the effect of patients not attending or cancelling and not rebooking their appointment impacts on the local NHS from both a financial and efficiency perspective.

Although anecdotally we receive comments that access to GP practice is a number one priority for patients, we have very little direct feedback from patients which we can use to form an opinion as to why people have difficulty accessing their GP practice and more importantly, why patients do not always attend.

Patients contact or attend GP Practices for other reasons and not just to see their GP so this report is not confined to gathering views on access to GPs but the views of patients accessing all services within the GP Practice.

The information received by Healthwatch Doncaster and discussions with various stakeholders led to the development of a survey and engagement project to gather the views and opinions of the local population regarding access to all services provided by their GP Practice:

- What the is the reality of accessing GP appointments in Doncaster
- What barriers patients perceive or experience in accessing an appointment
- Why patients do not always keep their appointments
- What improvements need to be made to assist making access better and utilising appointment times as best as possible?

During the planning phase, Healthwatch Doncaster developed a series of survey questions utilising intelligence from the local and national perspectives in relation to access to GP services.

There was a pre-engagement period to test the survey and the Patient Participation Group Network members accessed a cohort of patients from their practices who were happy to complete the draft survey. Evaluation of the feedback resulted in some refinements to the survey that enabled the development of the final version used in this project.

The aim was to gain the views of a cross-section of the local population across the whole of the Doncaster and to make every effort to gather views from patients from all GP Practices.

The project was supported by our partners and stakeholders across Doncaster who were receptive to our requests to either share information about this project and assist with providing opportunities where we could engage with local people.

The main approach to engagement was:

- Attend events to support people to get involved in the survey and discussions around access to GP services

Healthwatch Doncaster team members planned to attend a series of events inviting people to share their views by completing the survey on paper or digitally online.

- Digital and Social Media

To help promote wider engagement and involvement, Healthwatch Doncaster utilised its digital and social media reach to help encourage more people to have their say about access to GP services

This approach included having information about the project available on our website, including links to the online survey so that people could complete it at a time to suit them. It was supported by regular posts (text, images and video) through social media accounts and, additionally, press releases were published to raise awareness through local newspapers.

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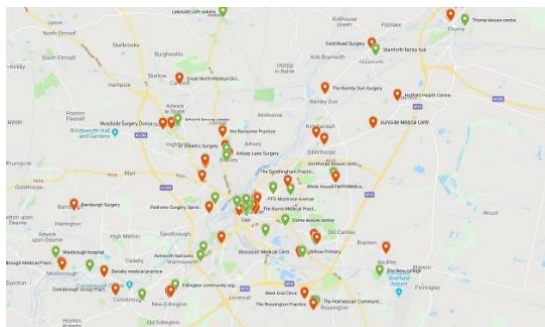
Engagement

Healthwatch Doncaster used a creative approach to engagement for this project to achieve our outcomes. Whilst the focus was to gain as many views as possible from local people, we specifically wanted to target the “working population” who are often excluded from such engagement.

In total, 47 venues were visited across the whole of the Borough to capture the views of patients from all the GP Practices. We were successful in our efforts to cover all GP Practices. A full synopsis of the engagement activity for this project is included in Appendix 1.

An interactive Google Map has been developed that demonstrates the community locations where we engaged with local people and the spread of GP practices where people told us that they were registered. You can access the map by clicking on the link below:

[Healthwatch Doncaster engagement activity map](#)



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Findings

1563 local people completed the survey. 1050 (67%) completed the survey face-to-face and the remainder completed it online through Survey Monkey. 98% of people who completed the survey (1524) told us that they were registered with a Doncaster GP and **94% of people** told us that they had used their GP practice within the last **12 months**. The feedback that Healthwatch Doncaster received as part of this project is current and reflects recent experiences of accessing GP services in Doncaster.

Analysis and review of the information shared by local people has identified three common theme areas:

- **Appointments**
- **Telephones**
- **Awareness of other services**

There is an underlying theme linked to use of **digital systems** and making and accessing appointments digitally.

"I do not have a problem at my Practice but my husband is at a different Practice and he has problems"

"I like to see the same GP each time I go but I know I can't anymore"

"I go and queue for people who cannot do it themselves to get them an appointment"

"I didn't know about appointments on a Saturday that would be helpful"

"I have to queue for an appointment and often when I get to the desk the appointments have all gone"

"I have to ring repeatedly to get through to my GP Practice"

"My mum could use the Extended Access service as I work all week and I have to escort her"

"I do not have any problems at my GP Practice"

"I have missed a call back and when I ring them back there is no answer as they are closed"

"I can only order a prescription at certain times"

"I have to work and cannot keep my phone on for a call back"

"I can never get an appointment when I want one"

Appointments

People shared their feedback about their experiences that illustrate some of the difficulties that are experienced in accessing appointments at their GP Practice. Many of the difficulties that are experienced by people when accessing an appointment are related to the availability of appointments.

45% of people who completed the survey did not experience any problems accessing their GP Services. This is positive, however this does mean that over 55% of respondents did experience some problems.

Of the 55% who experienced problems when they accessed their GP Practice, 344 (54%) wanted an appointment at a time to suit their commitments but it was not possible.

People have told us that when they cannot get an appointment to suit their commitments they feel inconvenienced and upset. This can then create negative views of their GP Practice.

In this survey we asked people why they missed their appointment. 31 people told us that they could not get the time off work. This suggests that they made the appointment with the intention of getting the time off work but were not supported to do so.

Through conversations at engagement sessions, people have told us that they cannot easily get time off work to go to an appointment. There is an opportunity to support people to access appointments at a time that is convenient to them.

42% of people who indicate that they had had a problem accessing their GP Practice told us that they wanted to see a specific GP or Nurse. We have heard that this can be an issue for people however, there is no evidence to demonstrate whether individuals waited until an appointment was free with a named clinician or they felt that they had to accept what was offered to them. In conversations as part of this engagement project, we had some people that told us that they were willing to accept any appointment offered because they just wanted an appointment.

People who work away during the week or on shifts told us that they struggle to get an appointment at a convenient time; they told us that if they had been aware of alternative appointments in the evening and at weekends they would be willing to access these.

What did Healthwatch Doncaster hear from local people?

I needed an earlier appointment but the problem wasn't urgent so I waited so long that the problem had altered

no appointments

an emergency same day appointment offered

no appointments at all available

Very difficult to get an appointment with my preferred gp. Had to go in very early to beat the telephone requests.

Just wanted an appointment, told 5 weeks wait or call at 8am for same day appointment

Several times couldn't get an appointment. Was told once I couldn't see anyone as my usual GP was on holiday and would have to ring the walk in centre. Was once told GP would ring me back as I was ill and couldn't get an appointment. GP did not ring.

Fortunately, it was not an urgent appointment and it is more a case of being lucky to see a Dr, not to see a specific one.

appointment was not as soon as I would have hoped for.

People's feedback about getting an appointment at their GP Practice

I wanted an appointment at any time and this wasn't possible

three week wait for appointment

Long wait for appointments

6 week wait

I wanted an appointment at any time any day. Told to ring back next morning

Was told no appointments available to book have to wait till 8am to get one

I called in the practice, and was told there were no pre bookable appointments left and that I should ring in the morning. When I eventually got through, I was told they had not been "put on yet" and was told to ring again at 4 30pm. When I did they had all gone. I rang the following day to check again, and ask when exactly the available appointments would be "put on". I was told that this is done randomly. I asked to speak to the practice manager to discuss this. I was told she would call me back, two days later she hasn't.

Every time I get told no appointments and to go somewhere else for an appointment. This should not be happening I have a GP and so should be able to see a doctor where I'm registered. Never do the receptionists explain that a nurse or Dr could call you back or use other services. Always they just want to send you to same day health centre.

Struggled getting an appointment

Time of appointments if not urgent are 2-3 weeks that can't be booked till week prior

Was told no appointments left for that day

Put on triage which is annoying not to be able to just book an appointment

A consultation with a doctor would have been preferable

appointment to see GP, but saw nurse practitioner

I needed an appointment where I could be accompanied

Can never get an appointment

I saw the diabetic nurse and she made a GP appointment for me, as I had been unable to.

sometimes appointments unavailable

We have a walking clinic in the morning but you can wait hours and you have to see who calls your name whether it's a doctor or nurse practitioners

Could not get any appointment and still can't for my 91 year old mother

Always different nurses, never no appointments

Only person you can see is a nurse practitioner 6 weeks wait to see GP

So hard to set an appointment.

Have to wait usually couple of weeks to get a mutually convenient appt

No appointments available

convincing reception that i needed to make previous appointment

2 week waiting time

Unable to facilitate appointment at requested time due to fully booked and I work full time. I don't find doctors hours flexible for full time working people

National GP Patient Survey - Making an appointment

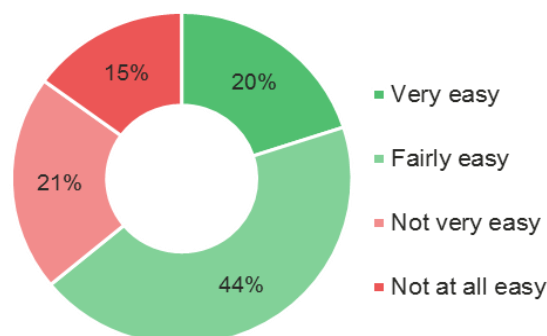
The National GP Patient Survey received 4342 responses from the Doncaster population covering all of the 40 GP Practices.

The Healthwatch Doncaster survey asked people about choice in relation to appointments in GP Practices. There were some interesting responses, which seem to differ from the National survey findings. The percentage of patients saying 'yes' they were offered a choice of appointment in the National survey ranges from 23% - 84% with the average being 57% compared with the National average of 62%. In the local Healthwatch Doncaster survey, 70% of people stated they were offered an appointment at a time to suit them

In the National GP Patient Survey an average of 64% of people were satisfied with their appointment time with a range of 41-97% across all GP Practices. Healthwatch Doncaster asked people about any problems encountered in relation to making an appointment and 54% of local people stated that wanted an appointment to suit their commitments but did not get one.

The responses and information that Healthwatch Doncaster received indicate a range of opinions about the services that are delivered by GP Practices in Doncaster. This is also evidenced in the National GP Patient Survey, which clearly demonstrates that patients across Doncaster have very different experiences from one Practice to another. The overall experience of GP Practice being reported as good (which includes very good and fairly good) has a range of 45-99% across all GP Practices.

As part of the National GP Patient Survey, a question was asked about the ease of getting through to the GP Practice on the telephone.



Across all GP Practices there was a wide difference in responses. In the lowest performing GP Practice only 21% of patients said that it was 'easy' to get through to someone on the phone. Whilst in the best performing GP Practice, 99% of patients indicated that it was 'easy' to get through to someone on the telephone.

It is evident that for some patients access to the GP Practice is not without difficulty. The data and information from the National GP survey correlate with and substantiate the findings in this report where 73% of respondents who had problems accessing an appointment did so because they could not get through on the telephone.

Missed Appointments in GP Practices

As part of the survey, Healthwatch Doncaster asked people if they had ever missed a pre-booked appointment at their GP Practice and their reasons why.

This question was asked in order to establish some of the reasons as to why people miss GP appointments because we know that this is still a major issue for many GP Practices locally and nationally.

The vast majority of people who participated in the survey - 86.8% - stated that they have not missed an appointment in their GP practice and 12.85% of respondents told us that they have missed an appointment. This amount might seem low, however if this cohort is representative of the wider population in Doncaster then it would be equivalent to 39,000 people who miss appointments in their GP Practice.

When asked for reasons for missing their appointments people told us that they could not get through to their GP Practice to cancel their appointment. This information links back to problems experienced by people in getting through to their GP Practice using the telephone.

Healthwatch Doncaster were also told that some people did not get a reminder about their appointment at the GP Practice. Some GP Practices and Acute Trusts send reminders to reduce missed appointments and maybe some of the respondents expected a text reminder and didn't receive one.

Difficulty in getting time off work was highlighted by people as another reason why they could not attend their appointment at the GP Practice. This suggests that they made the appointment with the intention of getting the time off work but were not supported to do so by their employer.

People have told us that they cannot easily get time off work to go to an appointment and information from the survey about awareness of additional or alternative services - Same Day Health Centre and Extended Access Clinics - indicates that people are not aware of their availability and how to access them. Both these services offer appointments at times that might accommodate people who working during the day and throughout the week.

What did people tell Healthwatch Doncaster about why they missed their appointments in GP Practices?

Appointments too far in advance

- *booked appointment are so far from bookings*
- *wait was 3 weeks + forgot*
- *Had to wait such a long time for an appointment I was better*

Mistakes

- *miscommunication regarding time of the appointment*
- *I didn't read the text message correctly*
- *letter with appointment times came after the date*
- *I did not receive an appointment later*
- *Just can't remember at times*
- *Memory issues part of my symptoms*
- *Appointment was 1 week before*

Too Ill

- *not well enough to attend*
- *Too unwell to attend*
- *Health reasons*
- *I ended up cancelling my appointment because I felt too ill to go to see the doctor*
- *Was given a different time than the one actually booked*
- *Too unwell to attend doctors surgery*
- *I have missed an appointment due to been unable to attend due to a gout attack*
- *Forgetting, or poor health (physical or mental)*

What else did people tell Healthwatch Doncaster?

Late for appointment

- *Late*
- *I misheard time and was an hour late*
- *Was 5 minutes late*
- *I was too late to attend blood appointment but rang immediately, have not missed any other appointment with the practice nurse as I have yet to see a GP*
- *Yes had a problem with unexpected build up of traffic and was late, they would not see me even though I phoned to explain I would be late*

Practice issues

- *GP 1 hour late, not even in the building. Also had no surgery or appointments prior to the surgery according to reception*
- *I've missed 1 appointment in 10 years it was a 8.15 am and practice was not answering phone. It was impossible to cancel*
- *I was given an appointment I did not request*
- *Rang doctors on day to cancel but it wasn't cancelled*
- *I was told not allowed to change appointment relative going through bad phase back to this cause a lot of anxiety for both myself and relative.*
- *I was advised to go hospital instead but I received a letter saying I had missed my appointment.*
- *surgery changed appointment but didn't cancel*
- *I turned up for a practice nurse appointment and it had been cancelled, despite a text earlier in the day reminding me of the appointment.*

Other comments made

- *rang in to cancel and reappointed*
- *I decided to cancel my appointment and did it online*
- *I never get to see my doctor*
- *Threatened to take me off the list*
- *reminders should be sent*

Telephones

The survey asked about whether patients were offered call-backs from their GP Practice. 465 (40%) stated they had been offered a call back and 402 (34.6%) stated they had not been offered a call back.

People we spoke to had mixed experiences of call-backs. Some people who work told us that the call-back is at an inconvenient time and that they are not allowed to answer their phone in the workplace. Others told us that the call back resolved their issue without having to visit the GP Practice.

What did people tell Healthwatch Doncaster about call backs?

I refused a call back when offered

I could not have a call back because it was emergencies only

Call back was not available as an option

I cannot take a call back when I am at work

Call back to receive an appointment is inconvenient due to work/school commitments and affects confidentiality

Having to ring the practice and be put on a list to be rung back to book an appointment is very inconvenient - I am not always available to receive calls

Was told GP would phone to discuss, it was receptionist instead who phoned back!!!!

I work in Leeds and could not do a call back for appointment that day. Told that was all they offered.

Call back is impossible when you have to have your phone turned off due to your job role

No specific time call back offered-not able to answer when called back.

Many people told us about access on the telephone being difficult and the impact that this has on accessing appointments. There are examples of patients experiencing many different responses to their request to obtain an appointment however, telephone access does appear to be the main difficulty.

What did Healthwatch Doncaster hear from local people when they talked about telephone calls with their GP practice?

People told us that they need to ring at a particular time to book an appointment but this is not necessarily successful

A number of people stated that they struggled to get through on the phone when ringing a GP Practice stating it took them numerous return calls.

One person told us that it took 86 redials and another person told us that it took 3 days to get through because the line was always engaged. Another person told us that they went up to the practice to get an appointment because they could not get through.

Ringling for appointments - all full. I work full time and find difficult to get there especially when trying to get results.

Repeat calls to get an appointment

It takes a long time to get through

15 mins on phone with repeat dialling to get through

It takes approximately 90 calls before phone is answered it usually takes 4-6 weeks. To get a booked appointment my surgery called me to make an appointment

Takes a long time to get through on the phone, so I go in person

Phones hard to get through on

the telephone introduction is so long my phone disconnects.

I've had to wait a week just to have a phone consultation

Have to ring at least 20-30 times - Rang 40 times

These views are common views that we have heard not just in this survey but in other engagement events. They are a reflection of what patients experienced at the time and naturally these patients feel inconvenienced and upset at a time when the majority of them feel unwell.

People told us about their experiences of phoning their GP practices:

Unable to get through - have to phone multiple times

Extremely difficult to get in touch over the phone always engaged. Takes around 20 rings to get through

Couldn't get through on the phone

Tried for 2 hours to get through on the phone

Took 3 days to get through as phone always engaged

Not being able to get through on the telephone until all appointments were gone

length of answering machine message and speaking to receptionist

Engaged 14 times

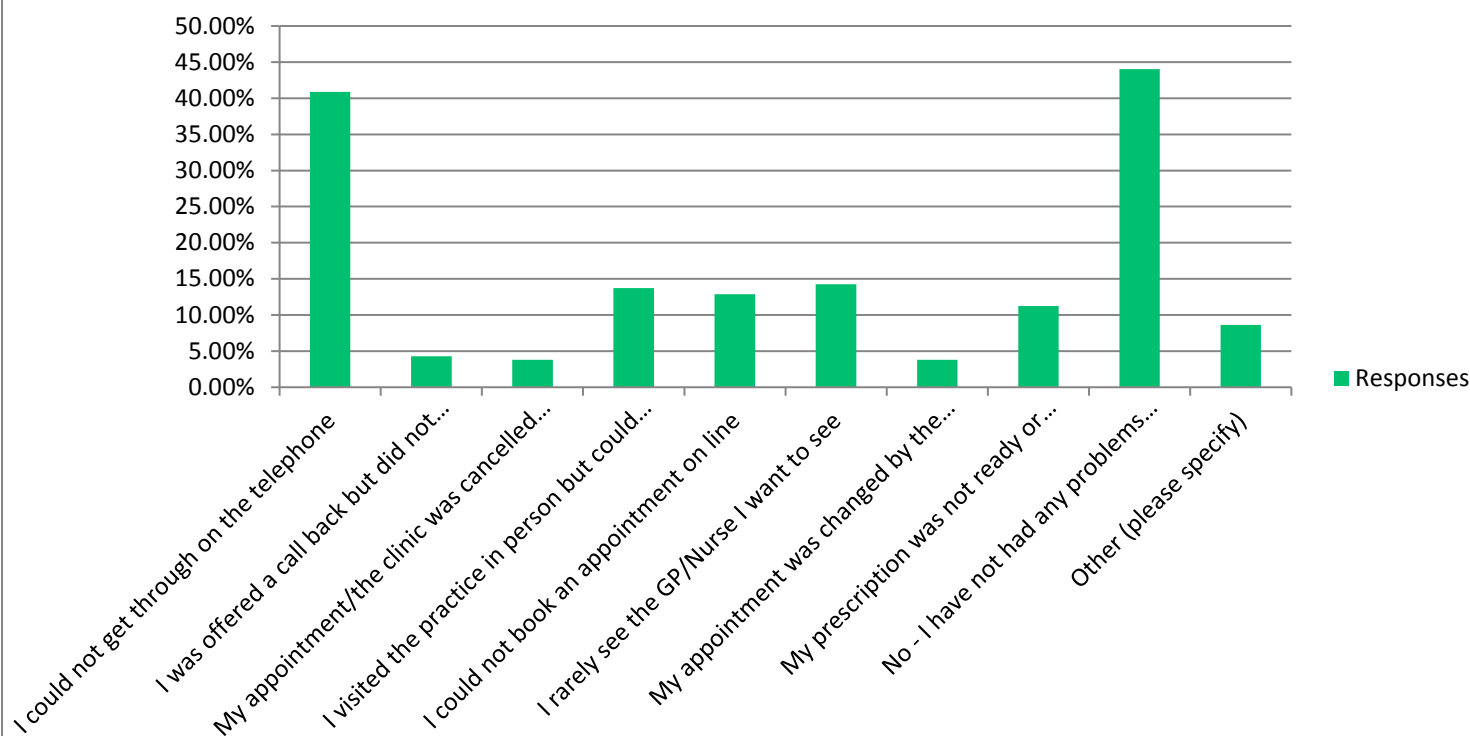
Spent hours trying to get through

Phone delay

phone takes a very long time before they answer

Problems accessing appointments or services at GP Practices in Doncaster

Have you had any problems accessing an appointment or services at the GP Practice?



The intention for this question was to establish a true reflection from the people we engaged with as to whether they experienced problems accessing an appointment or services at their GP Practice.

To gather as much information as possible common responses that had been heard from previous discussions and conversations with people through community events were included for people to choose.

There are increased number of responses to this question because people were asked to tick all the options that applied to them or the person they were completing the survey on behalf of.

It is encouraging that 628 (44%) of people who responded to this question did not have any problems accessing their GP Services.

This does mean, however, that 46% of people did experience some problems linked to their access to GP services. This reflects some of feedback and discussions that we have had with local people through community engagement sessions and meetings.

Healthwatch Doncaster have heard about the experiences that people have in getting through to their GP practice on the telephone, this survey illustrated that this was the case for 88% of the respondents who had experienced a problem.

Awareness of other services

Healthwatch Doncaster asked people about awareness of appointments and services available at the Same Day Health Centre or at other GP Practices through the (Extended Access) More Choice, More Appointments service.

These additional appointments not only provide services that might be more appropriate and convenient for some people to access and use but additionally if they are widely used by the public they would release the appointments at GP Practices during the normal working day. This could result in less demand on GP Practices and Accident and Emergency services where we know many people choose to go to get health advice and services.

Do you know that GP appointments are available at places other than your normal practice?



Encouragingly 50% of people who answered this question were aware of the Same Day Health Centre. This service provides access to GP and nurse-led appointments 8am-8pm, 7 days a week.

Some GP Practices do have clinics on Saturday morning and there is an Extended Access (More Choice, More Appointments) to Primary Care service in place that provides additional appointments in 4 locality Hubs on Saturday mornings.

The uptake of these services relies on the people of Doncaster being aware of these services and the survey results indicate that there are large numbers who are not aware of these services. Only 35% (513) of people told us that they are aware of Saturday morning clinics at other GP Practices, meaning that 65% are not.

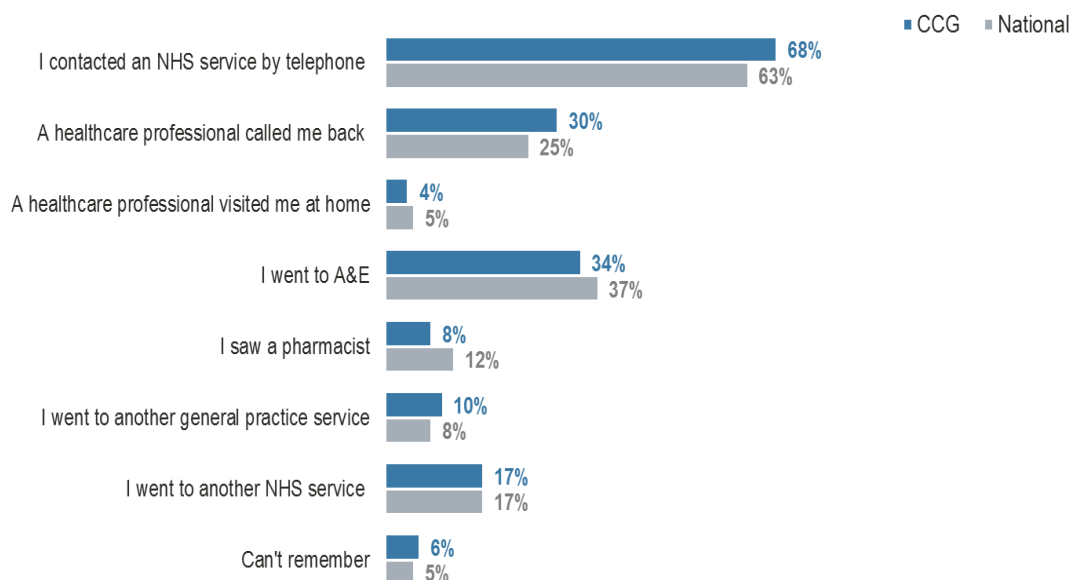
Nearly 40% (562) of respondents were not aware of alternative appointments in the week or at weekends. If these appointments were to be utilised this could have some impact on the appointments available through GP Practices during the week. People have told us that they would access weekend services and appointments because they would be more convenient for them. A number of individuals did ask us why

they had not been offered this as an option when they called to make an appointment at their GP Practice.

The Healthwatch Doncaster Engagement team used this project not only to gain insight about local people's experience of accessing GP services but also to provide information about the availability of additional services such as the Same Day Health Centre and the Extended Access Saturday morning clinics.

People who completed the survey were very keen to hear more about the Same Day Health Centre and the Extended Access Service irrespective of whether they had experienced difficulties in accessing GP Services or not.

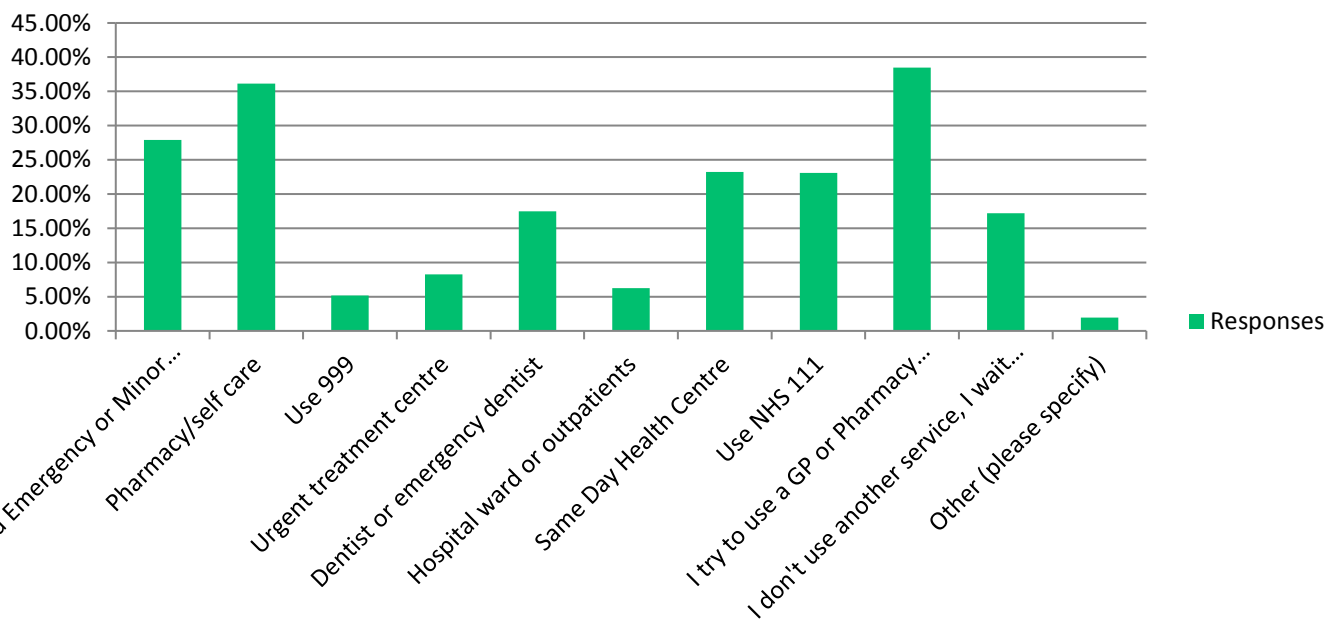
The National GP Patient Survey asked people what services they use when their practice is closed. The graph indicates the responses given to the National survey:



The results from the National GP Patient Survey support the data gathered through the local Healthwatch Doncaster survey about people's knowledge of other services. People told Healthwatch Doncaster that they mainly use telephone advice and/or Accident and Emergency services when they cannot access their GP Practice and fewer numbers of people use other GP or NHS services. This supports a recommendation to inform patients about alternative services other than their GP Practice because they are not used enough by local people because they may not be aware of them.

Healthwatch Doncaster asked people about services that they use instead of their GP Practice:

What service do you use if you do not use your GP Practice?

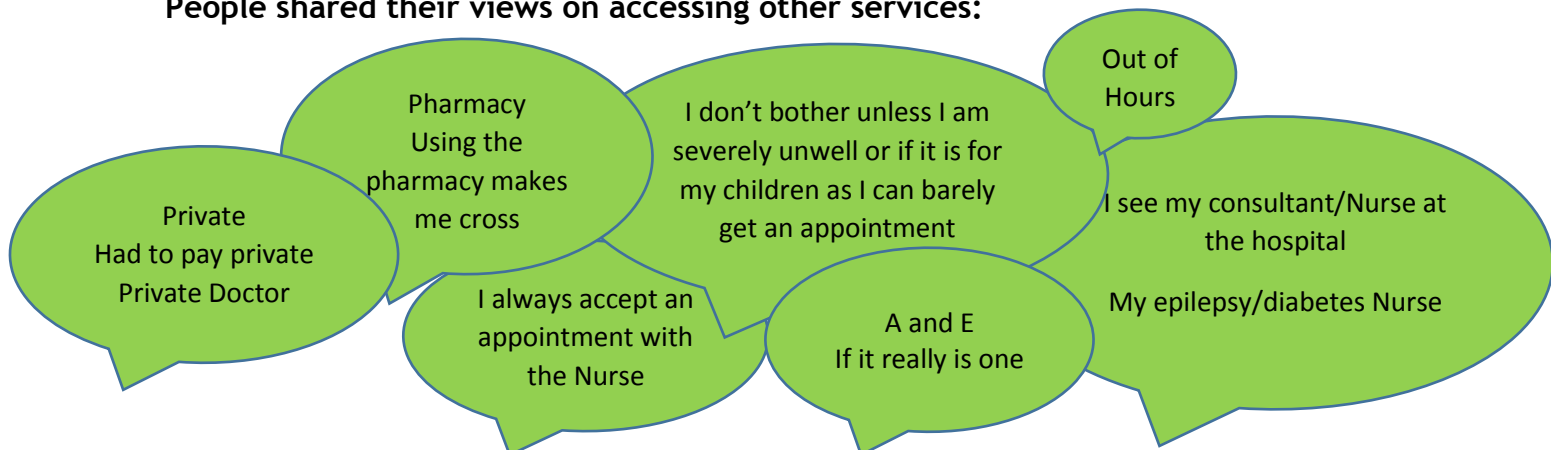


The majority of responses - 38.46% - demonstrate that the use of GP and Pharmacy services are the preferred option by local people. 36.16% of respondents told us specifically that they use pharmacies and self-care instead of their GP Practice.

There are a number of people (27.89%) that indicate attending Accident and Emergency or the Minor Injuries Unit is an option that they use. There will be appropriate use of Urgent and Emergency Care services but from previous engagement sessions that people have told us that they will go directly to Accident and Emergency because they have difficulties accessing their GP Practice.

NHS Doncaster CCG's Primary Care Strategy evidenced that one of the main reasons why people attended Accident and Emergency (A&E) was that they needed reassurance that nothing was seriously wrong with them however the same report evidenced that some of those attending A&E could not access an appointment in a GP Practice to gain that reassurance.

People shared their views on accessing other services:



Digital awareness

The Healthwatch Doncaster survey asked people why they access their GP Practice. 1373 people responded to this question and the highest number of responses - 50.4% - indicate that people use the GP Services to request or collect a prescription.

The survey does not provide any information as to how they request the prescription or where they collect it. We know that the process for requesting and collecting prescriptions varies considerably from GP practice to GP practice.

For many this involves contacting the GP Practice to request the prescription by phone/online or in person and then visiting the practice or pharmacy to collect it.

The electronic prescription service (EPS) will be rolled out nationally next month (November 2019), following rigorous testing involving 60 GP practices and hundreds of pharmacies.

Almost 70% of all prescriptions are already being prescribed and dispensed through EPS and there has been positive feedback from GPs and pharmacies. Once the roll-out of the final stage is completed, nearly all prescriptions will be sent electronically.

The information available for patients on the NHS website includes:

If you get regular prescriptions, the Electronic Prescription Service (EPS) may be able to save you time by avoiding unnecessary trips to your GP.

EPS makes it possible for your prescriptions to be sent electronically to the pharmacy or dispenser of your choice.

You may be able to order or cancel your repeat prescriptions online if your GP practice offers a [GP online service](#).

Check with your GP practice to find out how you can register for an account.

The NHS website goes on to provide information on how to access GP services digitally:

If you are registered with a GP surgery, you can access online services. Online services may allow you to:

- *book, check or cancel appointments with a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional*
- *order repeat prescriptions*
- *see parts of your health record, including information about medicines, vaccinations and test results*
- *see communications between your GP surgery and other services, such as hospitals*

Feedback gathered through this survey highlights the difficulties that some people have experienced in accessing their GP Practice via telephone. The rollout of the Electronic Prescription Service and the opportunity to access a range of services and information from a GP Practice digitally will have an effect on the number of people phoning to enquire about prescriptions or to book an appointment.

In February 2019, “The Pulse” stated that GP practices must make at least 25% of their appointments available for online booking by July 2019, as part of the new GP contract.

The contract, negotiated by the BMA and NHS England, said digital access to GP services should increase for all patients, with the hope that this will help practices manage workload.

This commitment comes after the NHS long-term plan pledged digital appointments to all patients and said digital GP models will help grow GP numbers.

The NHS website provides information for patients about how to start using online services for accessing online services in GP Practices:

If you are registered with a GP surgery, you can access online services. Online services may allow you to:

- *book, check or cancel appointments with a GP, nurse or other healthcare professional*
- *order repeat prescriptions*
- *see parts of your health record, including information about medicines, vaccinations and test results*
- *see communications between your GP surgery and other services, such as hospitals*

Healthwatch Doncaster asked people about any problems that had been encountered when accessing an appointment for their GP Practice. 23% of people told us that they could not book an appointment on line and throughout the survey we had comments left regarding issues about online services.

Interestingly in the National GP Patient Survey, 50% of the respondents stated they did not know whether their GP Practice offered online services and only 33% of respondents are aware that they can book appointments online or order a prescription online.

In the National GP Patient Survey, when asked what services respondents had used in the last 12 months either ordering a prescription on line or making an appointment online, **83% said they had used neither.**

These figures support the findings of the Healthwatch Doncaster survey and supports the recommendations that these services will only be utilised if people are aware of them and given clear information, training and support on how to access and use them appropriately.

5

Summary

The drive for this project was National and Local intelligence about access to GP services. The Healthwatch Doncaster Engagement Team were repeatedly hearing messages from people in local communities regarding specific issues in accessing GP Services. We wanted to talk to them about their experiences.

Healthwatch Doncaster held discussions with local stakeholders who agreed that it would be useful to hear the views of the local communities in relation to this intelligence.

A survey was designed to gain specific feedback on some of the main issues that we had heard about and we wanted to talk to as many people across our local communities as possible to ensure that their voices could be heard.

We wanted to gather experiences related to all services accessed at GP Practices and not just appointments with individual GPs.

Plans to engage with the local communities included face-to-face engagement and conversations at local events, links through social media and copies of the survey left at various venues.

The engagement resulted in gathering views from 1563 people, over 1000 of these were collected face-to-face at engagement events across the Borough.

We were successful in engaging with participants representing all of the GP Practices in Doncaster and across all age ranges.

All the views gathered were gained from respondents registered with a Doncaster GP and 94% of people told us that they had attended their Practice in the last 12 months. This clearly demonstrates that the information received is current and up to date. It was important that this was the case because we know many services change and develop and we did not want out of date views on the services that people access.

Additionally, every effort was made to include groups whose voices are seldom heard. We have access to number of groups whose voices are seldom heard and we engaged with some of these groups. We were also conscious that the views of the “working population” are seldom heard and we planned our engagement approach to be inclusive of this group of people.

Efforts were made to consider where we might be able to engage with these members of the community. Not only did we facilitate events/activities where we would engage with the working population, we also attended events at times that are considered outside the “normal working day”.

We also considered that whilst efforts were being made to target the working population, we would include the views of a younger aged cohort of respondents to the survey. This was facilitated by asking respondents not just to fill the survey out

for themselves but to consider anyone that they might accompany. This approach enabled us to gain the views of those supported by carers of all age groups in addition to children and young people.

Our engagement activities were a huge success. Members of the public were keen to engage and share their views.

Healthwatch Doncaster are confident that the project has achieved views from a wide demographic cohort and has demonstrated the range of service that patients receive across Doncaster.

The purpose of this engagement was to seek views on:

- What the reality is of accessing GP appointments in Doncaster
- What barriers patients perceive or experience in accessing an appointment
- Why patients do not always keep their appointments
- What improvements need to be made to assist making access better and utilising appointment times as best as possible?

The views gathered during the project are contained in the main body of this report and provide the perspectives and experiences of local people in relation to key points above.

The themes and trends from what people told us throughout this engagement project are summarised below:

Variation in services

What is evident from information received is the variation in the service that the respondents experience in relation to accessing GP Services.

Large numbers of individuals have very positive experiences when accessing their GP services however there are a large numbers of people who have negative experiences and are unhappy with the service they receive.

A number of respondents identified that they are aware of the variation between GP Practices for many of the services they access. We were made aware of some patients describing very different experiences from their family members because they are registered with different GP Practices.

Accessing your GP Services

The majority of people access these services for a range of reasons:

- To request or collect a repeat prescription
- To see the GP or Nurse for another reason
- When they are worried about symptoms which were not going away
- To collect or enquire about blood tests

The report suggests that a number of these interactions impact on other individuals wanting to access an appointment in the GP Practice.

People told us that requests for prescriptions and blood test results, in some GP Practices, is by telephone. This takes up telephone lines, which could be utilised by those wanting to request an appointment. Accessing the GP Practice by telephone is one of the main difficulties that some respondents have in relation to arranging an appointment.

Appointments

We asked people if they were offered an appointment:

1. Convenient to them or the person they were accompanying.
2. With a person of their choice?
3. With a different person to the one they requested?
4. A call back to discuss concerns?

Whilst a number of individuals (70%) stated that they did see receive a convenient appointment there were 26% who did not. Whilst we do not know the full implications for these patients however it would seem reasonable that there is a level of discontent and inconvenience when people cannot get an appointment to suit their commitments.

There are a number of respondents who were not offered an appointment with the person they wanted to see. This could be that they saw a more appropriate practitioner via a Care Navigation approach or were they saw someone who they feel did not meet their needs. 32.5% of the respondents to Question 4 stated that they were offered an appointment with a different person or service to the one they requested. This could be in relation to Care Navigation.

In relation to the question asking about problems encountered when patients contacted their GP Practice, 45% of people did not have a problem.

Of those people who told us that they experienced a problem, 54% of people wanted an appointment to suit their commitments but it was not possible. This was the overriding problem followed by 22.9% wanting to see a specific nurse or GP.

People told us that they were not aware of either Saturday clinics at other practices, the Same Day Health Centre and other appointments being available during the week and at weekends. This lack of knowledge will naturally put additional strain on GP Practices. Additionally if patients are aware of other services, they may receive an appointment more suited to their commitments.

Some respondents did ask why they had not been offered an appointment to suit their needs when told of the Extended Access Service and the Same Day Health Centre.

Telephone

In Question 7, 46% of respondents stated they had difficulties accessing an appointment or services at their GP Practice and of these 88% said they could not get through on the telephone.

Respondents were eager to tell us that they struggled to get through on the telephone to their GP Practice and in some of the narrative provided it is clear that some of them experienced prolonged delays in doing so having to make numerous calls sometimes over a number of days.

Some of the narrative received also evidenced that a number of individuals have to wait long periods of time to get an appointment at their GP Practice.

6

Recommendations

It is clear from the views gathered that some local people experience difficulties when try to access GP Services. The following recommendations have been proposed to enhance the experiences for patients in Doncaster when accessing GP Services.

Make patients aware of other health and care provision

Patients need to be informed about how to access additional services where they can gain health advice and support.

It is evident that many individuals are not aware of the Same Day Health Centre and the Extended Access Services (More Choice, More Appointments). There needs to be a clear Communication Strategy in place to inform the public of these services.

Uptake of this services will have an impact on the overall experience of Doncaster patients accessing GP services because the availability of appointments at GP Practices may increase thereby reducing the wait that some patients described and patients will be able to access appointments more suited to their commitments.

Keeping patients informed about signposting to the most appropriate clinician or service

People need to understand the concept and the benefits of being signposted to the most appropriate professional who can meet their needs. There needs to be consistent and clear communication for patients and local communities so that people understand that they will be signposted to the most appropriate clinician or service and that this will not always be a GP.

Use of digital and online services to book appointments/request prescriptions

Patients need to be able to access and book appointments in GP Practices online. We know that the survey indicated that some individuals have tried to do this without success and some patients identified that the facility is not available at their GP Practice.

To improve the experience of patients who prefer to contact their GP Practice for appointments, staff need to consider their requirements and signpost them to relevant services to suit their needs and/or commitments.

Services to access online requests for repeat prescriptions need to be developed and made readily available for patients. This will reduce telephone contacts made to GP Practices and improve the experiences for patients.

Promoting the service that Pharmacies can provide would also positively impact on patient experience.

Opportunities for people to request their repeat prescription online need to be made available and people need to be encouraged to access these online services.

Based on what people have told us, enquiries to GP practice in relation to blood results are having an impact on resources and creating some of the difficulties that respondents describe in relation to getting through to the GP practice on the telephone.

There needs to be consideration as to whether patients ringing for results is the most effective and efficient way of managing this service and whether there are alternative ways of providing feedback from blood tests.

The implementation and rollout of DoctorLink by NHS Doncaster CCG will be an improvement to the way in which people can access their GP Practice.

Alongside the rollout of the system architecture for GP Practices, there needs to be a clear programme of communication and information alongside a training programme to promote digital confidence and capability. This particularly important for people in communities who might be digitally isolated and at risk of not accessing their GP Practice.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Doncaster would like to thank the following organisations and people who have been involved in this project “Access to General Practice Services”

Firstly thank you to all the respondents to the survey who were very receptive and willing to give their time to share their views and opinions and we are extremely grateful for their support.

Members of the Patient Participation Group Network for their assistance in the pre engagement and promoting uptake of the survey

Healthwatch Doncaster Engagement Team and Healthwatch Doncaster Volunteers who conducted the face-to-face focus groups across Doncaster.

Mara Neagu and Natalia Martac for sharing the on-line survey and engagement work through the Romanian Community website

Grady’s Printers - Grady House, Bentley Rd, Doncaster DN5 9TJ for the supply of the surveys

Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council for allowing Healthwatch Doncaster access to the Civic Office One Stop Shop

James Keyworth all the staff at DCLT for their support in helping us attend sessions at the Leisure Centres at Thorne, Adwick, Askern, Dearne Valley, Armthorpe and the Dome

All the managers, staff at and families at the Family Hubs in Stainforth and Balby

Staff and patients at the Outpatients department at Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals

Staff at visitors at the Vermuyden Conversation Point, Martin Wells Conversation Point

Staff and visitors at Sprotbrough, Tickhill and Community Libraries

Staff and visitors at People Focussed Group, Montrose Avenue, Intake

Tour De Yorkshire launch event

Mexborough Hospital Out Patients Dept.

Appendix 1

Engagement

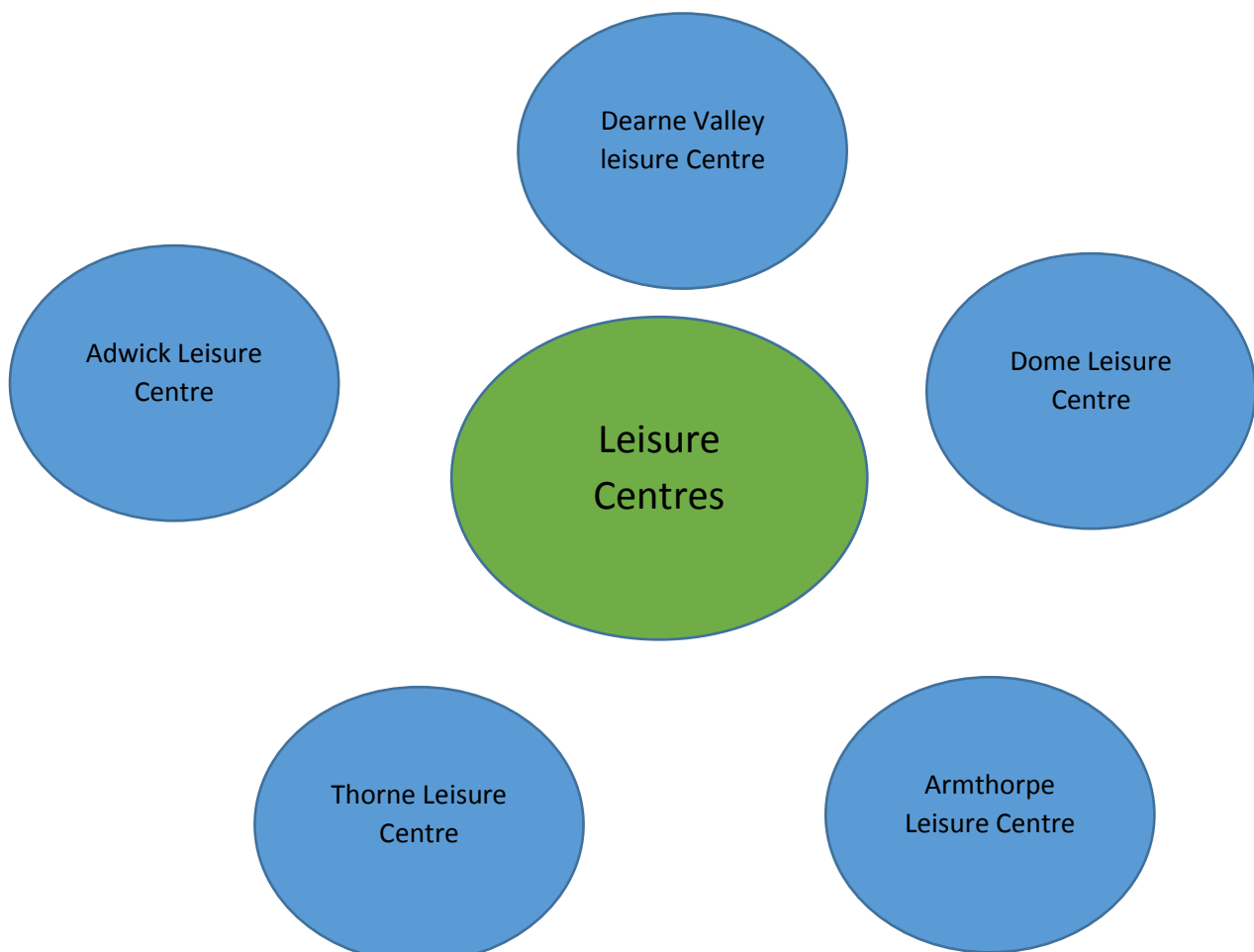
Community Events

Discussions with Doncaster Culture & Leisure Trust (DCLT) created a positive partnership that enabled us to access their sites across Doncaster. The rationale for choosing this as an option this was that many working parents accompany their children to swimming lessons after school/work and we could access them poolside.

We accessed leisure centres and community locations across the whole of Doncaster ensuring we did not focus our efforts in one area. This facilitated some very positive engagement. Most people were more than willing to complete the survey, however whilst this meant we were able to access the specific group we were targeting - the working population - it also contributed to accessing the views of a population registered with a wider group of GP Practices.

Another group within the working aged population, whom it has been noted do not readily get their views heard, are men. It was interesting that many men accompany their children to swimming lessons and many of them willingly engaged with the survey.

In some areas on the boundaries of Doncaster - Dearne Valley Leisure Centre and Thorne Leisure Centre - we engaged with people who lived out of Doncaster. Every effort was made only to take views from Doncaster residents however, some views were gathered from patients of GPs out of Doncaster. We have excluded these from the report. Below are the Leisure Centres we attended.



Planning of events ran in parallel with continuous reflection and evaluation of the project and the positivity gained from engaging with the working population facilitated continued efforts to engage with them at other events and venues.

Contact was made with Doncaster Athletics club who were very willing for us to attend their evening events where parents wait for their children who are go to Athletics training.

Links were made with staff at various hospital sites who have assisted with previous engagement and were again receptive to us attending their site to complete the survey. The sites and locations are included in the Appendices. Overall we achieved good coverage across Doncaster and local people were happy to complete the survey and contributed to anecdotal feedback contained in the full report.

In our engagement events Healthwatch Doncaster strive to ensure that the views of seldom heard groups are included. In doing so we have to consider how we approach these groups, taking into account their individual needs and the appropriateness of our interaction.

Where possible we utilise staff who have the skills and relationships with some of the groups to achieve our outcomes. After discussion with some of the community groups it was evident that completion of the survey could only be achieved by leaving a supply over a few weeks and this was the chosen approach with the People Focussed Group (PFG) - a peer support group for local people and Ashworth Barracks who support veterans and their families.

To ensure that we provided the surveys in an accessible format, A3 versions of the survey and copies on yellow paper were produced for the Partially Sighted Society to assist their clients to complete the survey.

Choice for All Doncaster (CHAD) is a committee of individuals who represent people with Learning Disabilities. They completed the survey with assistance from the group's Peer Support Worker.

It was recognised that some ChAD members are supported by carers when accessing GP Services and with that in mind, an Easy Read information leaflet was produced for them to take to their carer asking them to complete the survey with them. This engagement produced a good response from a seldom heard group of individuals.

Attendance at the Smile Centres and Doncaster Inclusive Centre of Excellence (DICE) Bingo Night produced a good response and gave respondents with Learning Disabilities additional the opportunities to participate in the project and offer their views and opinions.

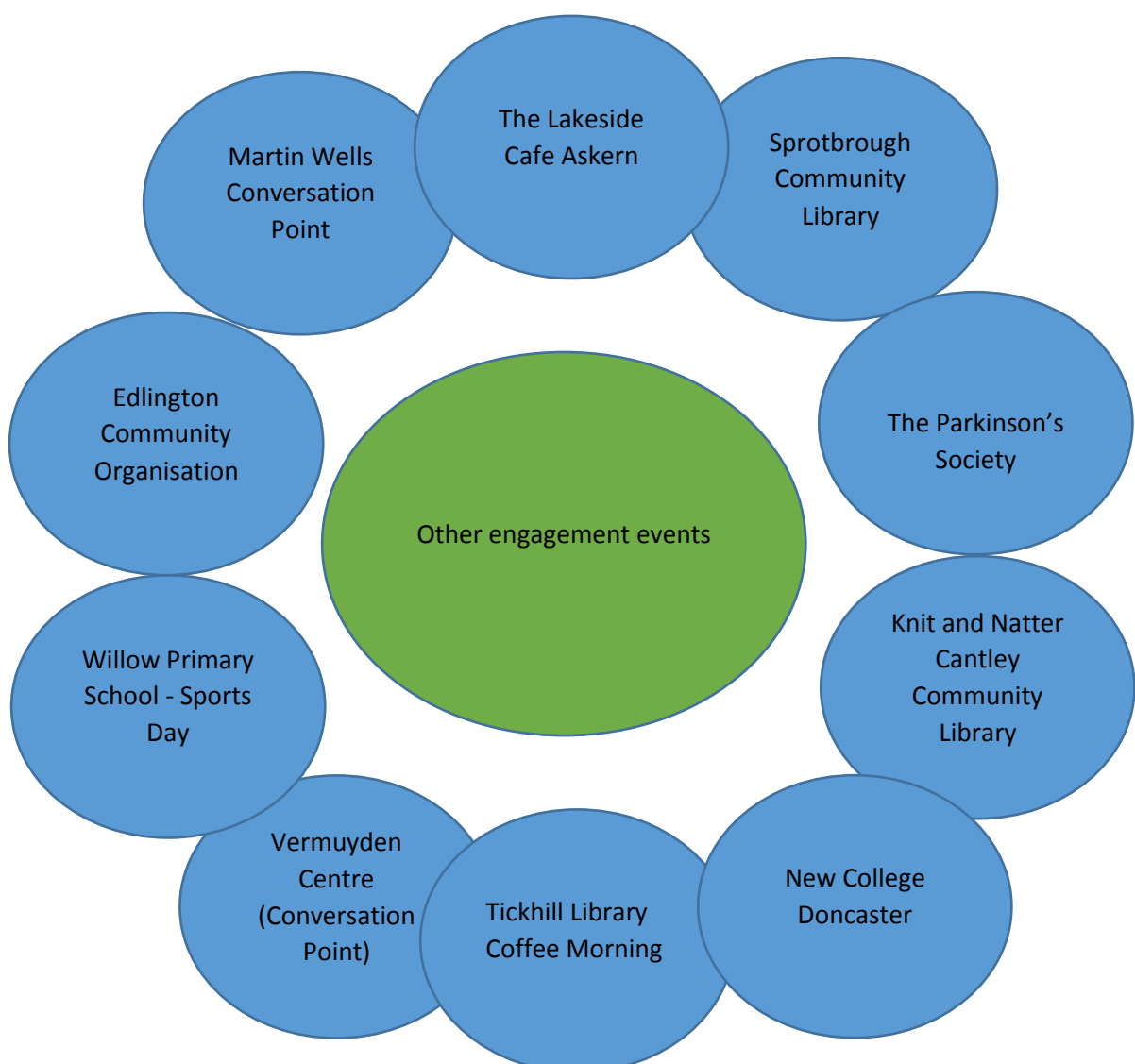
Carers views were represented at a number of our engagement events and in addition we attended a Carers Tea Party during Carers Week to engage with the local carers and gather their views.

Healthwatch Doncaster attended a number of Family Hubs to specifically engage with the parents and carers who attend these events. Engagement at these venues has proven successful previously because those attending have been receptive to our presence and are willing to engage with us.

During the project we had two Romanian students on a placement at Healthwatch Doncaster. They were keen to assist us in gathering the views of the Romanian community in Doncaster. They identified the most effective way of communicating to gather their views and their opinion was that many of the community work and few access group events but they identified that local Romanian people do frequent town and use specific Facebook page.

The students produced a Facebook post in Romanian specifically targeting the community which explained the project and encouraged them to share their experiences of access to GP Services. In addition, they agreed to attend an event in Doncaster town centre with Healthwatch Doncaster staff and informed their community that they would be present to help individuals complete the survey. This was a success and they were able to assist us to gather views of the Romanian community in Doncaster that we might not have otherwise achieved.

The diagram below demonstrates a number of other venues where we attended; the groups were happy to get involved and they were keen to express their views and opinions.



Large public events

We researched extensively for Town Centre events and venues and accessed a number where the public gathered in large numbers. We had positive engagement with the people that were there. The most successful events were the Tour De France Event at the Bentley Pavilion and the Armed Forces Day held in the Wool Market.

In conclusion the approach that Healthwatch Doncaster took to engagement was positive because nearly 1600 shared their views and opinions.

Selected highlights about the digital approach:

- Over 40,000 impressions through social media, including the use of paid advertising on Facebook to reach more people that also resulted in over 50 post comments
- Over 800 interactions with our posts on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram - people liking, sharing, re-tweeting, or posting comments about the project. 68% of people clicked on links from our Facebook posts to information about the project, such as the project homepage or the survey itself
- Our shortened URL links received under 87% clicks specifically directing people to our online survey, 293 clicks through our Facebook posts.
- Initial press release launching the project published in the Doncaster Free Press

Thorne Leisure Centre - Swimming sessions	45 Surveys completed
Dearne Valley leisure Centre -Swimming sessions	43 (8 out of area)
Armthorpe Leisure Centre Swimming sessions	71
Adwick Leisure Centre Swimming sessions	78
Dearne Valley Leisure Centre	35
Dome Leisure Centre	16
Doncaster Athletics Club Session	30
Doncaster Athletics Club 10km Race Castle Park	29
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals DRI Outpatients	86
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals - DRI Outpatients	29
Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals - DRI Paediatric OPD	87
Mexborough Hospital - Out Patients Dept.	12
Smile Day Centre - Holmes Carr	6
Smile Day Centre - Cantley	7
Smile Day Centre - Rossington	27
People Focussed group (PFG)	9
Choice for all Doncaster (CHAD Meeting)	27
Bentley Library Carers Tea Party	11
Changing Lives	45
Dice Bingo Night	29
Ashworth Barracks	10

Appendix 2

Full data export and graphs from the survey responses:



Access to General
Practice services - SL

The graphs and information can also be downloaded here:

<https://www.healthwatchdoncaster.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Access-to-General-Practice-services-SUMMARY-DATA-AND-GRAPHS.xlsx>