

# Championing what matters to you

Healthwatch Bolton  
Annual Report 2021-22



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# Message from our chair

Once again we have worked incredibly hard to listen to our community and ensure their voices are heard. Our fantastic staff team and volunteers have worked tirelessly to make new connections and networks and they have got involved in many new initiatives in Bolton.

Our work has continued to focus on ensuring we hear the voices that are less likely to be heard. We have reached out to so many different groups and individuals from a wide variety of diverse backgrounds, promoting Healthwatch, and giving people the opportunity to share their experiences with us.

We are proud of the work we have been doing in partnership with Bolton GP Federation that has built on the work we did on cervical cancer screening. The Federation have acted on some of our recommendations and have worked hard to understand the barriers that communities face. They have really been proactive in bringing screening opportunities to where people are, to make it easier, and more convenient, and to ultimately encourage uptake of screening in the more deprived areas of Bolton.

The work we did on bereavement during Covid 19 with people from ethnically diverse backgrounds resulted in the provision of extra counselling sessions, and mini mental health conferences, that took place throughout Bolton, to help people manage their mental health issues. I would like to thank Julie Darbyshire – Operations Manager, for her commitment, dedication and ability to communicate at all levels, which has been key to successfully completing some very important projects.

We look forward to another interesting but challenging year ahead, with the impact of Covid 19, the economy, and the changing landscape of health and care systems. We will continue to champion the voices of our community and ensure these voices do not go unheard.



Jim Fawcett  
**Healthwatch Bolton 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.”

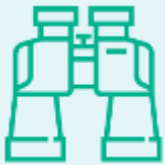
**Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England**



# About us

## Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Bolton is your local health and social care champion. 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



**820 people**

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

**343 people**

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

## Making a difference to care



We published

**5 reports**

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

Our most popular report was

**Primary Care – Accessing Your GP**

which highlighted the struggles people have on accessing their GP, including contacting their GP & getting appointments that are suitable for them.

## Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have

**12**

outstanding volunteers, who gave up their time to make care better for our community.

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

**£135,250 (core grant)**

Which is **12.5% less** than the previous year.

We also currently employ

**4 staff**

who help us carry out this work.

## How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring



Working with HWE we looked into the impact of long waiting times to receive hospital treatment.



We worked with Bolton GP Federation on cervical cancer screening, encouraging women from ethnically diverse backgrounds to have a smear test

Summer



We gathered feedback from people who were struggling to access their GP and to access a suitable appointment.



We supported the #BecauseWeAllCare campaign which saw 54,000 people come forward to tell us about issues they faced with services.

Autumn



We engaged with people from ethnically diverse backgrounds to talk about substance misuse and support needs, to inform a new support service in Bolton



We urged the Government to act after reporting a 452% increase in people struggling to see an NHS dentist.

Winter



In partnership with Bolton Carers Support, we talked to unpaid carers about their experiences and in particular the impact of isolation and loneliness



Our findings from this work were welcomed by the Local Authority who have used the information to feed into the carers strategy currently being refreshed in Bolton.

# 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



## Doing Things Differently: Making Cervical Screening Accessible in the Community

Thanks to people sharing their experience of cervical cancer screening with us, we worked with Bolton GP Federation who picked up on some of our recommendations:

- working more closely with women from ethnically diverse backgrounds
- offering more flexible and accessible appointment times
- increasing education and understanding of cervical cancer

From this a new project was created to bring cervical cancer screening into communities, particularly encouraging those from ethnically diverse backgrounds to come along.

Two drop-in clinics were held in the community at a GP practice and at Bolton Council of Mosques community centre. As well as smear testing, the clinics also carried out blood pressure checks, BMI checks and Covid boosters given.



**22 patients seen in the community**  
**22 conversations to address concerns and alleviate nervousness**

### What difference did this make

The project was innovative and allowed things to be done differently and non-traditionally

- No appointments were needed
- The community defined the time and place
- Lots of time to chat and discuss concerns
- Offered direct access to a lead nurse
- Allowed other services such as Covid vaccines, BP checks to be administered

Healthwatch Bolton worked in partnership with the community, liaised and made links to ensure the screening locations were in the heart of communities and best placed to encourage uptake from more ethnically diverse communities.

**The project's lead nurse has also won an award for Innovator of the Year for her work to reduce health inequalities and increase uptake in cervical smears for women in Bolton**



“I would have booked the appointment and then not gone, because I would have got myself worked up about it. The only reason I am here today is because I have walked in and not had time to over-think things. I just want to get it done now”





## Improving Access to GP Practices

**Thanks to people sharing their experiences of accessing their GP, we have helped the NHS identify issues with GP access and pushed for improvements.**

The Covid 19 pandemic changed the way people access their health and care services. This has meant that people have not had the same opportunity to engage with a health professional in the way they were used to.

Through our online survey and community engagement work, we heard from over 400 people in Bolton about their experiences of trying to access their GP. Whilst some people responded positively to the changes, welcoming the introduction of different and more convenient ways of accessing the GP, we found that access was overwhelmingly difficult for a lot of people with particular practices. This was mainly due to being unable to get through on the phone, being unable to use the technology such as the Apps and not being able to see a GP face to face.

Together with NHS Bolton CCG, we looked at the challenges people faced and we made recommendations to improve accessibility, communication and information sharing.



*“Needed a sick note after surgery. 45 attempts to get through over several hours. Ended up going in to ask for it.”*



### What difference did this make

Due to our call for the change, the CCG has

- Purchased 100 additional telephone lines, which will now average 8 per practice
- Will be asking GPs to offer substantially more appointments from April 2022
- Practices must now – post-pandemic, ensure they deliver appropriate levels of face to face to face care
- Distributed posters and information about using community pharmacy consultation services to various venues in the community



*“It is clear from the Healthwatch report that patients require GPs to offer a mix of different contact methods”*  
**Niruban Ratnarajah – Chair, NHS Bolton CCG**



## Three ways we have made a difference for the community

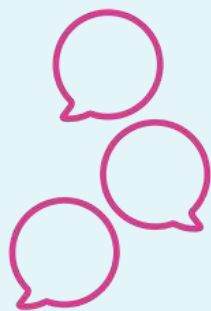
Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.



### 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 talked to people from ethnically diverse backgrounds looking at the impact of bereavement during Covid 19. This work identified a gap in access to culturally appropriate counselling services and accessible information. From this work a new counselling provision was set up working with a local charity. Mini mental health conferences have also been held in different communities in Bolton to share information and ensure that communities know where they can go to access help with their mental health issues.



### Getting services to involve the public

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

We worked with ethnically diverse communities in Bolton on substance misuse and support needs. We did in-depth case studies from both people who had experienced substance misuse themselves, and also the carer of someone who was struggling with this. The work we did has fed into the Local Authority substance misuse consultation to shape new and better services in Bolton to support people. The work has highlighted the needs of people in different cultural and religious backgrounds.



### 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.**

We have known about dental problems for a long time. In 2016 we published our report highlighting that some people were struggling to access dental care. Over the years we have continued to hear from the public about access problems. Last year we called for reform of NHS dentistry, co-signing a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for NHS dentistry to be accessible and affordable for everyone.

# 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
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need



## Signposting people who needed additional support Egg-free flu vaccine

The patient was allergic to eggs and was struggling to get a flu vaccine without eggs. The patient's GP practice said they do not supply egg-free flu vaccines. The patient is a wheelchair user, living with long-term health conditions and requested to have a flu vaccination home visit.

Healthwatch Bolton raised the issue with Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group's Medicines Optimisation and Prescribing Team. They confirmed that there is an egg free flu vaccine and they arranged, with the practice, for the patient to have the egg-free vaccine via a home visit.



*"I just wanted to say thank you so much for looking into and arranging the egg-free flu vaccine. I had the home visit on Wednesday and the jab, without your input I would not have been able to have access to the jab as I have been told on numerous occasions that the surgery do not offer it."*



## Access to GP appointments

The patient, who is a carer, received a long-term, life changing diagnosis and wanted to speak with their GP. The patient was unable to get a face-to-face GP appointment and/or a telephone consultation. The patient is dyslexic and is unable to complain in writing. The practice did allow the patient to complain verbally. The patient contacted Healthwatch Bolton to make a formal complaint.



We escalated the issues to Bolton Clinical Commissioning Group. We included additional Information, Advice and Guidance for the GP to consider. Within a few days, the practice contacted the patient and apologised. They offered on-going GP appointments, and assisted the patient's family members with their health conditions so it will be easy for the patient to cope at home.



*"I am very grateful for all of your help. I don't think I would have got anywhere without you."*

*"Many thanks. Excellent as ever."*



# 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 NHS and social care.

This year our volunteers:

- Carried out website reviews for local services on the information they provide and assessing their accessibility.
- Supported us with developing and improving our I.T systems.
- Attended various meetings representing us and feeding information back to our board of trustees.





### Kiran Syeda

“Hello! I’m Kiran Syeda, a voluntary treasurer at Healthwatch Bolton. I chose to volunteer for Healthwatch Bolton because I wanted to contribute any suggestions for the annual budget and report. My accountancy background gives me a good understanding of financial planning.

I feel more engaged with users of health services through being informed of the public surveys and awareness which Healthwatch advocates for. I anticipate advocating for more integrated health systems and build back fairer initiative as set out by the new Health and Care Act 2022.”



### Ms W

"I volunteer for Healthwatch as I feel that without input from those living in Bolton one would not be able to gather information of what is needed to improve our health services within Bolton. Volunteering this way is also a way of putting ones experiences forward thus helping others which is actually the forefront of why I volunteer. It is rewarding and an amazing way in which to discuss and be with like minded people. I will continue to volunteer in the hope that there can be the continuous voice for those who live in Bolton."



### Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



[www.healthwatchbolton.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchbolton.co.uk)



01204 394603



[info@healthwatchbolton.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchbolton.co.uk)

# 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		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£135,250	Staff costs	£94,832
Additional funding	£0	Operational costs	£23,752
		Support and administration	£2,213
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£135,250</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£120,797</b>

## Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Access to Primary Care, GPs and Dentistry
2. Adult and children’s mental health
3. Widening our community engagement, seeking out new opportunities to engage and give a voice to those we don't traditionally hear

## 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 Bolton, 27 Silverwell St, Bolton, BL1 1PP

Healthwatch Bolton uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.





## The way we work

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

Our Healthwatch board consists of 9 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 5 times and made decisions on matters such as work-plan and finance issues.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We use insight and information from our engagement work and the feedback we get from our information, advice and signposting service.

### 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, by email, provided a webform on our website, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual & physical activities and engaged with the public through social media.

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 working closely in partnership with faith leaders, community leaders and tutors who teach ESOL. This has given us many opportunities to gather valuable feedback from a diverse range of people.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website, newsletter, on social media and we share with our partners

### Responses to recommendations and requests

We had 0 providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations.

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 Bolton is represented on the Bolton Health and Wellbeing Board by Jim Fawcett.

### 2021-2022 Outcomes

Project / Activity Area	Changes made to services
<p><b>Hospital Waiting Times</b>                      We researched this topic under our secondary care priority area. We received local feedback from Bolton residents on this piece of work. The work looked at information, communication and support needs whilst people are waiting for hospital care. The work highlighted the need for regular and accurate communication and updates about how long people were waiting for treatment. People reported they had good support with pain management.</p>	<p>Bolton Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (BFT) have contacted every patient who is waiting for treatment to discuss their condition, and the next steps for them, however, they know that many of their patients may be experiencing anxiety, stress and discomfort as a result of their wait. Some dedicated resources have been developed to support people to stay as well as possible while they're waiting and work is ongoing to increase the support available via ORCHA apps for people who are waiting for treatment. They will make sure that they continue to communicate with every patient that is waiting longer than expected. They have recently introduced digital letters and a text reminder service to improve the way they communicate with patients and all patients on their waiting list have been contacted with an update about their surgery.</p>
<p><b>Loneliness and Isolation and Unpaid Carers.</b>                      We researched this topic under our adult mental health priority area. The work has explored the experiences of unpaid carers, physical and mental health support needs, information and communication and suggestions for improvements to carers issues.</p>	<p>This work will feed into the refresh of the Carers Strategy being developed by Bolton Local Authority. The impact of this work will be followed up this year.</p>
<p><b>Connecting with our Community</b>                      We continue to forge new links and relationships with the people of our community. We strive to ensure that we hear the voices of those we don't normally hear from.</p>	<p>This year we have met with and attended 144 events/meeting, sharing and promoting our work. We find that there is a snowball effect when we meet a new group as this usually leads to another group meeting with us and we encourage groups to forge links with others that can help and support them.</p>

# healthwatch

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