

# Exploring access to GP services in Dudley borough

May 2024



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# Introduction

**It's 7:59 am. I am waiting to call my GP practice at 8:00 am on the dot.** It's frustrating, but I know I can take time off work to make any appointment offered to me and I know I will be able to communicate with the health professionals I will see.

Now imagine I am Deaf and can't use a telephone. Or I am a stroke survivor and struggle to talk clearly. Perhaps I am a single parent and struggling with the cost of living, and can't afford to pay for a long phone call. Maybe I am a teacher and I can't use my phone during the day.

These are some of the stories we heard from people across the Dudley borough, highlighting the inequalities in accessing GP services. We want to champion the voices of the local community, including seldom-heard groups, and ensure the needs of everyone are considered by GP practices so that everyone can access healthcare when needed.

*We have heard from people who struggle to access their GP practice. We want to dig deeper.*

We understand the challenges faced by GP practices in the current climate. Throughout this piece of research, we heard from a wide range of patients, carers and professionals to build a picture of access to healthcare and the challenges faced by both GP practices and patients. We are thankful to everyone who has shared their experiences and we hope to provide a balanced view of the current situation.

We recognise that GPs and practice staff are working incredibly hard throughout this time. We hope our research has identified some solutions that could improve access for patients.



Chief Officer, Healthwatch Dudley

# A rising concern

# 29%

of people we spoke to in 2022-24 wanted to share their experiences of GP services



# 5%

of GP appointments across Dudley borough are missed by patients, further increasing demand<sup>3</sup>

## From 2022 to 2023, 29% of the people we spoke to wanted to share their experiences of GP services.

National research has shown general dissatisfaction with GP services.<sup>1,2</sup> However, this research doesn't capture people's experiences in their own words or provide detailed insights into real patient needs.

Healthwatch Dudley wanted to look into the barriers patients face when accessing GP services. We also wanted to explore how changes might be made, in view of the challenges currently faced by GP services in our borough.

The Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) has highlighted key challenges:

- **Caring for complex needs:** Healthcare providers are facing a rise in patients with increasingly complex needs
- **Workforce changes:** There have been changes to the primary care workforce in recent years including the number of GPs, additional clinical roles and their working patterns
- **Patient load:** Each GP is now responsible for more patients, with each GP seeing an average of 37 patients per session, which exceeds the recognised safe limit of 28<sup>3</sup>

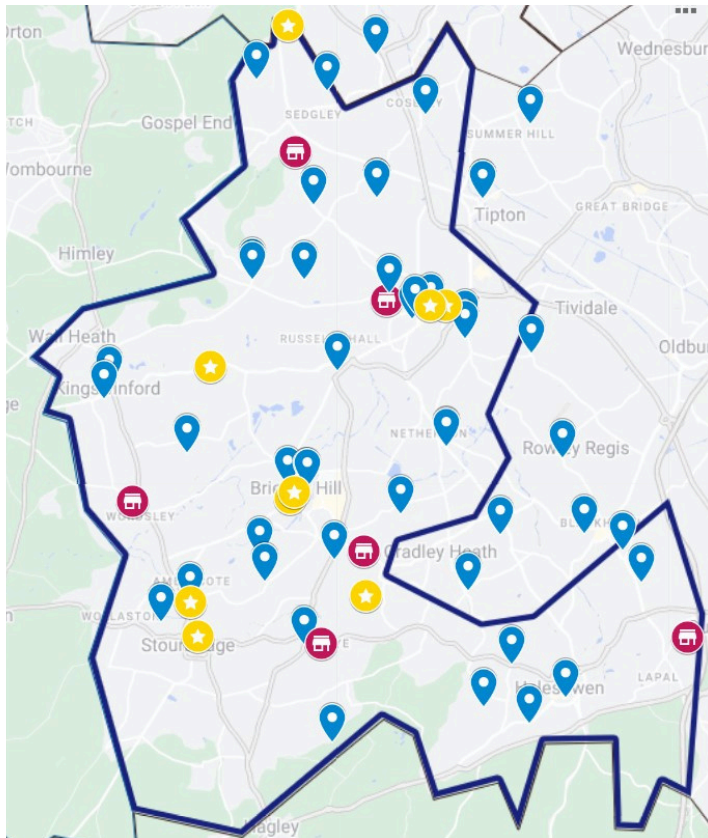
NHS England required primary care across the country to **"implement solutions to improve access"**.<sup>4</sup> The Black Country ICB is building on this with a new five year plan to improve primary care.<sup>3</sup>

We want to champion the voices of patients and carers and ensure that changes meet the needs of the population.




# Listening to Dudley borough

We recognise the benefit of listening to the community as a whole and understanding the differing needs across the population.

We visited six GP practices, using our statutory powers of Enter & View, and attended nine community groups. People registered at 41 different practices across the borough contributed by completing our survey.



## Map key

-  GP surgeries included in survey responses
-  Community or patient group visited
-  GP surgeries visited for Enter & View

We received survey responses from people who were registered at GP surgeries outside of the Dudley borough.

We have included the responses from practices close to the border as services may

overlap and patients may be residents of Dudley borough.

Our survey was accessed by people with varying health needs. Among the respondents, 27% shared that they had a disability.

We heard from diverse ethnic backgrounds, across Dudley borough, broadly representing the demographics of the CENSUS 2021.<sup>5</sup>

We heard from a range of age groups. This included people under 17 years old to people who were over 65 years old.

In terms of gender, the majority of respondents identified as women (67%). We encourage other genders to reach out and share their unique experiences.



1048 people  
contributed to  
our research

## The survey

- Designed in conjunction with:
  - Local GPs
  - Dudley Integrated Health and Care NHS Trust
  - The Black Country ICB
  - Healthwatch Dudley volunteers
- Details of the survey were sent to every GP practice in Dudley to display for patients
- 756 survey responses across Dudley
- Whilst the responses have not been independently verified, common themes emerged from the data

## Visiting GP practices

Healthwatch Dudley has the authority to conduct Enter & View visits to health and social care services, enabling us to observe services in action. We utilised these powers to visit six GP practices across Dudley.

Following each visit, reports were provided to the respective GP practices. Practices responded positively and proactively to our feedback.

## Community groups

As the research progressed we had the positive experience of being welcomed by various communities, which greatly enriched our data. We are grateful to have engaged with 12 groups and organisations who represented differing patient needs across the borough.

## Balancing the view

We reached out to professionals to hear their perspective on what the public told us.

We spoke with Practice Managers, NHS Black Country ICB, the Black Country Digital Inequalities Programme and Lead GPs.



**756**  
people  
completed  
our survey

**117**  
people  
shared their  
views in GP  
practices



**176**  
people from  
community  
groups  
spoke to us

# Making contact

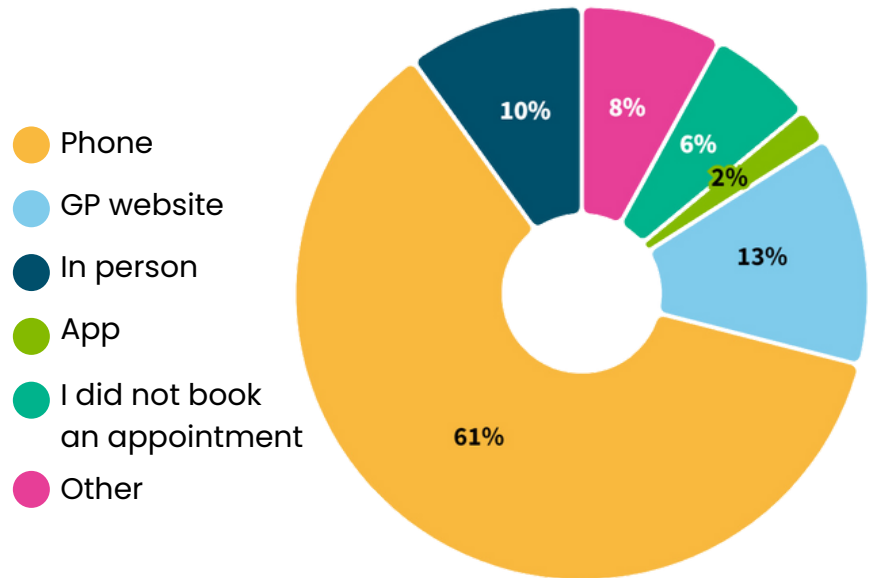
"I've visited the walk-in centre more than the GP, it's easier to wait for four hours than the hassle of trying to see a GP"

Survey respondent

**The Black Country is 7% more likely\* to attend A&E when they can't get a GP appointment**

\*than national figures<sup>6</sup>

## How people booked an appointment



Most of the people we spoke to booked their most recent appointment by phone. However, each patient had their own preferences. We found people appreciated flexible booking options, especially when juggling other commitments such as work or caring responsibilities.

Booking systems differed between practices. Some practices allow patients to book appointments in person while others directed patients to use either online services or the telephone.

Patients told us they had resorted to attending emergency departments when they were unable to get a GP appointment. Patients expressed frustration at "wasting time" at emergency departments.

### Recommendations:

- Ensure both digital and non-digital options are available for accessing services
- Support patients who want to learn how to use digital systems
- Train staff to understand and address barriers to digital access

# Making contact

*"[It's a] big problem to access on the phone. They need to have signvideo"*

Survey respondent

# 61%

*booked their last appointment over the phone*



**Costs prevent some patients from booking appointments by phone**

Patients described the reasons behind their preferred way to contact their GP surgery.

## Preferred digital services

- Patients could use it at convenient times
- Reduced anxiety of speaking to someone
- Avoided long waits on the phone

## Preferred phoning

- The process of phoning is "easy"
- Speaking to a "helpful receptionist" who can direct patients to the right care

## Preferred face-to-face

- Accessible for those without access to technology
- Preferable for those who faced communication barriers over the phone

## Call waiting times

People expressed their frustration at lengthy waiting times to get through on the phone.

Long waiting times presented barriers to:

- Working individuals unable to call their surgery during certain times
- Those who struggle to afford phone costs
- Carers

*"The pre-recorded message could be a lot shorter, if not got rid of all together, telephone calls cost a lot of money"*

Survey respondent

## Recommendation:

NHS England could work with Ofcom and telecommunications companies to explore providing freephone numbers for GP practices, eliminating cost as a barrier.



# Waiting times

"I have had multiple appointments when it would have been more convenient to have one longer one to reduce time away from work"

Survey respondent

"I like the ease of filling in the online form. A doctor called me back and arranged a prescription without having to see me"

Survey respondent



# 68%

of survey respondents who mentioned waiting times had negative experiences.

There was a mix of survey responses about the waiting times at GP practices. Patients expressed frustration at being unable to make GP appointments the same day or not being able to book ahead. This prolonged the wait for treatment.

*"I had to wait two weeks for access to a certain GP"*

Survey respondent

When survey respondents were asked what went well and what could be improved about booking an appointment with their GP, a large number of people spoke about waiting times.

Of the people who mentioned waiting times, **32% had positive experiences or were understanding of waiting times** and **68% of people told us about negative experiences of long wait times.**

There were misunderstandings around why some people could not see a GP on the same day and were directed to another healthcare professional or a later date.

*"When I asked for a same day appointment all the GP appointments had gone, so I had to see the Nurse Practitioner"*

Survey respondent

## Recommendations

- Consistently signpost patients to other services when an appointment can't be made e.g. hubs, pharmacy, urgent care and NHS 111
- Allow patients to book appointments ahead of time
- Explore ways to prioritise patients based on risk level and need instead of 'first come, first served'

# Digital services

"I have learning difficulties and [am] unable to use a computer or internet"

**Survey respondent**

"I never use apps or online services for health and social care, I need help"

**Dudley resident**



Our research revealed varying preferences and needs of patients when it came to using online services.

Online services can offer convenience or reduce anxiety.

However, these services can exclude individuals facing technological barriers.

## **This may include:**

- People with learning disabilities
- People whose first language is not English
- Older individuals
- People experiencing economic hardship
- People with communication barriers

Accessing online services poses difficulties for 78% of individuals with communication barriers, compared to 43% of those without.

Only 17% of people surveyed reported receiving information or assistance with using technology. Of the 17% many found this helpful, as it enabled them to access online services.

*"[I was] given instructions to enable me to view test results, appointments etc."*

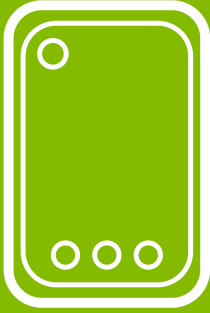
**Survey respondent**

Amongst the 82% of people who did not receive assistance, some said that they would appreciate help. Others were upset with the move to digital methods and prefer to call or go to the surgery in person.

## **Recommendations**

- Provide support for patients to learn to use digital services
- Provide digital and non-digital forms to access GP services
- Ensure patients can book appointments at different times

# Mobile apps



***“I have a learning disability and autism, I cannot use the app without my father’s help”***  
Survey respondent

Use of the NHS App increased during the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> Many patients have continued using it to book appointments, order repeat prescriptions, send questions to their GP and access medical records.

However, there is a lack of patient knowledge of the uses for the NHS App post-pandemic.

Some GP practices utilised other mobile apps to offer online services to their patients.

***“Finding an appointment on the [GP practice] app is harder than finding unicorn droppings”***

**Survey respondent**

Throughout the course of our research, the Black Country ICB was implementing new websites for all GP practices across the borough to meet the new NHS standards.

In order to assess the new service, Healthwatch Dudley volunteers shared their thoughts on the new GP surgery websites from six practices.

They found the user experience positive, with 83% of volunteers stating that overall the websites were very easy to navigate.

Volunteers praised the revamped sites as “very useful”.

***“The website offers easy access to appointment booking and changes, ensuring prompt assistance for patients”***

**Survey respondent**

# Updated websites



**83%**

of Healthwatch Dudley volunteers found the new websites easy to navigate.

# Online forms

*"I used the online system to ask a question, I then got sent an appointment through. So very good service"*

**Survey respondent**

*"My GP surgery constantly refers me online despite me being unable to use technology. **This is upsetting as I am missing out on services"***

**Survey respondent**



Patients can usually contact their GP surgery using a secure and confidential online form on their website.

*"Online forms acknowledged and appointment made very quickly"*

**Survey respondent**

A common complaint was that the online form was accessible only at certain times of the day which can present issues for:

- People with inflexible jobs
- People with caring responsibilities
- People who don't have access to devices at all times

*"The online request form is usually turned off late morning for the rest of the day"*

**Survey respondent**

Patients expressed frustration at the time taken to receive a response from the online form.

*"I had to wait until the form was triaged for an appointment."*

**Survey respondent**

Improvements are taking place which aim to improve the triage systems to ensure patients are seen by the right healthcare professional at the right time.

## Recommendations

- Online forms should be consistent with:
  - Providing information on how online forms are triaged
  - Providing signposting information to ensure patients are not left unsupported, especially for people in crisis
- Develop new triage systems considering the needs of the entire population

# Internet access

*“Anxiety impedes my ability to concentrate when trying to access the internet”*

**Survey respondent**

*“I do not understand the technology”*

**Survey respondent**

**89%**  
of residents stated they have internet access compared to 96% nationally

Whilst the majority suggest they are able to use technology to access GP services, 23% of people told us they were “uncomfortable” or “very uncomfortable” using technology.

*“Some elderly people are not [comfortable with technology] -please don't exclude them”*

**Survey respondent**

Only 89% of survey respondents had internet access, which is lower than the national average of 96%.<sup>8</sup> This may indicate a gap in internet accessibility across the borough. GP practices should not assume that their patients have the ability to use technology.

**3/4** of people who do not have access to the internet are not comfortable using technology.

## Improving access with the Black Country ICB Digital team

The Black Country ICB Digital team has been loaning residents Geobook Laptops, and internet connection if needed, to enable them to access health and social care information.

The devices can also allow people to access services, people and organisations who can help with health, care and education.



**Geobook laptops distributed to Dudley residents**

via The Black Country Connected Programme

For information on the Black Country Connected programme scan here

Or call Healthwatch Dudley on 03000 111 001  
(local rate number)



# Digital Access

## Improving access with the Black Country ICB's Digital Inequalities Programme

Heathwatch Dudley reached out to the Black Country ICB to find out more about its work to improve digital access to GP services. They are aware of some of the barriers local people face, and they have distributed laptops and provided training to people who lack access to the internet. They have also been working collaboratively with GP practices to standardise digital services.

### New and improved GP websites

Every GP website across Dudley has been improved to meet the new NHS England standards making them more user friendly. Patients now have the same opportunity to access digital services, regardless of which GP practice they are registered with.

*"The website is a brilliant addition to your services. It often means I can just send a question instead of waiting on the phone"*

### Increase NHS App usage

The team is working to improve GP practice knowledge and confidence in supporting patients to register and use the NHS App.

They aim to promote the features and benefits of the NHS App with patients.



### Improving the experience of calling GP practices

The digital team is supporting GP practices to move to a new phone system which can:

- Notify patients of their queue position
- Offer a call back so patients don't have to wait on the phone

The system also allows practices to proactively manage telephone demands and adjust their procedures accordingly.



### Improving triage

Improvements are taking place to reduce the 8:00 am rush faced by patients when contacting their GP practice.

When patients make a request to their GP practice, this will be assessed and prioritised by the practice team in a timely manner and they will respond with a number of options, to ensure everyone is seen by the right healthcare professional, at the right time.

### Want more information or support?

Email the Digital First Team on [bcicb.digitalfirstteam@nhs.net](mailto:bcicb.digitalfirstteam@nhs.net)

or call Time 2 Talk on **0300 0120 281**.

Scan here to find out more



# English as a second language

“My GP practice [was] flexible with my needs”

**Survey respondent**

“They provide certain doctors for people who do not speak English, which is nice”

**Survey respondent**

“I have to ask for an interpreter, it’s not automatic”

**Survey respondent**



Survey respondents whose first language is not English faced more challenges when accessing services at their GP practice.

This includes face-to-face appointments, online and via the telephone.

GP services should be aware of the need for interpreting services and should offer them as standard to patients that struggle to understand English.

Poor communication can lead to a lack of doctor-patient trust and to medical error.<sup>9</sup>

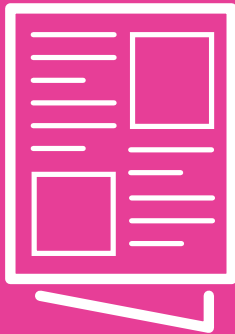
Many people told us how they relied on friends or family to communicate on their behalf. This presents challenges as their helper may not fully understand medical terminology. It also prevents a patient from having confidential appointments.

The purpose of an interpreter is to provide an accurate and neutral role in doctor-patient interactions, which may not happen when a friend or family member is interpreting.<sup>10</sup>

## Recommendations

- Consider targeting recruitment to reflect the language needs of the population. Display languages spoken by staff on website to improve patient choice.
- Alternative solutions that may be used when an interpreter has not been booked include:
  - Language picture chart
  - Longer appointment times
  - Face-to-face appointments
  - Type-Talk
  - Google translate
  - Medical translating applications<sup>10</sup>

# Literacy



*“The receptionist knows I cannot read or write yet kept telling me to fill a form in.*

*Why can't they fill it in for me?”*

**Dudley resident**

# 23%

of the adult Dudley population have no qualifications compared to 18% nationally<sup>11</sup>

We discovered significant barriers in accessing GP services due to low literacy levels. People expressed feeling misunderstood by their GP practice due to not being able to read or write.

## Paul's Story

*“They just said I had to go online. I just walked out as they didn't offer any help, not even to fill the form in for me”*

When Paul attempted to make an appointment at his GP surgery he was directed to the website to complete a form.

Despite informing the receptionist of his difficulty with reading and writing, Paul received no assistance in completing the form.

Paul said he had previously had cancer and was experiencing some concerning symptoms so wanted to speak to the GP about it. As a result, he asked a friend to contact the surgery on his behalf.

Dudley experiences a lower adult literacy rate than the national average.<sup>11</sup> To bridge this gap, GP practices could offer support to patients facing challenges with reading and writing to ensure everyone can access essential services.

## Recommendations

- Raise awareness of literacy needs with staff to ensure understanding
- Provide support for patients who have low literacy
- Improve links between GP practices and education providers to signpost patients to Adult & Community Learning



## Meeting patient needs

# 41%

of people who stammer reported they find it 'very difficult' using the phone to book an appointment<sup>12</sup>

# 43%

of people with additional needs feel their GP surgery doesn't meet their communication needs

**43%** of people who had additional communication needs said their GP doesn't understand or make adjustments to suit their needs. This is compared to 32% of patients who don't have additional communication needs. This highlights the barriers faced by people with additional needs.

Sharing information about patient needs between services, with patient consent, is essential for effective communication during healthcare.

***"GP was not aware I had a stroke, info not passed on from hospital"***

**Survey respondent**

STAMMA, a UK charity and membership organisation representing people who stammer, told us how people across the UK had been hung up on, laughed at and had their medication questioned – simply because they stammer.<sup>12</sup>

Due to the range of communication needs we have identified in this research, a concerted effort needs to be made to address all patient concerns and ensure no one is excluded from treatment.

### Recommendations

- GP practices could work together to appoint **Accessible Information Champions** to receive additional training and identify local challenges, barriers and best practices
- Ensure the reasonable adjustment flag is universally used by all practices<sup>13</sup>
- Give patients with additional needs longer appointment times

# Reception and triage service

“Discussing the colour and texture of [faeces] is not something I care to do with someone on the phone!”

Survey respondent

“I understand why they need to know information”

Survey respondent

“You need to tell lies to get a GP appointment”

Survey respondent

To guide patients to suitable care and minimise waiting times, many GP surgeries adopt a triage system when patients contact the practice to book an appointment.

Triage systems involve asking patients questions in order to direct them to the correct service.

Whilst some patients understood the purpose of triage systems, others expressed they were uncomfortable sharing personal information over the phone or in a waiting room.

**“I found this uncomfortable and intrusive”**  
Survey respondent

We heard from people who were concerned about the ability of the call handler to direct patients to appropriate care. Four patients described telling a **“lie”** in order to see a GP.

*“You have to make it seem worse than it is. Otherwise, they tell you to see a pharmacist or give bad advice over the phone”*  
Survey respondent

## Sandra's Story

*The receptionist did not listen or understand my medical query even though I explained it more than once.*

*Because the minor ailment treatment wasn't enough, I ended up being poorly on holiday and spent an evening in hospital on drips.*

*I don't think receptionists should be able to triage patients asking for an appointment, they are not medically trained and they don't know everyone's medical history.*



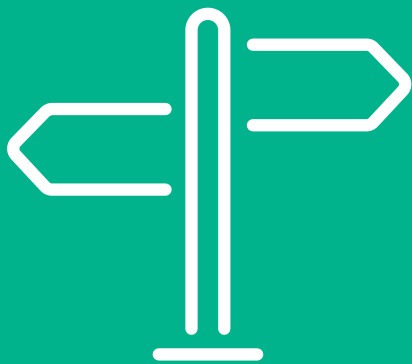
# Knowledge of services

“My son has no idea how to access other services”

Survey respondent

“The whole team is professional and do their best for each patient”

Survey respondent



# 86%

would like more information on the services their GP practice provides

GP practices employ a range of healthcare professionals that can treat patients depending on their needs.

In recent years there has been a diversification of the different healthcare professions available to patients at GP practices with the aim of reducing waiting times.<sup>14</sup>

We aimed to investigate the community's awareness of these diverse services.

We heard from patients who said that there was information about other healthcare services on the practice website, however these were links to private services.

*“I've noticed that the surgery website seems to offer private services, which is a dreadful thing to do”*

Survey respondent

One patient was aware of a list of other healthcare professionals, however they were not sure how to book with different services.

*“Advertised on TV in waiting area but many could be unaware”*

Survey respondent

Overall there was a mix of patient knowledge of services. But there was an overwhelming willingness from the public to learn about other services and how to access them.

## Recommendation

Provide information to patients about the range of services and healthcare professionals available at their GP practice.

# Doctor-patient relationship

**“I feel there’s been a deterioration in the doctor-patient relationship since Covid”**

Survey respondent

**“There used to be more doctors”**

Surgery patient



Accessibility isn't just about booking appointments; it's also about how well you're understood during the consultation.

We heard positive stories of how their GP or other healthcare professionals were understanding and adapted their approach to meet patient needs.

*“My daughters have autism and they are patient with them and give them more time”*

**Survey respondent**

*“Doctor is pleasant, caring and listens to my concerns”*

**Surgery patient**

But for some people their relationship with their GP has worsened in recent years.

They feel this is due to a perceived “lack of staff” and not being able to see the same GP regularly.

*“I don’t feel that I am known at the practice; for many years I usually saw the same GP who knew me well and who has retired recently”*

**Survey respondent**

## Recommendations

- Record patient communication preferences so staff are prepared for consultations
- Allow patients to choose whether to wait to see their named GP

# Right to access

Everyone in the UK has a right to register with, and see, a GP. Patients do not need identification (ID) or proof of address in order to register with a GP surgery.<sup>15</sup>

Healthwatch Dudley has heard from people who have been refused the right to register with a GP practice because they do not have ID documents or a fixed address.

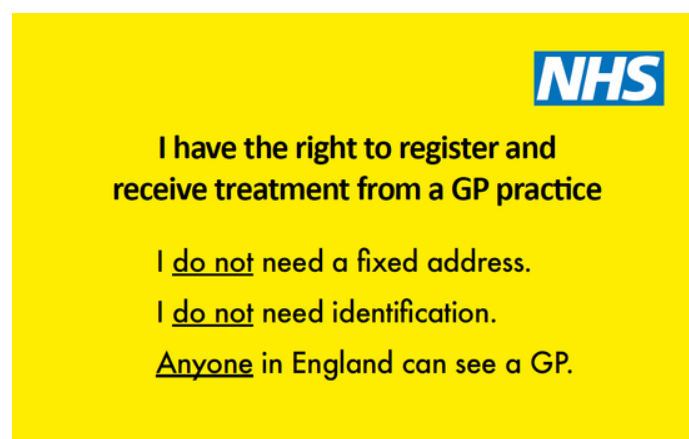
## Davyd's Story

Davyd has never registered with a GP in the UK and does not have any ID.

Healthwatch Dudley provided him with a 'I have the right to register with a GP' card which Davyd presented at a GP Practice in Dudley.

Davyd was told by the receptionist that he would have to complete paperwork and return with his ID - in spite of the NHS endorsed card stating: I do not need a fixed address / I do not need identification / Anyone in England can see a GP.

We recommend sharing information on the right of people to register without a fixed address or identification with all staff at GP practices.



## Alison's Story

*"When trying to get a telephone consultation with my Mum's GP for a prescription for antibiotics on a Friday afternoon, it was made very difficult. I knew she had a Urinary Tract Infection (UTI) and if caught quickly it would resolve.*

*The surgery had appointments but I had to call 111 to get a telephone slot. I had taken a urine sample into the surgery. I sat outside in my car to receive a call from the GP to confirm it was a UTI and then waited for a prescription and this all took about three hours.*

*If I had left my Mum she would have got worse and probably been admitted to hospital."*



Alison's story displays the difficulties people who are carers experience when obtaining treatment for loved ones from their GP practice. It highlights how carers are essential and how some more vulnerable patients could struggle to access care without their support.

**We recommend exploring ways to prioritise services for carers and more vulnerable patients.**

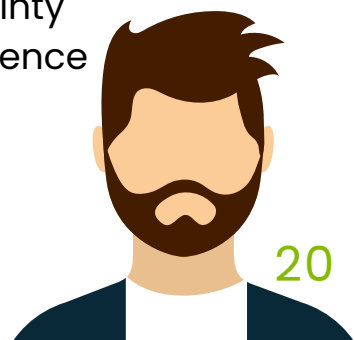
## Joey's Story

*"I rang for an appointment, the receptionist directed me to go to the pharmacy. The pharmacist advised an over the counter solution which I purchased.*

*Within six hours my issue had worsened and on contacting the GP surgery again the next day, the GP rang me back urgently wanting to see me. He was not impressed with what I had been advised by the pharmacist. I wasn't impressed that the receptionist could make a decision to send me to a pharmacy."*

Appropriate triage and signposting is essential for getting patients the right care. Triage to other health professionals can reduce waiting times and prioritise patients that need to see a GP. However, uncertainty in this process can lead to clinical mistakes and reduce confidence in the service.

**We recommend exploring ways to improve triage systems so that patient safety is prioritised.**



# Recommendations



## Commit to improving accessibility

- GP practices should work together to appoint Accessibility Champions across the borough
- Explore the reasons for high levels of missed GP appointments in Dudley and address the issues to improve availability



## Improve the ways patients can contact the surgery

- Ensure both digital and non-digital options are available for all GP surgery services
- Provide training for staff to understand and address barriers to access
- Work with patient groups to address specific access needs
- Consider the cost of phone calls



## Make digital services accessible for everyone

- Expand the times online services are available
- Ensure online services are user-friendly
- When patients use online forms, display a message to explain the triage process and information for alternative services
- Promote benefits of using mobile apps
- Promote organisations that can help patients access digital services



## Support individual communication needs

- Ensure the reasonable adjustment flag is universally used by all practices
- Automatically attempt to provide an interpreter for all patients who need it
  - If this is not possible use other methods to aid communication
- Literacy support
  - Educate staff on different literacy needs
  - Provide support to patients who struggle with reading or writing
  - Signpost patients to adult education to support literacy



## Reduce waiting times

- Refer patients to other services when no appointments are available
- GP practices could work together to share patient load
- Prioritise appointments for those with additional needs
- Consider using locum GPs and other healthcare professionals to manage high demand



## Patient choice in treatment

- Display GP and other staff names on online booking systems so patients can choose who they see
- Offer more flexibility i.e. booking ahead if preference to see named GP
- Inform patients about the range of services and healthcare professionals available at their GP practice so they can make informed decisions



## Patient feedback

- GP practices could reinvigorate Patient Participation Groups to meet the needs of their patients.

# Making change

*“We are grateful for opportunities afforded by gaining valuable insight in to patient experiences in the practice”*

**Practice Manager**

*“Thank you for your feedback, with this we can make changes to improve services to our patients”*

**Practice Manager**

# All

six GP practices visited have committed to changes following our Enter & View visits



As mentioned previously, Healthwatch Dudley conducted Enter & View visits to six GP practices, to speak to patients and assess the waiting rooms.

We shared our findings with the practice managers and made recommendations to improve access for patients.

We are pleased to report that all six practices we visited responded positively to our findings and each one has committed to making changes to address issues raised by patients.

## **These changes include:**

- Regularly updating notice boards
- Assessing their phone system
- Updating digital and non-digital materials to inform patients about the services offered
- Promoting digital education
- Engaging with Patient Participation Groups
- Reviewing online appointments offered

Two GP practices informed us of their existing plans to update their phone systems, which they hope will address the issues raised by patients.

One GP practice is in the process of moving to a triage system to direct patients to appropriate care on first contact.

**More information on the Enter & View visits can be found on our website.**

***“We consider all feedback as positive as it all provides opportunity for growth and improvement”***

**Practice Manager**



# Response to our findings

We shared our report and recommendations with stakeholders across the borough to allow them to respond to them.

Professionals from the Black Country ICB, DIHC NHS Trust and local GPs were open to receiving feedback from the people of Dudley borough and proactively responded to our recommendations.

***As a Dudley GP, this report provides a really useful insight to the experiences of our patients.***

*Access to appointments in primary care is a national issue and this report rightly captures that people who have extra needs are sometimes disproportionately affected.*

*All too often we rely on numerical data and the data here provides the story behind the numbers which is key to driving improvements.*

*I would like to thank those who took the time to respond to this survey. Hopefully we can utilise this information to support all of our patients' access timely medical care.*

*Dr Lloyd Baron*

Dudley GP  
Clinical Advisor for Health Inequalities Dudley Integrated Health  
and Care NHS Trust

*"[This report] includes some very valuable insights, particularly regarding groups of people who have difficulties in gaining access"*

**Dudley GP**

**Colleagues at the Black Country ICB are very appreciative of the report and the recommendations.**

The Black Country ICB team would like to thank the local people who have taken the time to share their views.

They will work with Healthwatch Dudley and other partners to explore the recommendations to improve access to GP services across the borough.

# Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Dudley would like to thank the people of Dudley borough who shared their thoughts and experiences with us. The overwhelming response from the community helped shape our research and highlighted barriers to access.

Thank you to the community and patient groups who shared our research with different groups of people to gain a deeper insight into their experiences.

The groups and organisations that kindly contributed to our research are:

- The Alzheimer's Society
- Beacon Centre
- Saltbrook Place
- Dudley North Cluster Connect
- Brierley Hill Connect
- Here4Youth
- Dudley Stroke Association
- Queen's Cross Network
- Rattle and Rhyme at Brierley Hill Library
- The Women's Discovery Group
- What? Centre - Gay Men's Support Group
- Outside the Boom Box
- King Edward VI College
- Dudley Deaf Focus Group

We would also like to thank the six GP practices we visited for Enter & View visits. We received warm welcomes and positive responses to feedback. We are pleased the practices have committed to acting on the feedback they received from their patients.

We also extend our appreciation to our valued Healthwatch Dudley volunteers for their dedicated time and valuable contributions. Their commitment and efforts in engaging with the public, collecting surveys, participating in the Enter & View team, entering data, and assessing GP practice websites are greatly appreciated.

## Notes

Comments may have been edited for clarity and conciseness. Names of the general public have been changed to maintain anonymity.

Healthwatch Dudley welcomes feedback from the public and professional bodies to continue to improve our work.

If you would like clarification on the methodology used through this piece of research or have queries regarding data or analysis please contact our team.

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# healthwatch

Dudley



## Committed to quality

Healthwatch Dudley is committed to providing a quality service, from how we collect data, to the information we provide. Every three years we perform an in-depth audit, in conjunction with Healthwatch England, to ensure we meet this high standard.

**Please contact us if you would like this  
report in another language or format.**

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