

The value of listening

Healthwatch Brent
Annual Report 2023–2024



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"Over the last year, local Healthwatch have shown what happens when people speak up about their care, and services listen. They are helping the NHS unlock the power of people's views and experiences, especially those facing the most serious health inequalities."

Louise Ansari, Chief Executive at Healthwatch England



Message from our Chair

We never have easy years at HealthWatch Brent, but they're always productive and we continue to hone our practices and our forms of delivery. Our small staff delivers way beyond its capacity and we had a number of wins in 2023-24.



Shyama Perera
Healthwatch Brent Chair

At borough level, we have strengthened our relationships with the council and are included in all consultations. We have identified short cuts that help us uphold the rights and meet the expectations of our communities.

We have consistently delivered the data, analysis, and lived experience of the people we serve, in forms that engage NHS and care services. We use what we learn to help local services rethink and reshape their offers. We strive to be ever-more precise in our presentations.

As we move into uncertain political times, please be assured that the team at HealthWatch Brent remains in place, looking for ways of improving your experiences within health and Adult Social Care, of extending their reach, and of making them better.

About us

Healthwatch Brent is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Our vision

That the people of Brent understand and can access health and social care, and that services are fit and fair for all communities.



Our mission

To understand our communities and their needs, logging and addressing their primary concerns.



Our values

- We provide an independent voice that amplifies what we hear from our engagement work
- We will be fair, accessible, and accountable
- We collaborate and support other groups We provide an independent voice that amplifies what we hear from our engagement work
- We connect and support communities so they can drive change locally



Year in review

Reaching out:

1197 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1210 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost-of-living crisis.



Making a difference to care:

We published

10 reports

Our most popular report was

Enter & View visit to Park Royal mental health centre

which highlighted the struggles people face when experiencing mental health in-patient care



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

22

outstanding volunteers who gave up 49 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2023 - 24 we received

£121,677



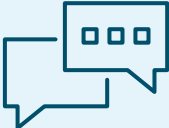





We currently employ

4 staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We supported patients with information about changes to GP access and NHS complaints processes</p>	 <p>Our report about emergency care in Brent was published, with recommendations for the LAS</p>
Summer	 <p>Engagement with the Romanian community highlighted issues such as translation and trust</p>	 <p>Our maternity project encouraged women to share their experiences of giving birth while living in Brent</p>
Autumn	 <p>Our community event celebrated carers, but also looked at the challenges they face</p>	 <p>We began collecting stories about the challenges people had faced accessing mental health services, particularly for complex needs</p>
Winter	 <p>We supported a consultation on changes to maternity, neonatal, and children's surgical services</p>	 <p>Our team began visiting local dementia cafes, to hear about residents' experiences accessing adult social care</p>



Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Developing equal standards of maternal care

In March, we published our report evaluating standards of maternity care within Brent, and across the wider North West London area.

The report aimed to see whether birthing parents received equal standards of care across all local hospitals and boroughs. Most women told us they had a positive experience throughout their birth and afterwards, and this was consistent across all hospitals, boroughs and demographics. However, there were still potential areas of improvement raised. We have presented these findings at North West London maternity groups, along with the key themes and recommendations listed below, and received a commitment from the local trusts to act on our findings.

20% of respondents said that they had a negative or mixed experience of care during birth. This rose to **42%** when asked about care after giving birth.

What did you tell us about maternity services

- Being listened to emerged as a key theme throughout the research. One in five of those who had a negative experience felt that not being listened to had contributed to this.
- High quality, consistent information is crucial. More than half of those who had a negative experience stated that they did not receive enough information about their care.
- More support is needed after giving birth. In particular, women told us that they needed more information about breastfeeding and about how to take care of themselves after birth. This should include information about mental health support.

What difference will this make?

- The NWL ICS took our concerns seriously, and our findings were presented to maternity service leaders from across the local trusts.
- The service leaders have committed to presenting actions on how they propose to address our concerns and make improvements to their services.
- Local service providers will be visiting the post-natal wards to share more information about the services they provide and care that can be accessed after giving birth. This will help ensure that all families receive the same quality of information.

Meeting the unique mental health needs of our communities

We have been working with local organisation Almis Association to help build knowledge and understanding of mental health conditions, and to support people with accessing mental health services. As part of this work, Almis Association also collected feedback from the community about what more can be done to support their needs.

The project was funded by Healthwatch Brent and co-developed by Almis Association and Healthwatch. It focussed on developing community resilience through outreach, drop-in sessions and training workshops. Two staff members were recruited to run the project, and a further 15 people were given training to allow them to support the mental health needs of their local community.

What difference did this make?

- **160** people attended drop-in sessions to learn more about mental health services and how to access care
- **45 people** were assisted in accessing services through outreach
- **120 people** from the local Somali community attended training workshops, helping to build capacity for responding to mental health challenges or crises.

As part of the project, 200 Somali people living in Brent shared feedback about their views on local services. The consensus was that more work needs to be done to offer culturally appropriate services across Brent, and to ensure that mental health professionals understand the needs of the Somali community.

Almis Association have identified a need for ongoing work in this area, both to safeguard the existing resources that have been developed, and to offer additional information and support for the community.

What will we do next?

- Further partnership is needed to build on the work that Almis Association have already completed. We will be supporting them to find funding that will allow the existing programme of drop-in sessions, outreach and training to continue.
- We are also exploring opportunities to co-produce training resources for statutory and voluntary sector to build understanding of mental health needs among Somali people living in Brent, and help overcome local health inequalities.

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Bringing our communities together to discuss important topics

Our monthly lecture series has brought together patients, members of the public, service providers and subject matter experts for frank and honest conversations about issues driving health inequalities.

Some of the issues we have covered include cancer care, prostate cancer awareness, support for unpaid carers, and inequalities within midwifery. These events feature patients talking about their own lived experiences as well as experts sharing helpful information. They are an opportunity for the community to forge connections and discuss how to make things better.



Helping everybody access the services they need

It's important that information about life-saving services is made available in a format that everyone can understand.

This year we worked with the local My Health, My Choice user involvement project to support people with learning disabilities in accessing information on important topics such as safeguarding and cancer screening. We are continuing to work on this project and will produce a series of cancer awareness videos specifically for people with learning disabilities.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

In February 2024, several residents contacted us to raise concerns about proposals to implement new 'same-day access hubs'. We wrote to the ICS to query what changes were being planned, and how patients were being involved in the process. As a result of pressure from Healthwatch and other patient advocacy groups, the ICS have delayed their plans and committed to further engagement with local people. This work will be ongoing over the coming years, and we will continue to champion the importance of public involvement.



There's a summary of other outcomes we've achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.



Hearing from all communities

Our approach to engagement is to try and support residents from across Brent's diverse communities to speak up about their needs, and to ensure local decision-makers take the time to listen to them. We visit the areas of the borough where people are most likely to be experiencing health inequalities, to make sure those who haven't been listened to previously are front and centre in our work.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Spending time each week visiting local community spaces, particularly in wards experiencing the highest levels of deprivation
- Partnering closely with local organisations such as the Romanian and Eastern European Hub and Almas
- Running events that bring together members of the community, local professionals and experts

Supporting residents to access a GP appointment

This year, we carried out a series of Enter & View visits to follow-up on findings from our 2022 report 'Experiences of accessing a GP in Brent'.

We found that the GP practices we visited had put measures in place to support their patients to have appointments more effectively, and that overall GP access had improved.

As a result of patient feedback, GP practices had implemented some of the following changes:

- Patients had more choice over whether to be seen face to face or via a telephone call
- Support for patients was in place to help with using digital tools such as PATCHS
- Patients stated that they felt more supported by GP practice staff

We also made some recommendations to help improve patient experience further. This included recommendations that:

- Practices further improve telephone systems to make access easier for patients
- Increase use of social prescribing and signposting to local services
- Ensure that patients have enough information about the current system for accessing care, including what they should expect from the triage process, current waiting times for appointments, and information about additional services such as social prescribing.

Sharing information to help people stay well over the winter

We received funding from NWL ICS to recruit a winter pressures community champion. Their role was to visit different communities in Brent and share information about services to help people stay well over the winter, including vaccination.

In total, we reached 48 people, visiting settings such as food aid organisations and local wellness hubs to reach those more likely to be experiencing health inequalities.

As well as sharing information, we collected feedback about people's attitudes towards the campaign, including vaccine hesitancy and general awareness of different services.

This information has been shared with the ICS and will be used to help plan future health awareness campaigns.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Developing our website to include advice and information on the most commonly requested topics
- Visiting local community spaces to provide in-person signposting for those who can't access our support online or over the phone
- Supporting people to access support in a range of different languages and formats
- Providing information about what services people are entitled to, and what to do if something goes wrong

Improving access to essential health equipment

Healthwatch Brent has been supporting local patients to receive vital wheelchair equipment.

Last year we were contacted by a number of Brent residents who were experiencing delays to receive essential wheelchair equipment, such as new cushions and moulded seating. When patients don't receive this equipment in time it can lead to discomfort, and can also exacerbate health issues. We were able to contact the service provider and address the delays, meaning that those who needed equipment were not left waiting any longer.

We are now engaging more regularly with the service provider, and will be having regular conversations to share patient feedback and ensure this is being acted upon. We will also be attending their regular service user forum, to better understand how wheelchair services are being delivered locally.

"Thank you very much for getting things sorted with my local wheelchair service. I have now received the new wheelchair cushion and my skin is looking so much better again. I am not sure how long it would have taken had you not gotten involved."

Brent resident

Working closely with NHS complaints advocacy

Many residents come to us because they need help making a complaint. By developing a close relationship with the local POhWER team, we're able to ensure residents get advocacy when they need it.

When residents contact us about making a complaint, we share information about how the NHS complaints process works and who they should contact with their concerns. However, some people need a little extra support. In these cases, we connect the resident with POhWER, either by making a referral, or by providing information for a self-referral.

Our partnership with POhWER means we can share information about the concerns residents are having – we meet regularly to discuss key themes and consider collaborative areas of working. We also attend POhWER's patient engagement forum to meet with residents and hear their feedback.

"Over the years POhWER has enjoyed a close partnership with Healthwatch Brent by sharing themes and trends about NHS complaints across Brent NHS providers. We have discussed learning and improvements required by some NHS providers. We meet at various forums in Brent to discuss issues around mental health, elderly residents and residents with disability. POhWER thanks Healthwatch Brent for their openness and responsiveness to new initiatives and their continued flow of new referrals to the Advocacy services provided by POhWER."

Stephanie Linden, POhWER Service Manager



Volunteering

We're supported by a team of 22 amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

Our volunteers are representative of Brent's diverse communities, coming from a range of areas and backgrounds. Seven of our volunteers are under the age of 29, and we have partnered with three different universities to help students and young people get placements that support their community and aid with their studies. Six of our volunteers this year were students who used volunteering hours to help support their development. We also supported two of our volunteers to find paid employment. We see volunteering not only as an invaluable part of our own work, but also as a way to help build capacity in the local community.

Activities our volunteers have participated in include community outreach, enter & view visits and awareness raising.



I have been with Healthwatch Brent since 2017.

I have found working with Healthwatch rewarding and interesting, as I have found that I have been able to bring my experiences and knowledge of working in the NHS when undertaking the enter and view visits and as a member of the advisory group. Meeting and working with other volunteers has been great as we come from varied backgrounds, and all contribute to the great work that is done.

Being able to obtain feedback from members of the community and using that feedback to help make a difference for them has been very satisfying.



Grace



I have been volunteering for Healthwatch Brent for a number of years.

Over this time, I have enjoyed carrying out Enter and View visits to various care providing establishments in Brent.

I gained some valuable knowledge into the care practices carried out. My input has also been appreciated by my Volunteer Manager.

I hope to continue volunteering with Healthwatch Brent as long as I am able.



Nisha

Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

 www.healthwatchbrent.co.uk/volunteer

 020 3869 9730

 Info@healthwatchbrent.co.uk



Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£121,677	Expenditure on pay	£74,312.91
Additional income	£3,167	Non-pay expenditure	£14,027.31
		Office and management fees	£22,085.06
Total income	£124,844	Total expenditure	£110,425.28

Additional income is broken down by:

- £1,667 received from Healthwatch England for work on a project (in collaboration with other Healthwatch).
- £1,500 received from the local ICS for joint work on a project.

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Carry out a one-year engagement programme addressing barriers to accessing adult social care
2. Ensure patient voice is at the heart of changes to primary care
3. Continue to build awareness of Healthwatch across Brent's diverse communities, ensuring everyone has the opportunity to get involved with our work



Statutory statements

**The Advocacy Project holds the contract for Healthwatch Brent.
Registered office: The Advocacy Project c/o SEEDs Hub, Empire
Way, Wembley HA9 0RJ**

**Healthwatch Brent use the Healthwatch Trademark when
undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence
agreement.**

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

The Advocacy Project Board of Trustees has overall oversight of our work. We also have a local Advisory Board consists of 10 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Advisory Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Board met three times and made decisions on matters such as how to develop projects to get the highest level of impact, and where to focus our attention for 2024 – 2025. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. This includes using data and insights provided by the public to decide which issues we should focus on. We also run coproduction sessions where members of the public and partners can comment on our priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website and ensure that a physical copy is available for those who wish to see it.

Responses to recommendations

We had one provider who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we take information to local scrutiny committees, the Safeguarding Adults Board and the Brent Health and Wellbeing Board.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in the North West London Integrated Care System. For example, we worked with the ICS on a commissioned piece of work to support their winter planning work, and shared feedback about vaccine hesitancy and the response to public health messaging. We also wrote to the ICS with our concerns about changes to same-day GP access. Finally, we share our data with Healthwatch England and the CQC to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter and view

This year, we made three Enter & View visits. We made ten recommendations or actions as a result of this activity.

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
GP - Stonebridge Practice	To follow up on previous recommendations from our 2022 GP access report	Wrote a report highlighting changes that have been made and the impact this has had on patient access. We also shared three further recommendations.
GP - Park Royal Medical Centre	To follow up on previous recommendations from our 2022 GP access report	Wrote a report highlighting changes that have been made and the impact this has had on patient access. We also shared two further recommendations.
GP - Oxgate Garden Surgery	To follow up on previous recommendations from our 2022 GP access report	Wrote a report highlighting changes that have been made and the impact this has had on patient access. We also shared five further recommendations.

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Brent is represented on the Brent Health and Wellbeing Board by Cleo Chalk, Healthwatch Service Manager. During 2023/24 our representative has effectively carried out this role by attending board meetings and presenting the annual workplan to the board.

23 – 24 Outcomes

The table below shows additional outcomes and activity that are not highlighted in the rest of the report.

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Engagement with Central London Community Healthcare Trust – visits to five departments, accompanying members of the CLCH Patient Experience team	Feedback from the patients was overwhelmingly positive, however we did not see some potential areas of improvement around communication and waiting times. These were passed on to the relevant service departments.
Engagement with patients about their experiences with local emergency care and London Ambulance Service	Our findings from this work fed directly into the new London Ambulance Service strategy.

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