

What local people said about access to services and their health and wellbeing

Briefing December 2023



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Introduction

Healthwatch Coventry is the independent champion for NHS and social care.

The Healthwatch Coventry mission is to hear experiences of NHS and social care services. We gather the experiences of local people on an ongoing basis through community outreach. An important part of our mission is to enable those in Coventry who do not have strong voice or are ignored to share their experiences of barriers to accessing care.

Who we heard from

Between July 2023 and November 2023, we gathered 123 people's experiences of local NHS services.

We reached people through stalls at the City of Coventry Health Centre, Central library, a session run by the probation service and other community events. The information was gathered through guided interviews or self-completion survey based on the preference of the individual.

We worked with Coventry University and Coventry City Council on a specific discussion group for the local Hong Kong Chinese community with 53 people taking part.

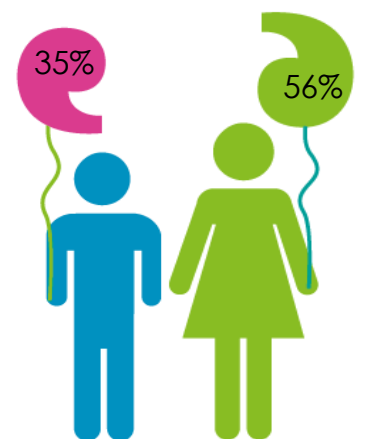
We did a piece an outreach project to understand the experiences of the local canal boat community, interviewing eight boaters during July and August.

Demographics

22 people, 8% said they were a family/unpaid carer for someone else

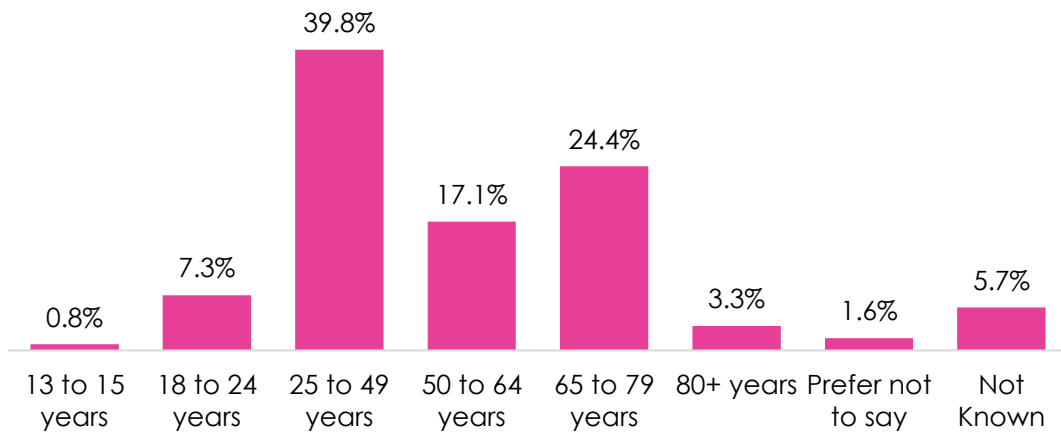
12 people, 9.75% considered themselves disabled

Gender

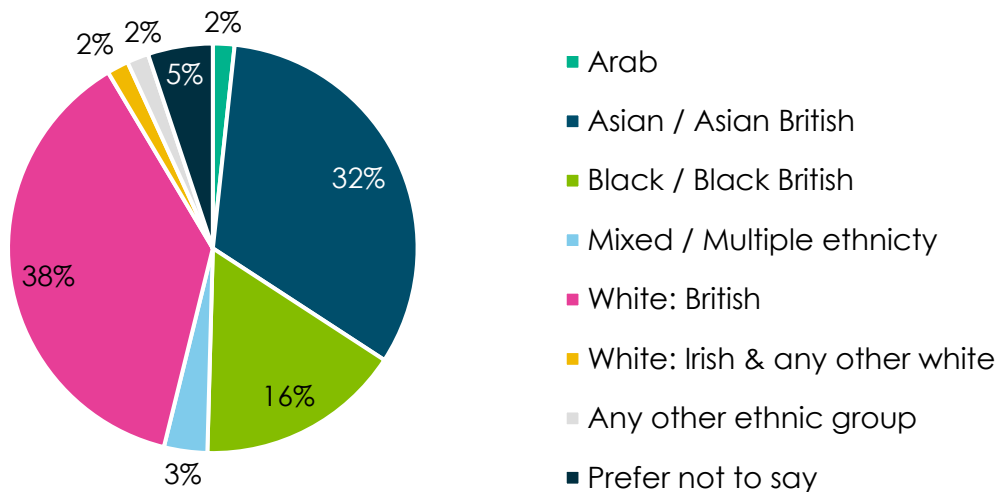


9% preferred not to say

Age Group



Ethnicity



What we found

Digital access

- 10% had no access to the Internet and 7% relied on public access routes to go on the internet.
- 67% used home Wi-Fi/broadband.
- 13% used their mobile phone network.
- People said the rising cost of living was impacting on being able to afford to use the internet/mobile phone.

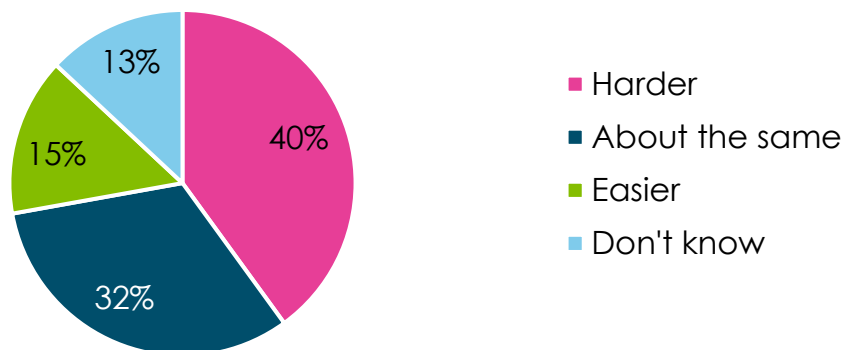
Access the internet	%	Count
Yes, on home Wi-Fi/Broadband	67%	77
No, I have no access to the internet	10%	11
Yes, on a mobile network	13%	15
Yes, on public Wi-Fi	7%	8
Yes, at work	2%	2
Not Known	2%	2
Total	100%	115

People's health

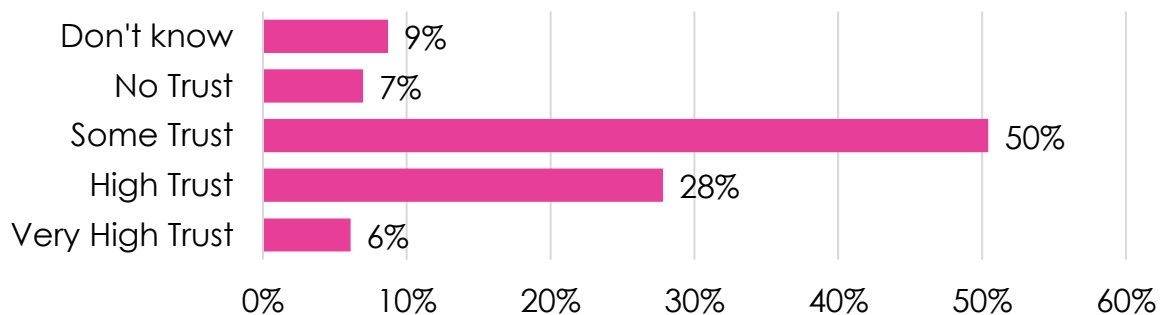
19% said they had quite poor or very poor health. 47 people (38%) said they had a long-term health condition.

Access to health care overall

We asked if people thought access to health care services in Coventry is getting easier or harder. 40% felt it was getting harder.



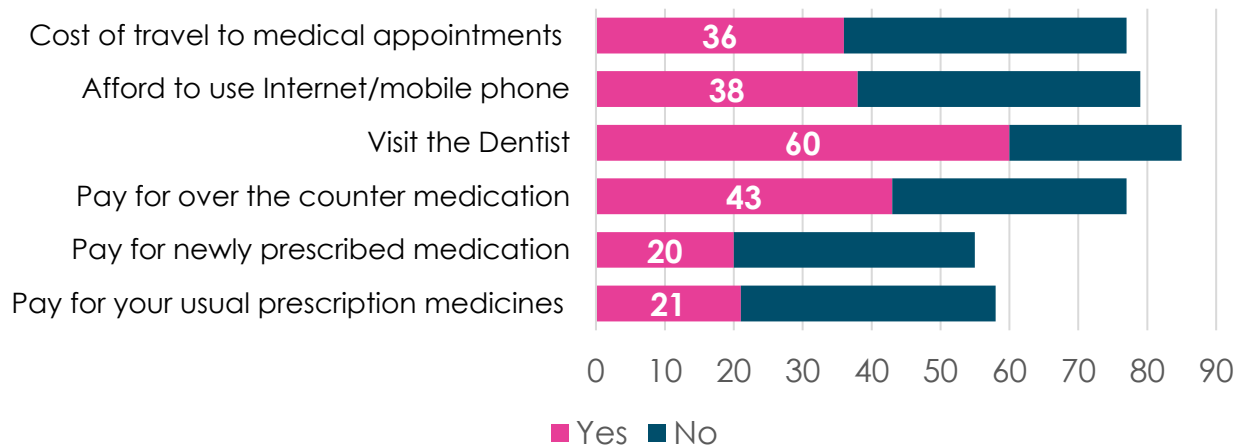
Rating of trust in the NHS to provide health care when needed



Cost of living and health

60 people said that rising prices impacted on being able to afford dental treatment, for 46 paying for over-the-counter medication was harder to afford and for 38 people the cost of running a mobile phone was an issue.

Experienced a cost of living impact



Dentistry

NHS dental treatment was highlighted with people commenting about the cost and how unaffordable it was for them:

- “The cost of dentist, especially in the private practice is really high. I need to see the dentist as I got bridge for my front teeth.”
- “It is very expensive and sometimes unaffordable to have treatment from even an NHS dental practice.”
- “I passionately feel dentistry should be free to all as 'teeth' for some have paid the price. Also dentures 'improved' teeth only available to 'well off' ... mental health problems due to poor teeth only apply to the 'well off'”
- “Costs of dentists and medication, keeps going up. Cost of daily items and petrol very expensive also.”
- “My dental work is something I can't afford as its not on the NHS”

Other areas of concern for people:

Medication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cost of medicine over the counter in pharmacy is too much. Worked all my life and can't afford meds on my pension
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Access to health service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Long waits for referrals make us want to pay for private but we can't afford it. • I will have to get a private doctor
Heating and health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our pensions cover our needs though we have cut down on heating by turning down the thermostat to 20 instead of 21 and since May we have turned the central heating off and use a blanket if chilly in the evening. • Energy - not putting heating on-not good for Arthritis
Mental wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • became anxious about money matters • Mental Stress of juggling to pay for everything

The following suggestions for what would help with cost of living concerns:

Mental health and wellbeing:

- Please I could get gym classes for my wellbeing and take off stress
- Increase availability of access to mental health support
- Advice on how to live better, eat better and keep fit
- We regret the loss of the extend exercise classes at the surgery which stopped because it became unavailable due to lack of support. It was geared to our age and mobility and was only £2 whereas other classes cost £5 and are not as suitable
- Have concessions for people on low income
- They could call you to find out your well-being and give you a health check
- Prioritise prevention, create community groups to support healthy eating, recognise that issues that seem non-urgent that impact mobility (leg/knee injury) can have huge cascading impacts on health
- More contact points. Help people stay healthy rather than only seeing a doctor when ill

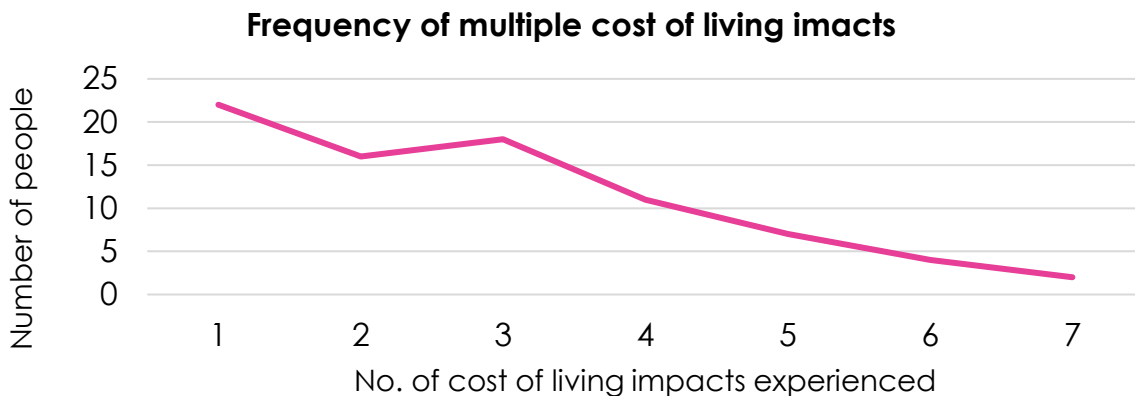
NHS charges

- Give free dental care
- Lower the cost of health care, especially dentist and eye care.
- Reduce the cost of medicines and dental treatment

- Financial support for those on regular meds. Free parking at hospitals
- Stop free prescriptions for people 60 years of age when they are in employment and not on supplemented income. The retirement age doesn't correspond with this. For those on low income and not eligible benefits charging for each item is a struggle

Food poverty

- Maybe choice of 'food vouchers' to poorer family instead of food banks (paid for by donations from public + government funding). So keep food banks but add choice for those who find it humiliating as at least it might help with how people feel. Vouchers are constantly used in supermarkets and would not be obvious
- Provide some easy, economical ideas for meals, especially for one. Not everyone has access to the internet. Give a free snuggle blanket not electric
- Provide healthy food vouchers as certain healthy foods are costly











Mental health

For the majority, 58%, their mental health had stayed the same and 21% felt it had got worse:

How is your mental health?	Count	%
Got better	18	16%
Got worse	24	21%
Stayed the same	67	58%
Did not answer	6	5%
Total	115	100%

Just 13% had sought any professional support for their mental health. Of those accessing professional support six people said they found it helpful and four people said they did not.

We gathered the following comments:

-  *Medicine. CWPT came over saw me four weeks ago, sometimes get down*
-  *Had to fund it myself*
-  *Doctor was sympathetic and prescribed mild anti-depressant*
-  *Didn't want to take medicine, just talked to doctor - recommended counselling, see how it goes*
-  *Prescribed medication that made me worse. Put on three year waiting list with adult neurodiversity service. The GPs are trying, but there is not enough capacity for services they refer to.*
-  *Had to go private due to long wait. Discharged from IAPT (Couldn't attend first appointment) hard to remember due to disability*
-  *Still waiting*
-  *Everything in society is negative, how to think positive*

GP services

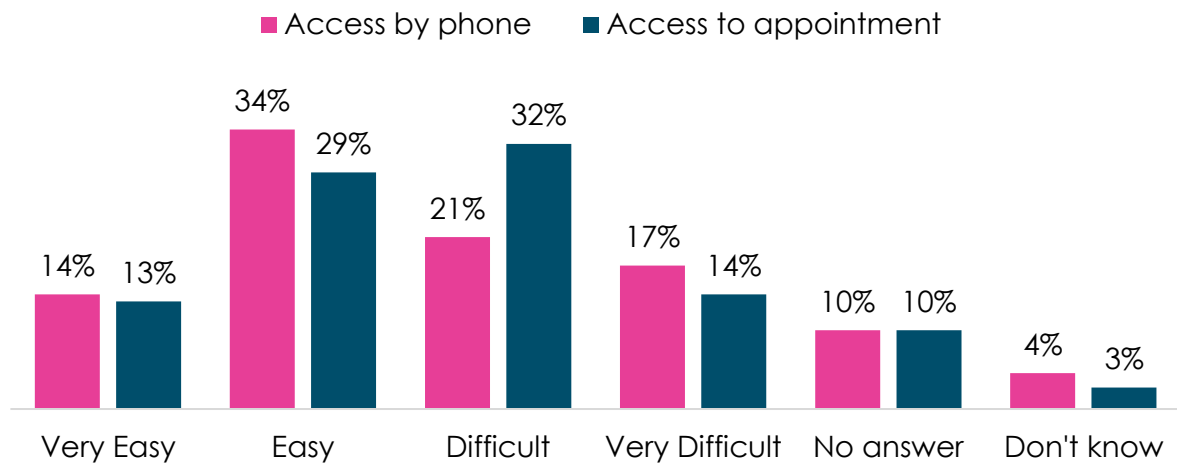
112 said they were registered with a GP practice either in Coventry or elsewhere, see the list of GP practices they were registered with in the appendix. Two were not registered and one did not answer.

There had been a high level of contact with GP services from those who took part. 66% had contact with their GP practice within the previous month.

	Count	%
In the last week	37	32%
In the last month	39	34%
Within the last three months	9	8%
Within the last six months	6	5%
Over six months ago	9	8%
No answer or not applicable	15	14%
Total	115	100%

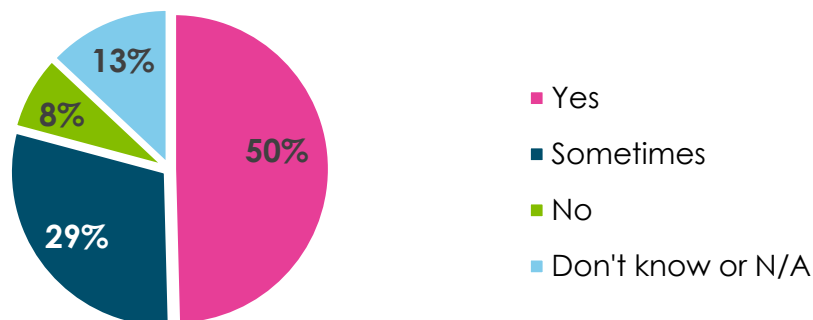
- 48% found both getting through on the phone easy or very easy and 38% found this difficult or very difficult.
- 46% found getting an appointment very difficult or difficult and 42% found getting an appointment very easy or easy.

Your GP practice how easy to...



Are appointments delivered in a way that works for you:

There was a mixed picture with people having different experiences about the format of GP appointments and if they thought this met their needs eg face to face or phone etc.


















Comments about GP services



We gathered 20 negative comments and 16 mixed sentiment comments on a range of concerns and issues:

Issues highlighted through comments:
















Getting through on the phone	It takes a lot of time for the surgery to pick up the phones sometimes, over 45 mins
	Spend 45 minutes to one hour on hold for an appointment
	Waiting for appointment but no one answer the call





	<p>Receptionists ask too many questions, keep waiting on telephone. Could be 10th in queue. Only one receptionist</p>
	<p>got the app and it's easier</p>
	<p>I have to go in person to the surgery at 8.30am. to get an appointment because the phone queues are excessive. The surgery only offered same day appointments, so could not make an appointment for later in the week.</p>
<p>Difficulties with booking process and getting an appointment</p>	<p>You are told on a regular basis, staff shortage extremely busy etc. When you ring in the morning its continuously engaged from 8am till about 9am. Then all the appointments are gone! And you've told me to ring again the next day. They won't let you book in advance. The prescription line is the same number so to get through to that is a long wait too.</p>
	<p>Every time is full, you have to wait for another 2 or 3 days</p>
	<p>Have waited three months for GP appointment twice in my short acquaintance with present surgery. I have never waited more few days with GP in past. Cannot get appointment online and difficult on phone. Lack of staff, I feel that it is more complicated to be ill these days as you cannot get through to GP or have a certain time too. God help anyone unable to use online services for whatever reason.</p>
	<p>recently you can no longer book an appointment in advance which is frustrating as you can only book on the day for that day</p>
	<p>You have to book an appointment in the morning and you are called back by the doctor the same day who after explaining your problem, book an appointment for you or gives a medical advice. You can therefore not book an appointment few days in advance.</p>
	<p>The waiting on the call takes longer than usual. Also you can't get an appointment once 8.15 passed. It's hard to be seen on the some day you wanted to.</p>

	<p> I have had two midwife appointments changed in the last four weeks due to the surgery closing for training</p>
<p>Comments about type of appointment</p>	<p> Difficult to get face to face appointments</p> <p> Takes time to get a face to face appointment</p> <p> NHS is relying too much on phone appointments. It should be easier to book appointment in say one week's time instead of 3.5 weeks times</p> <p> Prefer face to face</p> <p> I prefer face to face but it is not very easy</p> <p> Difficult to book face to face appointments. Since the introduction of phone appointments</p> <p> They give me a phone appointment first, if I'm persistent then they offer a face to face</p> <p> I am always having to settle for an after hours appointment. Has been the case on last three occasions</p>
<p>Language need</p>	<p> Was] difficult for my language and when finally I have appointment other is speak with a doctor</p>
<p>Communication</p>	<p> Several nice GPs but the main one - Dr XX is one of the worst, most unpleasant and really hostile and unprofessional GPs I've ever experienced. I am planning to switch soon</p> <p> I've found reception staff to be rude and hostile.</p> <p> Rude receptionists meaning I avoid calling</p> <p> I asked to have a blood test to check if I am developing diabetes 2 for which I am in the danger range. I was told I'd be sent information on monitoring myself but was not sent any and when I asked for my test results was told by the receptionist - no further action required. I'd have liked to know where I stand explicitly am I no longer in the 'at risk' category.</p> <p> have to go through receptionist if you want to call for doctor</p>

Appointment length	<p> I was going to my appointment at 2pm. I was waiting, waiting for 3/4 of an hour. 2.45pm but when they called me in, I was only in for about 5 minutes</p>
	<p> 10 minutes per appointment and can only discuss one issue. If you have more issues you have to book another appointment. Unacceptable. Don't want to be seeing my GP three or more times in a week.</p>

We gathered 21 positive comments:

-  *Picked up phone on time. Get GP appointment as needed. Could improve by sending GP appointment reminders via text message*
-  *When I need an appointment, I've got one*
-  *I always want to see/speak to a GP who knows me and my health history, much better than seeing a different GP each time. I am mainly able to do this (Five Stars awarded)*
-  *I can always get a phone consultation. I usually phone at 12.30 and almost always receive a call during the afternoon. They are very helpful - I am always polite!*
-  *Last time, I got the cervical cancer screening and it went really well and fast*
-  *Great advice and help*
-  *Picked up phone on time. Get GP appointment as needed. Could improve by sending GP appointment reminders via text message*
-  *Always pleasant*
-  *The doctors are fantastic if I need an appointment for my children*
-  *Very good service*
-  *I can always get a phone consultation. I usually phone at 12.30 and almost always receive a call during the afternoon. They are very helpful - I am always polite!*
-  *I never had a problem with that every time I had an appointment everything was good*
-  *Face to face is very easy*
-  *Easy access, appointment in same day*
-  *Professional and knowledgeable*












-  *In the past was a lot harder, but in the last couple of months been ok*
-  *Called, was able to make a same day emergency appointment. Was then given further care instead of being dismissed*
-  *I have managed to get appointments at the GP straight away*
-  *I ring them and if I am struggling they get me in straight away.*

Waiting for tests or appointments

61 people, said they were waiting for a test or appointment. Seventeen of these people had been waiting over six months. Nine said this was more than a year at the point we spoke with them.

We asked how people rated the communication about their tests and hospital appointments with most thinking this was good.

Communication	Count	%
Very Good	3	7%
Good	12	29%
Poor	21	51%
Very Poor	5	12%
Total	41	100%

-  *Didn't receive letter - received phone call reminder*
-  *I get updates*
-  *There were no communication from the hospital department (Ophthalmology) Until I had to call and remind several times*
-  *Helpful paperwork*
-  *No confirmation - Right to choose (Still waiting)*
-  *Still haven't received appointment - very stressful*
-  *Letter received with contact numbers on them*
-  *They send a text message appointment and when you call to re-arrange the appointment the phone is always on voicemail*
-  *They send letters for me to read and re-read*
-  *Communication poor, not any help or support offered*
-  *Physio appointment - 4 weeks after referral.*

Focus on people living on Coventry canal

We carried out three outreach visits along the canal from the Canal Basin to Sutton Stop, near Hawkesbury Junction and a little way above it to the North in July and August 2023. We used the Greyhound Pub as a base.

The existing Healthwatch Coventry “Your Experiences of local NHS services” survey was revisited. The issues and questions were made more relevant to discussing with the Boating Community.

We spoke to seven men and one woman, seven were White British and one did not say. Two considered themselves disabled and two had a long-term health condition. Six were aged 65-79 years, one 50-64 years and one 25-49 years.

The boaters we spoke with were continuous cruisers, that meant they were unable to stay in one place for more than a defined time. Although some due to health reasons were able to move within a smaller confined area. Initially some of the boaters we spoke to were very worried about us and saw us as a health intervention.

“If you hadn't of caught me, I wouldn't have spoken to you”.

Their decisions around which health services to use, are linked to how easy it is to access those services from a boat mooring. Bedworth Health Centre is a 15 minute walk from the canal.

Three people received their information from a different address.

“My NHS information and letters goes to X who lives on the lock”

Six people were registered with a GP, three within Coventry and one at Bedworth Health Centre and two completely out of the Coventry area. For one person it was difficult to register with a GP without having an address, but this was resolved.

“I give [my] brother's address although don't live there now, all sorted out. Phoning up to get a doctor's appointment is pain online worried about need for address – “Phone POD [Prescription Ordering Direct], POD works well”

Cost of living

Four people were concerned about the cost of living. Their ability to purchase fuel to enable them to move their boat (as continuous cruisers, this was potentially more of an issue) and to buy gas for cooking, when their wood burner was not in use.

Mental health

None of the seven people spoken to said they had contacted mental health services. Although three people recognised that they had mental health needs. There was a general view that they deal with such things themselves and through their families.

Focus on Hong Kong Chinese community

53 people took part in a British Nationals Overseas (BNO) Coventry workshop discussion session.

Top areas of concern:

- access to services - GPs Dentists and routine health checks
- communication – including language barriers

Access to Service

- One of the common issues was about getting GP appointments.eg: *“Hard to book GP appointment. Cannot get the medication”*.
- Long waiting hours, eg: *“Waiting time for GP is relatively long”*
- To register with GP is a difficult process, eg: *“GP registration long waiting time, no confirmation, no feedback, no update. They said just wait or call back after 2 weeks”*.
- Unaware of dental services processes, eg: *“Dental services are not clear to know more information”*.
- Request routine checks (as they had back home) eg: *“I am over 60 but haven't got body check or blood checks. Could you please arrange one for me”*.

Communication

People raised issues about communication in terms of language and medical knowledge, eg: *“I have communication problem between doctor and me not good”*.

- Difficult to communicate symptoms, eg: *“I received message from NHS asking for more information but I did not provide any thinking its phishing. Need better way of communicating”*.
- Issues understanding medication and lab results difficult due to language barriers.
- Some had positive experiences while communicating with health care staff, eg, *“The nurse was very nice she give clear instructions during cervical screening, difficult to register with the dentist.”*

Conclusions

By carrying out outreach Healthwatch Coventry has reached an ethnically diverse group of people and they have been able to share their experiences and feelings about services. Focused work to understand the lives and experiences of Hong Kong Chinese and canal boaters adds to the picture.

This research adds to previous Healthwatch Coventry findings.

Key points:

- Access to GP services remains a significant issue for many but others have a different, more positive, experience.
- 38% found getting through to their GP practice on the phone hard and 46% found getting an appointment difficult. There has been some improvement as our last report found 48% of people found phone access difficult.
- Since we started using this survey in January 2023 the proportion of people who thought access to NHS services is getting harder has reduced from 62% to 40%, however 40% is still a significant proportion.
- Communication remains an issue for people as they don't feel they get the information they need when they need it. NHS services can be hard to navigate, even more so for new communities or those without a permanent address.
- Cost of living rises are impacting access to dentistry and prescriptions and have other wellbeing impacts for individuals.
- 21% felt their mental health had got worse, but fewer than this had sought help.

Recommendations

- For local NHS managers and planners to reflect on the experiences we have gathered as evidence of the concerns of local people and consider how these can be addressed.
- For local NHS managers and planners to use this evidence as part of work to address inequality of access to services and broader health inequality in the local population.
- To acknowledge the report as part of wider evidence from Healthwatch and other organisations.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the City of Coventry Health Centre (a multi-Use NHS building), Coventry City Council Central Library and Library Services, for letting us use their spaces for a stand.

Thanks to all the people who participated in the survey and spoke to Healthwatch Coventry.

Appendices

More about participants

Ethnic Group	%	Count
Arab	1.6%	2
Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi	0.8%	1
Asian / Asian British: Chinese	6.5%	8
Asian / Asian British: Indian	9.8%	12
Asian / Asian British: Pakistani	11.4%	14
Any other Asian / Asian British background	2.4%	3
Black / Black British: African	13.8%	17
Black / Black British: Caribbean	0.8%	1
Any other Black / Black British background	0.8%	1
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups background - any other	0.8%	1
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White	1.6%	2
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White	0.8%	1
White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh	35.8%	44
White: Irish	1.6%	2
White: Any other White background	4.9%	6
Any other ethnic group	1.6%	2
Prefer not to say	1.6%	2
Not Known	3.3%	4
Grand Total	100.0%	123

Gender	%	Count
Woman	56%	69
Man	35%	43
Prefer not to say	2%	2
Not Known	7%	9
Total	100%	123

Sexual Orientation	Count	Count
Heterosexual/Straight	69%	85
Asexual	3%	4
Bisexual	2%	2
Pansexual	1%	1
Prefer not to say	10%	12
Not Known	15%	19
Grand Total	100%	123

Name of GP surgery registered with	Number
Alliance Teaching Practice	5
Barnsley (out of area)	1
Bedworth Medical Centre (Bedworth)	1
Bell Green Surgery	1
Broad Street Surgery	2
Broomfield Park Medical Centre	4
Cheylesmore Oak Surgery [sic]	1
City of Coventry Health Centre	1
Clay Lane Medical Centre	4
Copsewood Medical Centre	2
Dr R Bano and Partner	3
Dr Sani and Partners	2
Earlsdon Medical Centre	3
Engleton House Surgery	3
Foleshill Road	1
Forrest Medical Centre	3
Forum Medical Centre	1
Gables Medical Centre	2
Godiva Medical Centre	2
Govind Medical Centre	2
Harnall Lane Surgery	6
Holbrooks Health Centre	2
Jubilee Health Centre	3
Kensington Road Surgery	1
Keresley Green Medical Centre	1
Longford PC	1
Mansfield Medical Centre	2
Meridian Practice	3
Moseley Surgery	4
Park Leys Medical Practice	2
Parkhouse Surgery	1
Priory Gate	5
Springfield Medical Practice	3
Stockingford Medical Centre (Nuneaton)	1
Stoney Stanton Medical Centre	2
Swanswell Medical Centre	1
Tile Hill Surgery	1
University of Warwick Health Centre	1
Willenhall Oak Medical Centre	1
Wolverhampton (out of area)	1
Woodend Health Centre	1
Woodside Medical Centre	3
Not known/not applicable	25
Total	115

How would you describe your physical health	%	Count
Quite Poor	16%	20
Very Poor	3%	4
Reasonably Good	56%	69
Very Good	23%	28
Prefer not to say	2%	2
Total	100%	123

Postcode	%
CV1	27%
CV2	10%
CV3	10%
CV4	7%
CV5	9%
CV6	30%
CV7	2%
CV10	1%
CV12	1%
Unknown	3%
Grand Total	100%

Where do you normally moor your boat
Continuous cruising, but I have permission from Canal and River Trust to stay at Hawksbury
Continuous cruising from Coventry
Northamptonshire, Ashby Canal and Coventry
Not stated
Braunston Area but travel around - continuous
Sutton Stop
Continuous cruising - but small cruising area due to health
Coventry Canal - Atherstone to Coventry. Also Rugby



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