

Citizens Focus Panel

December 2020 – GP & Pharmacy Access

The Citizens Focus Panel enables us to get feedback on particular topics from a set group of Cheshire residents on a regular basis. Panel members complete short online surveys throughout the year.

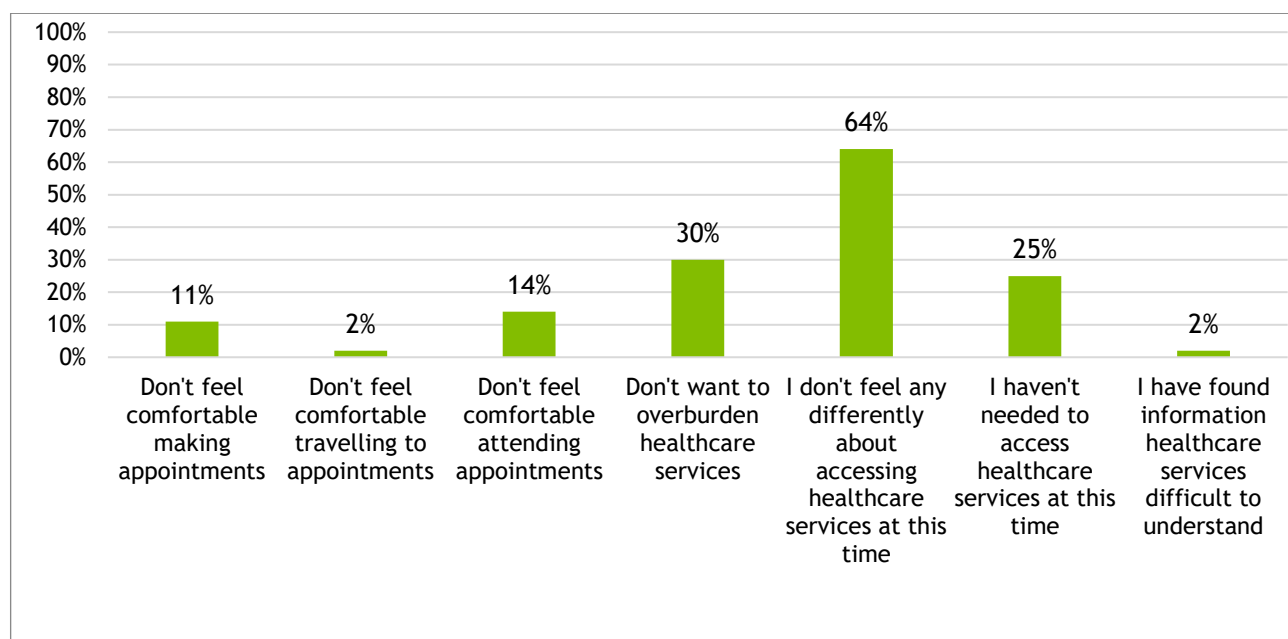
December’s survey focuses on GP and Pharmacy Access. Healthwatch Cheshire are helping to shape and improve local health and care services. You need services that work for you, your friends and family. That’s why we’re listening to your experiences of using local pharmacies and GP Practices during the pandemic. We’re using your voice to encourage those who run services to act on what matters to you.

This information sheet provides a snapshot of the key findings from the 50 responses that we received from Citizens Focus Panel members.

We’ll feed this information into those who provide and commission health and care services to improve the future experiences of people. The next survey will begin in January.

How do people feel about accessing local healthcare services at the moment?

This question is designed to ascertain how people feel about accessing healthcare services, amid the perception earlier in the pandemic that less people were seeking healthcare.



The majority of respondents (64%) told us that they don't feel any differently about accessing healthcare services at this time. Responses included:

- *"I know accessing such services is safe."*
- *"Our GP Practice has encouraged patients to seek appointments as usual, while pointing out the different ways they have to operate."*
- *"I think some of the current arrangements are actually an improvement. Now I can have a telephone call and scheduled appointments which happen on time."*



A further 30% however, told us that they don't want to overburden healthcare services during the pandemic.

- *"The news tells us an awful lot about how services are overwhelmed at the moment."*
- *"Clinical vulnerabilities have made health care increasingly difficult to access."*
- *"It can feel petty to access some NHS services at such unprecedented times."*
- *"It seems that there are a lot of cases where people have serious health concerns backing up during lockdown."*

Have you contacted your GP Practice to get an appointment in the last few months?

Out of 50 respondents:

- 36 people told us they had contacted their GP Practice to get an appointment.
- 14 people told us they had not.



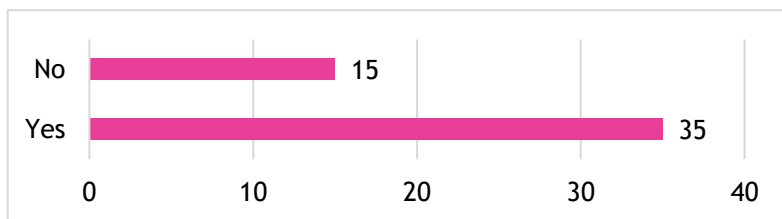
How easy was it to make contact with your GP Practice?

We asked people to rate how easy it was to contact their GP Practice, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult. 2.9 out of 5 was the average rating.

- *"I have had to wait quite a while first thing in the morning to get hold of my GP Practice. The NHS Patient Access App doesn't seem to have had any routine appointments available over the last few months."*
- *"8am seems to be the only time you're allowed to call. Very difficult for people who start work at 9am."*
- *"By the time I got through the receptionist told me all the appointments had gone for that day and to call back the following day. This seems to be a common occurrence."*
- *"Whenever I have called to request an appointment, there's often a wait, but I've always managed to get one without any issues."*
- *"I logged into the NHS Patient Access app on Sunday evening and got a telephone appointment with my own GP at 9.30am the next day (Monday)."*

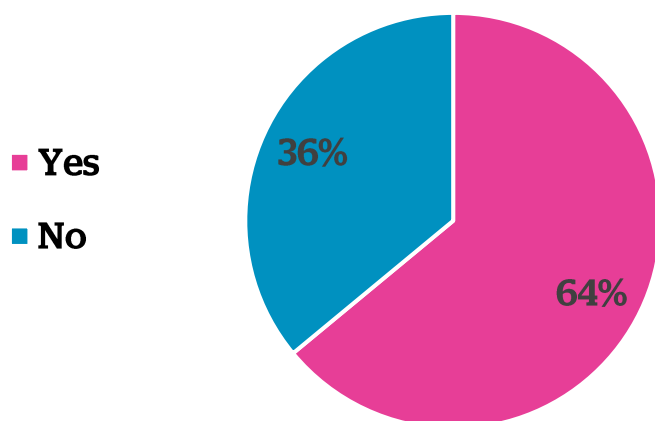


Have you had any face-to-face medical appointments over the last few months?



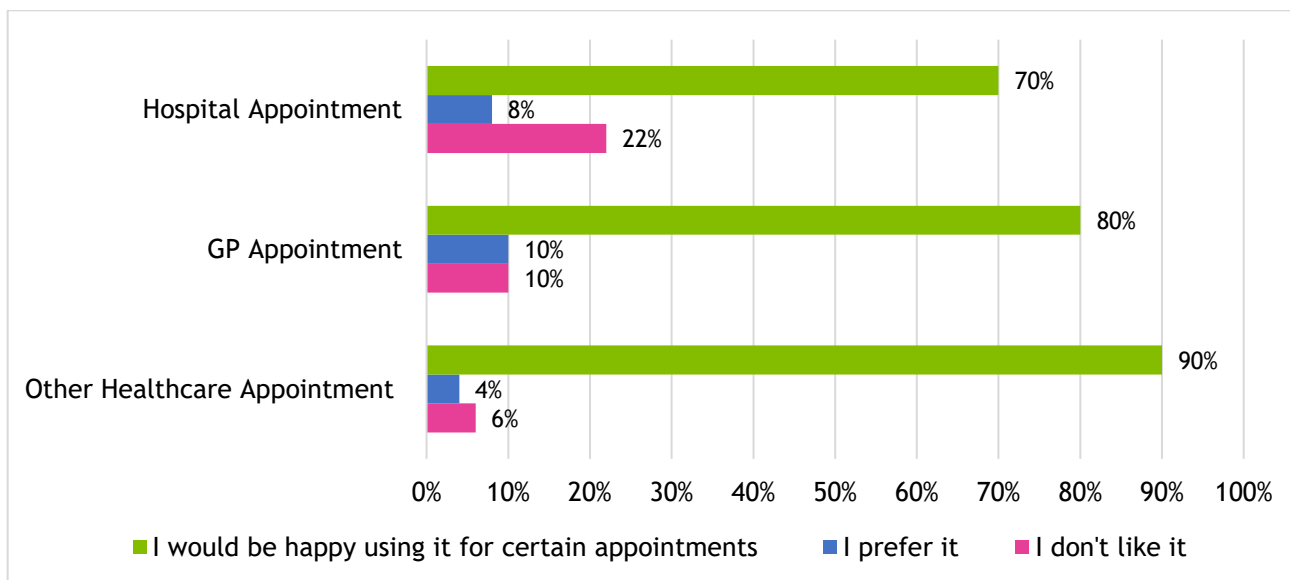
Out of 50 respondents, 35 had accessed a face-to-face medical appointment over the last few months, 15 had not.

Have you had an appointment by video/phone call?



64% of respondents have had an appointment with a healthcare professional via telephone or video call during the Coronavirus pandemic.

What do you think about video/phone appointments?



Out of 50 respondents, the vast majority told us that they would be happy using video and telephone calls for certain types of appointments across all healthcare settings. This tells us that the method of communication and setting used for healthcare appointments is very much dependent on the issue for which people are presenting.

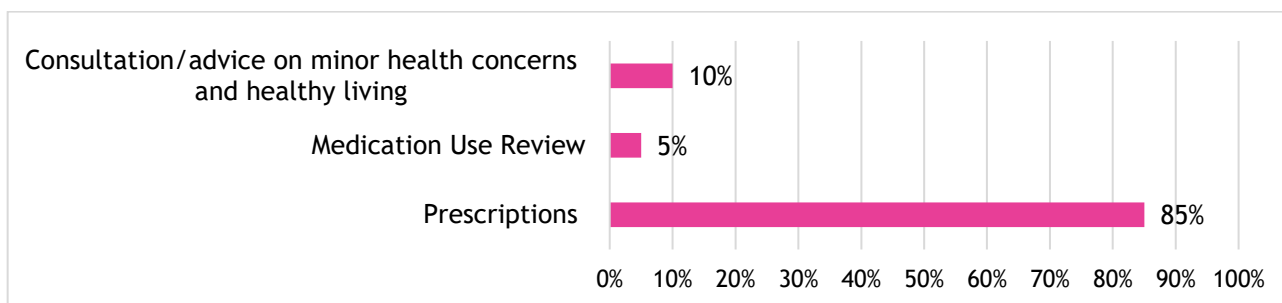
Have you attended your local Pharmacy in the last few months?

Out of 50 respondents:

- 39 people told us they had contacted their local Pharmacy in the last few months.
- 11 people told us they had not.



If so, what Pharmacy services did you use?



Out of 47 respondents, the vast majority told us that they attended their local Pharmacy to collect a prescription. 5 of which told us that they accessed more than one service during a recent visit.

How easy was it to access your local Pharmacy?

We asked people to rate how easy it was to access their local Pharmacy, with 1 being very easy and 5 being very difficult. **3.3 out of 5 was the average rating.**

- The vast majority of respondents told us that they've experienced issues with readily accessing their local pharmacy over the last few months, particularly when collecting prescriptions.
- Many indicated that issues with communication and availability of medicines was particularly prevalent in the early months of the pandemic.
- Social distancing, the relatively small size of some pharmacy premises and delays in service have created the need for many respondents to queue outside to access services, often in adverse weather conditions. The vast majority of people noted that they accepted the need for such measures, and felt safe accessing their pharmacy, despite the difficult circumstances.
- Moreover, some people told us they've adjusted their visiting habits to avoid peak times when queues are more likely and generally noted the positive attitude of staff, despite challenging working conditions.



Comments about people's experiences accessing pharmacies included:

- *"I visit at the same time each month, it's usually fine. On the last few occasions, the queues have been very long."*
- *"Supply issues with prescriptions on the last two visits."*
- *"I haven't received notifications when my prescription's ready - it just sits there. I have to go in person and check."*
- *"Waiting outside in the cold and rain for up to 40 minutes."*
- *"My pharmacy is small, so only one person can enter at a time in order to observe social distancing."*
- *"[Now I] choose the right time to attend my pharmacy, in order to access services straight away."*
- *"I still receive excellent service from my pharmacy, despite challenging conditions, they're safe and efficient."*

Do you have any other comments or concerns regarding health and care at this time?

- *"Everyone appears to be doing their utmost best. I know a lot of employees, doctors and pharmacists to cleaners, are exhausted."*
- *"Looking forward to getting a COVID-19 jab."*
- *"More online appointments are needed. I have things I need to see a GP about, but cannot make the call."*
- *"Wondering about the COVID-19 vaccine as I've had bad reactions to vaccinations in the past."*
- *"I'd like to emphasise the pressures under which NHS staff are currently working. They do a great job in difficult circumstances and at some risk."*
- *"COVID-19 seems an excuse for some services being poor or slow. My main concern is the lack of services at the weekend."*
- *"Most services are coping providing only a limited service e.g., I had a broken tooth and was only given a temporary filling."*
- *"Worried about the vaccine, I'm unclear of the side effects regarding my condition and what it could do to me"*
- *"I'm concerned about the build-up of cancer and other treatments, including elective surgeries."*
- *"Hoping the COVID-19 vaccine is rolled out quickly and safely."*



Summary

Most respondents told us that they don't feel any differently about accessing healthcare services at this time. However, a considerable number of people also told us that they don't want to overburden services at the moment. This is further evidenced by concerns about making and attending appointments.

Despite their concerns, many people have made contact with their GP over the last few months, albeit with some increased difficulty, due to demand. For those who had an appointment, some still attended in person, although most have taken advantage of the use of video and telephone call appointments.

Many indicated that issues communicating with their pharmacy and less availability of medicines was particularly prevalent in the early months of the pandemic. Queues outside to access services, often in adverse weather conditions, were common. People accepted the need for such measures however, and felt safe accessing their pharmacy, despite the difficult circumstances.