





Annual Report 2024-2025

Unlocking the power of people-driven care

Healthwatch Bolton

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I'm proud of the impact we've made this year—amplifying local voices to shape better health and care for all. This would not be possible without the public willingly sharing their health and care experiences with us. And for my incredibly hardworking staff and volunteers. My heart-felt thanks go to each and everyone.

Julie Darbyshire – Chief Officer

A message from our chair

This year, we've focused on the impact of our work and how your voices are driving meaningful change. We've closely monitored our efforts to ensure that the recommendations from our previous work are being implemented. In this report, you can read about the progress we've made in areas such as menopause support and information, and maternity experiences. We are also proud to have been shortlisted for a Healthwatch Impact Award for our work on menopause.

As you're aware, the NHS has faced immense pressure in recent years, with the ongoing challenges of the pandemic, as well as Covid, flu, and other respiratory illnesses. As a result, many people have endured distressing delays in Accident & Emergency (A&E) departments while waiting for necessary treatment. The use of 'corridor care' should always be a last resort and should never become standard practice. We've worked to ease the strain on A&E services by investigating why some individuals seek non-urgent care at A&E. Our outreach included engaging with diverse groups such as ethnic minorities, disabled individuals, and those with language barriers. The findings and actions we've taken are detailed in this report.

Looking ahead, the challenges for the NHS and public services show no signs of easing, with the cost of living and government budget cuts significantly impacting people's lives. As changes to health and care services begin to take effect, they may become more complex to navigate, and demand for support will increase. Please be assured that we remain committed to supporting you, as always, with your concerns and enquiries. Our dedicated team will continue to be here to help.

Finally, I want to extend a heartfelt thank you to Julie, Leah, and Yasmin, as well as our Trustee Board, finance director and volunteers, for their support and unwavering efforts to improve health and care services.



Despite ongoing challenges, we remain committed to supporting you, with our dedicated team continuing to improve health and care services for all.

Jim Fawcett - Chair

About us

Healthwatch Bolton is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Healthwatch Bolton has been an invaluable partner in shaping community-driven initiatives. Their expertise in designing and leading projects to actively capture the voices of our communities has been instrumental in ensuring that local concerns around our urgent care services are heard. Their responsiveness and insightful advice on key community issues have significantly influenced our strategic direction, allowing us to make well-informed decisions that truly reflect the needs of the people. Zabina Rahman, Assistant Director of Strategy and Delivery



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

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



Our values are:

Equity: We're compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.

Collaboration: We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.

Impact: We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.

Independence: Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.

Truth: We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

We supported more than 12,429 people to have their say and get information about their care. We currently employ 3 staff and, our work is supported by 4 volunteers."

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



1341 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, via community engagement, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

We gathered **370** pieces of intelligence via our Information, Advice and Guidance services and through community engagement, signposting many people to advice and information and providing one to one support.

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



We published **four** intelligence reports gathering feedback of people's experiences of using health and care services.

We published **two** further reports on Choosing Healthcare and Patient Choice.

Statutory funding:



1341 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

374 people came to us for clear advice and information and to share their feedback on their experiences.

Working together for change

We've worked with neighbouring Healthwatch to ensure people's experiences of care are heard at the Integrated Care System (ICS) level, and they influence decisions made about services at Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board

This year, we've worked with nine Healthwatch across **Greater Manchester** to achieve the following:

A collaborative network of local Healthwatch:



We have progressed into the second year of our partnership agreement with the ICS, as part of a network of 10 local Healthwatch to amplify the voices of people across the region. We've contributed to regional strategies, produced Greater Manchester-wide reporting, and launched shared platforms to strengthen our insight. Our representative ensures lived experience is heard and influences decisions across the ICS.

The big conversation:



We listened to thousands of people across Greater Manchester on topics like ADHD, Menopause, Pharmacy, Urgent Care and Children & Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS). These insights were shared with the ICS and used to inform strategy, consultations, and influence service design. By working together across the region, we've made sure the experiences of individuals and communities are central to how health and care services are planned and delivered.

Building strong relationships to achieve more:



In November, Healthwatch in Greater Manchester hosted a conference, bringing together ICS leaders, Healthwatch staff, the Voluntary and Community sector and communities. We presented our work across the network, highlighted the importance of Healthwatch work and explored new ways of working, including stronger patient representation and co-production at ICS level.

We've also summarised some of our other outcomes achieved this year in the Statutory Statements section at the end of this report.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.

Here are some examples of our work in **Bolton** this year:

Simple Changes Lead to Big Differences



Hearing personal experiences and the impact on people's lives helps services better understand the issues people face.

We highlighted that a service provider was not showing information explicitly on their website about how to make a complaint or raise a concern.

The provider has now rectified this so people can clearly see the information.

Understanding the patient experience



By involving local people, services help improve care for everyone.

Health professionals tell us that they really value the insight that our intelligence brings. It helps them understand how patients are experiencing their services. A health researcher at Bolton Hospital is adjusting and improving her practice after reading our maternity report, as she now better understands how a patient may be feeling whilst awaiting their appointment.

Improving care over time



Change takes time. We work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

We share all our intelligence and thematic reports with providers of health and care services in Bolton. This gives them a flavour of some of the issues people struggle with, that providers are not always aware of. It also allows providers to give us feedback about what actions they are taking to improve services.

Services can't improve if they don't know what's wrong. Your experiences shine a light on issues that may otherwise go unnoticed.

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Championing community concerns to improve information and support on menopause

Last year, we championed the voices of our community to help improve information and support for perimenopause and menopause

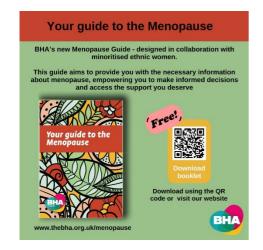
People told us that they struggled to find good information and support and that health professionals needed better training and understanding on perimenopause and menopause.

What did we do?

We shared our report, (Menopause and Me), with commissioners and providers of health and care services in Bolton. The report contained key recommendations which resulted in the differences made below.

What difference did this make?

- More training opportunities are being made available for health and care professionals.
- A booklet 'Your Guide to the Menopause' has been produced offering support and information on menopause symptoms and remedies. This can be downloaded by scanning the QR code.
- Information on pre-payment prescriptions certificates is now being made available by text message, to people who are using Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) medications.
- Community Champions are sharing information in communities.
- Awareness sessions are starting to take place in schools.



Improving Maternity Services in Bolton

Women/birthing people told us they wanted improvements in:

- · Staffing levels
- Communication and support
- Mental health support
- · A more welcoming post-natal ward
- · More consistent staff attention on the post-natal ward

What did we do?

We presented our report **Maternity and You** to commissioners and from this an action plan for improvements was drafted.

What difference did this make?

- All women/birthing people will have the contact numbers available on the front of the hand-held notes.
- Handover protocols have been improved to ensure all staff know what is in the notes for the birthing person.
- A member of staff is now allocated as communicator between the woman/birthing person and birthing partner in an emergency.
- Welcome packs and comfortable chairs are now available in the post-natal area.
- Staffing levels are reviewed three times in 24 hours to ensure appropriate levels.
- Women/birthing people are prompted during the daily postnatal check, to check on their mental wellbeing.
- ❖ A Birth Reflection Clinic is now available for anyone who wishes to discuss their birthing experience.

Improving Maternity Services - How Your Voice Makes a Difference





'I found the report incredibly insightful and easy to follow. It captured the authentic voices and raw experiences of birthing people using the service, which made it both engaging and impactful.

The case study stood out to me the most. It offered a glimpse into what an individual's journey through the service might look like. As someone who will be based in the antenatal diabetes clinic, the description of the waiting room experience — where "everyone there had some concerns with their pregnancy" — really resonated with me. It highlighted how overwhelming and emotionally heavy that space can feel for many. **RA**



The full report and recommendations will be taken through our Health Inequalities Group for consideration, and we will be working with the Maternity Voice Partnership to take the necessary action within our antenatal, labour and birth and postnatal clinical areas. We look forward to sharing regular updates publicly about the difference the feedback has made.

Fiona Noden - Chief Executive, Bolton Hospitals NHS Trust

Choosing Where to Go for Health and Care

We worked with Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership and Bolton Community and Voluntary Services (CVS) to find out what people knew about their local health and care services and how to use them.

What did we do?

We launched a survey and held focus groups to gather feedback on knowledge about GPs/Out of Hours Services, NHS 111, Pharmacies, Urgent Treatment Centres, A & E, and the Urgent Dental Care Service.

What did we find?

- We found that people attend A & E usually when signposted by another health organisation such as NHS 111.
- People have the knowledge of what services pharmacies offer, but not the whole range.
- Some people attend A & E with non-life-threatening conditions simply because they feel they have **no choice**, as they cannot access timely care elsewhere.
- Some people still struggle to access a timely GP appointment.
- Some people are unaware what an urgent treatment centre is or how to access one.
- There was some awareness of the urgent dental treatment service.

What difference did this make?

- ❖ The feedback was used to create tailored information to inform and educate community groups of alternative options to attending A & E departments. In time, once more people have the knowledge and awareness that there are other places to access care, then inappropriate A & E attendances should fall.
- People should be able to access timely care and treatment as they will have a better idea of where to go for their care depending on their health concern.

Choosing Where to Go for Health and Care



Khidma Ladies Group Session

People also shared their own experiences of using health and care services. We fed all this information back to commissioners in our report **Choosing Your Healthcare** which you can read here: Report

People told us how much they valued the information that we shared with them about their local health and care services and how and when to use them. Some people had no knowledge of certain services.



Bolton Hindu Age Inspiration (BHAI) Group Session



The partnership between NHS Greater Manchester – Bolton Locality and Healthwatch Bolton has continued to grow in strength and purpose, reflecting a shared commitment to improving the health, wellbeing, and care experiences of residents across our borough. Through close collaboration on a number of engagement and awareness-raising initiatives, we have been able to hear more directly from our communities, particularly those whose voices are too often under-represented. This work has played a vital role in shaping services that are more inclusive, better understood, and more responsive to the diverse needs of Bolton's population.

Anthony Szylak – Senior Project Manager – Urgent Care

Get to Know Where to Go

When you are not feeling well, it can sometimes be difficult knowing where to turn. So, it's important to know how to use your local health and care services.



Using Your GP

You should always contact your GP practice first if your concern is not an emergency. If you cannot get an appointment, then call NHS 111 or use your local pharmacy.

NHS 111

Dial III if you need help with a health concern and advice and information on how to manage it. They can also arrange for you to attend an Urgent Treatment Centre at your local hospital if necessary.





Using your Pharmacy

Sometimes there is no need to contact your GP as your local pharmacist can help you with health issues such as some minor infections, and in some cases issue prescription medicine without seeing a GP.

Using Accident & Emergency (A & E)

A & E should only used for life-threatening conditions, such as heart attacks, serious road traffic accidents and if you are having chest pain, shortness of breath, broken limbs, heavy bleeding, suspected stroke. **Dial 999 if you need an ambulance.** Try your GP, NHS 111 or pharmacist before attending A & E.





Using the Urgent Dental Care Service

If you need urgent help or you don't have a regular dentist, the Greater Manchester Urgent Dental Care Service can treat you for emergency dental treatment. **Call 0333 332 3800.** The service is available from 8am to 10pm every day by appointment only.

The above information can be downloaded from our website as a handy guide and is also available in **Urdu, Gujarati and Punjabi**. (You can also view videos too in these languages). Click here to see more: <u>Get to know where to go</u>

Patient Choice - We asked people if they had been given a choice of provider when referred for specialist care

We worked with Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership to find out if people were aware they had the right to choose where to receive their secondary/specialist healthcare.

What did we do?

We launched a survey to ask about experiences of being given a choice of care provider, and what conversations people had with their GP if they were given a choice.

What did we find?

- 35% said Yes they were given a choice
- ❖ 65% said No, they were not offered a choice
- ❖ Patients highlighted the need for accurate, transparent information—especially about real-time appointment availability, waiting times, and care suitability. Support for those less familiar with using online systems was also emphasised. Important factors for choosing providers included travel, accessibility, individual care needs, and the option to choose based on personal circumstances.

What difference did this make?

The findings have fed into the Planned Care division for all partners to review and improve the offer of patient choice in secondary care.



This is brilliant and reflects the kind of feedback we need as a partnership to make improvements around patient choice. **Helen Wright – Senior Programme Manager – Planned Care**

Hearing from all communities

We're here for all residents of **Bolton.** That's why, over the past year, we've worked hard to reach out to those communities whose voices may go unheard.

Every member of the community should have the chance to share their story and play a part in shaping services to meet their needs.

This year, we have reached different communities by:

- Attended 83 community events and engaged with 21 new groups or events
- Working in partnership with other agencies to reach more seldom heard communities such as presenting to overseas students learning British Culture
- Shared our Choosing Your Healthcare report with system leaders, which has highlighted the difficulties some communities face with accessing health and care services.



Hearing from all communities

Improving knowledge in different/diverse communities about health and social care services



- We heard feedback from people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities about their struggles using technology, online triage forms and the NHS App due to difficulties with expertise and language barriers.
- We heard from overseas students at Greater Manchester University who had no idea how to access healthcare services.
- We heard from young adults with a learning disability about their experiences of struggles to get GP appointments and difficulties using the triage forms and digital apps.

What we did to help improve experiences

- We informed the University about our concerns to ensure that all students have the information about how to register with a GP and how to access other health care services.
- We designed and provided printed information on how to use different health care services in Bolton and had this translated into three different languages and produced downloadable guides on our website with verbal translation.
- We included feedback in our intelligence reports to be shared with all commissioners and providers.

Hearing from all communities

Supporting Others for Greater Impact



Men's Health Event

We supported a community member to set up this important event. The focus was on men's health and in particular Information on **Prostate Cancer** and keeping well.



When my father was diagnosed with prostate cancer, I turned to Healthwatch Bolton for information and advice. Yasmin and Leah were very informative and introduced me to other groups. With the support from Healthwatch Bolton I was able to host a men's health event, which Healthwatch Bolton and other health groups attended.

The event was to raise awareness of prostate cancer especially in the ethnic community as the risk is higher. Moving forward, with the support from Healthwatch, they have given me the confidence to plan and attend more health events.



Fit for the Future Event

We supported our local neighbourhood teams and Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership, to share feedback and information about the future of the NHS.

Living Well with Dementia



Imagining Dementia Futures Conference

Leah was a guest speaker at this amazing event talking about her experiences of caring for her mum – Lucille, who lived with dementia. Leah's talk was well received and resonated with many people on what it is like to care for a loved one living with dementia.

Dementia United's Dementia Carers Expert Reference Group (DCERG)

Leah is a member of DCERG. She has connected with current and former carers.

As part of her research for our upcoming project on dementia, Leah has attended various events throughout the year, using this experience to shape this exciting piece of work. Find out more about DCERG visit: Dementia Carers Expert Reference Group - Dementia United





Shaping our Project

We have spoken to many stakeholders: Local Authority colleagues, voluntary sector colleagues, people living with dementia, carers and former carers, to co-produce our new piece of work. The project was launched in May 2025 for Dementia Awareness Week. Survey link is here: Living Well with Dementia

Information and signposting

Whether it's navigating the NHS complaints process or needing some information about a support group—you can count on us. This year 374 people have reached out to us for advice, support, help finding services, or sharing their feedback via community engagement.

This year, we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Supporting people to look after their health
- Signposting people to additional support services



Information and signposting

The Power of Listening

When a local carer reached out about social care costs for her husband living with dementia, we listened, offered support, and signposted her to Dementia UK. Thanks to this, an Admiral Nurse visited their home—providing vital advice, practical help, and reassurance.



Thank you very much for the Dementia Helpline number, it has been very helpful and supportive for me... You don't realise how helpful you've been. I also wanted to let you know that Dementia UK have been absolutely brilliant. An Admiral Nurse spoke to me; they are calling me on Monday and is looking to do a home visit so we can put a plan in place... You have been a tremendous help. I am not on my own. I can't tell you how much you've helped me. It's brilliant. I feel I have an outlet.... Thank you so much for your support, it has made a great difference to me.

The Importance of Travel Insurance

A family had to cancel their holiday due to unforeseen health reasons. The family told us they had been trying for approximately three weeks to get their GP to complete the holiday insurance form. We escalated the issue to the Primary Care Contracts Team.



The GP practice have now completed our insurance claim form. We have sent this today to [the insurance company] and hope that this will enable the matter to be resolved. It is three weeks today since this sorry saga started, but at least [the GP practice] has had a change of heart. Thank you for your help and advice in this matter.

Information and signposting

Timely Adult Social Care

The client is a full-time carer for her older relative. The family do not have any adult social care interventions. The relative is becoming frail and the client did not know where to turn for support. We provided the client with a wide range of information and advice to enable informed decisions to be made.



I am so glad I came to the carers event. As soon as I got home, I told my husband that I was talking to a lovely woman called Leah. The information you sent me was brilliant. Now I know where to turn. You showed me such empathy. Speaking to someone felt like 'I hear you.' You've made such a difference. You can tell straight away when you are drawn to someone. I went to another stall, and they gave me a leaflet and told me to call a number. I know everyone is busy. Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. It was good of you to invite me to sit down somewhere quiet to talk. It was so heart-warming to know there are good souls out there. You are definitely in the right job. Thank you so much.

Getting Answers......and an Appointment!

At a carers event, a patient told us he'd been referred to an audio and balance clinic—only to find out it no longer existed. Despite contacting the clinic twice, he got conflicting advice. We raised the issue with Royal Bolton Hospital, who apologised and confirmed staffing shortages and a long waiting list were behind the confusion. We flagged the risk of other patients being wrongly referred.

With our help, the patient secured their appointment.

Showcasing volunteer impact

Our fantastic volunteers have given over 100 hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication to improving care, we can better understand what is working and what needs improving in our community.

This year, our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote our work
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Supported us with keeping us informed of local news articles and events and awareness days
- Served as Trustees on our board



Showcasing volunteer impact

At the heart of what we do

From finding out what residents think to helping raise awareness, our volunteers have championed community concerns to improve care.

Over the years, my involvement with Healthwatch Bolton has given me a deep appreciation for the role that Healthwatch organisations play in their communities. They strongly focus on finding out, and amplifying, the voice of local people who use health and social care.

We work with a wide network of individuals, interest groups, and organisations. Sometimes, this may be pursuing an issue of concern; sometimes it is about promoting the improvement of services.

In my role as a volunteer Trustee, I act as a member of the Healthwatch Bolton Board, helping to shape priorities and overseeing the running of the organisation.

Healthwatch Bolton has a very small team of skilled, knowledgeable and dedicated staff. Despite the size of the team, the scale of its impact is impressive, in part because it can also call on the support of a pool of volunteers. I am

can also call on the support of a pool of volunteers. I am privileged to be a small part of this effort, particularly when representing the Healthwatch voice in a range of different forums.

Ann Schenk - Trustee

Volunteering at Healthwatch Bolton has been great for me as it has enabled me to be a part of a team, helping me with keeping certain skills going without having the pressure of keeping a full-time job down. This is partly down to the multiple disabilities I have. I have also met some lifelong friends along the way who I go out to socialise with.

Thank you for allowing me to volunteer with you. **Anon**



If you've felt inspired by these stories, contact us today and find out how you can be part of the change.



www.healthwatchbolton.co.uk



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Finance and future priorities

We receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to help us do our work.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£125,000	Expenditure on pay	£115,908
Additional income	£23,686	Non-pay expenditure	£17,106
		Office and management fee	£4,094
Total income	£148,686	Total Expenditure	£137,108

Additional income is broken down into:

- £500 received from the local ICS for Fit for the Future event
- £23,186 funding received from the local ICS for a specific project

Integrated Care System (ICS) funding:

Healthwatch across **Greater Manchester** also receive funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level, including:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
For representation at meetings and sharing intelligence and contribution to workplan	£2000

Finance and future priorities

Next steps:

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

- 1. Continuing our Choosing Healthcare work on educating communities about their local health and care services
- 2. Launching our in-depth piece of work on Living Well with Dementia
- 3. Exploring the experiences of people using their primary care services

Statutory statements

Healthwatch Bolton, PO Box 822, Wigan, WN1 9XF. Healthwatch Bolton is managed by VOICE Local, charity number: 1157070

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 six members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2024/25, the Board met four times and made decisions on matters such as workplans and staff reviews. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2024/25, we have been available by phone and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had 0 providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decisionmakers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us

For example, in our local authority area, we take information to the Locality Board, Strategy, Planning and Delivery Group, the System Quality Group, Adult Safeguarding Board, Safeguarding Effectiveness Group, Adult Health and Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Voice and Influence Group, Quality and Patient Experience Forum, Women's Health Network, Safeguarding Collaborative, Quality and Patient Experience Forum.

We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers in Greater Manchester Integrated Care Partnership. For example through the Greater Manchester Healthwatch Network, we share information on the Quality and Performance Committee. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch **Bolton** is represented on the **Bolton** Health and Wellbeing Board by **Jim Fawcett, Chair**

During 2024/25, the committee has not met and is in the process of review.

Healthwatch **Bolton** is represented on **Greater Manchester** Integrated Care Partnerships by Julie Darbyshire, Leah Payne and Ann Schenk.



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