

What we've heard during 2023/24

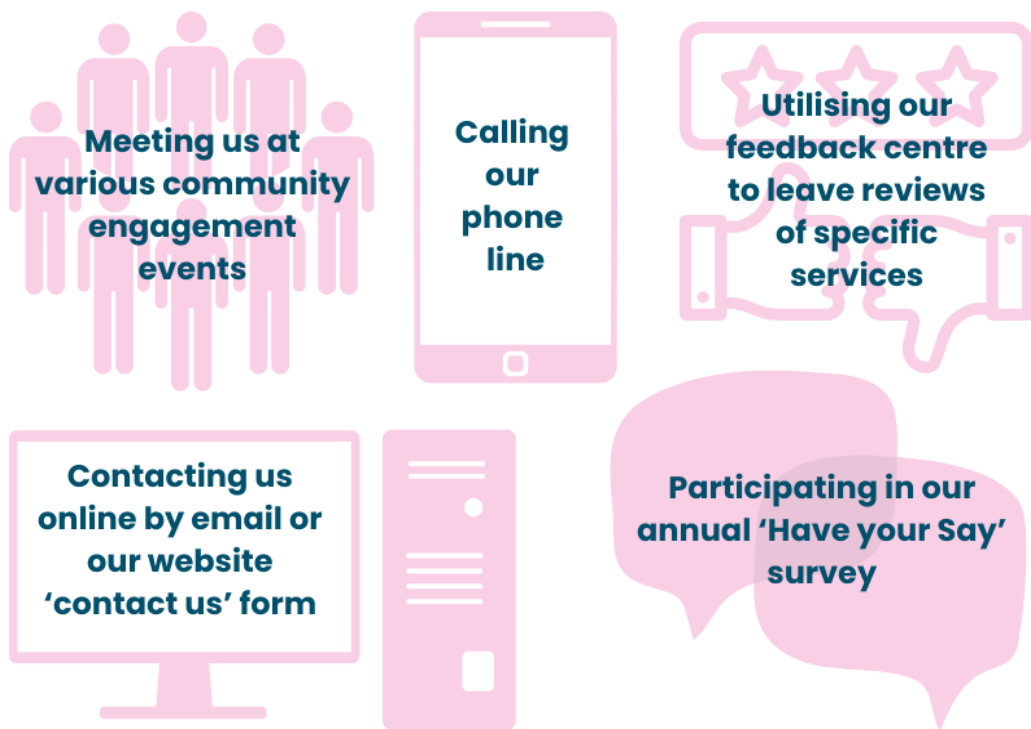
Summary of feedback Healthwatch North Tyneside have received from North Tyneside residents over the past 12 months.

June 2024



Talk to Us

At Healthwatch North Tyneside, we collect general feedback from local people on their experiences of health and social care services. Residents can talk to us and share their experiences in several ways:



From April 23 to March 24

2746 people engaged with us at 103 community events

2210 people shared their views and experiences to help us raise issues and improve care

181 people told us about their experiences of using local services on our online feedback centre

817 people shared **2,706** service experiences in our 2023 annual survey

Common Themes and Issues

Here are some of the common themes we have identified in the views and feedback residents and service users shared with us. The feedback we gathered this year is very similar to what people told us in previous years.

We know that different services have their own ways of working. It's also clear that a service can work well for one person and poorly for another. By listening to many different people, we can identify common issues.



High Quality Care – When people access care and support, the vast majority tell us it is of high quality. Staff are friendly and supportive and work hard to provide quality care which is greatly appreciated. In previous years we have heard similar feedback.

Access to care is a challenge in certain services – From the feedback we received, GP and Dental care continues to be the main concerns for residents. Many people say they still struggle to get a face-to-face appointment with a GP within a reasonable timescale and have trouble getting through on phone systems. Accessing NHS dental care is incredibly challenging for those without a regular dentist and for people moving into the area.

Accessible and reliable information is important – People want easy-to-read information in a variety of formats; online and on paper, as well as being able to speak to someone if they need to. People tell us more can be done to connect people to support that is available in the community, particularly voluntary sector support.

Choice in access – Having a choice of ways to book and attend appointments is increasingly important. People appreciate the ability to choose the method that suits them best, whether it's face-to-face, by phone or online. There are concerns that a shift towards online-only options could potentially exclude the most vulnerable people and restrict choice.

High cost of living impacts health choices – Many people feel their choices around healthy lifestyles and wellbeing are limited by the cost of living. In addition, the lack of available NHS dental care is pushing people towards private care that they struggle to afford.

Travel and Transport can be a challenge – People have told us that public transport networks do not sufficiently serve key hospitals. Delays, strikes and cancellations have impacted people's confidence in using public transport when accessing health services. Many say they need to rely on family and friends, or expensive taxis to ensure they make their appointments on time. Transport and parking costs are also a concern, particularly when travelling out of hours. Again this impacts mostly on people with limited mobility and those living on limited budgets.

Bringing services together and coordination – People tell us their experience would be improved by services working more closely together and communicating better with each other. Integrating health and social care services would enable a more personalised and holistic approach and better support families and carers.

Pushing people to pay privately – We heard from increasing numbers of people considering or 'being forced' to pay privately for care. People said they feel they have no choice but to pay privately for dental treatment. Others have said they have paid for private health assessments, operations and other treatments to avoid long waiting lists.

Lower expectations of care – We heard from people saying they feel that while individual staff are doing their best, it is within a system that is working against them. People now seem resigned to waiting for care and express surprise when it is timely, and when services work well. This is across many different service areas including GP appointments, getting a diagnosis, mental health support, secondary care and emergency care.



Feedback on Specific Services

GP Practices

- People praise **high quality service** when they receive care from GP practices. Many people said they were able to get appointments within a reasonable timeframe.
- **Frustration around access to GP services** is still the most common issue raised with us. This includes the processes different practices use to book and allocate appointments, phone systems and 'the 8.30 am rush'.
- Practices operate in different ways, what works well for one person, might not for another – this is a real challenge. Residents say having a **choice of ways** to interact with a practice is important and people appreciate the flexibility so different needs and preferences are met.
- Many people say that they **want another option for appointments** – when they don't need an 'urgent/same day appointment', but when 'several weeks in the future' feels too long.
- **Continuity of care** is particularly important for people with ongoing health conditions.
- People are still unclear about the **different roles within a practice** and need help to understand which person is best suited to see in a particular situation. Many want a choice of who to see and an option to see a doctor if they choose to.
- **More people now see the benefits of Triage approaches** and consider it an effective method of prioritising care.
- Practices that require people to **order repeat prescriptions online** are excluding people who do not have access to, or the confidence and skills, to use digital technology.
- **Stock issues of certain medications or sizes** can lead to prescriptions not being completely fulfilled. This can mean a new prescription needs to be raised by the GP, and multiple journeys to different pharmacies for the resident. Electronic prescriptions can be a barrier.
- People are starting to realise there are **differences in the support available at different practices** and primary care networks. Some offer appointments at different practice sites for instance.

Dentists

- People who are registered with an NHS dentist tell us they receive a **great service**. People who choose to pay for private dentistry are also pleased with the service they receive.
- Online booking systems, text reminder services and convenient appointment times were all highlighted as positives.
- For those without a regular dentist, or who have moved into the area, the picture is very stark, with apparently no practices offering NHS routine care to new patients.
- People **don't know how to access NHS urgent dental care** when they need it, other than by ringing around various practices until they 'get lucky'.
- There is still continuing anger from people after being '**delisted**' from an NHS dental register during Covid. People tell us they continue to be 'removed' from NHS lists without warning or prior notification.
- Some people told us their dentist has stopped offering NHS treatment, pushing them into taking on private plans. Others without a regular NHS dentist feel **forced into paying privately** to get the care they need. Others are simply unable to pay the cost of private care.
- We heard people are often being asked to **pay upfront** for their dental care.

Pharmacies

- Most people are very happy with the efficient service, advice and support provided.
- Some people commented on a decline in the quality of service and increased waiting times following **service closures** and consolidation, particularly in North Shields, Monkseaton/Whitley Bay and Benton.
- While many have had very positive **Pharmacy First** experiences, others feel that they have been 'bounced around'.
- Some love the move to **online and app requests for repeat prescriptions**, however, this doesn't work for others with less digital access/confidence.
- People have encountered supply problems for certain medications (ADHD and HRT). Electronic prescriptions make it harder to 'shop around' and residents may have to get their GP to change their prescription to an alternative product.
- Some people noted the **lack of suitable private space** for some of the additional services offered, such as smoking cessation and vaccinations.

Urgent and Emergency Care

- **Waiting times** at Emergency departments during busy periods are a real issue. People described their wait as **'terrible'** and **'extremely long'**, including people arriving by ambulance.
- The quality of facilities becomes more important with long waits, including privacy and access to refreshments.
- For people with additional needs e.g. autism, trained support about additional needs and suitable spaces to wait are limited.
- People commented that despite long waiting times sometimes experienced in these settings, staff were kind and friendly, and **doing their best**.
- Evidence of prompt triaging and efficient care. People were really pleased about the appointment booking systems at the Urgent Treatment Centre.
- Some people who accessed urgent care via NHS111 told us of **difficulties reaching an advisor** and delays getting called back.
- The links between services involved in urgent and emergency care are critical, including urgent care centre's and same-day GP care. We heard of some people 'bouncing around' services which could create transport problems.
- Feedback about the ambulance service was very positive. People highlighted the exceptional service, generally fast response times and warm and caring staff.

Hospital services

- When people received care they told us it was of generally **high quality** and they commended the friendly, helpful and professional staff.
- Frustration was expressed about access to particular services, including audiology and rheumatology.
- We heard about **waiting for care** and lack of communication about what was happening.
- People feel communication could be improved by better use of text/email reminders, but it is important that people can **choose the way** they want to be contacted.
- People reported **difficulties with travel, transport and parking** for different hospital sites, including gaps in the public transport network, and cost of parking and taxis. There was a feeling that Wansbeck and Hexham hospitals were too far for use by North Tyneside residents.
- Some people felt discharge processes can take too long and are not joined up.

Mental Health

- People told us talking therapies and other therapy services were felt to be effective. However, there are long waits for more complex therapies which is a concern.
- Feedback was mixed about support for those in crisis. While some people felt they were treated with empathy, others felt they weren't listened to. There was thought to be a lack of options for follow-up care.
- People tell us they struggle to get mental health support for their children. They say they have to constantly 'fight' for support. People told us without input from CAMHS, access to other services is limited.
- We heard it can be a long process getting a neurodivergent diagnosis, both for children and adults, and some people resort to going private. There is a lack of ongoing support for adults following diagnosis.

Care at home

- Positive feedback was received about some providers.
- For those who have to pay, there was a concern about the cost of care and balancing family budgets.
- People were very positive about North Tyneside Council's reablement team. However, this early care following hospital discharge can set high expectations for the services that follow.

Care homes

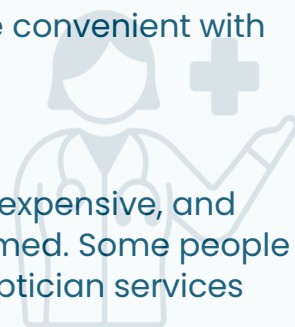
- Costs of care homes are a concern.
- Feedback is very positive about some services with friendly staff and excellent care.
- The importance of high quality care and good communication with families was highlighted.
- Additional support for younger residents to address sense of isolation would improve quality of service.

Social Care

- Some people told us they don't know where to go to get help when they need it.
- People who receive Continuing Health Care talked about some challenges following recent changes to the way services are delivered.

Opticians

- People generally feel the service is very good. Locations are convenient with good parking.
- The at home service is valued by people with disabilities.
- People feel appointments and prescription glasses can be expensive, and more help with costs for children's glasses would be welcomed. Some people are taking up a payment plan to manage costs and wish optician services were NHS.



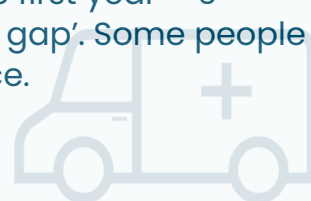
Maternity Services

- Care provided by maternity staff was praised. However, For some, appointments were consistently delayed.
- Some people said staffing can be 'stretched thin' leading to a reliance on partners' post delivery.



Health Visitors

- Some people told us they received exceptional support, whilst others struggled to access support and continuity of care can be an issue due to high staff turnover.
- People would welcome more check-ups, particularly in the first year – 6 weeks followed by a check at 1 year is felt to be 'too long a gap'. Some people would like longer-term support beyond this for reassurance.



Sexual Health Service

- Efficient, accessible and friendly service.
- People appreciate the prompt access options – drop-in and same-day appointments.



Feeding back to services

- Some people experienced issues with the GP complaints procedure after being taken over by the Integrated Care Board.
- Feedback opportunities within services often focus on complaints and suggestions for improvement, with little opportunity to give praise.



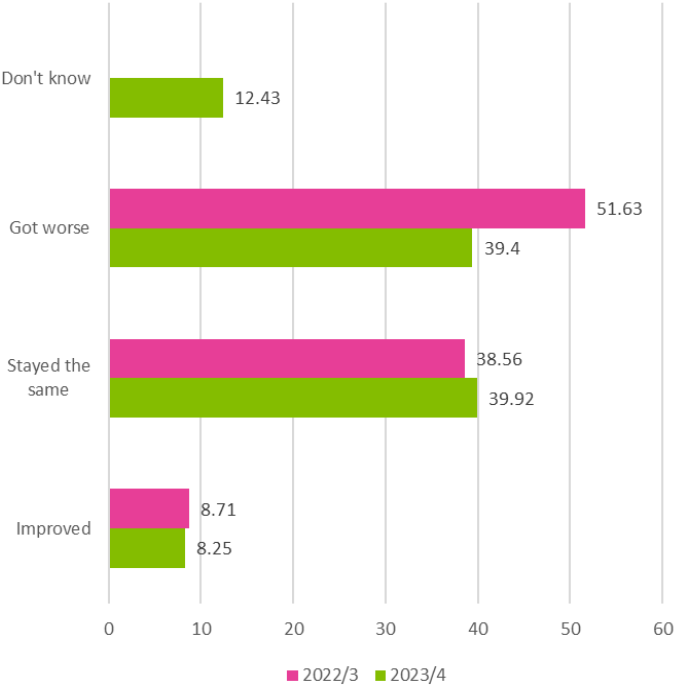
Have things changed?

We can show a year-on-year comparison of people’s responses to our annual survey, as we ask similar questions each year. There is limited change between years.

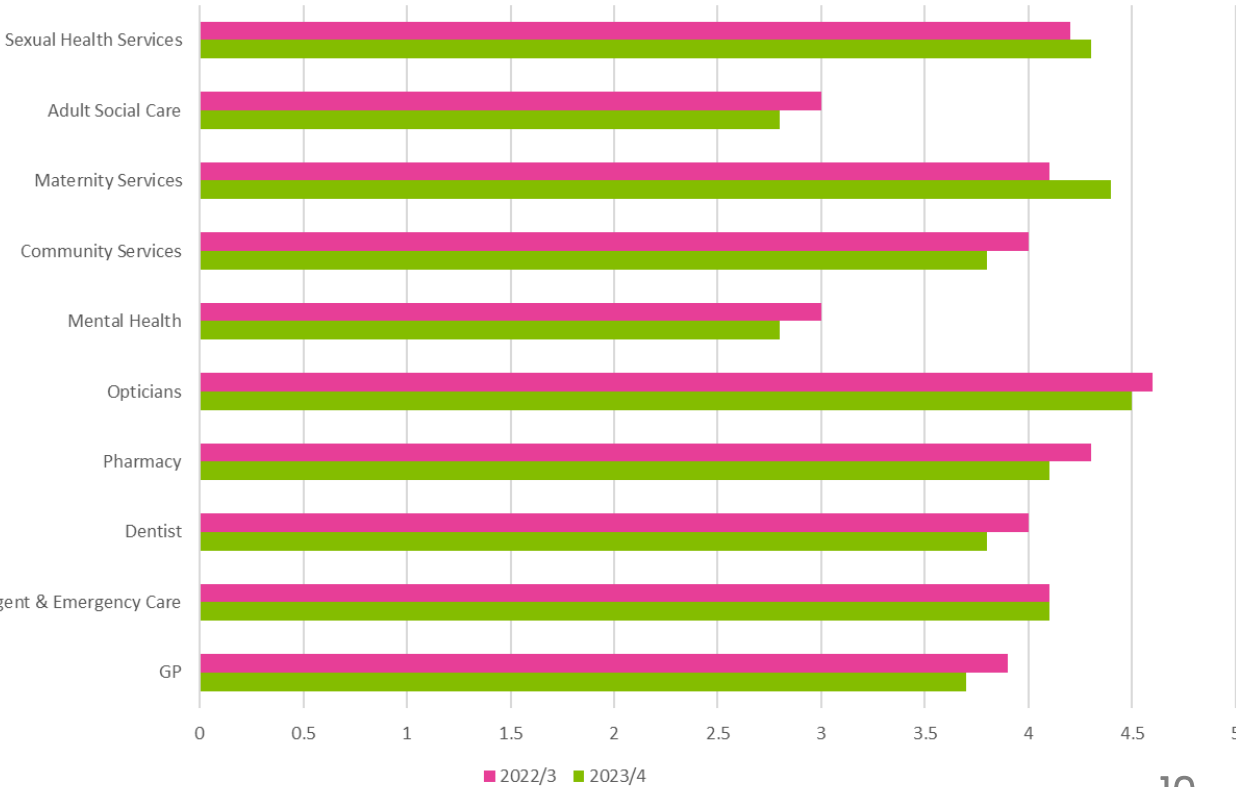
The two graphs show that overall there have been some slight negative shifts in the way individual services are regarded. Overall the results from 2023/24 are similar to 2022/23 and continue to be generally quite highly scored.

From the free text comments, we see that people are influenced by their own experiences; the experiences of family and friends, and news stories. The NHS strikes in 2023, and funding from central government were also mentioned.

Compared to a year ago, do you think health and care services have (%):



Average star rating of different services comparison between years



Who we Heard From

Top North Tyneside postcodes for annual survey returns were NE28, NE29 and NE25 with significant numbers from NE7, 12, 26, 27 and NE30

68% of the annual survey returns were from women

87% of the annual survey returns were from people of white UK ethnic background

1 in 4 of the annual survey returns were from people aged 35–44

What we do with this Feedback



- We provide direct feedback to individual services, showing what residents and service users have said about their service and other similar services.
- We share trends and analysis with key local decision makers, including NHS and social care commissioners.
- We highlight possible solutions to problems based on what we have heard from local people.
- We formally report to North Tyneside’s Health and Wellbeing Board to highlight resident’s issues.
- We share highlights with the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board to influence decisions across the region.
- We share our anonymised information and reports with Healthwatch England to help influence decisions Nationally.
- We use what people have told us to identify key issues we should focus our work programme for the next year – you can see our priorities for 2023/24 at www.hwnt.co.uk

Our research projects in 2023–2024

During the year, we have also published detailed reports on the issues that people raised with us in the previous year. You can access these at www.healthwatchnorthtyneside.co.uk/reports





We are committed to delivering the highest quality we can. Every 3 years we carry out an in-depth audit with Healthwatch England to ensure this.



Registered Charity Number 1160753

Healthwatch North Tyneside
Spirit of North Tyneside Community Hub
2nd Floor Wallsend Customer First Centre
16 The Forum
Wallsend
NE28 8JR

www.hwnt.co.uk
t: 0191 263 5321
e: info@hwnt.co.uk

 [@HWNTyneside](https://twitter.com/HWNTyneside)

 [Facebook.com/HealthwatchNT](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchNT)

 [healthwatchnt](https://www.instagram.com/healthwatchnt)

 www.linkedin.com/company/healthwatch-north-tyneside