



# Redbridge GP Website Review

## January 2021

## Introduction

Over the last year, the pandemic has created a greater demand for online services that can meet a patient's needs.

Throughout this emergency, our signposting service has received many queries as to how patients can contact their GP practice online as they have not been able to visit in person due to the Covid-19 restrictions. Whilst some patients have requested assistance to find additional information; some have asked for information on making a complaint.

For many, online services have become an important information provider and an accessible way to search for up to date and credible information. At Healthwatch Redbridge, we have consistently sign-posted patients to their GP surgeries' websites in order to provide an effective and consistent information source. However, many patients responded that they were unable to find the information they required, and indeed, in some instances, they were unable to find the website in order to search for the information.

We decided to see if there were any issues in contacting or searching practice websites in Redbridge. We wanted to find out whether every practice had a website, how easy it is to find, and what contact methods are available for patients to contact their GP.

NHS England recently published<sup>1</sup> a briefing for Trusts identifying a number of key communication points including the need for a range of contact points for patients including telephone and email options; we feel this should be offered across primary care services.

## Methodology

We have used the term, "researcher" to describe the volunteers and member of staff conducting the research for this report.

Three Healthwatch volunteers and one member of staff were asked to find and review the websites of Redbridge GP Practices. Two of the researchers had additional communication and support needs. All researchers had varying levels of ICT skills. We felt the researchers could be fairly representative of what it would be like for most members of the public trying to access information via GP websites.

Researchers conducted the survey using the popular search engine Google Chrome as we anticipated most people would use something similar.

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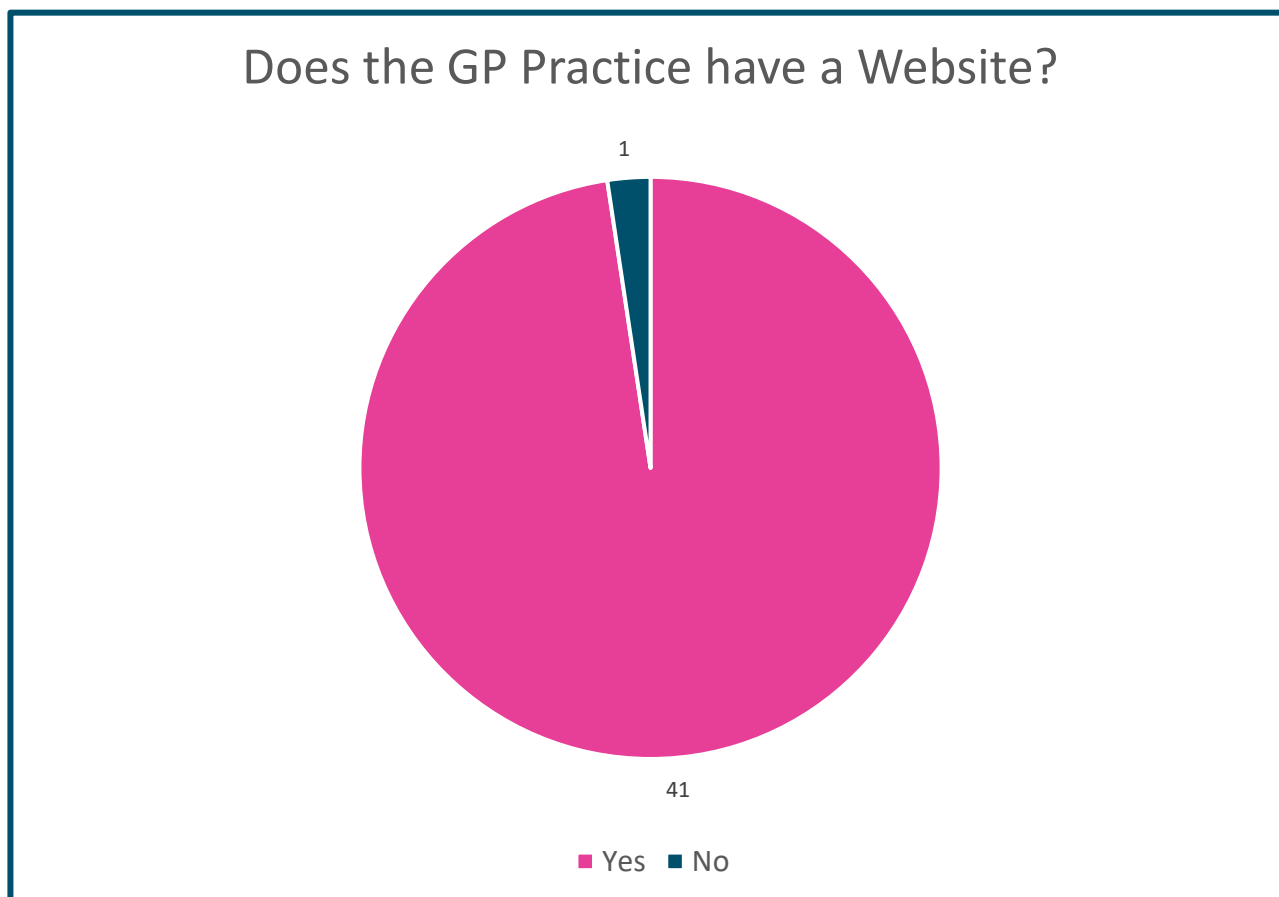
<sup>1</sup>NHS England: Good communication with patients – 21 January 2021 - [Briefing template \(england.nhs.uk\)](https://www.england.nhs.uk/briefing-template/)

## Findings

*Note: Some of the researchers had difficulty finding the information we were looking for. Where there were discrepancies with the findings; we used the findings of the survey lead as the definitive answer.*

### Question 1: Does the GP practice have a website?

There are 42 GP practices in Redbridge. Of these, 41 have their own website, with one using the NHS website<sup>2</sup> (formerly called NHS Choices<sup>3</sup>), rather than hosting their own website.



Out of the 41 GP practices with their own websites, all researchers were able to find 35 of them.

The other 6 websites were a bit less obvious for some of our researchers:

- one was unsure whether the six practices had a website,
- one was unable to find one of GP website,
- one also thought that three of the practices did not host their own website but used NHS Choices.

### Comment:

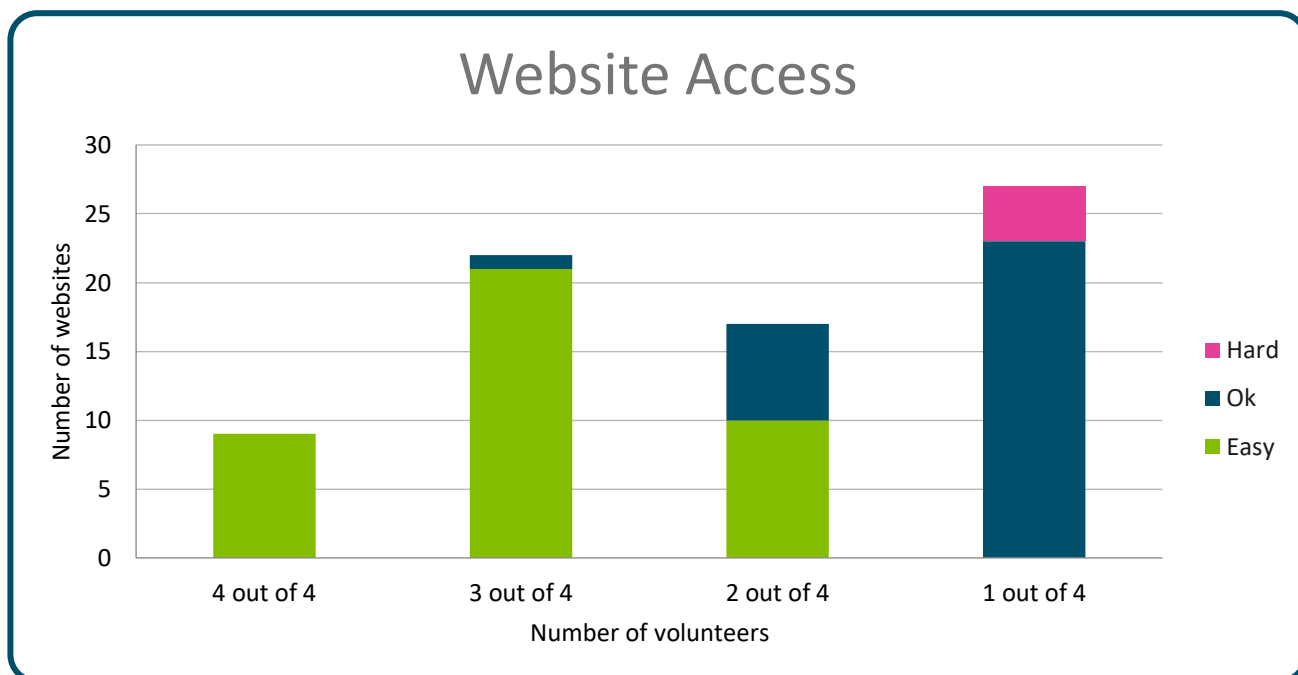
Some patients may have difficulty finding their GP's website.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-gp>

<sup>3</sup> NHS website (formerly called NHS Choices) is the primary public facing website of the NHS. Its pages include directories of local health services, information on a wide range of conditions and treatments and accessible public health information.

## Question 2: How easy was it to find the GP's website?

Researchers were asked to identify whether they found it “easy”, “okay” or “hard” to find each of the GP websites.



Most websites (40/41), were categorised 'easy' to find by at least one researcher. Out of these:

- Nine of the websites were identified by all researchers as “easy” to find,
- Twenty-one websites were identified by three researchers as “easy” to find, and
- Ten websites were identified by two researchers as “easy” to find.

A total of 31 out of 41 websites were identified as 'okay' to find by at least one researcher. Of those that were identified as “okay” to find:

- One of the GP websites was identified as “okay” by three out of the four of researchers,
- Seven were identified by “okay” by two researchers, and
- Twenty-three were identified by “okay” by one researcher.

Of those that were identified as “hard” to find:

- Four of the GP websites were identified as “hard” to find by one of our researchers.

The researchers gave the following comments regarding some of the websites:

*“Took a little time to find website. First directed to NHS Choices site but information very poor. If you really look there is another link to their own website which is more comprehensive.”*

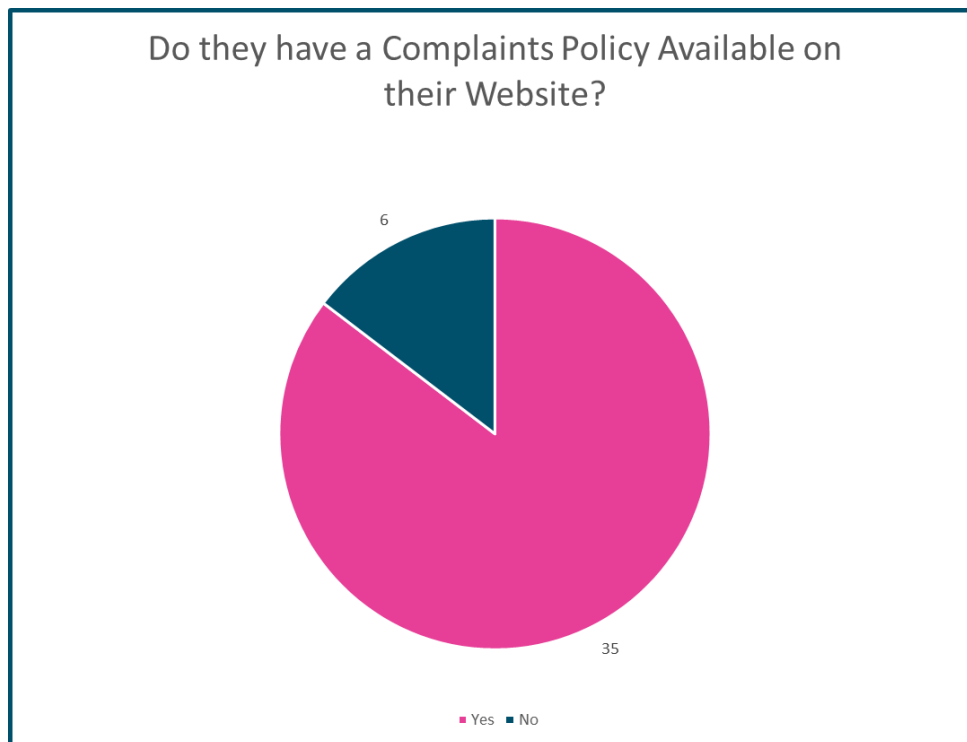
*“Slightly confusing as another GP practice comes up when you type in [Name], so patients could be distracted and click on that one.”*

### Comment:

Better website links could be identified to aid members of the public on search engines.

### Question 3: Do they have a complaints policy available on the website?

Of the 41 GP practices with websites, the majority (35) have a complaints policy available on their website, however there are six who do not.



There were some examples of good practice where the complaints policy was clearly identified as such and easily accessible via a link on the home screen.

*“Very comprehensive complaints information leaflet and form.”*

We saw further good practice where a downloadable complaints form was provided alongside the policy. Some practices required the patient to telephone to request a complaints form be sent to them.

*“Complaint leaflet can be downloaded.”*

In some cases, researchers were unable to find a complaints policy.

On some websites the complaints policy was difficult to access (accessed via a tab within a tab, not clearly labelled as the complaints policy or only accessible if you input/type “complaints” into the search box on the website).

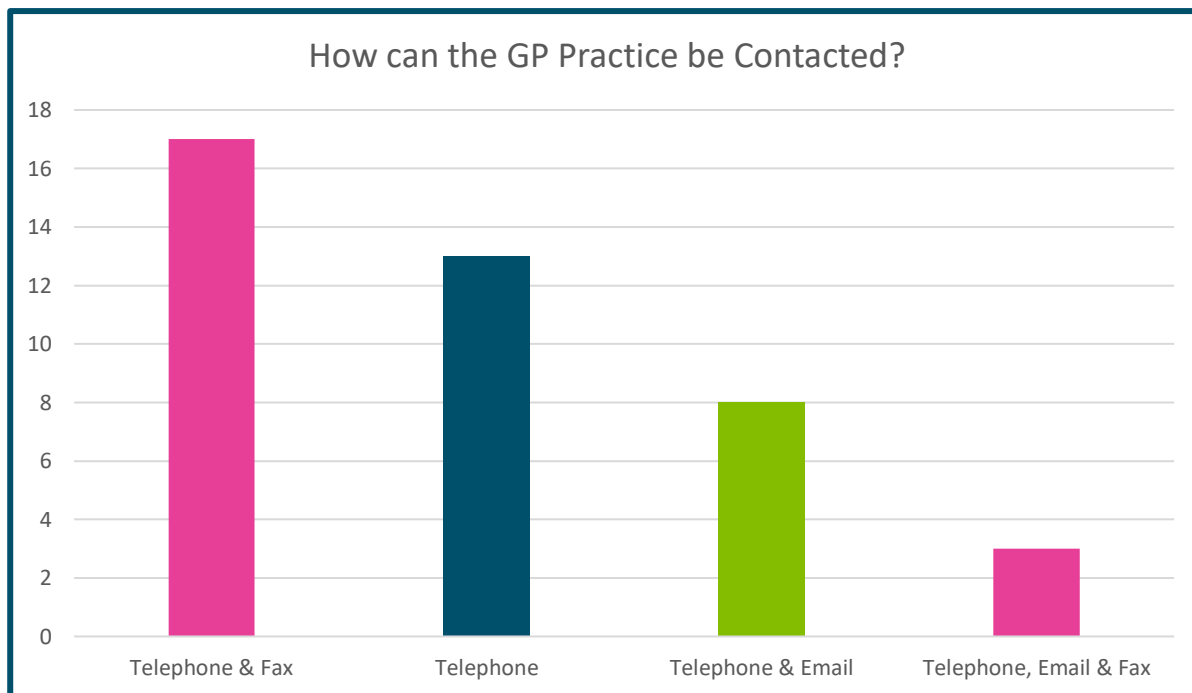
#### Comment:

As with any important information, complaints information should be easy to find and downloadable from websites.

Patients should not have to telephone the practice in order to request a form.

## Question 4: How can the GP Practice be contacted?

Researchers were asked to identify the contact information for the practice provided on each website.



Information on the websites showed that seventeen of the practices are contactable by telephone and fax (although fax is more likely to be used by clinicians, rather than patients).

Thirteen practices are only contactable by telephone. Eight are contactable by both telephone and email. Three practices are contactable by telephone, email, and fax.

Again, not all researchers found all the contact information. In some cases, it was noted that whilst the email address was visible on the website's homepage, it was not included within the "Contact Information" section which is where patients are most likely to look for this information.

### Comment:

If practices offer an email address as a contact method, it should be included within the "Contact Information" section of the practice website.

## Recommendations

- GP practices should seek to publicise their website address and ensure it is easily accessible to patients.
- All practices should have a website with up-to-date information.
- All GP practices should ensure they have information regarding their complaints policy available on their website and ensure it is easy to find. The document (and additional complaints form if required) should be downloadable. This is especially relevant now as patients are unable to drop into their GP practice to pick up this information.
- Practices should offer an email address as an alternative method for patients to contact their practice. This information should be prominently displayed on their website and within the “Contact Information” section of the website.
- Patients have previously told us<sup>4</sup> how difficult it has been at present to contact their doctor. Last year, we heard from some patients that it was taking more than five attempts and sometimes up to three days to get a response on the phone. Some patients gave up trying, which is a greater concern.

## Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Redbridge would like to thank their volunteer researchers for their assistance in compiling the data for this report.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://healthwatchredbridge.co.uk/reviewing-patient-access-gp-practices-redbridge>