

# Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch County Durham  
Annual Report 2021-22



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# Message from our chair

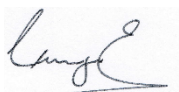
Welcome to our annual report, highlighting the work we have been carrying out on your behalf this year. This report shows the difference your contributions can make. We have seen the successful COVID-19 vaccination programme rolled out across the country. We know getting back to normal is taking time, but it has been the better year we hoped for in our report last year.

I would to thank the Healthwatch team, who despite having staffing challenges, continued to support the community. We are working together to deliver our priorities for the coming year.

We will be reaching out into communities to meet people and hear your views. We want to involve you in planning our work to make sure our reports are clear and relevant. We would welcome your views about how we can improve our partnerships and look forward to hearing from you in the coming year.

There are big changes coming to the organisation of the health and care this year with the introduction of the Integrated Care System in July. We are working closely with local Healthwatch across the region, to make sure we continue to share what matters to you. We will continue to work with commissioners and service providers as your critical friend.

Watch out for our video diaries, social media updates and our gazebo which will be appearing in locations near you. In the meantime, I hope you enjoy reading this report and thank you for your continued support,



Chris Cunnington-Shore  
**Healthwatch County Durham Chair**



“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities.”

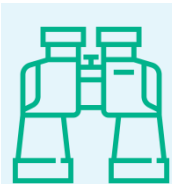
**Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England**



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch County Durham is your local health and social care champion. From Consett to Newton Aycliffe, Middleton-in-Teesdale to Seaham and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other 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

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

To make sure people’s experiences help make health and care better.



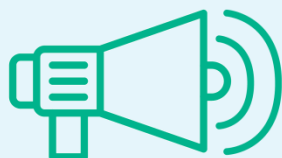
### Our values

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don’t always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people’s experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public’s independent advocate.

# Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

## Reaching out



**1,237 people**

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us including completing surveys as part of our workplan this year. This has helped to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**277 people**

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health, COVID-19 and NHS dental services.

## Making a difference to care



We published

**4 reports**

about the improvements people would like to see to in health and social care services.

Our **dentistry report**

was produced in response to the most frequent signposting enquiries we had from the public.

## Health and care that works for you



We're proud to have **24 outstanding volunteers**, who gave up 2049 hours (equivalent to 273 days) to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority. In 2021-22 we received:

**£180,600**

This is the same as the previous year.

We also currently employ









**7 staff (FTE 4.5)**

who help us carry out this work. However, this year recruitment has been a challenge and as a result there have been vacant posts.



# How we've made a difference throughout the year

Some of the things going on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring	 <p>With the concerns about dental services, we used our e-bulletin and social media to keep people updated about how to get emergency dental care.</p>	 <p>We reported our findings about patients accessing GP services and worked with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to find solutions to some of the issues.</p>
Summer	 <p>In Volunteers' Week we planted a fruit tree in a community orchard to celebrate the great work of our volunteers. We made a short video about what a huge asset the volunteers are to Healthwatch.</p>	 <p>We supported Healthwatch England's campaign, with 191 young people filling in a survey about their attitude to the COVID-19 Vaccination Programme.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We continued to gather the thoughts of young people about their mental health needs. It turned out to be one of our biggest surveys of children and young people, with almost 1000 taking part.</p>	 <p>We held our Annual General Meeting online with two informative guest speakers, who told us more about Integrated Care Systems and NHS dentists in our region.</p>
Winter	 <p>We made some simple recommendations to improve online information and access to appointments in our report about dental services.</p>	 <p>To support our GP access work we spoke to refugees from Syria about their experiences using health care services. This was a small start but our work will continue as COVID-19 restrictions lift.</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 feedback to services to help them improve.



## What Mental Health means to children & young people

**An amazing 989 children and young people shared their views and experiences about mental health with us over the last year. Thanks to this, we've been able to share the things that are important to them and what could improve.**

Over the course of 2021 we listened to children and young people. We used a wide range of engagement activities. It was very powerful hearing about the things that worried them. They told us what they did to help themselves, family and friends.



### Children as young as 4...

**told us that they were worried about not having enough food to eat, or money for the family**

What we learned from our research:

- All the young people we spoke to knew what mental health was and that it can be affected by many things
- Young people told us the things they are most likely to worry about are - being alone, meeting new people, schoolwork, exams and bullying. Lots of younger children had money worries relating to household income. They had concerns about not having enough food to eat and going hungry
- When children are feeling down they told us that a cuddle with friends, family or pets really helped. Exercise was a good activity to take their mind off problems and help them to feel calm and in control
- The main thing that young people want is to be heard. They want to be able to talk, be listened to, respected and to be involved in making decisions

### What difference will this make?

Our report has only recently been published and we know significant changes to mental health support is a long-term, work in progress. As we were able to engage with so many young people, our work has captured some valuable things to think about. We have shared what we found with stakeholders and service providers alike.



“Ensuring that children and young people’s voices are heard is incredibly important to us at The Bridge Young Carers, so we were delighted to be included in this important piece of work by Healthwatch.”

Philippa May – The Bridges Young Carers Service





## Finding an NHS dentist

**People were asking us for help to find an NHS dentist. Many were telling us the information available online was not up-to-date, so we decided to investigate.**

We spoke to 42 of the 54 dental practices in County Durham who provide NHS dental services. We wanted to know the current position in the [practices](#). We also compared what they told us with the information on the NHS “Find a Dentist” webpages.

None of the practices were registering new adult patients, but 3 were accepting children. They all said they were providing NHS emergency dental treatment. We were surprised at the number of practices who told us there were some patients who were failing to arrive for their appointments.

We also found:

- 7 practices were not accessible for wheelchair users or those with mobility issues
- 15 dental practices had information on the NHS “Find a Dentist” webpages that matched what they told us when we called
- We were unable to find 2 practices on the NHS website



“We are down to only one dentist and advertising for an associate – we are not taking any more patients until one has been appointed.”

Dental practice, County Durham.



### What difference will this make?

What we learned gave us a picture of the current situation with local practices. It was useful when we were giving advice and promoting emergency treatment on social media.

We know it's going to take time to solve the current dental crisis. We have some simple recommendations that could help patients:

- All NHS dental practices should keep NHS webpages up-to-date. It's not difficult or time consuming and it makes it easier for people to find information
- NHS England should encourage all dentists to use appointment reminder services. This should reduce the number of patients failing to attend
- NHS England should consider extra funding for schools' programmes to make sure children have early access to dental education



“I have tried without success to register myself and my baby with a dentist. NHS advice is that you should take your child to a dentist when their first teeth appear.”

Parent who contacted Healthwatch County Durham.



**Three ways we have made a difference for the community**  
**Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.**



**Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life**

**It's important for the NHS and social care services to step back and see the bigger picture, through hearing personal experiences, and the impact on people's lives. This provides a deeper understanding than using data alone, can challenge assumptions and motivate people to think and work more creatively.**

We have started producing video diaries. These will allow us to share real life stories from patients about services. The videos will be shared with a range of health and social care providers and commissioners. They will help them to understand patients experiences.



**Getting services to involve the public**

**Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.**

Some of our volunteers checked the automated telephone messages at GP practices. They also looked for information on their websites. We were able to give the CCG real examples of some of the problems patients were experiencing across the county. This helped them with their plans to direct funding to make improvements.



**Improving care over time**

**Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.**

The new Integrated Care System comes into operation in July 2022. We have been working with Healthwatch England, our neighbouring Healthwatch and health and care commissioners. We want to make sure that people in County Durham continue have their views and wishes represented. It remains important that Healthwatch is recognised as an independent champion for health and social care.

# 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, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Sharing information about the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need



## Solving a COVID-19 Vaccine Passport puzzle

\*John contacted us because after months of trying, he still could not access his COVID-19 Vaccine Passport. He needed it to travel abroad and his GP practice, NHS 111 and 119 could not help.

Talking with his GP practice, we realised that his medical records were marked as restricted. This meant that only his GP had access to his full records.



We worked with the practice manager, safeguarding GP and social worker. A request was sent to NHS Digital to lift the restricted status. This finally gave him access to the information he needed to travel. He was also able to use other online NHS services, such as eConsult and book appointments. John was delighted and said "I truly believe my problem wouldn't have been solved without your help"

\*Name changed to protect identity

## Understanding appointment systems

At a routine examination, \*Amanda's 8-week-old baby had been diagnosed with a suspected 'clicky hip'. She was told that an appointment to have this checked would not be for 4 months. She was concerned that her baby had to wait this long to be seen. She felt that her GP practice was doing all that they could, but she wanted a better understanding of the process.

We contacted the CCG, who got in touch with the service manager for paediatrics.

They gave the following appointment information for these circumstances. If the baby meets specific criteria they would be given an appointment within 6 weeks and as part of the national programme they would be scanned. If the baby does not meet the criteria, they would get a routine scan as soon as they could be seen. This could be a few months but the delay would not be a risk to the baby. Amanda was reassured about her baby's health with the information we gave her.



\*Name changed to protect identity



# Volunteers

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

This year our volunteers:

- Contributed to our e-bulletin, raising issues such as blood pressure, cancer awareness, alcohol related problems and the wellbeing of health and care staff
- Circulated over 800 flyers, business & postcards and more than 300 surveys
- Carried out website and telephone reviews for GP access and approached dentists for information
- Attending the System Wide Advisory Group about pain management , supported cancer service groups and contributed to a County Durham engagement calendar
- Continued to give us important feedback in areas such as COVID-19, talking to care home staff, patient discharge from hospital and concerns about the impact on accessing health services due to fuel price rises



We are here to help  
out of Health and Care services

- Would you like some advice on health & care services in your area such as dentists, GPs or care homes?
- Do you need further information on these, or other health and care services?

Our Information and Signposting Team can point you in the right direction



• Meet BEN a trainee therapy dog owned by one of our volunteers





**Devonshire House Care Home**

We met residents, using a safe 'Pod' in the care home garden. They told us about dealing with health issues and how confident they were about going outside.

Bryan said " My family come to take me out, I am happy, it makes me feel good".

**Bryan and Joanne**



**Video Diaries with young people**

Video diaries are a powerful tool, allowing patients or service users to share their journey. A community film maker, 6 volunteers and the Volunteer Supporter are following 3 young people who are sharing their stories.

**Kris and Grace**




**Using the valuable experience of volunteers**

As part of a working group set up by Durham County Council we gathered public feedback about using an online tool to allow people to carry out their own financial assessment for care services. What we learned will help to make sure that using the tool will meet their needs and is user friendly.



**Do you feel inspired?**

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today with Claire, our Volunteer Supporter.

-  [www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk)
-  **07756 654223**
-  [claire.sisterson@pcp.uk.net](mailto:claire.sisterson@pcp.uk.net)

# 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.

Income	
Funding received from local authority	£180,600
Additional funding	£0.00
Total income	£180,600

Income	
Staff costs	£104,944
Operational costs	£32,886
Support and administration	£16,271
Total expenditure	£154,101

## Three priorities for 2022–23

- Finding out about people’s experiences of hospital discharge
- What the delays in hospital treatment has meant for people in the county
- Have things changed for people living in care homes now restrictions have been relaxed and the long-term effects of being away from loved ones

## Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that’s because of where you live, income or race.

# Statutory statements

## About us

Healthwatch County Durham, Whitfield House, Meadowfield Industrial Estate, Durham, DH7 8XL.

The organisation holding the Healthwatch contract is the Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP). PCP is a multi-award winning health and wellbeing charity operating across the North East.

For further information please visit [www.pcp.uk.net](http://www.pcp.uk.net).

Registered Charity No, 1067888 Company Registered in England No. 3491237

Registered address: Pioneering Care Centre, Carer's Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, DL5 4SF

© Pioneering Care Centre

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## **The way we work**

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

Our Healthwatch board consists of 8 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the board met 9 times and made decisions on matters such as supporting emergency first aid training for our volunteers and developing a series of video diaries that outline the experiences of people using health and care services.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

By using insight from information and signposting enquiries and then having a public vote to prioritise our annual workplan.

### **Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.**

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, email, webform, attended virtual meetings and forums, used our volunteer network to access their local communities, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media. We published a monthly e-bulletin to share information and advice as well as to ask for feedback on a range of services.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by, for example, carrying out specific engagement with refugees, to hear their experiences of accessing health services and had valuable advice from a volunteer with a learning disability about some of the documents we produced.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it making it available to Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), NHS England, County Durham CCG, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Commissioners for Healthwatch at Durham County Council. We also publish it on our website.

### **Responses to recommendations and requests**

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.



## Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch County Durham is represented on the County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board by Chris Cunnington-Shore, Chair of our board. During 2021/22 our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing an annual update and responding to various initiatives under consideration by the committee.

### 2021-2022 Outcomes

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
Reporting on accessing GP services by telephone and getting advice from their websites.	Although the CCG already had funding for improvements in telephone systems and websites, they used our findings to help with ongoing work.
Undertaking Young People’s COVID-19 research.	Provided valuable feedback to Healthwatch England which allowed them to report on national trends.
Provided public feedback to the local authority on the introduction of an online financial assessment tool.	Helping to ensure the tool is informative and user friendly.
Providing local dental information to Healthwatch England	Contributed to Healthwatch England’s call for a national reform of NHS dental services.







# healthwatch

County Durham

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