



Image by [Debbie Clark](#)

# What we heard: how experiences and stories are making a difference?

June to September 2023

# Healthwatch in Sussex

Healthwatch is your health and social care champion. If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services, we want to hear about your experiences. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and improve standards of care.

We use people's feedback to better understand the challenges facing the NHS and other care providers locally, to make sure experiences improve health and care services for everyone. We can also help people to get the information and advice they need to make the right decisions for them and to get the support they deserve.

It's really important that people share their experiences – whether good or bad, happy or sad.

If someone has had a negative experience, it's easy to think there's no point in complaining and that '*nothing ever changes*'. Or, if they've had a great experience, that they '*wish they could say thank you*'. Remember, feedback is helping to improve people's lives. So, if you know someone that needs advice or are ready to tell their story – we're here to listen.

# Healthwatch in Sussex

**Healthwatch in Sussex** is how we describe joint work carried out by the three Healthwatch teams in Sussex: Brighton and Hove, East and West Sussex.

Collectively, we report monthly to the local health and care system – Sussex Integrated Care System ('Sussex Health and Care')

Our report includes anonymised 'stories' and the experiences of local people, that have been shared with us.

This adds to the Sussex Health and Care System's intelligence to inform decision-makers in how they develop, transform services and support for our people and communities.

Healthwatch also use this insight to guide our strategic discussions and to help shape the work we do, including setting our priorities.

Where necessary, we escalate issues and concerns.

**The following pages outline what we have learnt from listening to people across Sussex from June to September 2023. It has been designed for a health and care system reader, but we are publishing it so that we are transparent with the public.**

# What people have told us

Issues	What the issue is	Action taken by Healthwatch and information we have obtained
<p><b>People have contacted us with concerns about Pharmacy closures, medication shortages and access to out of hours services</b></p>	<p>We are aware of the short term closure of some pharmacies due to staffing issues and more permanent closures in East and West Sussex and Brighton and Hove. In some cases, this has left a village/area without a local provision.</p> <p>People have told us about issues with finding an out of hours pharmacy service to get timely access to medication.</p> <p>People have also shared with us their challenges in getting a range of medications, such as HRT and diabetes.</p>	<p>Each local authority has a Health and Wellbeing Board responsible for developing and publishing Pharmaceutical Needs Assessments which describe the level of need in an area. They also publish supplementary statements if they consider the closure of a pharmacy has left a gap that could be filled by a new application. We are aware that a supplementary statement has been published by East Sussex Board that relates to the closure of the Lloyds Pharmacy in Sainsbury's in Newhaven.</p> <p>We discussed closures with NHS Pharmaceutical needs assessment teams, seeking assurance from them that there is adequate and accessible provision.</p> <p>NHS Sussex, responded to the issues raised: <i>"We are aware that workforce challenges are affecting the pharmacy sector across the country which has led to a significant rise in the number of short-term pharmacy closures in the latter part of 2022 and into 2023. However, we have also learnt that the numbers of short-term closures has significantly decreased over the last few months, partly because of regulatory easements that were introduced to support the sector. We know there have been some permanent closures of pharmacies In Sussex, but these have generally been pharmacies that are in the vicinity of other pharmacies."</i></p> <p>Cont/d</p>

# What people have told us

Issues	What the issue is	Action taken by Healthwatch and information we have obtained
<p><b>Continued from pharmacy issue</b></p>		<p>Healthwatch suggested using QR codes on prescriptions, that link to appropriate website pages on pharmacy locations and out of hours services. NHS Sussex advised that prescription forms are pre-printed (and a national format). Healthwatch has since suggested QR codes on posters and inclusion in the winter communication campaign.</p>
<p><b>Varying access to GP-led care/support from GP surgeries</b></p>	<p>Some positive stories about changes to access routes within GP surgeries.</p> <p>Continuing accounts of difficulties and confusion in how people can access healthcare at GP surgeries.</p>	<p>GP Surgeries and pharmacies are working together to deliver on the Sussex strategy, through a shared delivery board. This provides a space for Healthwatch to share insight and impact on patients.</p> <p>Messages for the public, to help them understand the different roles in surgeries are being developed, with input from Healthwatch and community members.</p> <p>Sussex specific communication materials and messaging are being created to support the National campaign and will run throughout Winter. This campaign explores the wide range of staff, not just GPs and nurses that now support modern General Practice.</p>

# What people have told us

Issues	What the issue is	Action taken by Healthwatch and information we have obtained
<p><b>Access to NHS dental care</b></p>	<p>Volume of enquiries about access to NHS dentistry appears to be slowing, but we are hearing from more vulnerable people who have additional needs and cannot find any NHS dentist to meet these (shared in August/September).</p> <p>Most enquirers mention their inability to afford private dental care.</p>	<p>It is unclear whether the decline in dental enquiries is a reduction in need, or people are no longer trying to obtain appointments?</p> <p>How NHS dentistry is commissioned is changing and we are talking to commissioners to understand what is being done to reduce inequalities.</p> <p>NHS Sussex are currently developing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An Urgent Treatment and Stabilisation Plan, as a pilot, to pay 'units of dental activity' (UDAs) plus additional rates for work done and extend the urgent treatment service to include stabilisation treatment, meaning that if follow-up appointment(s) are needed they are available.</li> <li>2. Rapid Commissioning for Adur, Arun and Worthing: a pilot for existing providers to be commissioned for extra UDAs on a permanent (rather than the current temporary) basis.</li> </ol> <p>Further plans are being progressed.</p>
<p><b>Maternity care</b></p>	<p>We are hearing an increased number of <b>positive</b> maternity stories, but people still suggest midwives and doctors need to listen more to expectant parents (particularly those who have given birth before).</p>	<p>NHS Sussex stated: <i>the Maternity Voices Partnerships (MVPs) in Sussex help facilitate the ongoing development of maternity services ensuring they are responsive to service user feedback and continuously improving how services are delivered. This detail will be shared with the MVPs to support their ongoing work to drive improvement.</i></p>

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Issues	What the issue is	Action taken by Healthwatch and information we have obtained
<b>Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)</b>	<p>Families continue to share issues with ongoing and continuity of care – particularly during transition to adulthood, waiting times and access to referrals.</p> <p>Interestingly, more parents seem aware of their 'right to choose', but it is unclear how well private assessments/diagnosis are accepted by education (in terms of education, health and care planning) and other agencies.</p>	<p>NHS Sussex shared that: <i>there is dedicated clinical leadership work taking place to understand and improve young peoples' experience of transitioning to adulthood. Extra support is now being funded to avoid people falling through the gap.</i></p> <p><i>And, we have heard that as demand for services remains greater than current resources, new ways of working are being identified and CAMHS are piloting a stepped care model in East Sussex. Early evaluation suggest this is successful for those who engage with the support offered.</i></p>

# New things we have heard

New issues	What the issue is	Action taken by Healthwatch and information we have obtained
<p><b>Complaints handling by University Sussex NHS Foundation Trust</b></p>	<p>Lack of response to complaints within appropriate timeframes and lack of complaint policy information on website.</p>	<p>This has been escalated to the Trust and the system. NHS Sussex has stated that this matter continues to be discussed at Executive level to ensure that the issues identified are being addressed by the Trust.</p>
<p><b>Quality of healthcare in Sussex prisons (East and West Sussex)</b></p>	<p>Emerging themes from East Sussex drop-in sessions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• lack of access to mental health and substance misuse support</li> <li>• lack of timely communication as to when appointments will happen</li> <li>• access to medication/pharmacy items</li> <li>• access to information on arrival and release from prison.</li> <li>• complaints.</li> </ul>	<p>The Healthwatch prison visiting team will be discussing the themes and issues residents experience with the prison management and commissioners to look at improvements and the need to involve prisoners in shaping services.</p>
<p><b>Difficulties in getting 'Fit to Fish' medical certificates that become mandatory for commercial fishers</b></p>	<p>This issue was identified during recent coastal engagement activity. Awareness of this mandatory certification was low amongst healthcare professionals and fishing personnel were concerned about the cost and challenges of accessing GPs for the accreditation.</p>	<p>By working with commissioners this matter has been addressed in East Sussex, with one Primary Care Network agreeing to provide the service, at a set rate, which is being advertised through the fisherman's charity in the area</p> <p>Healthwatch has explored if this is an issue in West Sussex and Brighton and Hove.</p>



# New things are we have heard

New issues	What the issue is	Action taken by Healthwatch and information we have obtained
<p><b>Re-emerging concerns that communication and support needs are not being met, leading to people not attending appointments</b></p>	<p>Teams are hearing more accounts linked to communication barriers (for both spoken language and disability needs) and inflexibility in connecting with services. This is in enquiries, through research work (outpatient deliberation work) and through care home visits.</p>	<p><u>Healthwatch comment:</u> These examples demonstrate not only the health inequality but financial need (Do Not Attends and deteriorating health costs) for all providers to be disciplined in following the 'Accessible Information Standard' – Ask, Record, Share and Action patients' communication and support needs.</p> <p>Healthwatch are scoping key lines of enquiry in April 2024, to allow time for the publication of the revised Accessible Information Standard (which has been co-designed with Healthwatch England). The aim of this work is to support better patient experience and reduce wastage for the NHS.</p>
<p><b>Increase in enquiries and stories relating to poor experiences of discharge from hospital</b></p>	<p>Family/friend carers have been sharing concerns that patients' were coming home without any notice being given to the carers, and in some cases without appropriate assessment of ability to cope when returning to home.</p>	<p>Sussex is a discharge from hospital frontrunner, and our integrated care system (ICS) is looking at different ways to ensure people leave hospital effectively when they are medically ready. The Sussex ICS has agreed a comprehensive discharge and improvement transformation programme which includes action to improve the use of integrated data and digital care solutions to improve how people leave hospital.</p> <p>The insight people shared with us, will inform our discussions around discharge.</p>

# Healthwatch in Sussex areas of focus

Issue	Description	Our actions
<b>GP communication</b>	Raise awareness amongst Sussex patients of modern primary care roles and how these can help people	Working in collaboration with partners to identify appropriate ways of sharing information about roles within GP surgeries.
<b>Working with people and communities</b>	How we all demonstrate we are listening too and involving people and communities in developing health and care for all	Supporting a refresh of the Evaluation Framework, to help embed this into practice, as a continuous improvement tool.  Developing a Young Peoples' Independent Involvement Panel.
<b>Thematic Review of Neurodiverse insight</b>	There is a need to draw together all the recent qualitative insight relating to neurodiversity, to identify common themes to inform the next steps for our system.	We have been commissioned by NHS Sussex to review a range of local reports to identify the common themes and will report findings to the system in January 2024.

# Planned work activities

## In Brighton and Hove

Issue	Description	Our actions
<b>Women's Health</b>	Understanding hesitancy towards or avoidance of cervical screenings.	We will be reporting on themes identified through detailed interviews with younger women to Healthwatch England, as part of a national project exploring this topic.
<b>Use of digital technology to support health and wellbeing</b>	Understanding the experiences of older ethnic minoritized groups and their use of digital technology to support their health and wellbeing.	We are conducting interviews and focus groups delivered in partnership with Bridging Change, Sussex Interpreting Services and colleagues at University Hospitals Sussex Trust. We will report on themes early next year and share them with NHS partners.
<b>Health inequalities</b>	Analysing factors which adversely impact and also support LGBTQ+ health needs.	We will report on themes identified through a literature review exploring LGBTQ+ health and wellbeing. This will be used to produce a LGBTQ+ toolkit, suite of graphics and training package including an animation, for health professionals, commissioners.
<b>Children and Young people</b>	Understanding the barriers to accessing a local drugs and alcohol service aimed at supporting younger people.	We have commissioned the <a href="#">ru-ok</a> service to deliver a series of focus groups. Supporting our Young Healthwatch work, their report will explore the barriers which prevent younger people from accessing this service. Results will support the city's Combatting Drugs Partnership strategy.

# Planned work activities

## In East Sussex

Issue	Description	Our actions
<b>Understanding community needs</b>	Completing and analysing Rye/Rother listening tour findings.	Reporting on the themes identified through talking to local people and visiting services.
<b>Hospital environmental visits</b>	Analysing the findings from recent <i>Enter and View</i> visit to A&E/UTC in East Sussex	Reporting on the themes observed and identified through talking to patients and staff.
<b>Paediatric care</b>	<i>Enter and View</i> to look at paediatric care delivered by East Sussex Healthcare NHS Trust.	Visiting hospital paediatric wards to observe service and talk to young patients and their families.
<b>Ear wax removal</b>	Ear wax removal services have changed over time, and we want to explore the impact this is having on people.	Creating and promoting a public survey that will be reviewed in December 2023 to see if there are themes that show positive or negative impacts following these changes.

# Planned work activities

## In West Sussex

### **Prioritising our work**

Prioritising helps us to focus our resources and be clear with the health and social care commissioners and services on what we plan to work on and where additional resources will be needed to enable us to provide insight and support. Our independent Board agreed, in November, what we should be focusing on.

### **Our priority areas for 2023 - 2025 are:**

- Mental Health
- Dentistry / General Practices
- Adult Social Care
- Women's Health
- Information, Advice and Signposting
- Independent Health Complaints Advocacy (IHCAS) funding.

[Click here for more detail on these focus areas.](#)

# For more information

Please contact Katrina if you would like any further information about the content of this document:

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The logo for Healthwatch In Sussex is displayed on a white rectangular background. The word "healthwatch" is written in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. The letter "h" is dark blue, "e" is pink, "a" is dark blue, "l" is dark blue, "t" is dark blue, "h" is dark blue, "w" is dark blue, "a" is dark blue, "t" is dark blue, and "c" is dark blue. The letter "o" is replaced by a green circle with a white dot in the center. Below "healthwatch", the words "In Sussex" are written in a smaller, dark blue, sans-serif font.

**healthwatch**  
In Sussex