

People across Dudley have told us of their difficulties accessing GP services. This is in line with national trends, research shows a general dissatisfaction with GP services. However, this research doesn't capture people's experiences in their own words or provide detailed insights into real patient needs.



1048 people shared their experiences

Healthwatch Dudley reached out to the community to hear real patient stories.

Booking an appointment

61% of people booked their last appointment by phone.

GP practices differed in the booking options offered.

Costs prevent some patients from booking appointments by phone

Patients appreciate flexible booking options, especially when juggling other commitments.

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

"The pre-recorded message could be a lot shorter, telephone calls cost a lot of money"

Waiting times

68% of people who mentioned waiting times had negative experiences.



"I had to wait two weeks to see a certain GP"

Patients who used online forms to contact their surgery told us of the quick response time.

"Online forms acknowledged and appointment made very quickly"

Digital services

Digital services, such as apps and websites, aim to improve access to services. However, they can exclude some groups of people.

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

89%

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

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.

Every GP website across Dudley has been improved to make them more user friendly.

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

English as a second language

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

"I have to ask for an interpreter, it's not automatic"

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.

People who use BSL may struggle to contact their GP surgery. Deaf people told us how they had to rely on friends and family to book appointments.

"They need Sign Video"

Literacy

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



"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?"

43% of people who had additional communication needs said their GP doesn't meet their needs.

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.

Reception and triage

To guide patients to suitable care and minimise waiting times, many GP surgeries adopt a triage system.

"I found this uncomfortable and intrusive"

There were some misunderstandings about the roles of reception and other staff.

86% of people would like more information on the services their GP practice provides.

Everyone in the UK has a right to register with, and see, a GP. We heard from people who have been refused the right to register with a GP practice because they do not have an ID or a fixed address.

We recognise the difficult situation facing GP practices, with a reducing workforce, an ageing population and increasing costs. Hard working practice staff are facing more challenges in treating local people.

However, we have identified potential solutions that could improve access for marginalised patients. We encourage services to work with their patients to improve access.

- ✓ **Commit to improving accessibility**
- ✓ **Improve the ways patients can contact the surgery**
- ✓ **Make digital services accessible for everyone**
- ✓ **Support individual communication needs**
- ✓ **Work creatively to reduce waiting times**
- ✓ **Empower patients so have choice in treatment**
- ✓ **Use patient feedback to improve services**

Detailed recommendations can be found in our full report.

We encourage GP practices to consider how they could work with the people in their area.

Healthwatch Dudley conducted Enter & View visits to six GP practices. We shared our findings with the practices and we are pleased to report that **all six practices have committed to making changes**, thanks to feedback from 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

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

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

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

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.

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

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.

To read the full report visit: <https://t.ly/OdAHE>

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

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Healthwatch Dudley is committed to providing a quality service. We perform audits, with Healthwatch England to ensure we meet this standard.