

**Public views of access to  
GPs in Leicester and  
Leicestershire**



# Introduction

The first place many of us will use the NHS services, is through our GP practice. So, it is not surprising that the most common experience shared to Healthwatch, is that of using (or trying to use) GP services.

As such we felt it was important to focus on the patient experience of GP services during the first few months of the newly established Healthwatch organisation covering Leicester City and Leicestershire.

Building on the survey work completed by Healthwatch Leicestershire (Your views about GP services - Nov 2017) we are looking to understand the public support for how GP services will change in the coming years.



## Methodology

A survey was created by Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire to gather people's experiences of accessing GP services.

Our overarching aims were to assess; access to appointments, patient choice and to look at ways to improve the service for patients.

During July - September 2018, we attended meetings, festivals and events across the city and county to speak to people about their GP services and to complete the survey.

The survey was made available online and cascaded to all Healthwatch contacts and other networks. The survey was also promoted via social media.

**211 surveys** were completed.





# Key findings

The project aimed to engage with a range of people using GP services in Leicester and Leicestershire. The demographic information collected showed that most of the respondents identified themselves as being White British. There were a higher number of female respondents than male and the highest percentage of respondents were aged between **35 and 59** years old.

Booking appointments was predominantly carried out by telephone with almost **75%** of respondents using telephone booking. Perhaps as a result of the dominance of telephone booking, improvements to the telephone systems of practices were a common theme suggested by respondents with comments about being cut off and being on hold for long periods of time. There were also comments about the difficulties of getting through and then there being no appointments left.

There was a relative lack of online booking and suggested improvements were around making more appointments available including next day appointment.

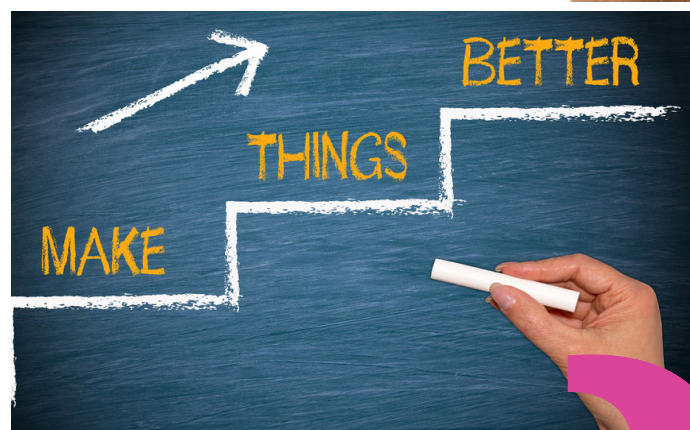
**45%** of respondents said that they were not offered a choice of practitioner when they booked an appointment, but continuity of care was an area for improvement for a number of respondents, particularly in relation to those with ongoing health conditions such as mental health concerns.

Although **62%** of respondents said that they were either completely satisfied or satisfied with their practice opening times, there were some that raised opening times as an area for improvement. Suggestions were generally in relation to practices being open for longer in the evenings and opening at weekends in order to accommodate the working patterns of some patients and make appointments more accessible.

When accessing out of hours primary care, respondents opted for a range of services. Promisingly less than **5%** said that they would turn to A&E rather than using another primary care service.

Improvements suggested by respondents other than in relation to the process of booking appointments or accessing a preferred practitioner covered a range of issues, including increasing staff at all levels to improve services, providing better training for reception staff to provide better customer service and environmental improvements such as increased car parking.

## AND THE SURVEY SAYS...



# Results

## Who took part

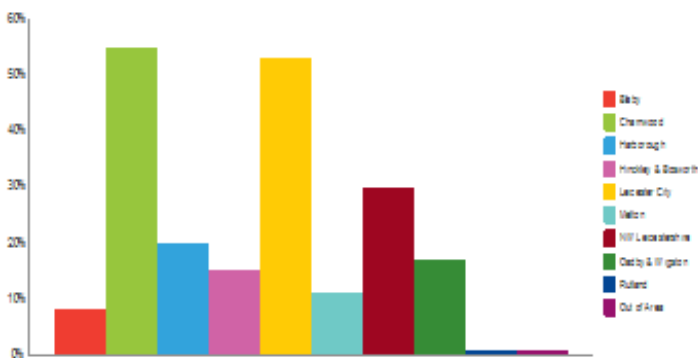
We spoke to a range of people as part of this project and the following results show the characteristics of the people that took part in the survey.

### Location

Respondents were asked what part of Leicestershire they lived in. The respondents also included two people from out of the area but as they account for a low percentage of responses they have not been removed.

The highest percentage of respondents lived in Charnwood, with Leicester City accounting for the next highest percentage. Blaby made up the lowest percentage of respondents, followed by Melton.

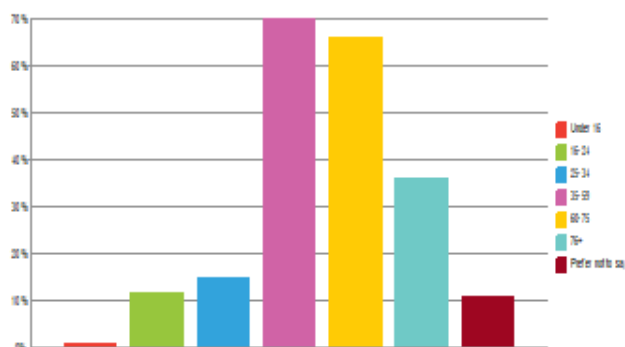
What area do you live in?



### Age

The highest percentage of respondents were in the age bracket **35-59**; followed by those aged **60-75**. The lowest percentage of responses were from those aged under 16, followed by **16-24-year** olds and then **25-34-year** olds.

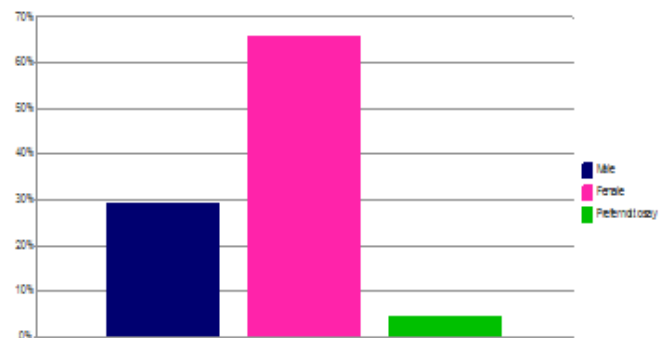
What is your age?



### Gender

Female respondents accounted for around two thirds of the total respondents at **65.9%** and male respondents accounted for **29.4%** with **4.7%** preferring not to say.

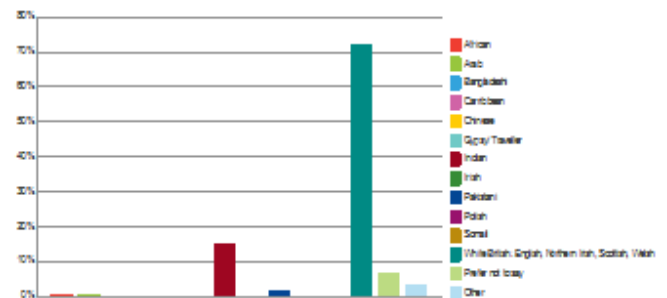
What is your gender?



### Ethnicity

White British respondents made up the highest percentage of respondents at **72%**. The next highest group identified as Indian (**15.2%**); respondents who identified as Pakistani made up **1.9%** of respondents.

Can you please tell us your ethnicity?



### Booking appointments

The highest percentage of respondents said that they usually booked their appointments by telephone (**74.9%**); **12.8%** booked in person and **11.4%** booked appointments online. None of the respondents said that they used email to book an appointment.

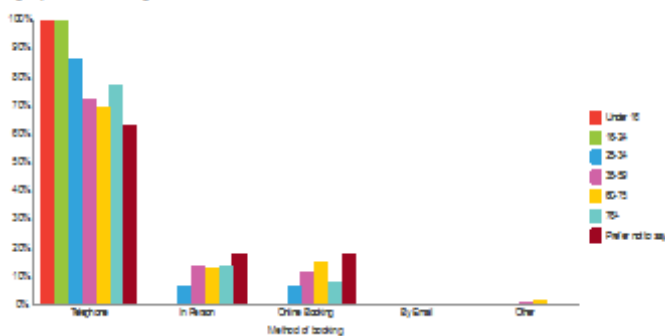


How do you normally book your GP appointments?



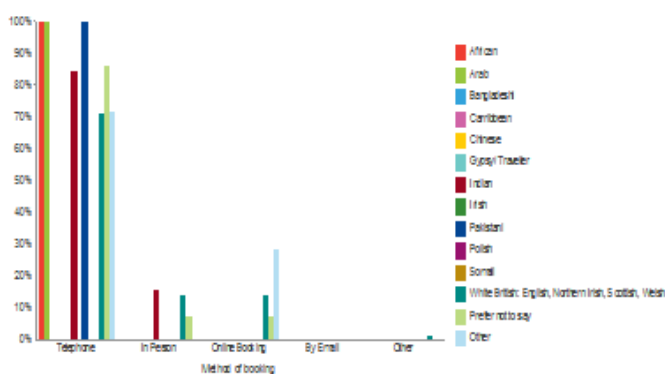
When looking at the age groups who are using each method, online booking was not being used by younger age groups to book appointments. All respondents aged **under 24** used the telephone to book their appointments and the **60-75 year** old age group make up the largest percentage of people booking online at **41.7%**.

Age by method of booking



A breakdown of ethnicity shows that online booking was not used at all by those identifying as Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi or African and that the telephone is favoured. Those identifying as White British were more likely to use online booking at **13.8%** but there is low take up on online booking generally. However, it is difficult to draw conclusions from this as there are a number of ethnic groups or nationalities who are not represented in the survey.

Ethnicity by method of booking



Respondents were asked if it was easy to get through to their GP practice by telephone in order to make an appointment. The responses almost evenly divided with **51%** saying that it was easy to get through to their practice by phone and **49%** saying that it was not.

Is it easy to get through to your GP Practice on the tele...



Booking appointments was the most common theme for respondents when they were asked what one improvement they would like to see at their practice. Within this theme there were a number of areas that people suggested for improvement.

There were some comments about the use of online booking systems, with one respondent asking that the practice **“allow online booking for next day appointments.”** Another suggested that they would like to be ‘able to book everything online.’

Others commented on the difficulty of getting appointments, particularly appointments in advance and one told of how they would present at the GP practice in order to get a same day appointment saying, **“I have found the best way to get an appointment is to visit at 8am.”** Others spoke of how they would have to call first thing in the morning, would struggle to get through and then find that there were no appointments left with one respondent commenting that **“you have to ring them at 8am or 1.30pm sharp. Two minutes after that there would be no appointments available.”**

Waiting times for appointments were also pinpointed by a number of respondents as an area for improvement. One respondent said that **“being able to have an appointment in the same week and not be given an appointment in 3 weeks time”** was an improvement that they would like to see.

Another respondent commented how they would like to **“be able to book appointments again. They have a system where you [can] not book an appointment. You ring, a GP rings back to give you an appointment if they deem it necessary.”**

The telephone systems of the practices were also singled out for improvement by a number of respondents, because of issues such as being repeatedly engaged, or queue systems that cut people off after they had been waiting for long periods of time with one respondent telling how the 'telephone [is] engaged all the time, or [you] get cut off when finally through' and another saying that their practice had a **“very poor telephone system that transfers the caller, but after ringing for some time - cuts off. Mean[ing] you have to start again.”**

## Choice of practitioner

Respondents were asked if they were offered the opportunity of seeing a preferred practitioner when they booked an appointment. Just under **42%** of respondents said that they were given the option and **45%** said that they were not. Just over **13%** said that they did not mind whether they were given the option to see a preferred practitioner.

Do you get the choice to see a preferred doctor or nurse?



Being able to see a practitioner of choice was a key area for improvement identified by respondents, with being able to choose which doctor they wanted to see within a reasonable time period being important for some with one saying that they would like to **“See doctor of choice within 1 week.”**

The key reason for wanting to have a choice of practitioner was given as being continuity of care and the doctor knowing their previous history with one commenting that **“there's no opportunity to build trust and a relationship having different doctors all the time.”** Some linked this with having a lot of locums in the practice meaning that there was a turnover of practitioners. The impact of this for one respondent was **“deterred from going to the doctor because it's all locum GPs who I have no relationship with and, who seem to care less.”**

## Type of practitioner

Respondents were asked if they would see a health practitioner other than a doctor if such an appointment was offered to them. Just under **61%** said that they would do so whereas, **14.7%** said that they would not. Just under a quarter of respondents (**24.6%**) said that they may consider seeing a different health practitioner.

Would you see a health professional other than a GP?



There were some suggestions for improvement in relation to booking appointments with practitioners other than doctors. One respondent suggested that they would like someone other than a doctor that they could get health advice from. Being able to book with a nurse of their choice was important to some in the same way as being able to book with their choice of doctor.

## Opening hours

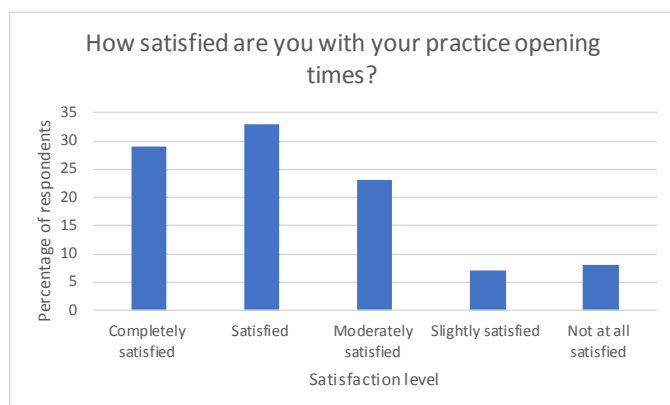
Respondents were asked if they had ever experienced their GP practice being closed when it was advertised as being open.

**93.4%** of respondents said that they had not experienced the surgery being closed when it should be open.

Have you ever experienced your practice being closed when it should be open?







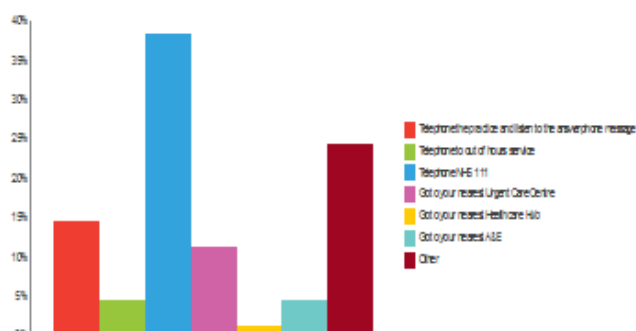
When asked how satisfied they were with the opening times at their practices, the highest percentage of respondents said that they were either completely satisfied (**29%**) or satisfied (**33%**). However, there were **8%** of respondents who said that they were not at all satisfied with their practice opening times.

Opening times were an area for improvement for a number of respondents with requests for weekend opening and later opening that meant that people who were working during the day were more easily accommodated. One respondent made the suggestion that there should be *“opening hours that reflect the working population”* with weekend opening times and another saying there should be *“after 6pm appointments for people who work shifts or full-time.”*

## Out of hours services

When asked where they would go if they needed to contact a doctor or nurse out of practice hours the highest percentage said that they would telephone **NHS 111 (38.4%)**; just under a quarter said that they would take another option, using a mixture of any of the options depending on what the issue was. Just under **5%** said that they would go to A&E, the same percentage as those that would phone the out of hours GP service. Just over **11%** said that they would go to their nearest urgent care centre and the same percentage said that they would go to their nearest healthcare hub.

If you need to contact a doctor or nurse when the practice is closed what would you do?



## Improvements

As well as improvements to the ways of booking appointments, choice of practitioners and opening times respondents also made suggestions for other areas.

The types of appointments that are offered was one area for improvement from some respondents. Comment was made that they would like *“face to face appointments with a doctor”* which suggests that the practice uses telephone appointments or uses a triage system rather than all appointments being face to face.

A number of respondents made suggestions about changes to the practice environment, including the provision of more or better parking with comments being made about the lack of adequate numbers of spaces. One respondent commented that there was *“parking for 5 vehicles only, [and] double yellow lines on road outside.”* Issues around car parking were more prevalent than concerns about privacy at reception which was raised by only one respondent.

Others suggested that there needed to be more or bigger consulting rooms. There were also some comments about there being the provision of drinking water for patients in the reception areas.

There were also comments about the need to have more staff, not just more GPs. One commented that there needed to be more *“more doctors and receptionists. [As] it feels a battle getting through on the telephone. They have less receptionists nowadays.”* The use of locums was commented on in respect of its impact on continuity of care from doctors and pinpointed as a need for the recruitment of more permanent doctors.

The attitudes of some staff were also suggested for improvement with reception staff being pinpointed as needing improvement. One respondent said that they would like to see *“better trained reception staff who are more sensitive to their customers’ needs and concerns.”*

Being asked what they needed an appointment for was an issue for some of the respondents and as a result they felt that the reception staff needed to change their approach. One commented that *“receptionists ask too many questions”*, and another said that as a result there was a *“lack of privacy.”*

One respondent made a comment that they would like to see an improvement in their practice in relation to mental health with *“some sort of mental health strategy. We have only one resident GP who is excellent but almost always booked up.”*

There were also two respondents who made comments about improving support and services for patients with dementia. One suggested that there needed to be some *“dementia expertise [because the] Memory clinic [is] discharging people because otherwise they can’t cover the new referrals, but GPs are not dementia specialists.”*



## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the report findings.

1. It is recommended that practices look at the methods of booking that they offer and provide more access to appointments through online booking to encourage up take of that method.
2. Consideration of the number of appointments available and the ways that they are made available in order to reduce the necessity to call the practice first thing in the morning to secure an appointment.

3. Consider ways that those who need an advance appointment can be accommodated in a reasonable timescale without impacting negatively on those who need same day appointments.
4. Consider how extended opening hours can be used to provide access to appointments for those who are working and are unable to access appointments at other times.
5. Look towards ensuring that those with ongoing health conditions are able to see a preferred practitioner who is familiar with their history, including those with mental health conditions.
6. Promote the potential for patients to see a nurse practitioner rather than a doctor for some conditions and offer these appointments at the point of contact from the patient.
7. Consideration of how telephone systems can be improved to ensure that patients are not left waiting on hold for long periods of time or cut off.
8. Provide customer service training for reception staff, but also provide information for patients about why the reception staff may ask why they need to see a doctor.





# Appendix 1 - Survey

## Your views about GP Services

Healthwatch Leicester and Leicestershire conducts survey that allows us to obtain the views, opinions and experiences of the public in order to influence positive change.

1. Name of GP Practice

2. How do you normally book your GP appointments?

- Telephone
- In Person
- Online Booking
- By Email
- Other

3. Is it easy to get through to your GP practice on the telephone to make an appointment?

- Yes
- No

4. When making your appointment, are you given the option of seeing the doctor or nurse of your choice?

- Yes
- No
- Don't Mind

5. Would you see a nurse or a health professional instead of the doctor if this was offered to you?

- Yes
- No
- Maybe

6. How satisfied are you with the practice opening hours?

- Completely satisfied
- Very satisfied
- Moderately satisfied
- Slightly satisfied
- Not at all satisfied

7. Have you ever experienced your GP Practice being closed when it is advertised as being open?

- Yes
- No

8. If you needed to contact a doctor or nurse when your GP Practice is closed what would you do?

- Telephone the practice and listen to the answerphone message
- Telephone the out of hours service
- Telephone NHS 111
- Go to your nearest Urgent Care Centre
- Go to your nearest Healthcare Hub
- Go to your nearest A&E
- A mix of any of the options
- Other

9. What one improvement would you make to your GP Practice?



# Appendix 1

## Information about you

What area do you live in?

- Blaby
- Charnwood
- Harborough
- Hinckley & Bosworth
- Leicester City
- Melton
- North West Leicestershire
- Oadby & Wigston
- Rutland
- Out of Area

What is your age?

- Under 16
- 16-24
- 25-34
- 35-59
- 60-75
- 76+
- Prefer not to say

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

Can you please tell us your ethnicity?

- African
- Arab
- Bangladeshi
- Caribbean
- Chinese
- Gypsy/ Traveller
- Indian
- Irish
- Pakistani
- Polish
- Somali
- White British: English, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh
- Prefer not to say
- Other



# 6





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