

# **Healthwatch Sutton**

Investigating people's experience  
of GP surgeries in Sutton

August 2024

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# Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on NHS services, including GP surgeries. Many surgeries introduced new ways of working in response to it, some of which have remained. Some patients have welcomed these changes, whilst others have found them difficult. As such, people's experience of their GP surgery has become a frequent topic in both the national media and political debate.

In this context, in 2023 Healthwatch Sutton (HWS) decided to investigate people's experience of their GP surgery in Sutton. It had already been receiving feedback from residents which suggested their experiences were mixed, so it decided to run a larger, more comprehensive survey to expand on this insight. It created a survey which asked people about three aspects of their GP surgery's service in Sutton, based on NHS England's Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care:

- How they contacted their surgery
- What outcome they received
- How their appointment went

Sutton Primary Care Networks emailed the survey on HWS's behalf to 110 000 people registered with a GP surgery in Sutton. The survey was also shared by other means, which are described in the Methodology. In total, it had 4285 responses.

The survey's main findings were:

- 1 in 4 respondents found it hard to contact their surgery, of whom half weren't able to contact at all.
- One of the reasons for finding it hard to contact the surgery was childcare and work commitments, which made it difficult to be available at the right time of day.

- The majority (69%) of respondents still used the telephone to contact their surgery, despite the ambition to shift to digital tools.
- Of the surgeries which had piloted digital tools, three had significantly higher proportions of respondents using 'Other apps' to contact them (21%, 20% and 16%).
- Most respondents (74%) still tried to contact their surgery in the morning, with half of these respondents contacting 'first thing/ at 8am'.
- 72% of respondents who were able to contact their surgery were satisfied with the outcome they received.
- 86% of respondents who attended an appointment thought it went very well or quite well.
- Many respondents gave highly positive individual feedback about their surgery.
- Some respondents complained about only being able to book appointments on the day.

The survey also asked respondents for their own feedback about their surgery. Surgeries received more positive than negative feedback about the care they provided, and more negative than positive feedback about the processes for accessing that care, particularly appointment availability.

Based on these findings, HWS has the following recommendations for GP surgeries and other healthcare organisations in Sutton:

- Enable people to book surgery appointments for the future, rather than only on the day.
- Enable people to send appointment requests and other communication to their surgery throughout the day, including outside of working hours.
- Enable more people to contact their surgery and book appointments through the NHS app.
- Maintain the three ways of contacting the surgery and booking appointments: phone call, online/app and in person.
- Emphasise to patients that their surgery participates in the Sunflower Scheme for Hidden Disabilities. Participation includes accepting the preferences of people with a disability for how they contact their surgery.

- For people who find it difficult to use digital tools, accept their preference for contacting their surgery another way.
- Surgeries could consider publishing data showing the average waiting time in their telephone queue, the number of appointments they are delivering, the proportion of these which are face to face, and the proportion which patients did not attend. (*This is to give people accurate information about appointment availability in Sutton*).

HWS will formally share this report with NHS South West London Integrated Care Board. It will also share it with the following organisations and individuals in Sutton:

- Sutton Practice Managers
- Sutton Primary Care Networks
- Sutton Council

Together with the associated Boards:

- Sutton Health & Wellbeing Board
- Sutton Place Partnership
- Sutton Alliance Board

It will also share it with the MPs for Carshalton & Wallington and Sutton & Cheam, and an extensive list of further stakeholders. Finally, it will share it with Healthwatch England, to add to its own body of insight into GP surgeries nationwide.

HWS wants to work collaboratively with these organisations and individuals to use the survey's findings to recognise good practice and identify changes which could further improve people's experience of their GP surgery in Sutton. It recognises the current issues and pressures that GP surgeries are experiencing and the impact that may have on their ability to take action.

A first step could be to focus on ensuring residents don't decide to stop seeking healthcare from their surgery, because they are too frustrated with the

appointment booking process (see page 41 for examples of this). The most vulnerable service users may be most likely affected by this.

HWS welcomes feedback about this report, from both stakeholders and Sutton's residents.

# Introduction

In Spring 2024, Healthwatch Sutton (HWS) carried out a survey of people registered with a GP surgery in the London Borough of Sutton. The survey asked them about their recent experience of using their GP surgery. In total, it had 4285 responses. This report summarises the results and provides recommendations for GP surgeries and other healthcare organisations in Sutton. The aim is for these recommendations to help them deliver accessible services.

## National Context

In May 2023, NHS England published its 'Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care' (referred to as the Delivery Plan for the rest of this report). The Delivery Plan set out proposals for enabling GP surgeries, Dentists, Opticians and Pharmacies to respond to the following challenges:<sup>1</sup>

- The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic
- An increase in patient demand
- An ageing population

NHS England states significant progress has already been made towards these goals. For example, it says in the twelve months up to February 2024, there were 57.5 million more general practice appointments-excluding those for Covid vaccinations- than before the pandemic, of which 3 in 5 were face to face and almost 9 in 10 were within two weeks of booking.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NHS England, *Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care* (2023). Available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/PRN00283-delivery-plan-for-recovering-access-to-primary-care-may-2023.pdf> [Accessed 25/04/24], 3.

<sup>2</sup> NHS England, *Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care: update and actions for 2024/25* (2024). Available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/delivery-plan-for-recovering-access-to-primary-care-update-and-actions-for-2024-25/> [Accessed 25/04/24]

However, the British Medical Association highlights a variety of challenges facing GP surgeries. It describes a situation of 'declining GP numbers, rising demand, struggles to recruit and retain staff and knock-on effects for patients'.<sup>3</sup> The BMA's members have also recently voted for collective action by GP surgeries, to increase pressure on the government to reform the contract between GP surgeries and the NHS, which they say needs to be fixed.<sup>4 5</sup>

As for national patient experience data, the results from the 2024 GP Patient Survey were published on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2024. This was carried out between January and March 2024, and had 700 000 respondents from across England. 67% had a good overall experience on the last occasion they contacted their GP Practice, whilst 90% felt their needs were met at their last appointment.<sup>6</sup> These figures reflect one of the themes captured by HWS's survey, that respondents' positive feedback tended to be about the care they had from their GP surgery, whilst their negative feedback tended to be about their experience of accessing that care.

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<sup>3</sup> British Medical Association, *Pressures in general practice data analysis* (Last updated: 4<sup>th</sup> April 2024). Available online: <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/pressures-in-general-practice-data-analysis> [Accessed 25/04/24]

<sup>4</sup> British Medical Association, *GPs prepare to take collective action after overwhelming ballot result* (Published: 1<sup>th</sup> August 2024). Available online: <https://www.bma.org.uk/bma-media-centre/gps-prepare-to-take-collective-action-after-overwhelming-ballot-result> [Accessed 20/08/24]

<sup>5</sup> British Medical Association, *Protect your patients, protect your GP practice* (no date). Available online: <https://www.bma.org.uk/GPcontract?query=GMS> [Accessed 20/08/24]

<sup>6</sup> GP Patient Survey, *2024 survey: Headline findings*. [Presentation]. Available online: <https://gp-patient.co.uk/surveysandreports> [Accessed 16/07/24]



Given the current situation of GP surgeries and patient experience at a national level, HWS decided to investigate people's experience of their GP surgery in Sutton.

## **Sutton context**

As of July 2024, there were 21 GP surgeries in Sutton, each with between 4000 and 16 500 registered patients.<sup>7</sup>

Over the past year, these surgeries have made the following changes to how they operate, in response to the Delivery Plan:<sup>8</sup>

- All 21 have new telephone systems, which offer a 'callback' option.\*
- 20 out of 21 have refreshed websites, or this work is underway.
- 9 have piloted digital tools for online consultations, messaging and booking appointments. These tools are called Anima and Accurx.

*\*This means people telephoning their surgery don't have to wait on hold. They can ring up, join the telephone queue, end the call and be called back automatically.*

HWS decided to run this survey to find out about Sutton residents' recent experience of these changes, in order to provide a 'patients' perspective' on them.

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<sup>7</sup> NHS England, *Patients Registered at a GP Practice–August 2024*. Available online: <https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrjoiNGZhOTc3ZGQtNmUwOS00M2M3LWFIZTItZjliMzNIYjExNmM5liwidCI6IjM3YzMINGIyLTgIYjAtNDdmNSliMjlyLTA3YjQ4ZDc3NGVIMyJ9> [Accessed 22/08/24].

<sup>8</sup> Sutton Primary Care Networks, *March 2024 Update*. 12 March 2024 [Presentation] [Accessed 16/07/24]

# About Healthwatch Sutton

Healthwatch organisations are statutory (legally required) bodies that have been set up to ensure that the voices of local people are heard in the design and delivery of health and social care services. The council for every local authority area must procure a local Healthwatch organisation.

Healthwatch Sutton (HWS) is the local Healthwatch organisation for the London Borough of Sutton. We are a charity and a company limited by guarantee. Our principal activities are projects that investigate specific areas of health and social care and we use our statutory power to influence improvements for residents, and for people who work or who are educated in the borough.

We also provide an information and advice service, and support access to NHS complaints advocacy through the Together for Sutton partnership ([www.togetherforsutton.org.uk](http://www.togetherforsutton.org.uk)).

# Key Findings and Commendations

## Key Findings

The key findings from the survey were:

- 1 in 4 respondents found it hard to contact their surgery, of whom half weren't able to contact at all.
- One of the reasons for finding it hard to contact the surgery was childcare and work commitments, which made it difficult to be available at the right time of day.
- On average, respondents found some surgeries easier to contact than others.
- Visiting in person was the most effective way to contact the surgery (96% of respondents who did this said they successfully contacted their surgery).
- The majority (69%) of respondents still used the telephone to contact their surgery, despite the ambition to shift to digital tools.
- A higher proportion of respondents found the NHS App easy to use than the telephone (70% compared to 58%).
- Of the surgeries which had piloted digital tools, three had significantly higher proportions of respondents using 'Other apps' to contact them (21%, 20% and 16%).
- Most respondents (74%) still tried to contact their surgery in the morning, with half of these respondents contacting 'first thing/ at 8am'.
- 55% of the respondents who tried to contact their surgery by phone 'first thing/at 8am' were given an appointment within 24hrs, compared to 32% of those who tried to contact by phone later in the morning.
- Some respondents complained about only being able to book appointments on the day.

- 72% of respondents who were able to contact their surgery were satisfied with the outcome they received. This figure was lower (63%) for respondents who cared for someone for 50 or more hours a week.
- Out of the 3500 respondents who were offered a single outcome when they contacted their surgery, 2% were asked to book online instead and 6% were asked to call back another day.
- Out of the 3007 respondents who had an appointment with one type of clinician, 74% saw a GP.
- 73% of respondents wanted to be contacted by email about changes at their surgery.
- There was considerable variability in overall patient experience across the surgeries in Sutton.

## **Commendations**

The surgeries in Sutton achieved the following:

- 61% of respondents who said they were able to contact their surgery found doing this very or quite easy.
- Out of the 3500 respondents who were offered a single outcome when they contacted their surgery, 80% were offered an appointment within two weeks. Just over half of these appointments were within 24hrs.
- 86% of respondents who attended an appointment thought it went very well or quite well.
- Many respondents gave highly positive individual feedback about their surgery (see page 48).

# Recommendations and Further Suggestions

## Recommendations

- Enable people to book surgery appointments for the future, rather than only on the day.
- Enable people to send appointment requests and other communication to their surgery throughout the day, including outside of working hours.
- Enable more people to contact their surgery and book appointments through the NHS app.
- Maintain the three ways of contacting the surgery and booking appointments: phone call, online/app and in person.
- Emphasise to patients that their surgery participates in the Sunflower Scheme for Hidden Disabilities. Participation includes accepting the preferences of people with a disability for how they contact their surgery.
- For people who find it difficult to use digital tools, accept their preference for contacting their surgery another way.
- Surgeries could consider publishing data showing the average waiting time in their telephone queue, the number of appointments they are delivering, the proportion of these which are face to face, and the proportion which patients did not attend. (*This is to give people accurate information about appointment availability in Sutton*).

## Further suggestions

### Quality of Care

- If clinically safe, enable people to request an appointment with a specific clinician, even if they have to wait longer.
- Clarify to people how long appointments are, if there are any limits on how many conditions they can discuss, and what to do if they think these limits will prevent them from getting the right care.
- Review how patients' medication records are kept up to date, including how messages from them about their medication are actioned.
- Review how test results are shared with patients, and whether, where needed, they are offered the option to discuss them with clinicians. How is responsibility for following up split between patients and clinicians, including when it is serious and urgent? Can a standard procedure be followed by all surgeries in Sutton?

### Manner of staff

- Avoid making people feel rushed during their appointment.
- If someone comes to speak to reception staff, acknowledge them even if they need to wait.

### Administration

- Create a separate communication channel for carers/ review how surgeries identify callers who are carers.
- Review the pre-recorded telephone message to see if it can be simplified and if it is welcoming.
- Communicate surgery updates to people via email as standard, but offer other communication options e.g. letter.

### Appointment availability

- Give people the time of day of available appointments so they can choose the right one.

- Share information about the surgery's triage process, including reasons for implementation and the training staff have to complete to carry it out.
- Share information about the different systems for contacting the surgery and booking appointments.
- Let people know which clinician their appointments are with.
- If a clinician decides during a patient's appointment that they need a follow up appointment, is there capacity to book this then?
- If someone is triaged as needing an appointment, respect their preference if they would like to have it face to face.

## Digital tools

- Review patient guidance for using digital tools to request appointments.
- Record examples of digital tools incorrectly triaging patients and contact developers with suggested changes.
- Review whether digital tools for requesting appointments can be simplified/shortened.
- Review patients' ability to reply to surgery's messages.
- Review whether digital tools can confirm if a patient has an appointment when they first submit their appointment request.
- Review whether digital tools can allow multiple people to register on a patient's behalf.
- Review whether digital tools can allow patients to book multiple appointments at a time.
- Review whether digital tools can allow patients with a disability to specify that their appointment needs to be face to face.

## Other

- Review consultation rooms' soundproofing and, if there are concerns, take measures to improve patients' privacy.
- Review surgeries' accessibility for people with disabilities.
- [Outside GP surgeries' remit] Review whether there can be a ULEZ/Parking charge exemption for patients' car journeys to their surgery.
- [*Ditto*] Review availability of Blue Badge parking bays at/near surgeries.

- Specify the time of patients' telephone appointments, to the hour, rather than giving them a wide time window, such as sometime in the morning or afternoon.
- Review whether automatic updates can be sent to patients if their telephone appointment is delayed.

### Awareness

- Share a summary of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on surgeries, including the changes which have remained.



# Methodology

## Project Background

In 2023, HWS decided to carry out this project. As described in the Introduction, this was due to both the range of information about GP services at a national level, and the changes taking place at GP surgeries in Sutton. Moreover, HWS had been receiving feedback about GP services from Sutton residents in its Have Your Say survey, which suggested their experience varied across the borough.<sup>9</sup>

HWS's Board agreed to the project as one of three to deliver over the next two to three years. HWS also agreed with South West London Integrated Care Board to complete the project as part of its Primary Care Engagement Delivery Plan.

To deliver the project, HWS decided to survey adults (18 years and older) registered with a GP surgery in the London Borough of Sutton.

## Survey development

To create the survey's questions, HWS used a number of sources. Its counterpart in Richmond (Healthwatch Richmond) had developed its own survey of people's use of GP surgeries, so it agreed to use their questions as a template. It adapted them to investigate whether people's recent use of their GP surgery in Sutton matched that described in the Delivery Plan, which established NHS England's vision for how people should be able to access their surgery. For example, the Delivery Plan states "We want to make it easier for people to contact their practice",<sup>10</sup> so HWS's survey asked people how easy or difficult they found doing this.

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<sup>9</sup> Data from Healthwatch Sutton, *Have your say survey*, Healthwatch Sutton, [CSV file], (2024). [Downloaded 29/04/24]

<sup>10</sup> NHS England, *Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care* (2023), 25.

HWS also met with Sutton Primary Care Networks to identify gaps in their knowledge of Sutton residents' use of GP surgeries. This identified two: how people wanted to be contacted about changes at their surgery and what type of clinician people thought they were seeing. HWS's questions asked about both of these.

HWS Volunteers telephoned the GP surgeries in Sutton to review their pre-recorded telephone messages. This identified the contact and booking options that each explained to patients, which helped develop the survey's questions about contacting the surgery and the outcomes offered to patients.

Finally, HWS asked for feedback from members of the Sutton Patient Reference Group about the availability of appointments on digital tools such as Anima. This helped develop the questions around booking appointments.

## **Survey delivery**

Once created, HWS arranged for the survey to be shared in the following ways (see Acknowledgements for further details):

- **February to April 2024:** HWS offered paper copies to the public at various organisations' events and services.
- **March 2024:** HWS and third sector partners shared the survey on their websites and social media.
- **March 2024:** HWS sent a poster to 21 GP surgeries and 3 Pharmacies in Sutton for display. The poster contained a QR code link to the survey, and HWS's contact details for people who wanted a paper copy.
- **April 2024:** Sutton Primary Care Networks shared the survey by email with approximately 110 000 people registered with a GP surgery in Sutton.

To share the survey in these ways, HWS created a digital version and a paper version. The digital version was created on Microsoft Forms and could be accessed with a URL link or QR code. See the Appendix for a copy of the paper version.

The survey closed on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2024 with 4285 responses:

- 45% of respondents last tried to contact their surgery in March 2024.
- 29% last tried to contact their surgery between January 2024 and March 2024.
- 12% last tried to contact their surgery between October 2023 and January 2024.
- 12% last tried to contact their surgery before October 2023.

As for respondent demographics (see Demographics for more detail):

- Each of these age groups gave approximately a third of the responses: 25-49, 50-64, 65-79.
- There were also smaller numbers of responses from 18-24-year-olds (53 responses) and people who didn't give their age (111 responses).
- 65% of respondents were women.
- 96% were straight/heterosexual.
- 68% were White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh.
- 17% said they had a disability or access requirement.
- 18% said they looked after or supported someone as a carer.

The respondents' demographics were not the same as Sutton's whole population, which was a limitation of the survey. However, this may partly be because users of Sutton's GP surgeries are not proportionately spread across its whole population. Another limitation of the survey was that it did not capture the impact of changes made at GP surgeries since April 2024. Finally, some surgeries had significantly more respondents than others, as shown on page 20.

Analysis of the responses and report writing took place in May-August 2024.

Surgery name	Registered patients (August 2024) <sup>11</sup>	Number of survey responses
Wrythe Green Surgery	16529	476
Cheam GP Centre	12382	442
The Old Court House Surgery	13574	392
Cheam Family Practice	13790	384
Benhill & Belmont GP Centre	12428	327
Robin Hood Lane Health Centre	15007	317
Grove Road Practice	11185	310
James O'Riordan Medical Centre	9627	287
Mulgrave Road Surgery	8820	261
Circle GP Surgery (previously 'Green Wrythe Surgery')	10515	208
Chesser Surgery	6221	154
Hackbridge Medical Centre	7411	152
Bishopsford Road Medical Centre	5012	94
Faccini House Surgery	4655	92
Sutton Medical Centre	5436	67
Wallington Family Practice	16464	23
		20 (Respondents confused with Cheam GP Centre)
Maldon Road Surgery	4551	
Shotfield Medical Practice	12377	18
Manor Practice	12400	14
Park Road Medical Centre	4353	11
Beeches Surgery	5465	2
Carshalton Fields Surgery	Merged with Wallington Family Practice, 1st July 2024	1
Not sure	/	6
Registered at a GP Surgery outside of Sutton	/	5
Not registered at a GP Surgery	/	1
Prefer not to say	/	1
Blank	/	220
Total	208 202	4285

<sup>11</sup> NHS England, *Patients Registered at a GP Practice–August 2024*

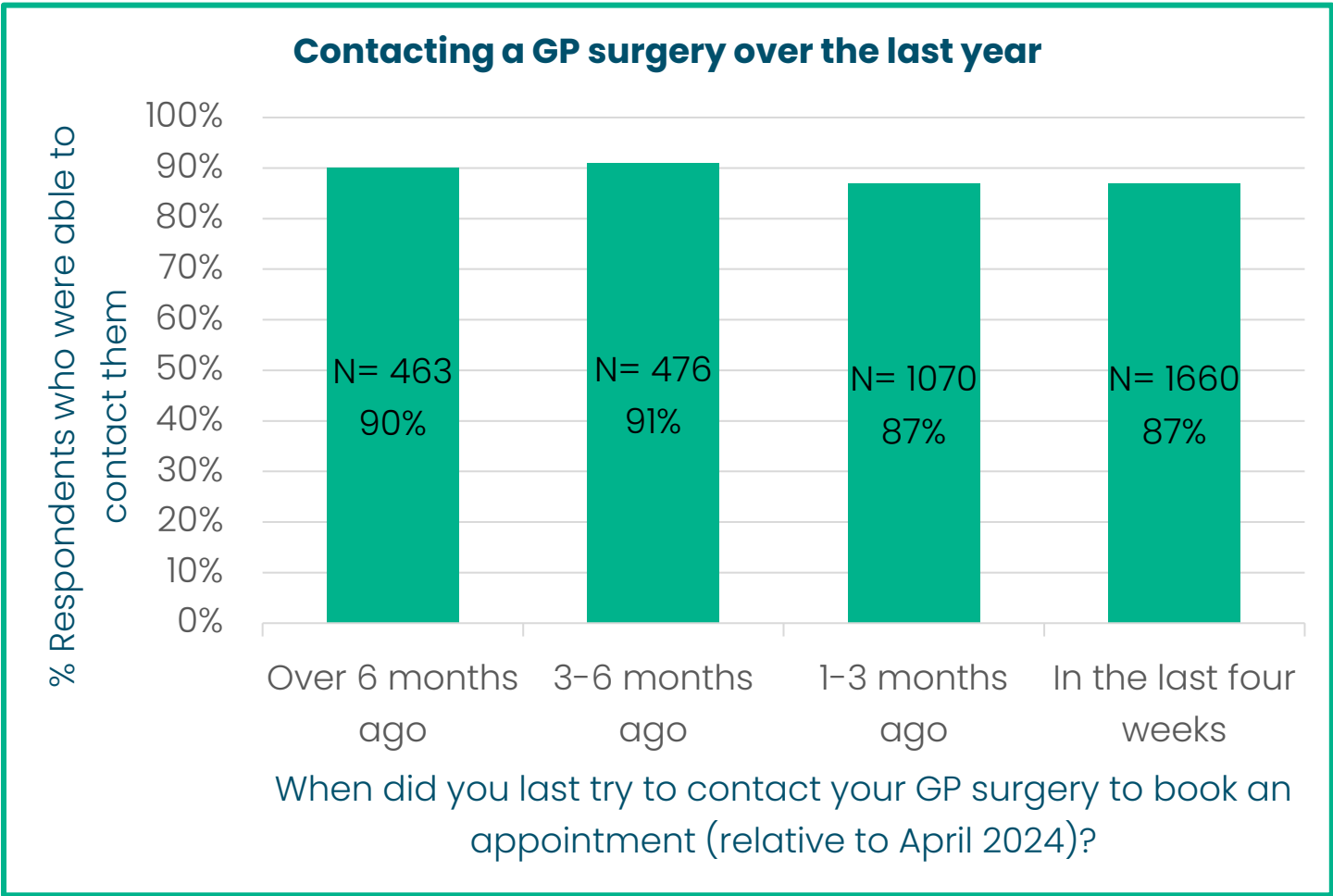
# Results

The following results are in two sections. The first presents the data about respondents' use of their surgery, together with some of their comments. The second presents their comments in more detail.

## Section One: Respondents' use of their GP surgery

### Has it become easier to contact a GP surgery?

After removing blank answers, the proportion of respondents who said they were able to contact their surgery to book an appointment remained approximately the same between October 2023 and March 2024.



However, of those respondents who said they *were* able to contact their surgery, more started to find doing this easier. This proportion increased by 8% between October 2023 and March 2024, from 57% to 65%.

*“Making an appointment was easy to perform. Got an appointment to see a doctor very quickly. Very happy with the service I received.”*

Despite this, there was still a significant number of respondents who struggled to contact their surgery. Overall, 1 in 4 found it hard to contact, of whom half were not able to contact at all. Across surgeries, between 4% and 35% of respondents who were able to contact their surgery found doing this very hard or quite hard.

*“Not being able to book online is frustrating, getting through by phone is and has always been challenging.”*

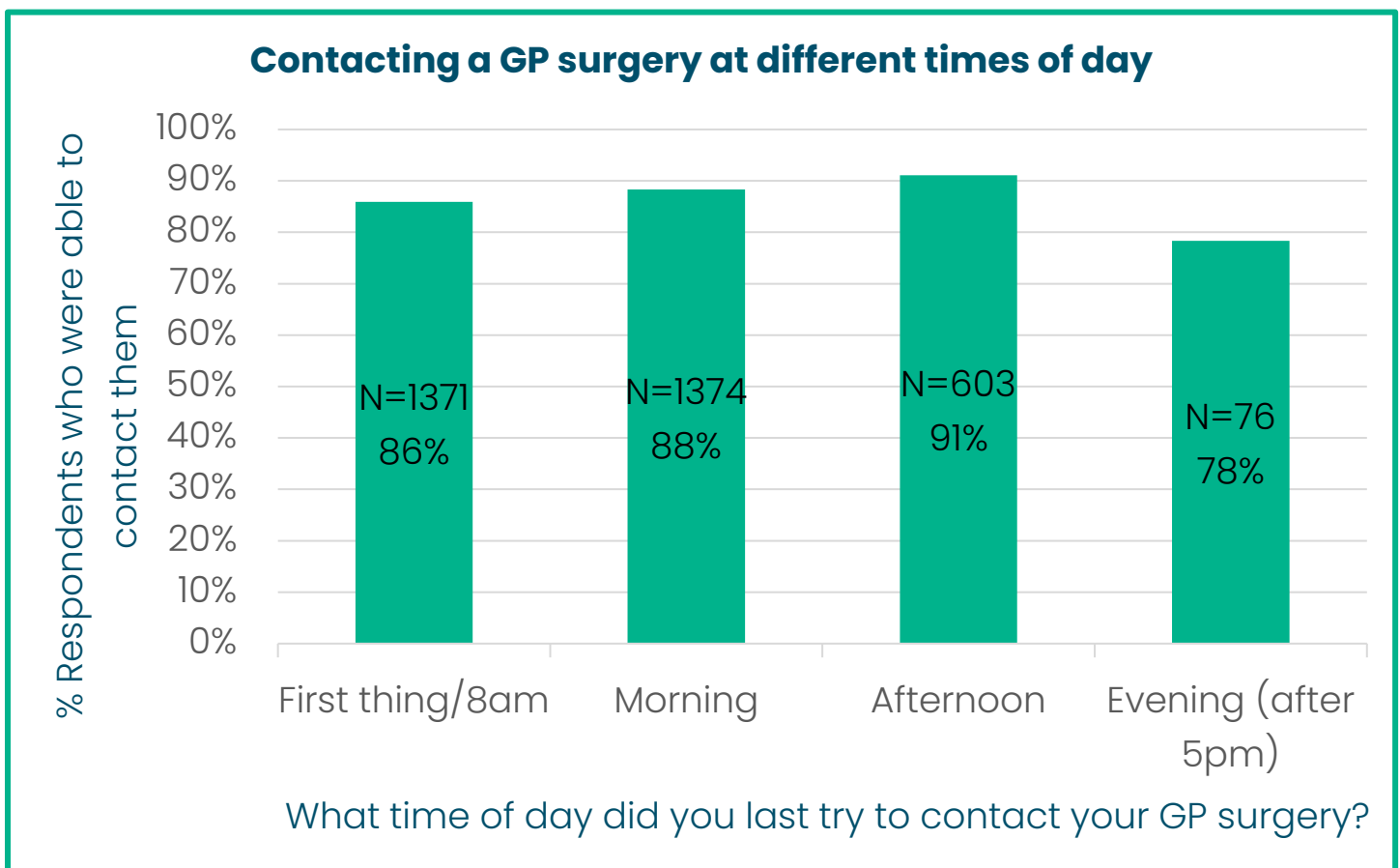
The table on page 23 shows each surgery’s average score for how easy it was for respondents to contact them. The surgeries’ names have been removed and those with less than 50 responses excluded. Respondents’ answers were weighted to produce these scores, which are out of 5. A higher score means, on average, respondents found it easier to contact the surgery.

Where individuals are finding it hard to contact their surgery, they may need further support to use the new systems introduced for contacting. Surgeries may also need further support to fully implement these systems. Surgeries also need to maintain and possibly develop the other ways of contacting them, which may work better for some residents.

Surgery	How easy it was to contact (Average )
Surgery 1	3.00
Surgery 2	3.08
Surgery 3	3.18
Surgery 4	3.27
Surgery 5	3.40
Surgery 6	3.56
Surgery 7	3.61
Surgery 8	3.71
Surgery 9	3.80
Surgery 10	3.82
Surgery 11	3.84
Surgery 12	4.01
Surgery 13	4.16
Surgery 14	4.22
Surgery 15	4.30

## Does contacting the surgery at different times of day make a difference?

Overall, trying to contact the surgery at different times of day did not significantly affect how likely someone was to successfully contact them. After removing blanks, 86% of respondents who tried to contact their surgery first thing/ at 8am were successful, rising to 88% for those who tried later in the morning, and again to 91% for those who tried in the afternoon. However, those who tried in the evening (after 5pm) were less likely to successfully get through (78%), although only 2% of respondents tried at this time.



Despite this lack of difference, most respondents (74%) still tried to contact their surgery in the morning. Half of these respondents contacted 'first thing/ at 8am'. This may be because, for some, contacting in the morning fitted in better with their lives, rather than because they thought they were likelier to get through. Either way, it suggests the '8am rush' is still occurring in Sutton.



One of the Delivery Plan's aims is to 'tackle the 8am rush by making it easier for the public to contact their practice by phone and online'.<sup>12</sup> The fact that respondents were as likely to successfully contact their surgery at different times of day suggests the surgeries have partly achieved this, at least for contacting by phone. However, the 8am rush is still occurring, and what may explain this is that, although respondents were as likely to get through at different times of day, 55% of those who tried to contact their surgery by phone 'first thing/at 8am' were given an appointment within 24hrs, compared to 32% of those who tried to contact by phone later in the morning.

*"If urgent appointment needed as long as you either go on line or phone early morning you can always get a same day appointment."*

Perhaps fewer of the respondents contacting later in the morning were seeking such an appointment. That aside, maintaining availability of them throughout the day, as far as possible, would help those who can't contact their surgery first thing/at 8am. Respondents gave a variety of reasons for being in this position, such as childcare responsibilities and work commitments (see page 41 for more examples).

*"I have to take children to school so it's impossible to get on (online) before 9am."*

### **What methods are people using to contact their surgery?**

69% telephoned, 15% visited in person, 14% used the NHS app, 11% used their GP surgery's website and 6% used Other apps. 2% used Email. [Visited in person means going to the surgery and speaking to someone there]. Many respondents used more than one of these methods.

Of the surgeries which had piloted digital tools, three had significantly higher proportions of respondents using Other apps (21%, 20% and 16%).

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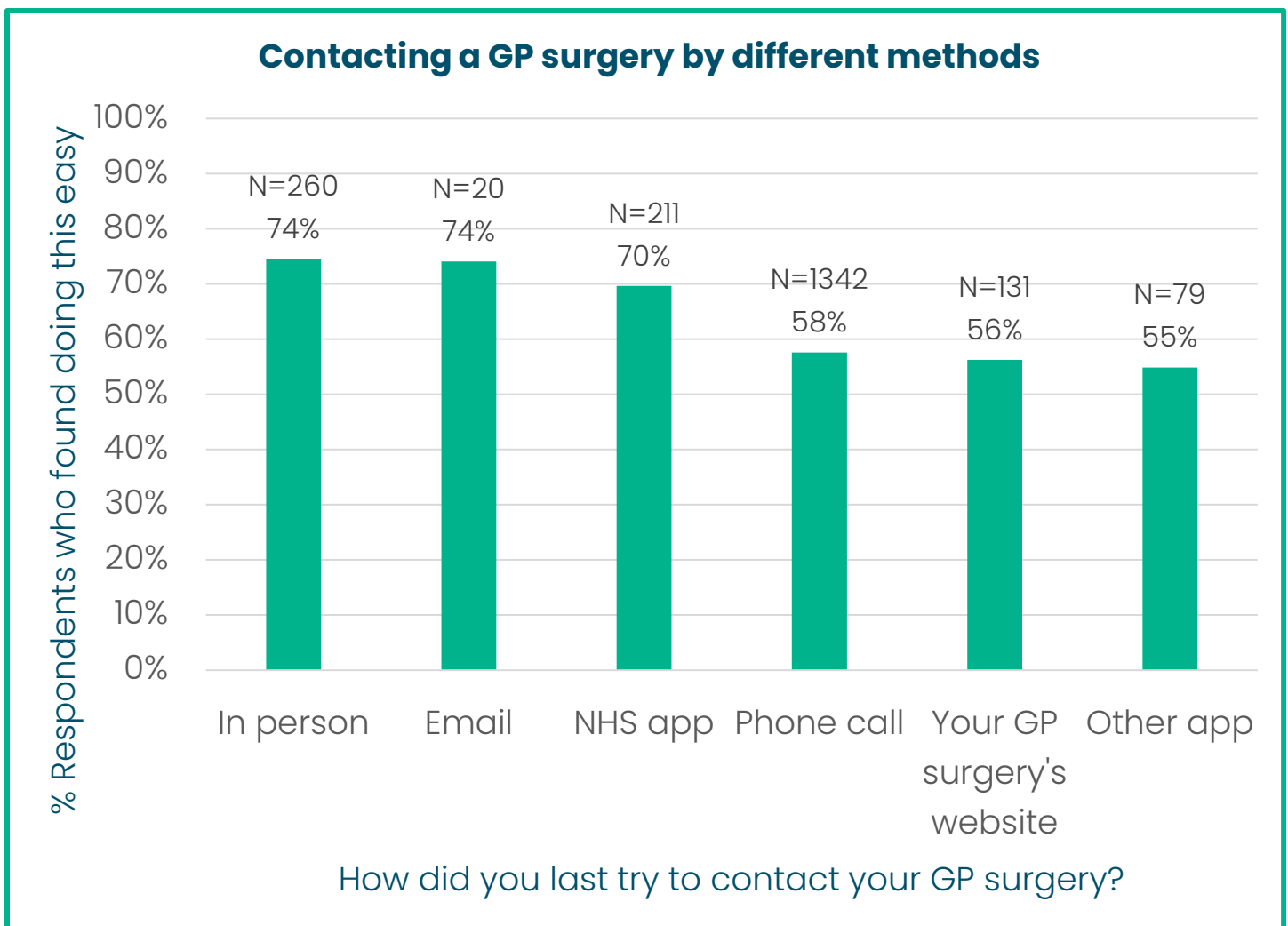
<sup>12</sup> NHS England, *Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care* (2023), 19

## Are certain methods for contacting the surgery more effective?

Visiting in person was the most effective. After removing blanks, 96% of those who tried to contact their surgery in this way were successful, followed by 93% of those who telephoned. Digital methods were less effective, as 85% or less of those who tried to contact their surgery by Email, the NHS app, Other Apps or their surgery's website were successful. [These figures were calculated from the 3491 responses of people who used only one of the listed methods].

## Do people find certain methods for contacting easier to use?

After removing blanks, respondents found visiting in person and Email the easiest (74% of those who did these found them very or quite easy), followed by the NHS app (70%), Phone call (58%), their GP surgery's website (56%) and Other app (55%). 2% of respondents used Email and 6% used Other app.



Based on this data, surgeries could consider making visiting in person and email more mainstream ways for patients to contact them. However, given they have between 4000 and 16 500 patients, this could be unrealistic. Also, only 15% of respondents visited in person and 2% used Email, so more evidence is needed to confirm them as preferred contact methods. Some respondents may also have only visited in person because they found it hard to contact their surgery using other methods, which they would have preferred to use.

*“When we emailed and explained the issue in more detail, she was offered an appointment within 2 days!”*

*“If I need an appointment I usually go in person and queue at the door as quite difficult to get an appointment on the phone”*

A separate finding was that a higher proportion of respondents found the NHS app very or quite easy to use than the telephone (70% compared to 58%). This is interesting, as a greater proportion of those who used the telephone were able to contact their surgery. If people find the NHS app easier to use, but less effective for contacting their surgery, then a more beneficial focus may be enabling more people to contact and book appointments using this method. However, the sample sizes for users of these two methods were unequal, so these questions would need to be repeated first.

*“It would be easier if the surgery could release more appointments via the NHS app.”*

Enabling more people to use the NHS app could work well for those who are able to use and confident with digital technology. However, some in Sutton may not be in that position.<sup>13</sup> For them, surgeries need to consider maintaining and possibly developing other ways of booking appointments.

*“People like me (without internet access) are overlooked. We are all expected to be online and able to communicate on our phones.”*

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<sup>13</sup> London Borough of Sutton, *Sutton Strategic Needs Assessment*, 21 May 2024 [Presentation] [Accessed 22/05/2024].

## What outcomes are people getting when they contact their surgery?

The survey asked respondents which of the following outcomes they received when they last contacted their surgery. These outcomes are listed in the Delivery Plan as those which surgeries should and should not be offering patients:<sup>14</sup>

- A face to face or telephone appointment within 24hrs
- A face to face or telephone appointment within 2 weeks
- A face to face or telephone appointment after 2 weeks
- Advice to use another service
- Advice to self-care
- Asked to call back another day
- Asked to book online instead
- Other

Many respondents said they received more than one outcome when they last contacted their surgery. Of those who received only one (3500 respondents), 43% received a face to face or telephone appointment within 24hrs. A further 37% received this kind of appointment within 2 weeks. As these outcomes are the two which the Delivery Plan says should be offered to people who need an appointment,<sup>15</sup> the surgeries in Sutton can be commended for offering them to a majority of respondents.

*“The last 3 times I have contacted them I was offered an appointment within 48 hours.”*

However, 2% of respondents who received one outcome were asked to book online instead, and 6% were asked to call back another day. Whilst these numbers are small, the Delivery Plan says patients should no longer be receiving these outcomes.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> NHS England, *Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care* (2023), 4-5

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, 4

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, 4-5

*“When you eventually get through on the phone you’re told all appointments are gone and call back next day.”*

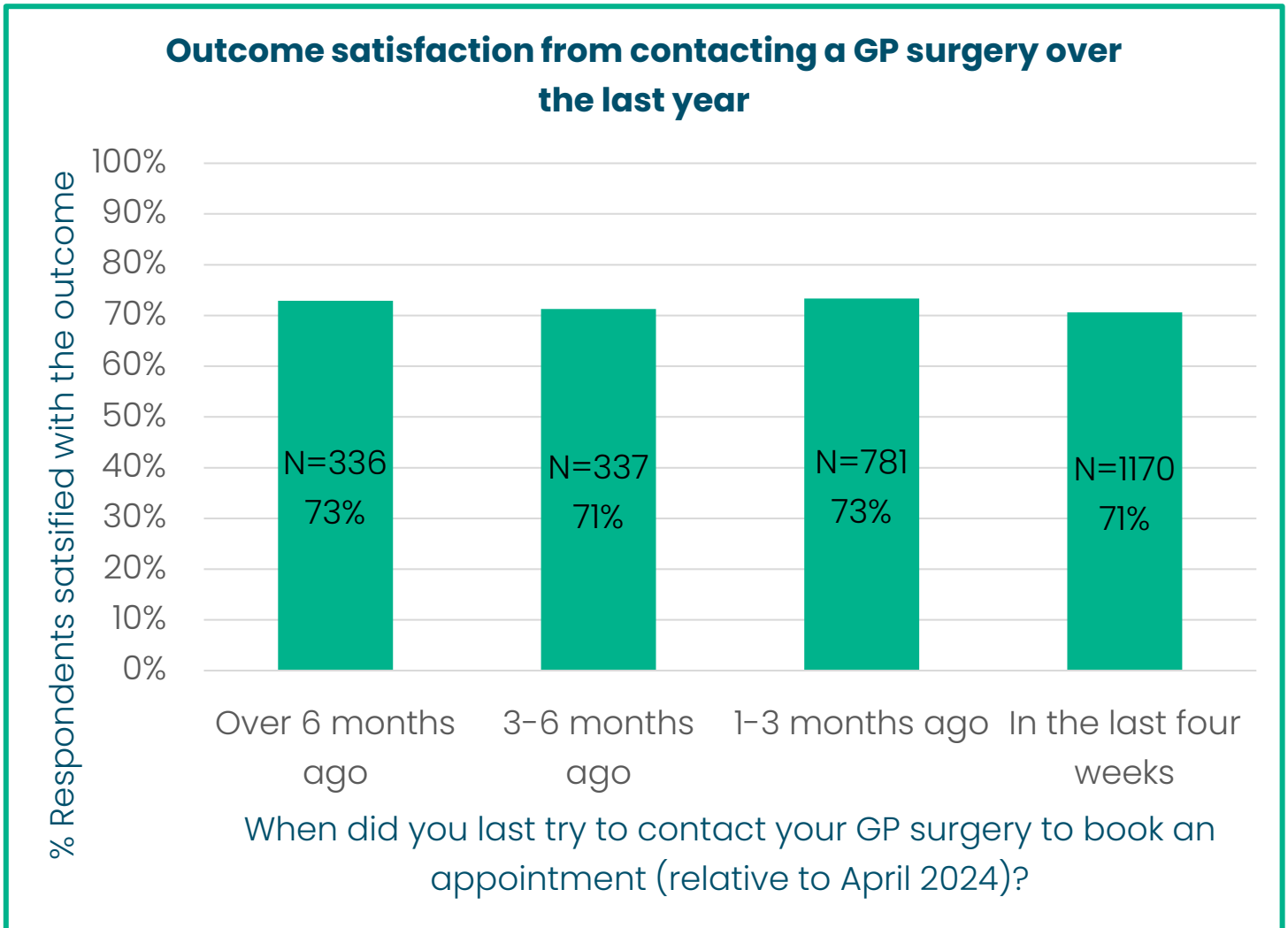
HWS spoke to three surgeries about their procedure for when a patient contacts them for an urgent appointment, but there are none left that day. All surgeries said they either signpost them to 111 or book them in for the next available urgent appointment. One surgery added that any urgent case is in the first instance triaged and reviewed by the Doctor, before any signposting takes place. This suggests surgeries are taking a pragmatic approach, trying to implement Modern General Practice Access as far as possible and avoid offering the two said outcomes to patients. However, it would still be worth surgeries and other healthcare organisations in Sutton reviewing their procedures to see if anything more can be done to avoid offering them.

As for the types of clinician who respondents had an appointment with, some said they saw more than one. Of those who saw only one (3007 respondents), 74% saw a GP. 16% saw a Nurse and small numbers saw other types of clinicians who now work directly from surgeries: Physician Associates (3%), Pharmacists (2%), Health Care Assistants (2%) and Physiotherapists (2%). If Surgeries’ own figures for how many patients are seeing these other clinicians are higher, this suggests some respondents didn’t know who the clinician they saw was. If this was the case, it would be worth clarifying how patients in Sutton find out which clinician their appointment is with.

*“Seeing a physiotherapist for new muscle/joint pains instead of a GP has sped up management and treatment.”*

## Are more people satisfied with the outcome from contacting their surgery?

After removing blank and 'not sure' answers, the proportion of respondents satisfied with the outcome from contacting their surgery ranged from 71% to 73% between October 2023 and March 2024.



Respondents who attended an appointment were asked how well they thought it went. Overall, after removing blanks, 86% thought their appointment went very well or quite well, whilst 6% thought it didn't go that well or that well at all.

*“Doctors are very good. Take time to answer questions and explain what steps need to be taken.”*

*“the doctor said to me sorry I’m in a rush and did not check me over properly and I had a chest infection.”*

When compared to respondents’ self-described financial situation, an interesting trend appears. Respondents who said they were in a less secure financial situation were less likely to think their appointment went well. However, a relatively small number of them completed the survey, so it would be interesting to repeat this with a larger group.

Self-described financial situation	Number of respondents who thought their appointment went well	Proportion of respondents who thought their appointment went well
I have enough for the basics, and at least a fair amount extra that I can save or spend.	1043	90%
I have enough for the basics, and a small amount extra that I can save or spend.	1037	86%
I only have enough for the basics, I am living month to month or using savings.	350	79%
I don't have enough for the basics, I am struggling to make ends meet.	71	65%

## How do people want to be contacted about changes at their GP surgery?

Many respondents gave more than one method by which they wanted to be contacted. The most popular was Email, which 73% gave. This was followed by Text message (47%), Letter in the post (19%), In person at the surgery (7%) and Poster at the surgery (5%).

Communicating by email would clearly work for a majority, and could be easier for surgeries to use than text messages. Other less popular contact methods should still be offered, as whilst the proportions preferring them are smaller, these proportions represent significant numbers of people across the whole Borough. For example, 5% of respondents said they wanted to be contacted only by letter. Applied to Sutton's whole population, this represents 10 500 residents.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Data from Office for National Statistics, *Sutton Local Authority, London Region and England Country. 2021 Census Area Profile*, Nomis. Available online: [https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census\\_2021/report?compare=E09000029,E12000007,E92000001](https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/sources/census_2021/report?compare=E09000029,E12000007,E92000001) [Accessed 04/06/2024]



## Section two: Respondents' comments about their GP surgery

Question 13 invited respondents to give their own comments about their surgery. 2651 responded, and their comments covered the following themes:

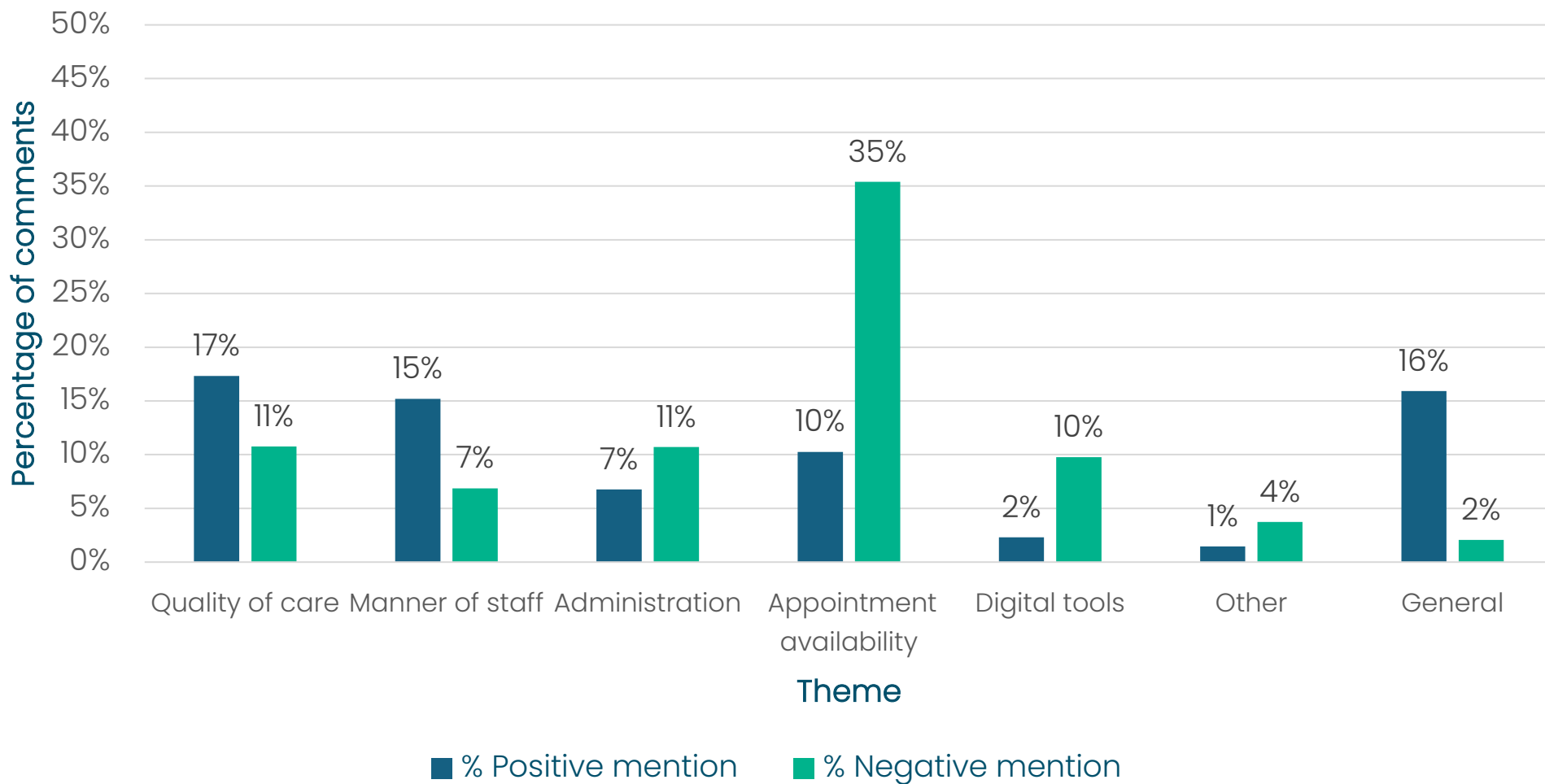
- Quality of care
- Manner of staff
- Administration
- Appointment availability
- Digital Tools
- Other
- General

The graph on page 34 shows the percentage of comments which gave a positive or negative mention of each theme.

Overall, Quality of care, Manner of staff and General were the themes which had more positive than negative mentions, whilst Administration, Appointment availability, Digital Tools and Other had more negative than positive mentions.

With this in mind, would focussing on how people access care have the greatest impact on patient experience? This isn't to say that care itself can be overlooked, nor that all respondents were satisfied with their care. But their feedback suggests that more of the problems they had with their GP surgery were with accessing the care they provided, rather than the care itself. The comments which best reflect this point are on page 49.

### Respondents' comments about their surgery



## Feedback by theme

Below is a selection of comments by each theme. The points they make are summarised in bold.

### Quality of care

Many respondents praised the quality of care they received from their surgery

- “The GPs are amazing and I’ve always had excellent care.”
- “Very good service, excellent GP and Nurse Practitioner.”
- “When I found a breast lump they got me in within half an hour!”
- “Recent appointments with nurse and HCA went extremely well.”
- “Dr went over and beyond to help me and steer me in the right direction.”
- “GP has been looking after me very well and I’m most grateful to everyone involved in my care.”

Others reported more negative experiences

- “I do feel sometimes that the GP doesn’t take your concerns seriously and tries to make a quick fix.”
- “I’m not overly happy at having to speak to a physicians associate before I can speak with a Dr.”
- “Have only had one home visit since stroke.”
- “Appointments are rushed and stuff gets missed.”
- “The doctor told my child to take antihistamines to cure a nose that has been blocked despite telling them I had tried everything available over the counter.”
- “Women’s health issues are completely ignored and made trivial by the GP.”

Some respondents preferred seeing the same clinician in order to have continuity of care, whilst others were happy to see a variety

- “It would be good to see the same doctor on each appointment for the same problem.”

- “For non-urgent or ongoing ailments, I would like to have the option to book an appointment with a specific doctor.”
- “I’m a chronic kidney patient and seeing the same doctor makes everything easier and more efficient.”
- “I am quite ok to see any Doctor indeed when I have seen other Doctors I have been treated with the same care from all of them.”

### Some respondents wanted to discuss more than one condition at their appointment, or for appointments to be longer

- “They insist you can only discuss 1 issue at each appointment- I do not think this is in patient’s best interest.”
- “I will speak with a GP regarding the most urgent of my conditions and often leave the other symptoms.”
- “I had another problem and tried to tell the GP but got told to book another appointment as I had already used my appointment up on something else.”
- “The 10 minute appointments with the GPs are too short which results in every patient being delayed.”

### Some respondents had positive experiences of the follow up for medication and tests

- “When I collect my mother’s medication from the local pharmacy, or require a prescription for other medical issues it is always there ready for me.”
- “They do their best to help you with finding out test results and make suggestions of how to get answers to queries and prescription administration.”
- “Blood test taken at my home within 24 hours. Prescription delivered the same day as phone call made.”
- “The system for repeat prescriptions is flawless.”

## Whilst others were unsatisfied with these aspects of their surgery

- "Adjusting a repeat prescription has been ongoing 6 months now."
- "When entering notes/comments regarding medication. No one seems to respond and medication stays the same."
- "I had to ask for results and was told by the receptionist if I hadn't heard she imagines it's alright."
- "One of the blood tests wasn't organised over the phone appointment as promised."

## Manner of staff

### Respondents gave a range of comments about their surgery staffs' manner

- "The receptionists at the surgery are so efficient as well as being friendly and professional. I cannot stress how important their approach on the phone is when you get through. They are amazing."
- "He asked me to hurry up during my consultation because he was running behind."
- "The doctor was very sympathetic to my concerns and listened patiently, she was very reassuring to my issues."
- "If I need attention at reception desk, although there are always at least 3 staff at the desk I instantly become invisible. I have to wait to be noticed or I need to be assertive."
- "The reception staff are friendly, professional and supportive and the Doctors are great."
- "I felt that the appointment was rushed. Made me feel like a nuisance."
- "All GPs are kind & compassionate."
- "I don't think that receptionists should be rude."
- "The surgery staff are amazing and very helpful, as are the medical team."

## Administration

### Respondents had mixed experiences of the administration at their surgery

- "Reception staff are outstanding and every time I have contacted them they have fulfilled my request."
- "I submitted paperwork to register my child in the week that they were born. 2 weeks later, I was told that they could not have an appointment because the surgery had not finished the registration process for them."
- "They contact me via SMS re: blood test due vaccinations etc. Works very well."
- "More information needed when systems change i.e. Blood tests from swift queue to sangix."
- "Love how helpful the receptionists are and that we can go in to talk to them to sort stuff out."

### A carer suggested having a separate communication channel for carers contacting GP surgeries

- "GP practices should provide a communication channel reserved for professional carers (paid or volunteers like me)."

### Others thought the pre-recorded message when they rang their surgery could be shorter

- "Too many options on initial telephone connection i.e. press 1 for this, press 2 for that etc. 9 options in total."
- "I find the answerphone message very long and quite distressing, seems to imply that the patient should not call the surgery."

## Appointment availability

### Some respondents were satisfied with their experience of getting an appointment

- "I'm very satisfied with my GP surgery and have not experienced any difficulties contacting them or getting an appointment."
- "Very happy with GP Surgery always manage to get an appointment either in two weeks or same day."
- "In the 50 Years that I have been a patient at this surgery I have only once not been able to get a face to face appointment on the day I phoned."
- "I've never had to wait for an appointment for myself or my children."
- "If I need an urgent appointment I get it, but also able to arrange scheduled appointment ahead of time for follow up when required."
- "Usually able to get an appointment easily and within a time frame that suits my concern."
- "Always easy to get an appointment on the same day if needed."
- "Never had a problem getting an appointment in the 30+ years I've been at this surgery."
- "We are always able to get an Emergency appointment when we need one, and easy to book non-urgent appointments."
- "I have had no trouble with making appointments, whether over the phone or face to face with a doctor."
- "Very good surgery, I need regular appointments and I have no problems getting them."
- "Every time I call my surgery I either get an appointment or telephone consultation, on the same day."

### Whilst others found it difficult to get one

- "They only allow appointments the same day we ring...we don't always manage to get an appointment and have to keep trying the next day."

- "It's difficult to get a non-urgent appointment with my GP. Appointments are released daily after 12 noon, one waits in a long queue only to find there are no apps left."
- "Usually have to wait up to an hour to get through and usually no appointments are available."
- "If you ring later (than 8.30) they tell you there are no appointments left for that day and you should ring back at 8.30am the next day."
- "I was asked by doc to make appointment and I could not get one for a month."
- "If you get a letter asking you to make a routine appointment, reception tell you that you must use the app, but there is just nothing available."
- "Whenever I spoke to the reception, I always had the impression of being queried as to whether if I really needed the appointment...it's really difficult and even more difficult when you was not well..."

### Some who found it difficult to get an appointment tried a range of methods to overcome this

- "Started looking on line every couple of hours for an appointment. 3 days later one came up for 1.5 hours later. Grabbed it."
- "I book random appointments for future. If I need or my kids need I keep the appointment."
- "We haven't been able to book an appointment in months and have instead been using our work's health insurance or trying to find other options."
- "Have previously gone to hospital (A&E) as this was the only way to be seen on the day."
- "We have been contacting 111 as it is a lot easier speaking to someone about the issue at hand and them guiding you correctly, but also giving you an outcome there and then."
- "It is so hard to get an appointment for routine things that I just wait until they either go away or they get so bad that I can justify an emergency appointment."



## Whilst others decided to stop trying for an appointment

- "I have had a couple of ailments that I just waited to pass because it was easier than trying to see a doctor!"
- "It causes so much stress trying to get an appointment that I don't bother with it."
- "Don't seem to be able to get any appointments for 1 month so don't bother and hope I can just walk it off/ it heals itself."
- "I would like a PSA test but haven't bothered as yet because of the aggravation getting an appointment."

**Some respondents found it difficult to book or attend appointments because they couldn't contact their surgery at the right time of day. This was because they had other commitments then, such as childcare or work.**

- "Only being able to complete the form at 7.30am which for us is in the middle of trying to get two small children out the door."
- "Difficult to keep trying to call when you work full time and don't have a job where you can access a phone all day or work from home."
- "They don't always offer after 4pm appointment which is hard again for my job in education."
- "Drive for a living , can't spend ages on hold / pressing options on mobiles, and not safe to do so either."
- "If I'm taking my son to nursery I'm not able to get through."
- "I find having to ring for an appointment at 8am really difficult as I have a sleep problem."

**Some of these respondents suggested online booking as a way to resolve this**

- "It would be helpful if we could book appointments on the app/online. I work long shifts and I cannot stay on the phone in a queue for 45minutes."
- "Would be hugely helpful if more appointments are available online to book. For those who work, trying to phone around 12:00 to get an appointment is very difficult."

- “I would really like an easy way to book an appointment online or via the app, at any time of day.”

### Some respondents wanted to be able to book appointments for the future, rather than only on the day

- “Last time I had a health concern I was given an appointment for the same day without warning, which meant I could not arrange to take the time off work.”
- “It is only possible to book appointments to see the doctor on the same day. This can leave patients in full time jobs in a difficult position when unable to give enough notice to employers.”
- “Can only make an appointment if it’s less than 7 days in advance. And often told nothing is available. Would be helpful if a longer time frame was available.”
- “For planning around my full time job, I’d like to be able to book an appointment in advance.”

### Others wanted the next available appointments to be sooner

- “Unable to get an appointment for 3 weeks.”
- “It is difficult to get an urgent appointment with the GP, it is often a 2 week wait at least.”
- “The lag between making an appointment and seeing a doctor is usually 3 weeks or so.”

### Some respondents wanted more information on the different ways to book appointments and which clinician their appointment was with

- “It would be useful in GP surgery to display information on options to make appointment, get access to medical records etc.”
- “My husband finds that there are too many different PC based apps e.g. NHS App, Patient Online, NHS Choices, Patient Access, NHS 111 Online.”
- “I find it very confusing to know what type of appointment I can make online (if any) and what I have to phone them for.”

- “When I phone through would like to be told the Dr name I am booked in with.”
- “I seem only able to see nurse practitioners or doctor associates. And I really do not know what they can do.”
- “I would like to see info made clearer about which Doctor works which day in which surgery.”

### Some respondents preferred face to face appointments, whilst others were comfortable with remote ones

- “You can’t explain in detail your problem over the phone and how can the doctor prescribe the right medication if they don’t physically check you?”
- “It is clear from recent experiences that it is not always necessary to see a Doctor in person.”
- “For children sometimes you just want someone to see them.”
- “I like the fact that Drs triage patients by phone so that only those that need face to face appts get them. This frees up more appt slots for those patients that need them.”
- “My English is not well so it is difficult to have a phone consultation.”

### Respondents had a range of experiences with surgeries’ new telephone systems

- “The new appointment service seems to work quite well will call back without losing place in the queue.”
- “The surgery offers a call back service but when you call early in the morning it just terminates your call if there are too many people queuing.”
- “Excellent call back option on phone has made it easier.”
- “The call back system did not work in my case.”

## Others had difficulties attending Extended Access Hub appointments

- "If it involves a child you get a hub which can be anywhere and any time of the evening which is unacceptable when you don't drive and your child is unwell."
- "If they offer an appointment after 4 it's at another surgery which is hassle to get to if you don't drive."

## Digital Tools

### Some respondents preferred to book appointments online

- "The new system of requesting an appt via the surgery's website is much better than telephoning."
- "I've found the booking system on line always works brilliantly."
- "Never had a problem accessing my GP I usually use the app to request meds and appt if needed."
- "We've started using Anima and it's good for booking appointments but have to be early at 7.30am!"

### Whilst others had difficulty booking appointments in this way

- "I was feeling very ill and fighting with a website to get an appointment is not my idea of fun. When you are ill you need to speak to someone and hope they are kind."
- "I don't really want to have to use the App for booking appointments and so on because I worry about online security."
- "I can't afford a monthly subscription (to have internet), so I am effectively being discriminated against."
- "I find the system frustrating because, I might be unwell but if you cannot express it well you cannot get an appointment."

## Respondents valued being able to communicate with their surgery online

- "It was so easy. I submitted my request, with information about the issue. Within 5 days I had a text back from the surgery to let me know that I didn't need to bring my child in to see the GP and a referral had been made."
- "Have also used the NHS app via Accurx which is also excellent and the doctors reply within less than 24hours."
- "Using the NHS app has been a great step forward both in sending messages and finding out test results."
- "I particularly like the new online form. Requested a blood test, got info through straight away and then got doctor's response to my results by text which was all I needed. As a millennial I love not calling people!"

## Others suggested ways to improve this

- "It would be really useful to be able to submit requests via Accurx outside of surgery hours."
- "If you're sent a message from the surgery you have no ability to reply, you have to raise another request."
- "Please have an option for non-urgent requests like sick notes, vaccinations or other non-urgent things to be sent at any time of the day."
- "The function to request repeat prescriptions is switched off out of surgery hours. How does this make sense?!"
- "I send my appointment request without knowing if I am going to be given any appointment on that day. GP app was much simpler to use and also I could see the appointment dates."
- "Only myself or my children's father can register to log a request for them not both of us. This can make things difficult when one of us is working and unable to book an appointment."
- "I would prefer to be able to book more than two appointments at a time online as I have multiple ongoing health issues."

## Respondents with a disability were not always able to use digital tools

- "I am registered blind so I can hardly read the sign-in screens in the surgery's waiting room. Surgery also asks me to do things online, but because of my sight I can't read screens, particularly numbers. I tell them this and they say it's OK to phone up instead."
- "Online is very difficult to navigate as I have dyslexia. I prefer phone calls if online is made mandatory it would make things difficult for people with disabilities like myself."
- "As deaf on line booking appointment are difficult as have to be face to face and the app does not recognise that fact."
- "I am BSL user. Impossible to use telephone or text message for an appointment."

## Others cited their age as affecting their ability to use them

- "As a pensioner sometimes the new innovation technology is hard to meet especially when registration from Anima if you don't have internet and WiFi connection."
- "Our knowledge of IT systems and apps isn't that good - we are both in our 70s."
- "I am nearly 80 years old and have never used a computer. I am reliant on someone to make this appointment for me."

## There were a range of comments specifically about Anima

- "Anima app is very good indeed."
- "Anima system doesn't address what one needs i.e. a non-urgent appointment able to be booked in advance."
- "Using the new Anima system and it's easy to use and I don't tend to call the surgery."
- "I have been contacted via text by the GP requesting that I make an appointment to discuss my results. Whenever I try to book on Anima it "evaluates" my answers and will not give me any sort of appointment."

- "This Anima system needs to have less pages to complete and more free text facilities."
- "We have to use Anima by 7.32 all appointments gone. This has happened several times."

## Other

### Respondents gave a variety of comments about their surgery's building

- "Much better facilities in new building."
- "I feel the surgery being a house converted is not really appropriate as there is no privacy for the patient the doors do not have soundproofing so everything being talked about can be heard in the waiting room and by the reception staff."
- "The waiting area is extremely small for the number of patients but the staff manage this as best they can."
- "I am disabled and walk with a stick, would like more hand rails and bigger seats with arms."

### Others mentioned driving to their surgery

- "I cannot walk very far and have to travel to the practice by car, since the introduction of the ULEZ I get a £12.50 fine for going to the doctors plus a parking charge."
- "Good to have a Blue Badge parking Bay."

### For telephone appointments, respondents found it frustrating to not be called at a specified time

- "Difficult and stressful when phone appointments were given a 4 hour window as when you're teaching you can't answer the phone!"
- "(Would like) Updates when running late. Advised GP was running 8 minutes late but it was over 20 minutes."
- "The telephone app timeline is hard if you are working as you should be given an actual time not a time range."

## General

### Many respondents gave general feedback about their surgery which was highly positive

- "I have only ever had great service from my GP for my family and myself for nearly 20 years."
- "My doctors practice is first class from the receptionist to the Doctor nurses back room staff all brilliant."
- "Been great over the last year where I have been under a lot of stress due to my husband having cancer treatment."
- "My GP surgery is fantastic. A good bunch of people working there."
- "They are the best GP surgery around I can never fault the service they provide."
- "Every time I have contacted the surgery the staff have been exceptional."
- "The staff are exceptional. This applies to receptionists and doctors. Thank you."
- "Very satisfied in all respects. Range of services offered is excellent."
- "I have never had an issue with my surgery. Always seen and staff very accommodating and professional."
- "Strongly believe that this surgery should be the blueprint to how others are managed and run."
- "At present the surgery offers an excellent service."
- "This surgery is excellent, they have supported me and my family very well over the past 18 years of being registered there."
- "Great place and staff."
- "Excellent surgery who always go above and beyond for all of their patients."
- "Always found this surgery very good and very caring. They go the extra mile!"
- "My GP surgery is very helpful and supportive."
- "It (the surgery) is one of the reasons I stay where I live."
- "The Practice should be used as a role model for other practices to show how a good vibrant Practice runs and works."



Others drew a distinction between the process of getting an appointment, which they found difficult, and the quality of care they received, which they were very satisfied with

- “The appointments are so far in advance but when you get to see someone it’s very good.”
- “It is very frustrating trying to get an appointment, but when you do get through everyone is very helpful and polite and the service has always been exceptional.”
- “I am really happy with my GP doctor and other doctors as well. They really do very good and hard work. But receiving an appointment is a challenge for me or for my kids.”
- “When one gets to see a medical professional they are always excellent. The Problem is getting an appointment.”
- “When I get to speak to a doctor the experience is very good. It’s just so difficult getting to that point.”

## Awareness

As well as the seven themes summarised above, respondents commented on the circumstances within which GP surgeries and the NHS deliver services:

### High demand

- “The doctors, particularly my GP, have been outstanding under what can be seen as a heavy workload.”
- “I do understand how busy the calls are on reception, so understand the stress they are under.”
- “I have a lot of respect for the NHS staff and know they are doing their best under a lot of pressure.”
- “The GP is a helpful person but over-burdened I think.”
- “We recognise that there is increasing demand nationally and locally on health services.”
- “I think that the staff are professional but over worked.”
- “I know GP surgeries are overloaded, so I try not to contact mine unless important/urgent.”

- "I think they have too many patients for the surgery to cope with."
- "The last couple of years have been extremely challenging for us all, but especially staff in the NHS."

### Available resources

- "The staff at the surgery are always very supportive and helpful. Even though they are incredibly busy and underfunded."
- "I am very grateful for NHS and would happily add more funding to maintain it."
- "I hope they (surgery) get all the support from the NHS that they need."
- "Our GP surgery is good to me. The NHS just simply need to invest in staff."
- "End of the day they don't have enough resources to meet demand. A complaint less against them & more against the resources they are given to work with."

### Some respondents were frustrated by the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on services

- "All seems to have changed since Covid. I don't know why it couldn't have gone back to how it was."
- "It appears they are still working to COVID restrictions when you couldn't attend the surgery!!"
- "It's so much harder now to get an appointment than before covid."
- "It would be nice to go back to pre-covid."

# Conclusion

Sutton's residents have had varied experiences of their GP surgery over the past year. Given their different needs, a 'no one size fits all' approach is required to deliver GP services in the Borough. For example, the introduction of digital tools for accessing GP services should continue, but they cannot replace the more traditional processes that some rely on.

It is worth noting that many residents had positive experiences of their surgery, so the idea that the whole system is broken is not shown in the survey evidence collected. A majority of respondents were offered an appointment within two weeks, and approximately half of these were offered one within 24hrs. Moreover, 86% of respondents who had an appointment thought it went well. In general, therefore, the surgeries have demonstrated their ability to deliver a responsive service despite the high demand they meet.

However, there are undeniably still challenges for the surgeries in Sutton, particularly around residents' experience of accessing care. 1 in 4 respondents found contacting their surgery hard, of whom half were not able to contact at all. On average, respondents found some surgeries easier to contact than others. One of the reasons for finding it hard to contact a surgery, as well as attend appointments, was having other life commitments, which made it difficult to be available at the right time of day.

Perhaps a useful first step would be to focus on ensuring residents don't decide to stop seeking healthcare from their surgery, because they are too frustrated with the appointment booking process. The most vulnerable service users may be most likely affected by this.

The survey's findings are reflected in other local Healthwatches' work from across the country, as well as in the national 2024 GP Patient survey. This suggests the current situation for GP surgeries in Sutton is not unique to the Borough, which is significant, as it means any changes may not need to be unique either. That said, how much scope is there for Sutton to come up with

creative ways of addressing some of the challenges? For any changes that are put forward, surgeries will need sufficient support and resources.

HWS will formally share this report with NHS South West London Integrated Care Board. It will also share it with the following organisations and individuals in Sutton:

- Sutton Practice Managers
- Sutton Primary Care Networks
- Sutton Council

Together with the associated Boards:

- Sutton Health & Wellbeing Board
- Sutton Place Partnership
- Sutton Alliance Board

It will also share it with the MPs for Carshalton & Wallington and Sutton & Cheam, and an extensive list of further stakeholders. Finally, it will share it with Healthwatch England, to add to its own body of insight into GP surgeries nationwide.

HWS wants to work collaboratively with these organisations and individuals to use the survey's findings to recognise good practice and identify changes which could further improve people's experience of their GP surgery in Sutton. It recognises the current issues and pressures that GP surgeries are experiencing and the impact that may have on their ability to take action.

HWS welcomes feedback about this report, from both stakeholders and Sutton's residents. One area for further investigation could be the experiences of GP surgery staff in Sutton during and since the COVID-19 pandemic, which could sit alongside these findings about the experience of residents.

# Acknowledgements

HWS would like to thank these organisations for sharing the survey on its behalf:

- Sutton Primary Care Networks
- Community Action Sutton
- Sutton Women's Centre

It would also like to thank these organisations for allowing HWS to attend their events and services to offer people paper copies of the survey:

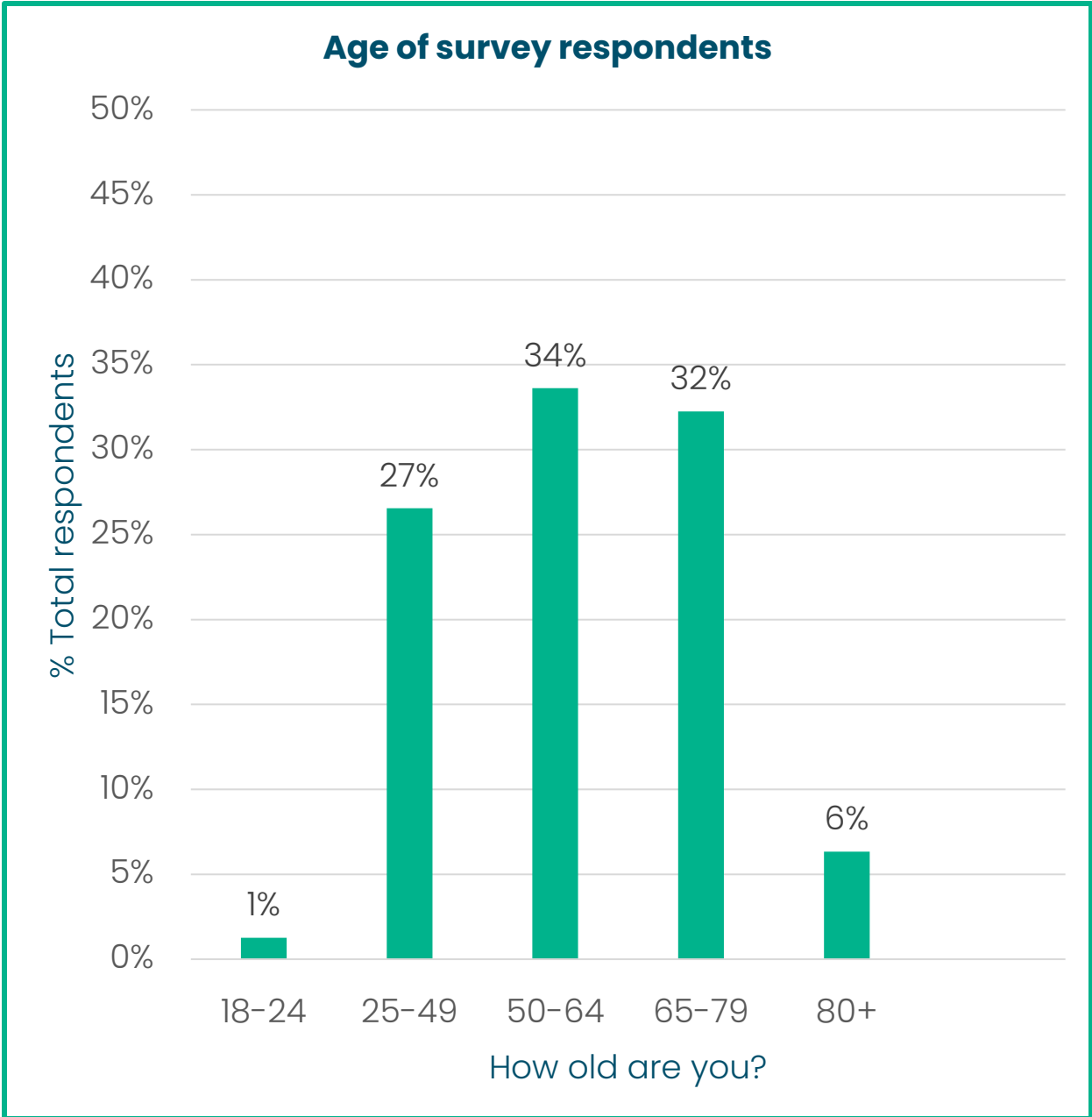
- Friends of The Elderly (1 session with Cloverdale Court Tenants)
- Volunteer Centre Sutton (3 Health Check events at GP surgeries)
- Sutton GP Extended Access Hub (1 Saturday Clinic)
- Wallington Wellbeing Integrated Neighbourhood Team (2 Healthy You Events)

It would finally like to thank the following individuals who supported with the survey creation and response analysis:

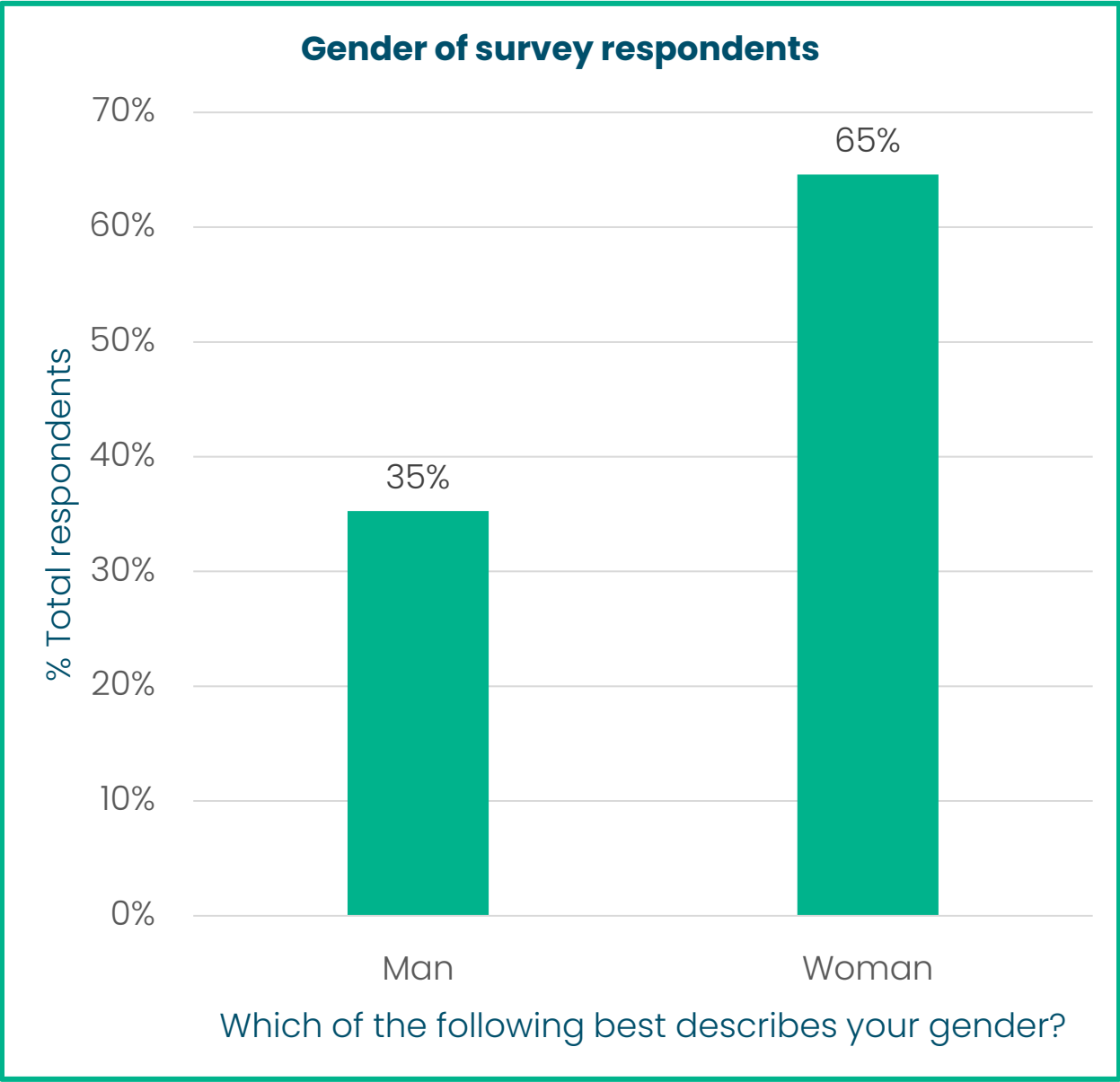
- Healthwatch Richmond staff
- Healthwatch Sutton volunteers
- Sutton Patient Reference Group

# Demographics

## Age

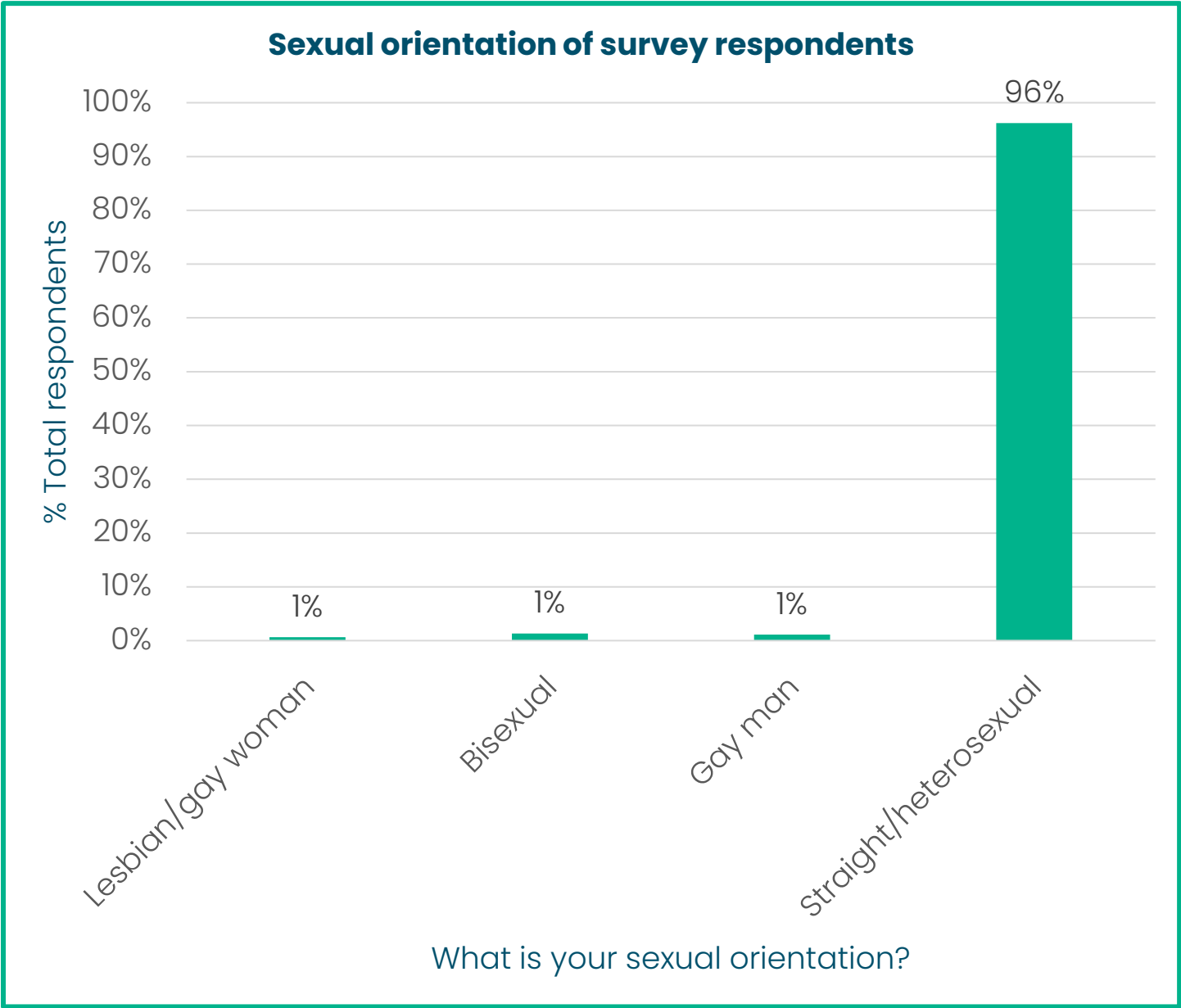


# Gender



*There were also 5 responses from non-binary residents.*

# Sexuality





## Financial situation

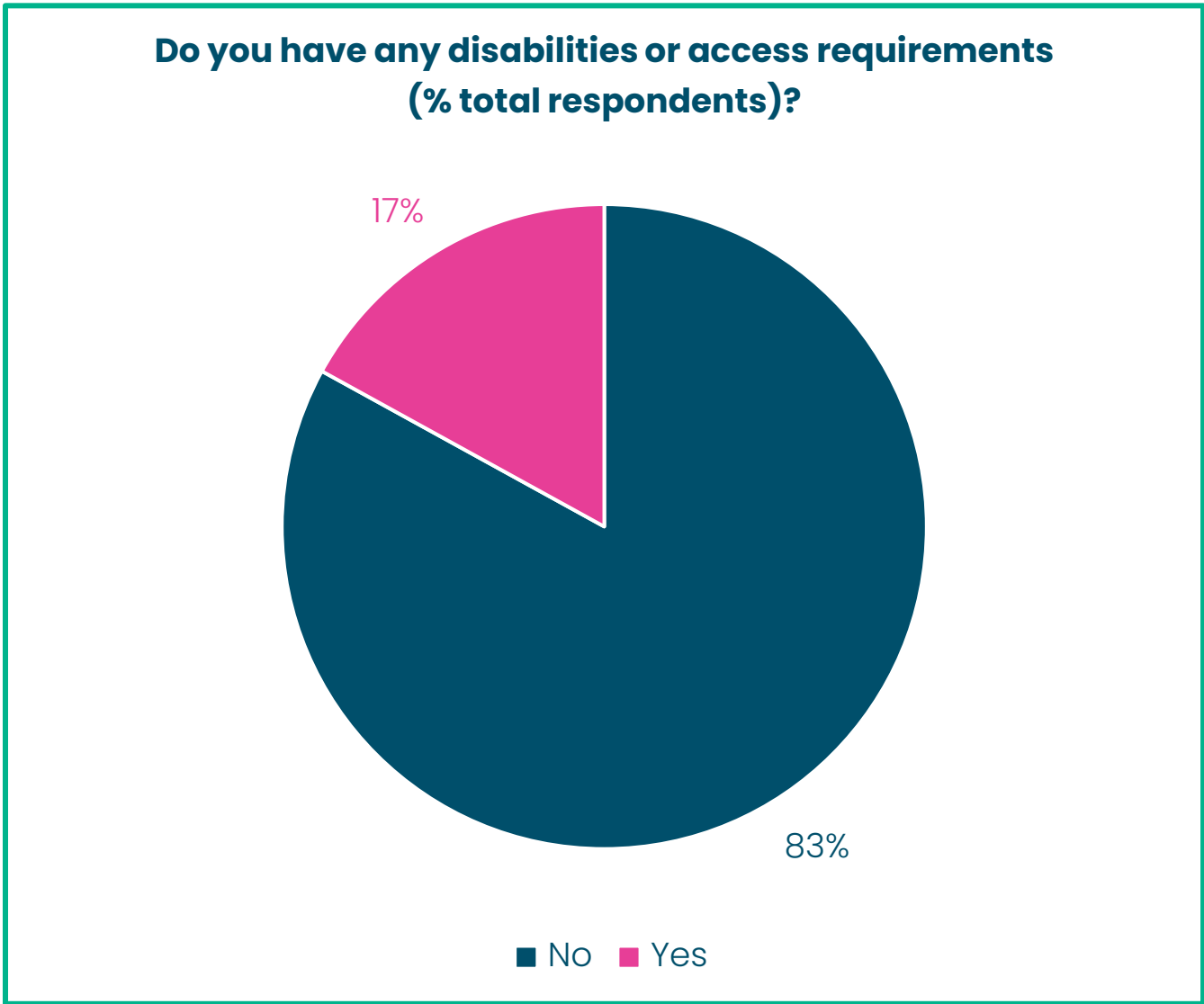
Self-described financial situation	% total respondents
I have enough for the basics, and at least a fair amount extra that I can save or spend.	34%
I have enough for the basics, and a small amount extra that I can save or spend.	36%
I only have enough for the basics, I am living month to month or using savings.	14%
I don't have enough for the basics, I am struggling to make ends meet.	4%
(Blank)	12%

## Ethnicity

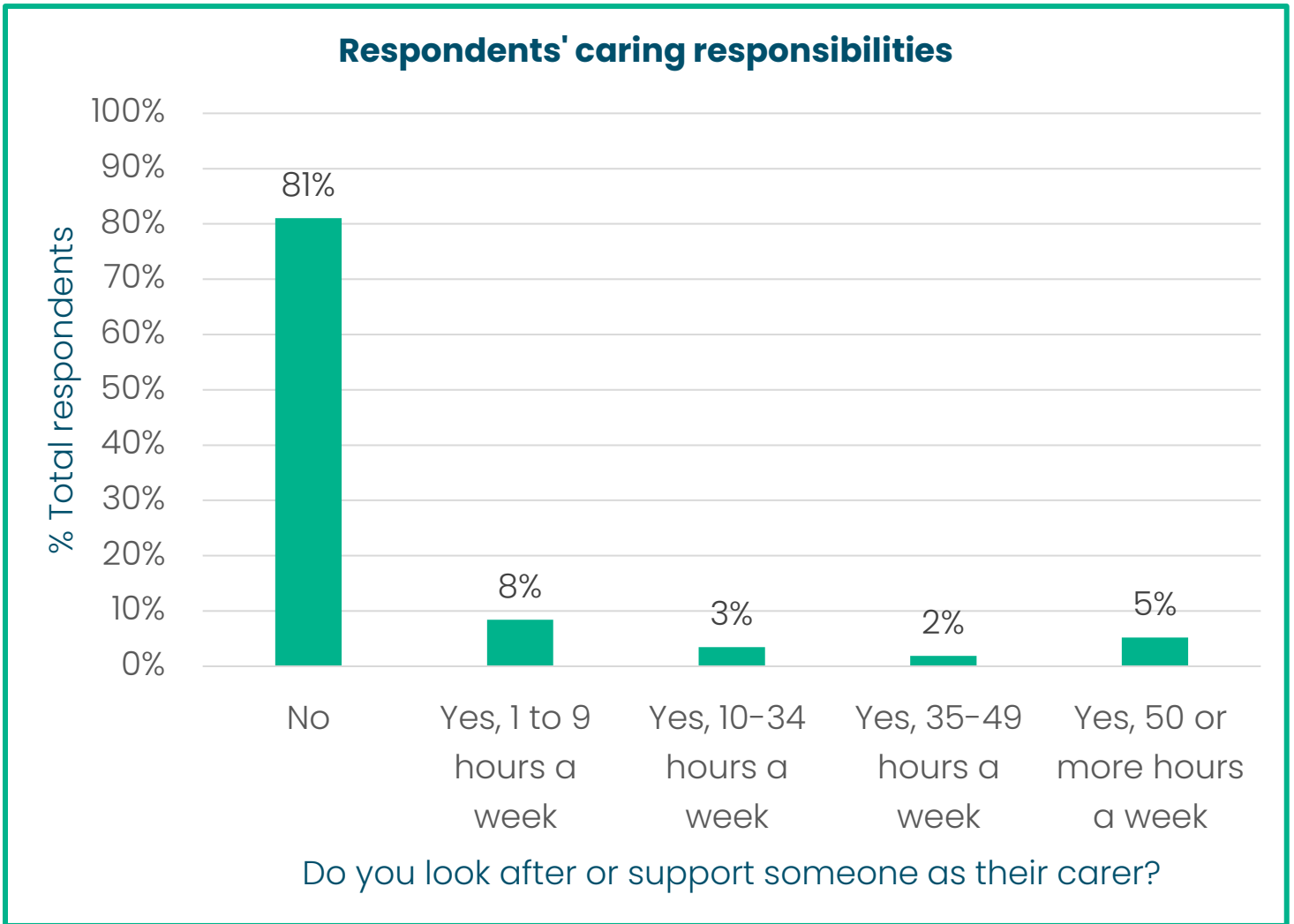
What is your ethnicity?	No. of respondents	% of total respondents
Arab	15	<1%
Bangladeshi	19	<1%
Chinese	58	1%
Indian	146	3%
Pakistani	34	1%
Any other Asian/ Asian British background	130	3%
Caribbean	35	1%
African	61	1%
Any other Black/Black British background	34	1%
Asian and White	22	1%
Black African and White	8	<1%
Black Caribbean and White	10	<1%
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	35	1%
White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	2897	68%
White: Irish	81	2%

White: Gypsy, Traveller, Irish Traveller	1	<1%
White: Roma	5	<1%
White: Any other white background	317	7%
Any other ethnic group	30	1%
Prefer not to say	10	<1%

### Disabilities and Access requirements



## Caring responsibilities



*The full question was 'Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions and/or conditions related to old age?'*

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# Appendix

## Copy of survey

### GP surgery survey



**Thank you for taking part in this survey.**

You can complete this survey on behalf of someone else – for example, if you are their carer. You can't be identified by taking part.

We'll produce a report based on the answers we get. We'll share this with the surgeries, general public and other healthcare providers in Sutton. Any comments you include may be quoted anonymously.

If you'd like more information, please contact Andrew McDonald (Project Officer) on 0747 020 3655. Please contact him if you need help filling it in or you need it in another format or another language.



**Closing date: 19 April 2024**

**1. Which GP surgery are you registered with?**

- Beeches Surgery
- Benhill and Belmont GP Centre
- Bishopsford Road Medical Centre
- Carshalton Fields Surgery
- Cheam Family Practice
- Cheam GP Centre
- Chesser Surgery
- Faccini House Surgery
- Green Wrythe Surgery (name changes to 'Circle GP Surgery' on 1st March 2024)
- Grove Road Practice
- Hackbridge Medical Centre
- James O'Riordan Medical Centre
- Maldon Road Surgery
- Manor Practice
- Mulgrave Road Surgery
- Park Road Medical Centre
- Robin Hood Lane Health Centre
- Shotfield Medical Practice
- Sutton Medical Centre
- The Old Court House Surgery
- Wallington Family Practice
- Wrythe Green Surgery
- Registered at a GP surgery outside of Sutton
- Not registered at a GP surgery
- Not sure
- Prefer not to say

**2. When did you last try to contact your GP surgery to book an appointment?**

- In the last four weeks
- Between 1 and 3 months ago
- Between 3 and 6 months ago
- Over 6 months ago
- I haven't contacted my GP surgery since registering (please go to question 14)
- I'm not registered with a GP surgery
- Not sure

**3. How did you try to contact them?**

- In person (you visited your GP surgery and spoke to someone)
- Phone call
- Email
- Your GP surgery's website
- NHS app
- Other app
- Other:

**4. What time of day did you do this?**

- First thing/8am
- Morning
- Afternoon
- Evening (after 5pm)
- Not sure

**5. Were you able to contact them?**

- No  
Now please go to **question 6**
- Yes  
Now please go to **question 7**

**6. If you weren't able to contact them, please give more details**

**Now please go to question 12**

**7. If you were able to contact them, how easy was it to do this?**

- Very easy
- Quite easy
- It wasn't easy but it wasn't hard
- Quite hard
- Very hard

**8. If you were able to contact them, what outcome did you get?**

- A face to face or telephone appointment within 24 hours
- A face to face or telephone appointment within 2 weeks
- A face to face or telephone appointment after 2 weeks
- Advice to use another service
- Advice to self-care
- Asked to call back another day
- Asked to book online instead
- Other:

**9. Were you satisfied with this outcome?**

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

**10. If you were given an appointment which you attended, which type of staff did you see?**

*All these types of staff now work in GP surgeries in Sutton.*

- Social Prescriber
- Health Coach/Health & Wellbeing Coach
- Pharmacist
- Physiotherapist
- Paramedic
- GP/Doctor
- Physician Associate
- Mental Health Practitioner
- Nurse
- Health Care Assistant
- Other (please state: \_\_\_\_\_)
- Not sure
- Prefer not to say

**11. How well did the appointment go?**

- Very well
- Quite well
- It didn't go well but it didn't go badly
- Not that well
- Not well at all



**12. How would you like your GP surgery to tell you about changes they are making which affect you?**

- Email
- Text
- Letter in the post
- Poster at the GP surgery
- When I speak to someone at the GP surgery
- Other:

**13. Please give any other feedback about your GP surgery**

**Some questions about you**

*These questions are optional.*

**14. How did you find out about this survey?**

- Email
- At my GP surgery
- At my pharmacy
- From Healthwatch Sutton
- Word of mouth
- Other:

**15. How old are you?**

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-49
- 50-64
- 65-79
- 80+

**16. Which of the following best describes your gender?**

- Non-binary
- Woman
- Man
- Prefer to self-describe:

**17. Is your gender the same as recorded at birth?**

- Yes
- No

**18. What is your sexual orientation?**

- Straight/heterosexual
- Gay man
- Lesbian/gay woman
- Bisexual
- Asexual
- Pansexual
- Prefer to self-describe:

**19. What is your ethnicity?**

**Arab**

- Arab

**Asian/Asian British**

- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Indian
- Pakistani
- Any other Asian/Asian British background

**Black/Black British**

- Caribbean
- African
- Any other Black/Black British background

**Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups**

- Asian and White
- Black African and White
- Black Caribbean and White
- Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background

**White**

- White: British/English/Northern Irish/ Scottish/ Welsh
- White: Irish
- White: Gypsy, Traveller, Irish Traveller
- White: Roma
- White: Any other white background

**Other**

- Any other ethnic group

**20. Which of these statements best describes your finances?**

- I have enough for the basics, and at least a fair amount extra that I can save or spend.
- I have enough for the basics, and a small amount extra that I can save or spend.
- I only have enough for the basics, I am living month to month or using savings.
- I don't have enough for the basics, I am struggling to make ends meet.

**21. Do you have any disabilities or access requirements?**

- Yes
- No

If yes, please give details (optional)

**22. Do you look after, or give any help or support to, anyone because they have long-term physical or mental health conditions and/or conditions related to old age?**

(Please don't include anything you do as part of your employment or volunteering)

- No
- Yes, 1 to 9 hours a week
- Yes, 10-34 hours a week
- Yes, 35-49 hours a week
- Yes, 50 or more hours a week

**23. If you'd like to keep up to date, please provide your email or postal address and tick the relevant statements:**

- I'd like to be contacted about the survey's results
- I'd like to receive Healthwatch Sutton's newsletter

Your email or postal address

**Thank you for completing this survey. Your feedback is appreciated.**



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