

Making your voice count 2017

healthwatch



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We are Healthwatch

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We exist to make sure that people are at the heart of care. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved and we share their views with those with the power to make change happen.

We've pulled together seven inspiring stories from our 2017 Healthwatch Network Awards, to show how your feedback is helping to change health and care for the better.

Volunteering



Understanding care from the patient perspective

Medical students volunteer to find out what people think of health and care.

Healthwatch Staffordshire has recruited medical students studying at Keele University to help find out what people in the local community think of services. This is just one of the innovative approaches to recruiting volunteers that saw the organisation recognised at the Healthwatch Network Awards 2017.

Volunteers are a vital part of Healthwatch. Without them it wouldn't have been possible to reach the 300,000 people the network spoke to across England last year.

But finding people able and willing to give up their time is challenging. So Healthwatch Staffordshire considered how the role could be beneficial to both the volunteers and their work.

Healthwatch Staffordshire was awarded the Investing in Volunteers accreditation from Volunteering England in 2016. Going through the process to achieve this status, they realised the need to create roles for volunteers that suited their personal needs and interests.

To complete their course, university medical students have to spend time working in the community. The local Healthwatch realised that volunteering with Healthwatch gives them the perfect opportunity to do this, whilst helping make local services better.

The most recent intake of volunteers looked into what local people think of GP, pharmacy and other community services, to inform changes to care provided in the future.

As well as training volunteers, they also learn from them, listen to their feedback about what could make volunteering better, and they recognise people's efforts in a yearly awards ceremony.

Advice and information



Helping people in Essex find the right support

Healthwatch Essex has helped over 4,000 people in their community get the right health and care.

Helping communities navigate local health and care services is one of the main roles of local Healthwatch.

Healthwatch Essex has been recognised for carrying out this work.

Dedicated information service

They have a team of four specialists dedicated to providing information and advice. In the two years since it launched, the service has helped over 4,000 patients, carers and professionals better understand the local health and care system.

Promoting choice in health and social care services

In partnership with the local council they developed the [Living Well Essex](#) website. Up to 15,000 people visit the site every month to get information on a range of topics, as well as a directory of services.

Making people aware of the information service we offer

Healthwatch Essex work hard to try and reach as many residents as possible to let them know where they can go if they have any questions or concerns about health and care services. They regularly go out into the community to visit job centres, health events, drop-in cafes, and patient events.

Using what people say to improve local services

They keep a record of each enquiry to help spot trends and share them with local health and care leaders. Some of the insight shared has led to urgent reviews to address issues with accessibility and care quality.



Engagement in service change



Busting myths about why people go to A&E

More than half of people Healthwatch Reading spoke to had contacted an NHS service before visiting A&E.

Healthwatch Reading has been recognised for their work using people's experiences to help improve health and care services.

In Reading, Healthwatch spent a week speaking to people who had been to Royal Berkshire Hospital's A&E department to find out about their experiences.

They asked people if they had contacted any other health services before coming to A&E, such as 111 or their GP or pharmacist, and what made them decide to visit A&E.

Their findings challenged the assumption that people were 'misusing' A&E and as a first point of call or for minor problems, rather than for serious accidents and emergencies.

More than half of the people Healthwatch Reading spoke to had contacted an NHS service beforehand, and 80 per cent had been sent by that service to A&E as a result.

Nearly half of those who didn't seek help from any other service said they would next time, if provided with more information about who to call.

Healthwatch Reading also found that some patients can't hear emergency department doctors call them through to the clinical area; there aren't enough seats in the waiting room, and reception staff don't always notice new patients when they arrive.

Healthwatch Reading wrote a report and, as a result, those in charge of local services have committed to making the suggested changes. They're going to make changes to the A&E waiting area, and identify ways to meet the needs of people who go to A&E regularly.

“People are doing the right thing by seeking help before making a decision to go to A&E, but more often than not they are told by other NHS services to go to hospital. This raises a question about consistency of messages from various services including GPs, 111, the walk-in centre, and others, about the right place to go for their care.”

**Mandeep Kaur Sira,
Chief Executive of Healthwatch Reading**

Engagement in service improvement



Improving dignity and respect in care homes

Healthwatch Isle of Wight won two awards for their work helping to improve care homes for residents.

People who live in a care home should expect to receive more than just basic care. However, for many this isn't always the case. Many older people lead busy lives before they move into a care home, so it's important that they are supported to stay active and connected.

Healthwatch Isle of Wight heard that the quality of care in some nursing and residential homes was not up to standard. They visited 13 care homes and spoke to residents and their families about their experiences.

People told them in some cases basic care needs were not being met, there were restrictions on food and drink, and families often found their loved ones wearing other people's clothing.

Although most homes offered activities for residents, there was a general feeling that staff did not understand the effect meaningful activities could have on a person's quality of life.

Healthwatch Isle of Wight also surveyed care home managers to understand the pressures staff were facing and what they needed to provide a better service. Some managers felt that staff shortages led to a drop in standards, and this was often worse during the evenings and weekends.

After sharing what they'd heard with the Clinical Commissioning

Group (CCG), local authority, and Care Quality Commission (CQC), a variety of steps have been taken to make things better. Residents now have a say in the types of activities they want to do, which has helped improve their quality of life. Care homes are also developing activity planners and organising trips to nearby attractions to support this.

Thanks in part to Healthwatch Isle of Wight's efforts, the majority of care and nursing homes have since received a good rating by CQC and no homes are rated as inadequate.

They also hosted the first Isle of Wight Care Awards to recognise and celebrate the outstanding care they saw during their project.

Healthwatch Isle of Wight's work was also awarded the NICE Better Care Award for the way in which the team used NICE guidance to demonstrate to those running residential homes why it was important to have clear plans in place for people. They also helped local authorities understand the difference that improving the quality of care can make to people's lives.

Working together



Helping people in south London get support after leaving hospital

Being discharged from hospital isn't just about going home - it's also about the care and support you receive afterwards.

The Healthwatch network has played a vital role in bringing to light what happens when discharge goes wrong. Last year, local Healthwatch published 23 reports highlighting people's experiences of leaving hospital.

Healthwatch Southwark and Healthwatch Lambeth have been recognised for working together to find out about people's experiences on hospital discharge in their boroughs.

Their project, 'Going Home', tracked people for up to three months after they left hospital, and monitored how they got on with each service along the way.

Together with their local CCG, Healthwatch Southwark and Healthwatch Lambeth ran an event for over 150 staff from hospitals, GP surgeries, pharmacies, social care, and the community and voluntary sector to share what they'd learnt. They showed a film, documenting a 92 year old's journey from a fall to recovery, to illustrate the impact a bad discharge process has on people.

Both Healthwatch are now helping their CCGs and councils explore ways to make leaving hospital better, and continuing to speak to people about their experiences. People in charge of health and social care services in other areas have also been in touch to see what they can learn from their work.

The local Healthwatch are also working with King's Hospital to adapt the 'Going home' project to help them understand older people's experiences of visiting the A&E department and returning home.



Diversity and inclusion



Young people in Leeds help improve services

This award-winning group of young volunteers inspire other young people to have their say.

Healthwatch aims to find out the views of everyone in their communities. 42 local Healthwatch published reports to highlight what young people think about services in 2016/17.

Healthwatch Leeds has been recognised for their work helping young people to share their views.

To understand how health and social care services could be made better for young people, Healthwatch Leeds set up YouthWatch, made up of volunteers aged 14-25.

YouthWatch Leeds is responsible for a range of innovative projects that give young people a voice. For example, trained YouthWatch volunteers have been visiting schools and running sessions to help young people understand their rights in the NHS.

They also worked in partnership with local and national organisations to produce a short video, '[Doctors, Talk to me](#)' to show how people with learning disabilities might feel if health professionals don't take the time to properly explain things to them.

YouthWatch is an opportunity for young people to build their skills for the future, whether that's through planning events, multi-media projects or visiting services. The local Healthwatch provides them with the training they need to get involved and make a difference.

In return, young volunteers get their peers involved and share their ideas for how health and care services can improve.

“Healthwatch is an organisation that is genuinely willing to listen to your ideas and concerns, your contributions are valued and there’s a chance to get involved in something that is real and genuine, your voice counts.”

Shanjida, YouthWatch Leeds Volunteer



it starts with
YOU
healthwatch



Parents and carers help GPs become autism-friendly

Parents and carers of autistic children won our 'It starts with you' award for their work training staff at GP surgeries in Crawley.

Change is only possible when people speak up and share their feedback on how health and care services can improve.

Maria Cook, Autism Support Crawley and Perry Anderson from Poundhill Medical Group together won the It Starts With You award, in recognition of their outstanding work dedicated to making GP services better for children with autism.

After years of stressful visits taking their children with Autism Spectrum Disorder to the doctor, a group of parents and carers decided to call for change.

Working with Healthwatch West Sussex and a local GP practice, the group encouraged over 100 families to share their experiences and suggestions for improvements.

Based on what people told them, the group created a simple five-step plan that GPs could follow to make a real difference.

The project has gained significant local support, and more than seven GP practices are using the plan to make positive changes to the way they work with people with autism.

These dedicated volunteers continue to give up their time to help train GPs in the area at no cost, to help make going to the doctor a better experience for other families.

Thanks to those who shared their experiences, families and carers of children with autism have noticed a huge difference in the care they receive.

“It has completely transformed my son’s view of the GP surgery... I’m surprised that something so simple has made such a difference to him.”

Mum of a child with autism



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