

GP Access for Older People

A report by Age UK Redbridge, Barking & Havering



April 2024

“It worries me that I’m being pushed to use the computer.”

Local GP Patient

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1. Introduction

Age UK Redbridge, Barking & Dagenham and Havering is a local charity, which has been working with older people for over 50 years. We have dedicated, trained staff who are making a positive difference to the lives of older people through a variety of services. This includes the Voices of Experience Project, giving older people in Redbridge the opportunity to give their feedback.

2. Background

According to local, regional and national research, the ability to obtain a timely appointment to see a GP or Practice Nurse is becoming ever more difficult. This is due largely to unprecedented demand, with fewer clinicians available to see a growing number of patients.

To help with this, many services have switched to a remote (telephone or online) setting, rather than in-person. While this does help to manage demand, research also shows that a large number of people, including older or disabled patients, and those from ethnic minority communities, are now at a disadvantage when accessing services through these new systems.

We redesigned and rerun this survey as we wanted to know if patients are being treated fairly and equally, whether any support meets the wide variety of needs and circumstances and whether there have been any improvements in Redbridge since we first ran the survey in October 2022.

3. Methodology

Participants who could access the internet were emailed a link to an online survey. Additionally, we sent paper copies in the post to those lacking online facilities. Some participants even gave their feedback over the phone. We also visited supported living establishments and local community groups to collect their feedback.

4. Strengths & Limitations

The flexibility of our approach in gathering feedback from people, the time devoted to outreach to collect feedback from harder to reach communities and the variety of methods used are among the project's strengths. The limitations are gaining more feedback from male Redbridge residents, who seem less keen to complete surveys than female residents and collecting feedback from residents under 65 years of age.

5. Executive Summary of Findings

During December 2023 - March 2024, 280 local older people completed our survey on access to GP services in Redbridge.

This section summarises key findings - see sections 6 - 7 for findings in full.

Survey Response - In Summary

Appointment Booking

- A clear majority of respondents (83%) usually book their appointments by phone, with just 10% visiting the practice and a similar number (7%) using online services.
- When phoning, around a quarter of respondents (23%) usually get through within 10 minutes. For a sizeable 35%, waiting times while calling range from 10 to 30 minutes and a quarter of callers (25%) usually wait for half an hour or more. 8% have not been able to get through at all.
- Of those using online booking, almost half (47%) have experienced difficulty, while the same number (47%) have not.
- 60% of respondents are able to book in-person, while a sizeable minority (34%) say this is not possible, at their practice.
- Around three quarters of respondents (70%) usually feel respected and supported when booking their appointments.
- When looking at responses by age, we find that older people (aged 75 or over) are noticeably more likely to give positive feedback about customer service.
- On ethnicity, white respondents are considerably more likely to give positive feedback, compared with those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

Waiting Times

- A marginal majority of respondents (59%) are usually seen the same day for emergency appointments. A quarter (24%) say they have waited 3 days or longer.
- For routine appointments, two thirds of respondents (68%) are usually seen within a week. Less than a tenth (9%) generally wait more than two weeks.
- A broad majority (80%) say they are usually called back within the expected time. A tenth of respondents (10%) say they are not.

Consultations

- Just over a third of respondents (39%) are usually offered a choice of consultation method.
- Under a third (29%) usually get to see their preferred clinician, while a larger number (37%) suggest they do not. A quarter (26%) say they have no particular preference.
- Half of respondents (51%) feel that remote consultations have fully met their needs, with a smaller number (36%) suggesting they have not.
- Three quarters (75%) express satisfaction with their practice, on the whole. A fifth (19%) are not satisfied.

Those with support needs?

- Around two thirds of (respondents 62%) have either a long term condition or disability, are not fully able to use computers/devices, or do not speak English as a first language.
- It is commented that not everyone has the inclination, ability or equipment to get online, we also hear that family members are often required to assist - such as in booking appointments or tests.
- Respondents with sensory conditions - hearing or sight impairments, need to book through suitable methods. Those having to phone comment on delays, and some describe anxiety with the booking process.
- One person who requires in-person appointments, has not been supported with this.
- Those who do not speak English as a first language, often rely on family members to translate.

Overall, what has changed, since our 2022 survey?

In the Autumn/Winter of 2022 we conducted a very similar survey, with 203 responses.

What has improved since then? Respondents are now:

- More likely to get through (by phone) within 10 minutes.
- More likely to be offered a choice of consultation method.
- Being seen quicker for emergency appointments.
- Being seen quicker for routine appointments.
- More likely to be called back, on time.
- Generally more satisfied, with remote consultations.

What has not improved? Respondents are now:

- Less likely to see their clinician of choice.
- Feel less respected by staff, when booking.

What else has changed since 2022?

- We note that use of remote appointments is now considerably more widespread - with 60% of respondents attending one in 2022, rising to 91% in 2024.
- Use of phones, to book appointments, has declined marginally by 4%.

[Click here](#) to view the 2022 survey findings.

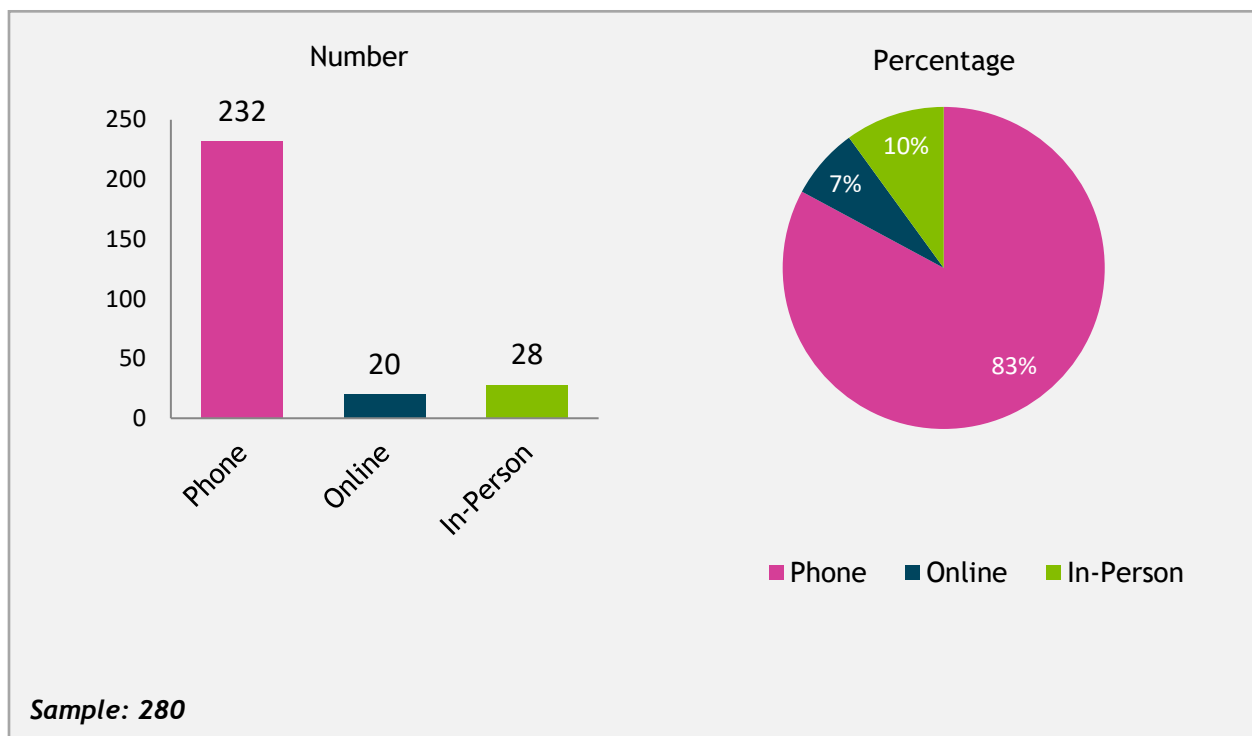
6. Our Survey - Analysis of Feedback

During December 2023 - March 2024, 280 local older people completed our survey on access to GP services in Redbridge.

We asked questions on ability to book appointments including telephone, online and in-person access, waiting times, experience of reception services, choice and quality of consultation, and whether issues related to disability, physical or mental health, the move towards online/remote services, or language have presented any barriers.

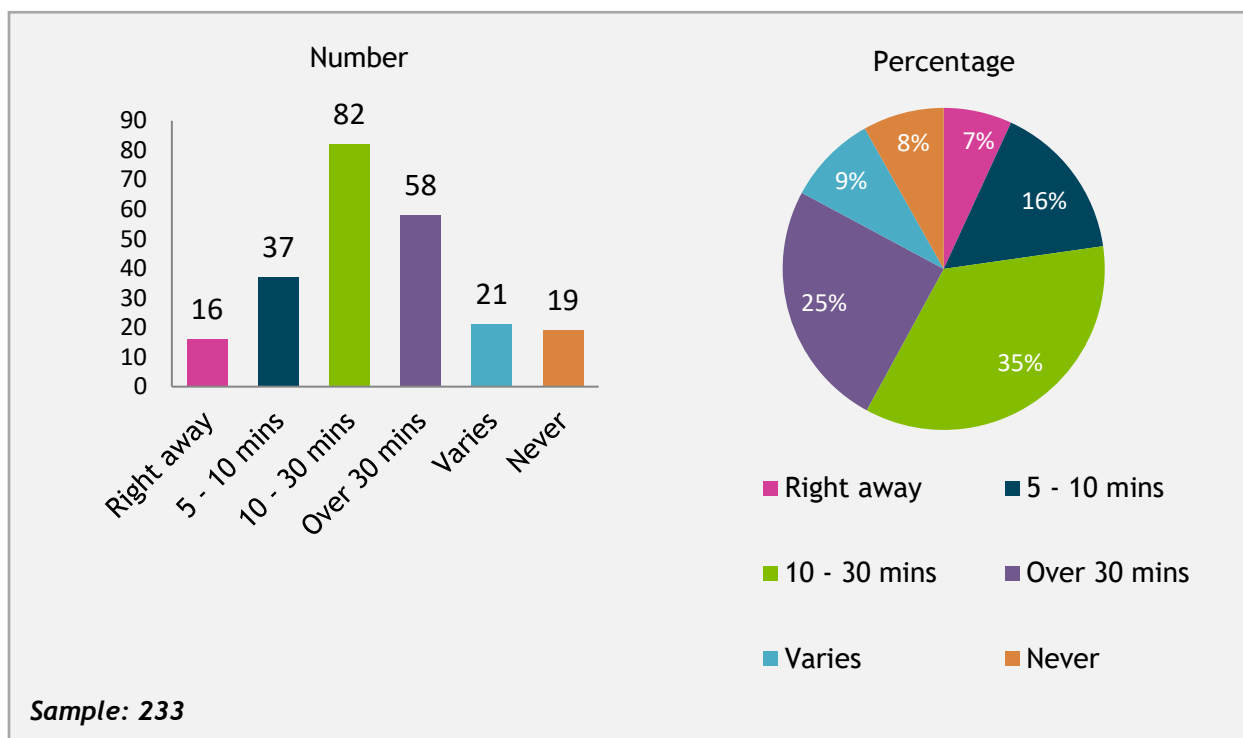
The majority of questions were free-text, enabling participants to detail their opinions and experiences.

6.1 How do you usually book your appointments, to see a GP, Nurse or other professional?



A clear majority of respondents (83%) usually book their appointments by phone, with just 10% visiting the practice and a similar number (7%) using online services.

6.2 If by phone, do you usually get through right away? If not, how long does it take to speak with someone?



When phoning, around a quarter of respondents (23%) usually get through within 10 minutes. For a sizeable 35%, waiting times while calling range from 10 to 30 minutes and a quarter of callers (25%) usually wait for half an hour or more. 8% have not been able to get through at all.

Feedback suggests that lines are more likely to become congested at around 8.00am when practices open, with lengthy queues and waits commonly experienced. Mondays and Tuesdays are reportedly busiest.

Several people have not been able to make contact at all, with faults reported - such as being cut-off. If getting through late, callers may be told that all appointments are gone, and to try again the next day. In cases, callers have been told to 'book online' instead.

Some practices are now operating a 'ring back' service, so callers do not have to stay on the line.

Selected Feedback

"Depends on the time of day."

"I would usually ring as early as possible for an appointment. Would have to wait about 5 minutes but stay on the phone until I speak to someone."

"Need to ring by 8am. If later, all appointments are taken."

"The phone is always engaged, not worth ringing up."

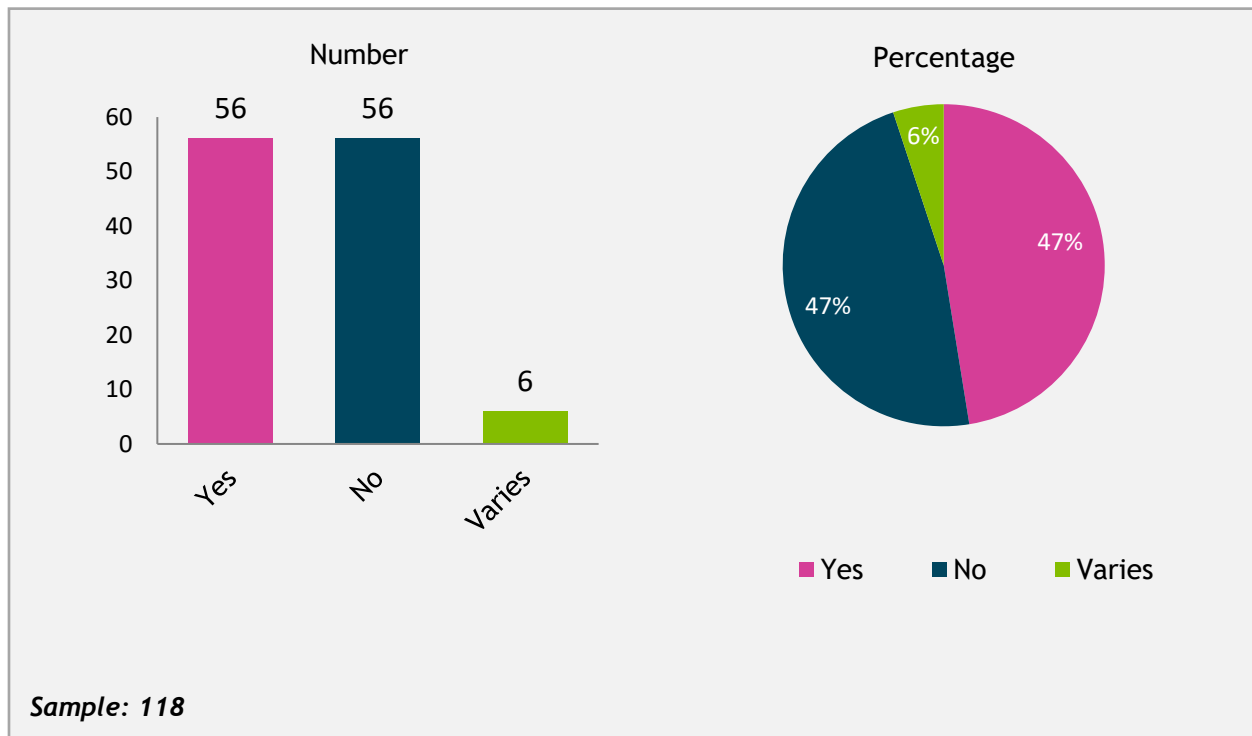
“I have never been able to book appointments on the phone. Impossible to get through. At times, a message says ‘you are 15th in the queue’, then gradually it comes down to zero. Then nothing happens.”

“On a Monday and Tuesday it can take an hour to get through, by which time all appointments are taken.”

“Sometimes more than an hour and sometimes even more than that. I have to wait in the queue to talk to the receptionist and they don't book an appointment on the phone.”

“New system at our surgery which has just started. You ring in the morning at 8.00 am and there is a ring back service which seems to be working.”

6.3 If online, can you find the online form easily? Is it easy to complete?



Of those using online booking, almost half of respondents (47%) have experienced difficulty, while the same number (47%) have not.

For some, the online forms are ‘straightforward’ to use while others feel they are ‘confusing’, containing too many - including unnecessary questions. Having to remember passwords can be a challenge.

We hear that systems can be inflexible, with patients having to wait days for their appointment, and not able to choose their clinician. There is also frustration that having completed the form, patients may be instructed to phone instead.

Selected Feedback

"It's easy. Straightforward."

"It is very confusing. I even wrote a letter to my GP to try herself making an appointment online."

"It's not very well designed. A bit confusing trying to get the right issue sorted."

"Too many boxes and questions they already have answers to."

"It's easy to complete but the passwords and access are often difficult."

"I can but again the appointments are days away and you don't get the GP you want to see."

"The online eConsult form is very inflexible in its questions and it often concludes by saying that I need to phone the surgery in person to make an appointment - this can be impossible."

Those with previous experience, or with 'all the information to-hand' have generally found it to be easier. Online systems are complimented, as a more convenient alternative to the phone.

Selected Feedback

"It's OK now that I have done it a few times."

"If you have all the information together, it is easy to fill out."

"Before the online system was introduced it used to take ages to get through by phone. In that sense the new online system is better."

It is noted that not everybody has internet access, or the skills to competently use computers/devices, or browse. Not all practices have working online forms, we are told.

Selected Feedback

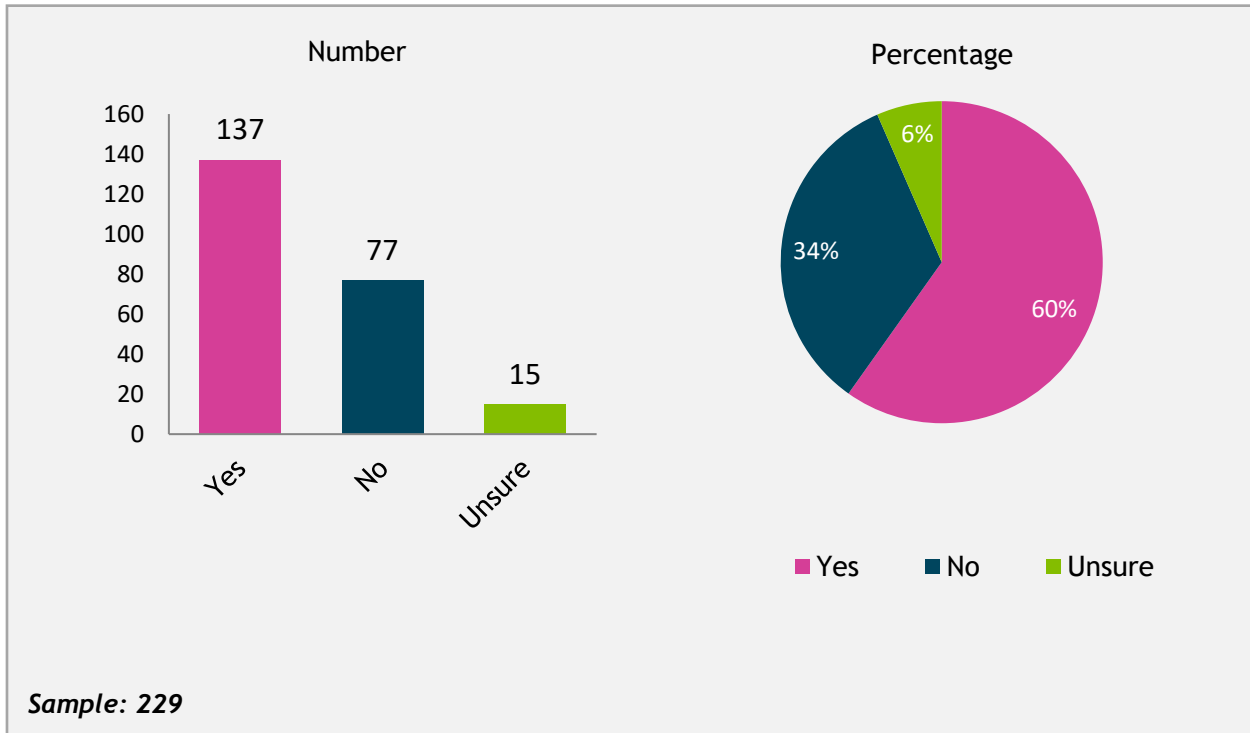
"I'm not on the internet."

"Not like us to go online to book, it is very hard, older people cannot use computers to book an appointment. It's difficult."

"Although I use a PC for emails, I don't cope well with websites so avoid them if there is an alternative."

“They’ve turned appointments off on their app.”

6.4 Can you make an appointment in-person?



60% of respondents are able to book in-person, while a sizeable minority (34%) say this is not possible, at their practice.

6.4.1 If not - please tell us more as to why?

It is commented that in-person booking is either not possible, or discouraged. Patients are told to either phone or use the online form.

Some practices only admit patients with booked appointments, we hear.

Selected Feedback

“The surgery has told us they don’t book any appointments in person. This is a management decision.”

“Not allowed any more.”

“To book an appointment in person is deemed unwelcome.”

“I think that this is discouraged.”

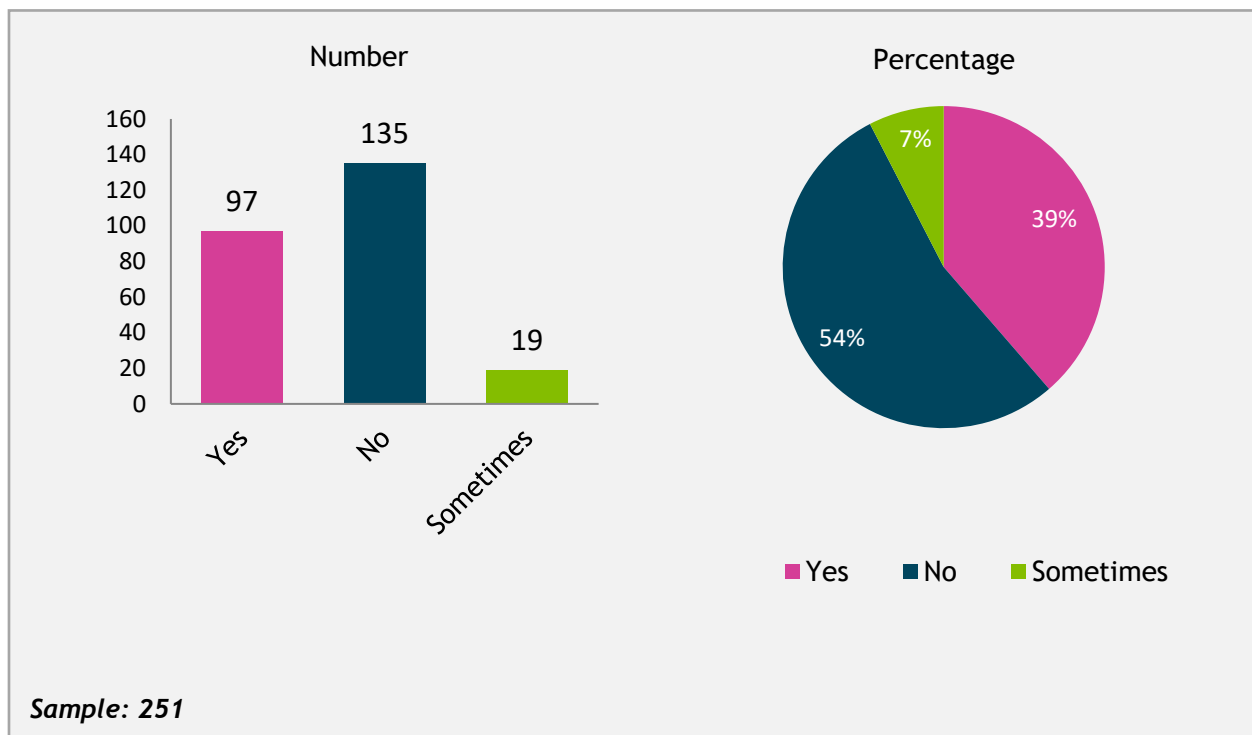
“They will say “we are busy, please phone us.”

“No because they always say do it online or by phone.”

“For the ‘on the day’ appointment, you need to go to surgery at 8am. Even then occasionally the reception feels that this is not an emergency so you need to go the next day. Other times, you are given the link to book online appointments, even when you have gone in person.”

“We are not allowed to enter the surgery unless we have an appointment.”

6.5 Are you usually offered a choice of appointment method (in-person, telephone or video consultation)?



Just over a third of respondents (39%) are usually offered a choice of consultation method.

Typically, patients are assessed first remotely, then called into the practice for further investigation or follow-on - if necessary. We frequently hear there is little choice, and decisions are often made by practice staff.

It is commonly reported that in-person appointments are difficult to acquire, and that patients need to be ‘insistent’ if this is their preference.

Selected Feedback

“It’s always a telephone or video appointment first.”

“Usually telephone appointment, then told to book an in-person appointment if it is deemed necessary.”

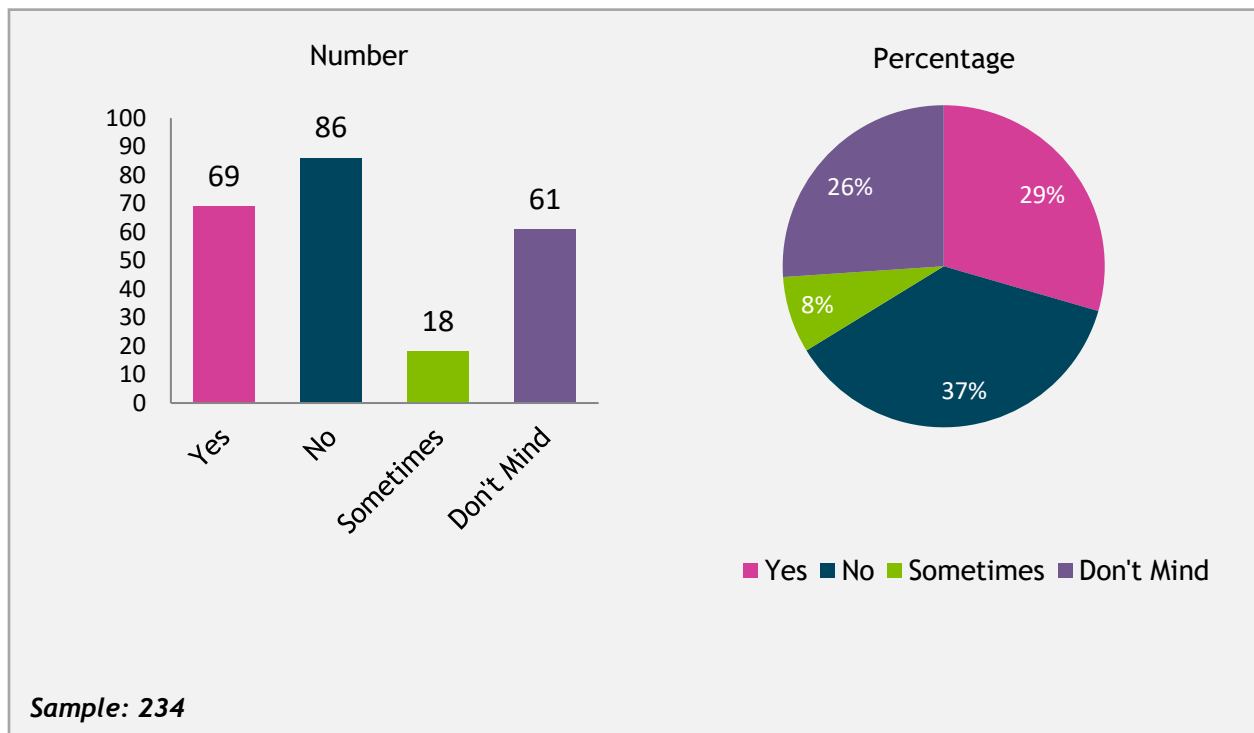
“No, I get told what I'm going to have.”

“The surgery decides the type of appointment needed.”

“Not offered - have to ask - and hope you get what you want.”

“No you have to insist on in person.”

6.6 Is your appointment usually to see your own GP or preferred Nurse? If not, how do you feel about this?



Under a third of respondents (29%) usually get to see their preferred clinician, while a larger number (37%) suggest they do not. A quarter (26%) say they have no particular preference.

The importance of continuity is often expressed, and while this means waiting times will be typically longer, it also avoids having to repeat information - a common cause of frustration, and may be beneficial if taking medication or receiving a diagnosis.

While preferences are important, it is acknowledged by many there is often 'little choice' - especially in emergencies.

Many people say they do not have a named clinician, due to frequent staff turnover, or being at a group (or larger) practice.

Selected Feedback

“A consistent GP can get to know the patient and understand his/her medical condition.”

“I haven't seen the same GP twice in absolutely ages (years). it would be much better to see someone who knows you.”

“No - it is very difficult to get an appointment with my own GP. I do not feel as comfortable with other doctors.”

“Never offered a choice of GP, if requested there is usually a long wait.”

“The practice doesn't seem to have any regular GPs. It's annoying and potentially dangerous for any diagnosis.”

“Don't usually see the same doctor, just whoever is available. Just used to the situation.”

“If it's urgent, I'm very happy to see whoever is available.”

“Because the GPs change so frequently it's difficult to know my GP even is!”

“I am part of a group practice and happy to see any doctor or nurse.”

Many respondents are more relaxed about who they see, and one person notes the benefits of 'different opinions'.

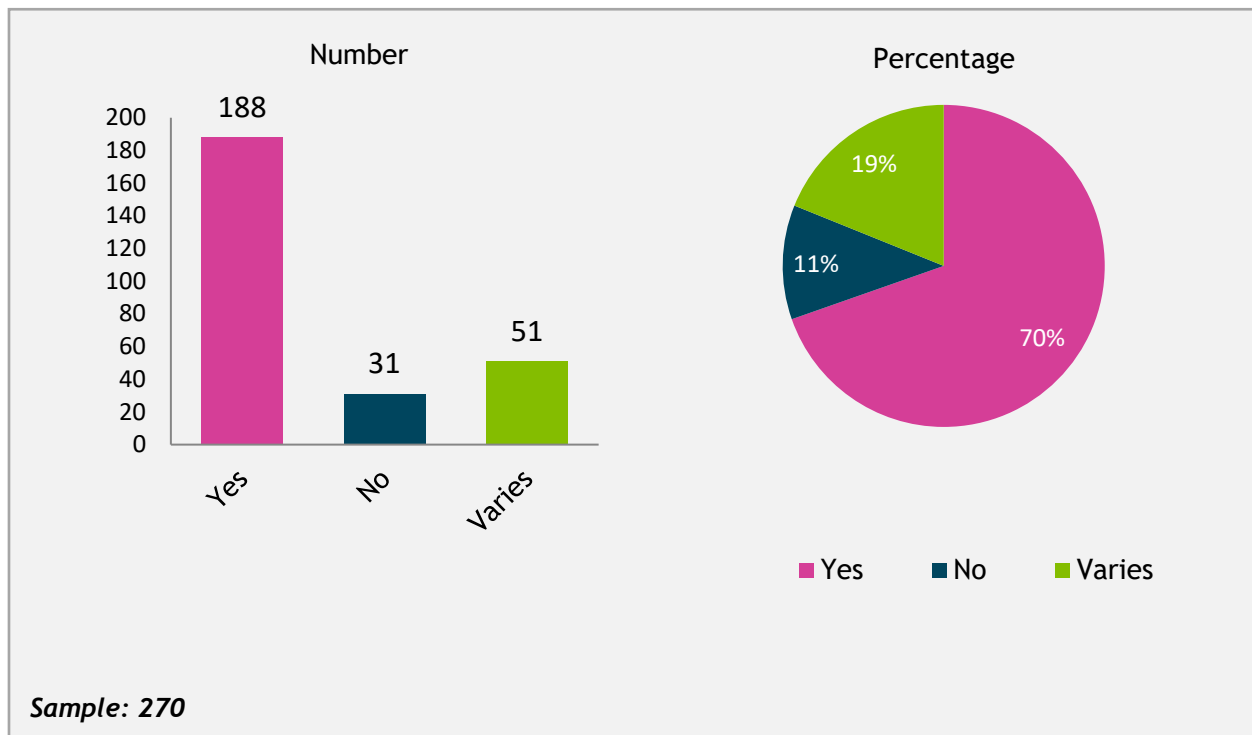
Selected Feedback

“I don't usually see my own GP. But I do see a GP, and I am quite happy with that.”

“Not usually - thankful to be able to see any doctor face to face.”

“No, I don't mind seeing a locum, they seem good. It would be good to see the same doctor each time, but a different opinion could be useful.”

6.7 When booking, how are you generally treated by staff members? Do you feel respected and supported?



Around three quarters of respondents (70%) usually feel respected and supported when booking their appointments.

Staff members are widely complimented, for being polite, respectful and supportive.

Some patients are not comfortable with triage by reception staff, who may not be qualified, or trusted to uphold confidentiality.

Selected Feedback

“Staff are always polite and very cooperative.”

“Very polite and supportive.”

“They are respectful and supportive, very nice.”

“The majority of staff are friendly - occasionally an odd one not so.”

“I don’t like the fact that reception staff decide whether my issues are urgent or not and decide on an appointment.”

“They try, but they are not well trained.”

“No, reception staff asking and repeating ailments in front of strangers.”

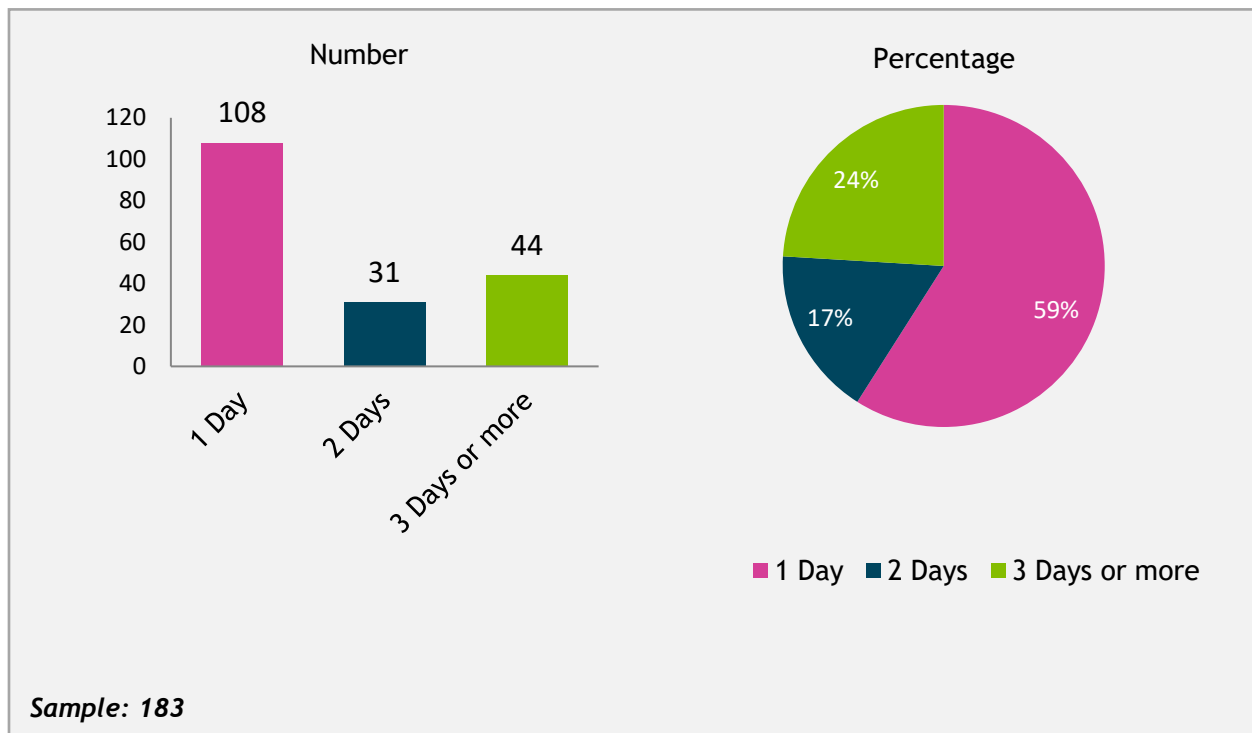
6.7.1 Feel respected and supported when booking

	% Consider Important
Aged 90 or Over	83%
Aged 75 - 89	81%
White Respondents	78%
All Respondents (Baseline)	70%
Aged 50 - 64	67%
BAME Respondents	60%
Aged 65 - 74	59%

When looking at responses by age, we find that older people (aged 75 or over) are noticeably more likely to give positive feedback.

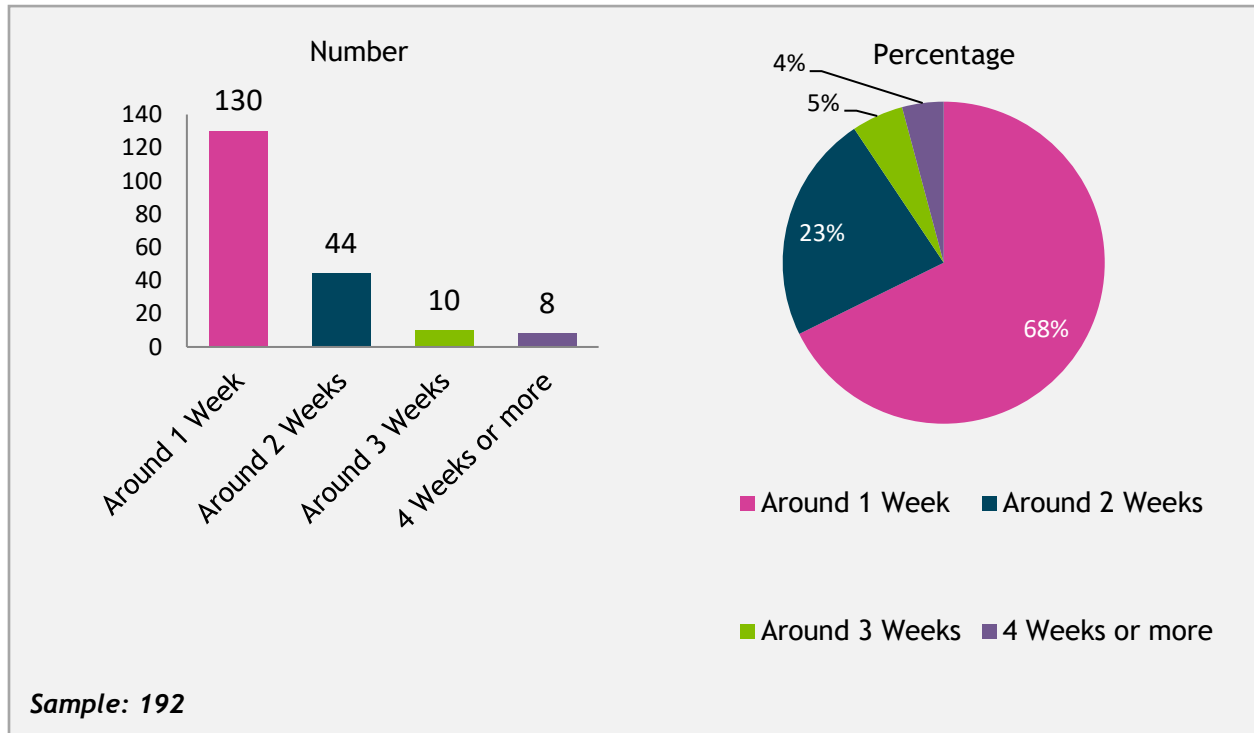
On ethnicity, white respondents are considerably more likely to give positive feedback, compared with those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) backgrounds.

6.8 For urgent appointments, how long do you usually wait?



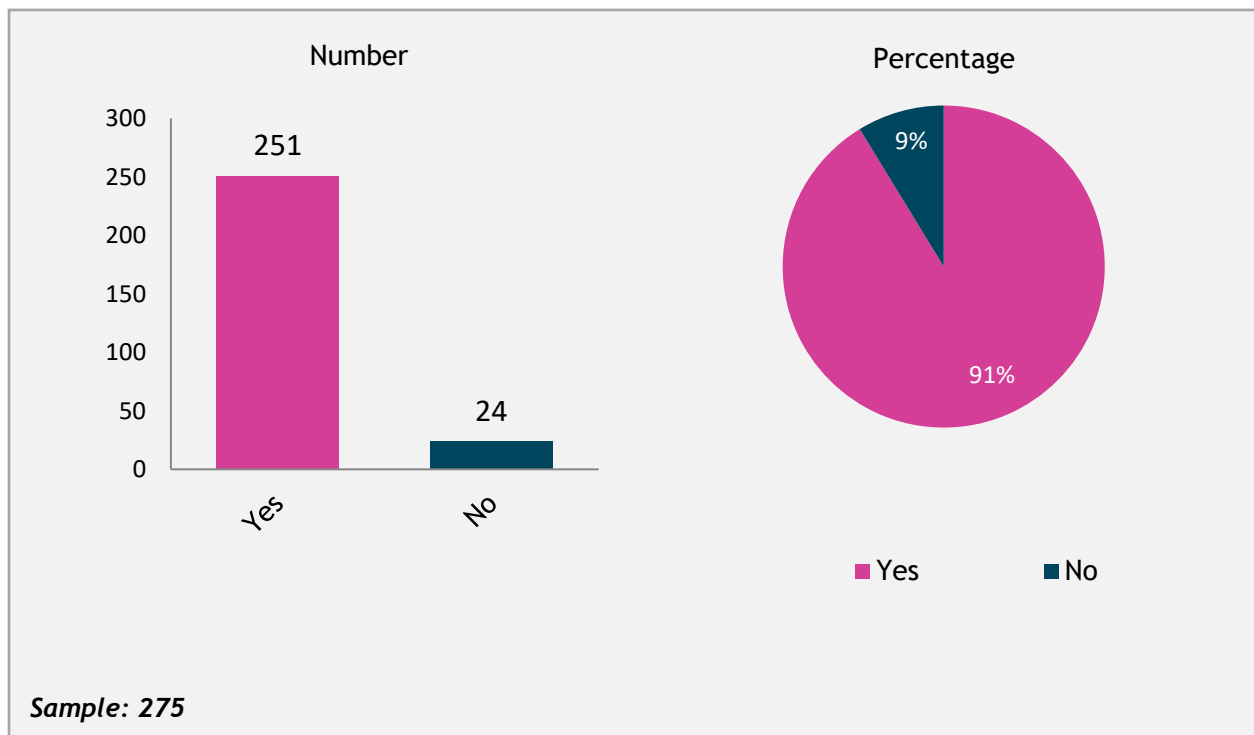
A marginal majority of respondents (59%) are usually seen the same day for emergency appointments. A quarter (24%) say they have waited 3 days or longer.

6.9 And for routine appointments, how long do you usually wait?



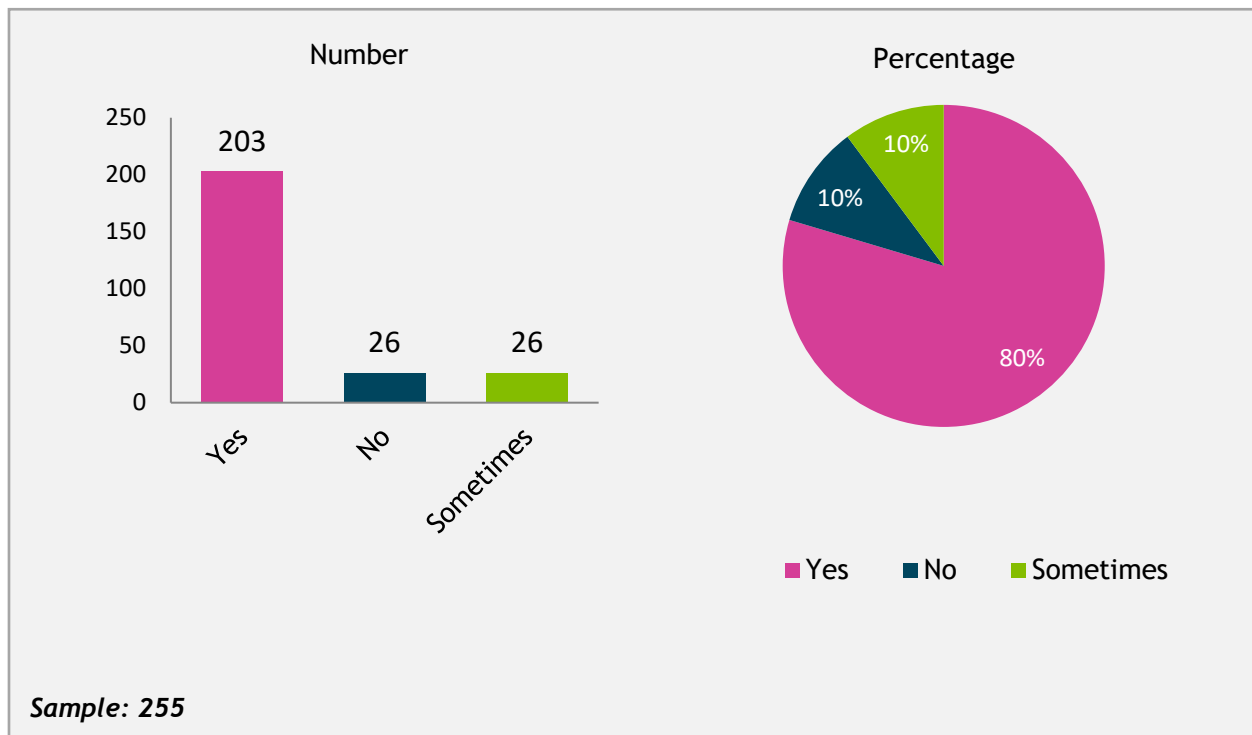
For routine appointments, two thirds of respondents (68%) are usually seen within a week. Less than a tenth (9%) generally wait more than two weeks.

6.10 Have you had a 'telephone triage' or online appointment in the past?



A clear majority of respondents (91%) have experienced a remote appointment.

6.11 If so, does the doctor (or other staff member) usually call you back, when you expected them to?



A broad majority (80%) say they are usually called back within the expected time. A tenth of respondents (10%) say they are not.

While most people are satisfied with punctuality, we hear that some have been called earlier or later, and not all have been given a specified time.

If calls are missed, patients need to re-contact the practice, we are told.

Selected Feedback

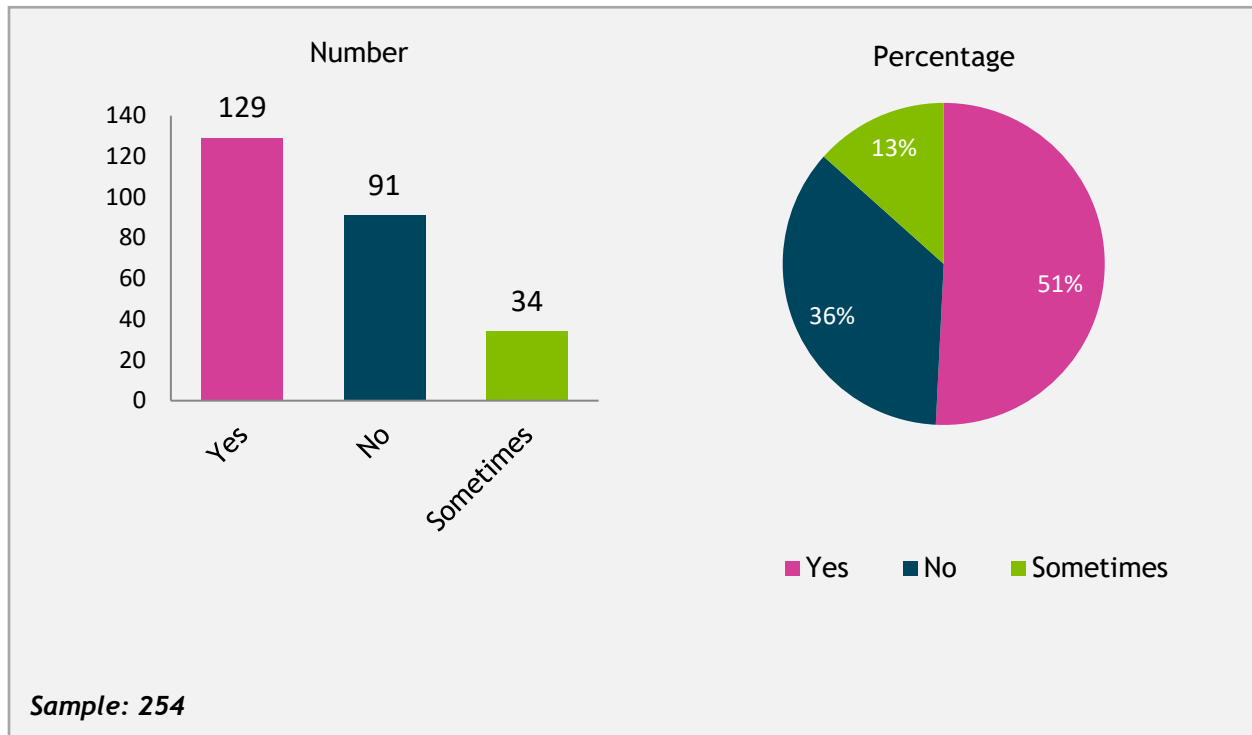
“Yes always on time.”

“No - always late and when you are having dinner!”

“Yes - but you have to wait either the whole morning or whole afternoon for the call.”

“No, you have to be available. If you miss their call, they don't ring back. You have to ring the surgery and find you are no.12 in the queue!”

6.12 If you had a doctor's consultation, does it usually meet your needs? Do you feel the doctor is able to diagnose accurately on the phone or online?



Half of respondents (51%) feel that remote consultations have fully met their needs, with a smaller number (36%) suggesting they have not.

Some people are confident in the accuracy of remote diagnosis, and in being called in for potential follow-up, however a significantly larger proportion feel that diagnosis and good communication largely depends on in-person interaction.

It is felt that remote appointments are most appropriate for routine (not complex) consultations, and it may also depend on the clinician and patient.

Selected Feedback

“With my chosen doctor, I have been extremely pleased with their knowledge and attitude.”

“Depends what kind of problem one is facing. If the doctor thinks it has to be seen they will give you appointment after the phone consultation.”

“I think it is impossible in some cases for a doctor to diagnose on the phone.”

“Without examining me, I do not know how the doctor can diagnose - maybe they have x-ray vision?”

“Often, I question the opinion given over the telephone and usually don't feel comfortable with diagnosis, as in prescribed meds as a trial, as I don't feel properly examined.”

"I have only had a phone call regarding cholesterol levels. I don't believe phone/online diagnosis can be reliable."

"It really depends on the problem."

"Not always, they have limited time, sometimes I have difficulty in explaining myself sometimes."

"Don't always understand over the phone or what's written. I suffer short term memory."

"Yes my GP is very helpful and explains to me his diagnosis and does not blind me with medical terms."

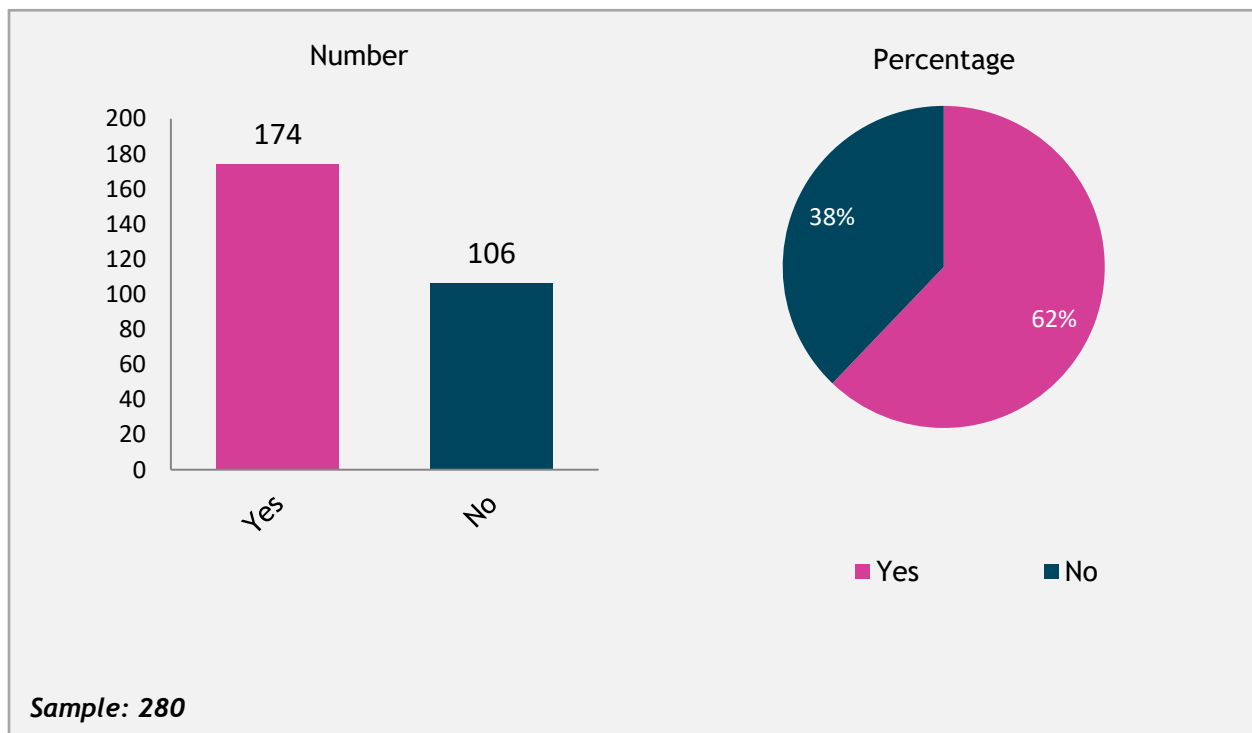
Remote appointments can be perceived as 'rushed' or 'box ticking exercises' and it is much easier, for clinicians to end the consultation.

Selected Feedback

"No. I find during a phone consultation it is too easy to get dismissed more easily than if you were in person, or in my experience on one occasion told he was putting the phone down as he had other patients to speak to after a couple of minutes."

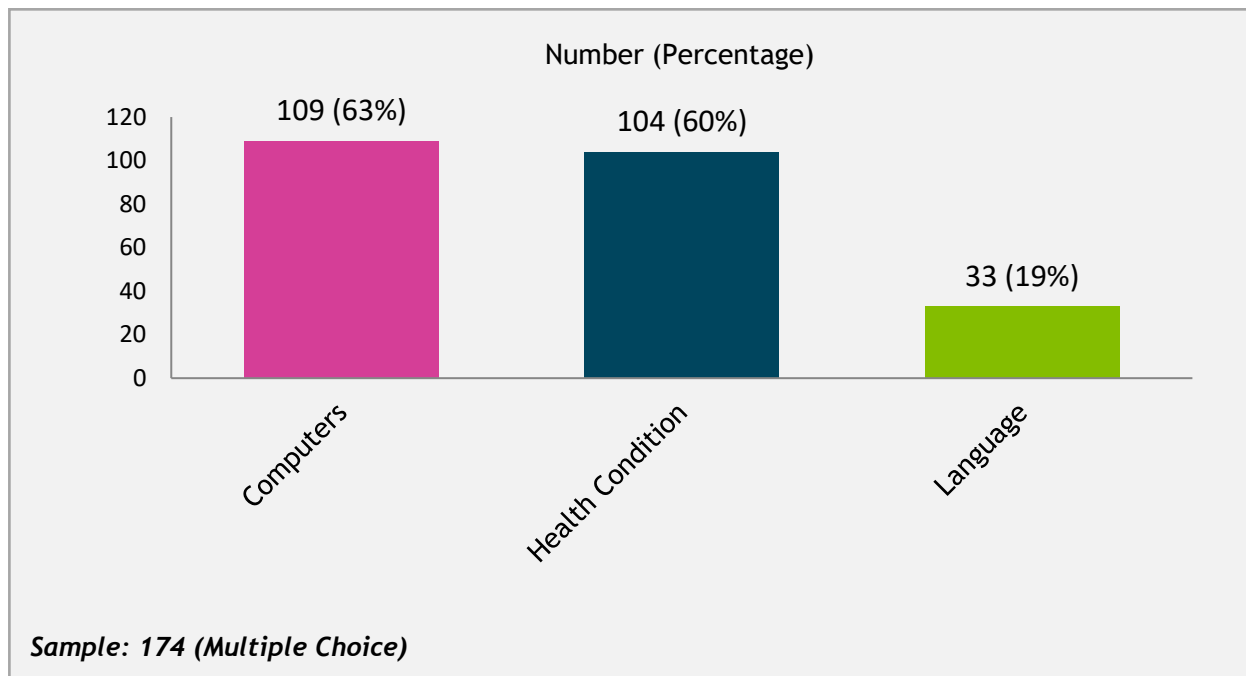
"No - it doesn't meet my needs - I feel that the doctor/pharmacist just want to hurry things up so they can cross me off their list."

6.13 Potential Barriers: Do you have difficulties using computers, smart-phones or the internet? Do you have a disability or long term (health or mental health) condition? Is English not your first language?



Around two thirds of respondents (62%) have either a long term condition or disability, are not fully able to use computers/devices, or do not speak English as a first language.

6.13.1 Breakdown of Potential Barriers



63% of respondents are not fully able to use computers/devices, 60% have a long-term condition or disability, and 19% do not speak English as a first language.

We asked participants to outline any potential barriers.

6.13.2 Computers, Smart Phones and the Internet

While some people prefer face-to-face booking or contact, others suspect that online options are more efficient, negating the need to spend time on the phone, or in queues at the practice.

It is commented that not everyone has the inclination, ability or equipment to get online, we also hear that family members are often required to assist - such as in booking appointments or tests.

We receive an example of good practice (a receptionist completing an online form, on a patient's behalf).

Selected Feedback

"I feel that by phoning in for appointments I am left behind those using online because of recorded information prior to getting through to join the queue. If I need to be seen -

by the time I've spoken to receptionists - 9 times out of 10 - appointments are all gone - told to ring back in the afternoon or tomorrow."

"Don't use the internet. always book by phone."

"I am not confident booking appointments online."

"Lack of ability to access the correct website to make appointments online - too many steps to remember."

"it is not my forte, therefore doing things online takes a long time."

"It worries me that I'm being pushed to use the computer."

"Can't go online usually get my daughter to do it."

"No, I tell the reception from the start I won't do appointments by computer as I prefer to talk to somebody. They fill the form for me and arrange a same day appointment. They give me an appointment for the same day. If I can't get to the surgery they give me a same day telephone call... usually the same morning."

6.13.3 Disabilities or long term (health or mental health) conditions

Respondents with sensory conditions - hearing or sight impairments, need to book through suitable methods. Those having to phone comment on delays, and some describe anxiety with the booking process.

One person who requires in-person appointments, has not been supported with this.

Selected Feedback

"Yes, I can only make the appointment by phoning at 8am as I am partially sighted."

"Can take a long time to get through to the secretary."

"Would always try to book in person."

"I only use a landline as cannot hear on a mobile."

"I dread having to make appointments."

"Negatively, I have problems with mobility and hearing. Hearing is quite a problem."

"I am old and my eyesight is not good and I find it difficult to adapt. I become anxious & stressed."

"Yes, when I ring up to make an appointment I have to say, 'I want face to face' but I'm not usually granted."

6.13.4 Language

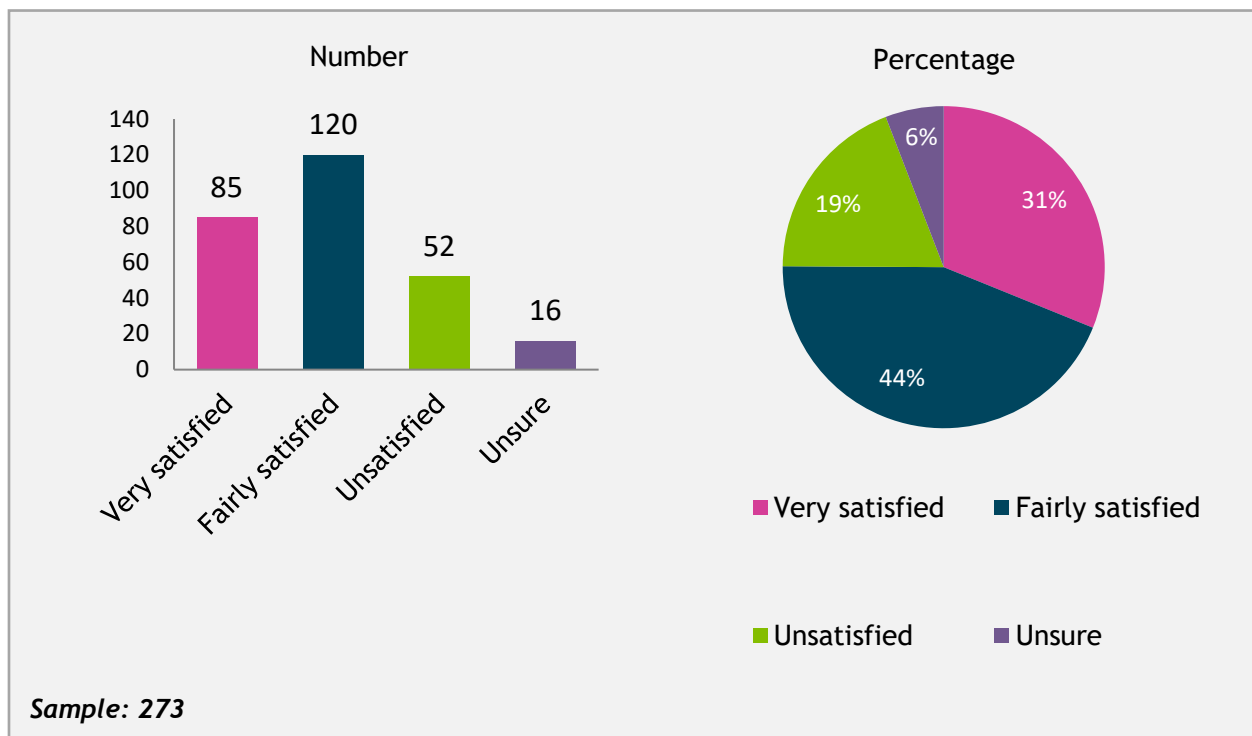
Those who do not speak English as a first language, often rely on family members to translate.

Selected Feedback

“Appointments are always booked by family members who also act as interpreters.”

“My son has to do everything. He has to take me to the surgery every time to see and translate for the doctor.”

6.14 How satisfied are you with your GP Practice and the services they offer?



Three quarters of respondents (75%) express satisfaction with their practice, on the whole. A fifth (19%) are not satisfied.

6.14.1 What do you think works well about the service?

When asking respondents what they feel works well, we detect themes on booking & online systems, general practice, clinicians, staff, and location & mobility.

Selected Feedback

Booking & Online Systems

- When you phone for an appointment and are in a queue the receptionist will always phone you back when it's your turn.
- Reminders are sent regarding vaccinations etc. They will contact you by phone if an appointment needs to be made e.g. prescription review.
- Follow up appointments work well.
- Online booking gets a response for non-urgent calls.
- From my experiences, there is an effort to call back.
- I'm always able to speak to someone in person.
- Telephoning as early as 8am to get to see a GP the same day.
- If booking for appointment, receptionist sometimes calls me back.
- The fact they have a ring back service and you can book online on your NHS App and the GP App for online.
- Immediate appointment - or within a day or two.
- Getting a quick appointment.
- I have been able to speak with a GP as needed.
- Patients can review blood test results, consultation notes and clinic letters on the NHS app.
- The online process for booking appointments and ordering repeat prescriptions.
- The online service is second to none. Brilliant.
- If you go online urgent calls are dealt with quickly.
- The e-consult process is good.
- Telephone call followed by a face to face if needed, works for me.
- I am able to get through on the phone for appointments, mostly on the same day.
- If it is an emergency, they are very efficient.
- There is another surgery to book an appointment, if needed.
- The phone triage is fine so the doctor sees the really urgent people.

General Practice

- The wide strengths across the whole staff team at the practice outweighs any negative feelings.
- It runs smoothly.
- It's a well-run office and the staff have long worked together.
- The care you get from your doctor and the service from staff.
- I have been a patient at my surgery for many years and they know me so well, I trust them.
- General advice.
- It is extremely well run. The staff are well trained and the facilities are modern.
- Regular BP checks.
- Good record keeping.
- They have a highly professional approach to all they do.
- Follow up messages and reminders work well.
- They jump through all the hoops, inviting patient for flu jabs, blood tests etc.
- Routine jabs.
- Excellent range of services.

- The idea of ordering repeat prescription through the pharmacy is good when they get it right.
- Online repeat prescription requests.
- Physio and pharmacist in the surgery. Log in to appointments via a machine.
- Clinical competence seems high.
- Relatively small practice.
- Recently extended hours to 6.30pm and linked with other practices.

GPs & Nurses

- Once you do get to see a doctor, your treatment/diagnosis is done professionally and successfully.
- Going back to see your own GP.
- Doctors have always got time to spend with you. Once you get access it is excellent.
- I can usually talk to a GP even if not my own.
- Same doctor who listens and does not rush me.
- On site nurses.
- Seeing my regular GP.
- They have sufficient GPs to cover the large practice.
- Started to see patients in person again.
- The surgery has some great experienced doctors who have been there quite a long time and recognise you when you are referred to them.
- Generally seen on time. My GP is wonderful.
- Diagnosis and respect for me.

Staff

- Staff are very kind and listen, understand my problems & needs very well.
- Caring & understanding.
- I feel that I'm always well treated.
- There is always an efficient person at reception.
- Most staff are considerate and caring.
- I feel respected, supported and being heard.
- Have been with my doctors for 30 years & have always been treated respectably & in a friendly way.
- They treat you with respect.
- Always ready to listen and act appropriately. Friendly staff.
- I am listened to and action taken fairly quickly.
- At my age I usually get treated very well.
- The people involved listen.
- Staff and medical personnel mean well.
- Receptionists mostly being very helpful.
- Kindness, respect and understanding.
- Admin staff understanding & supportive.
- Trained polite receptionists.
- The staff at the surgery are courteous and helpful.

Location & Mobility

- It's local to our home.
- They have 2 surgeries which i can travel to easily.
- Personably that the surgery is in walking distance.
- I was unable to walk for some months last year and when requested, received two home visits by a doctor. I could arrange for blood tests at home. District Nurses called for various reasons, injections after operations & leg dressings.
- It's so local (nearby - across the road from me). Also blood tests done at medical centre.
- They seem to have a good range of facilities.
- The fact blood checks can be at the surgery.
- It is local.
- They are within walking distance and if I have an urgent problem I feel confident that they will see me. If necessary I can go and talk to the receptionist in the daytime and hand my prescription in.
- Home visits and doctors contact us when they identify a problem.
- Good bus service available.

6.14.2 And what do you think could work better?

When asking respondents what they feel could work better, we detect themes on booking & online systems, general practice, clinicians, staff, and location & mobility.

Selected Feedback

Booking & Online Systems

- I should not have to divulge my symptoms to GP receptionists.
- Need more staff to answer calls rather than holding on for 40 -60 mins. When you get through most appointments have been taken.
- Patients should be given a choice of how to book appointments because elderly people can't use the computers or smart phones.
- The one thing I really fear is having to make an urgent appointment.
- If you could make an appointment other than at 8am!
- Answering the phone and then putting you on hold.
- One should be answered straight away instead of keeping you waiting.
- You should be able to book appointments more than 2 days in advance. A call back system would be good. They need more urgent appointments.
- Probably just getting through on the phone.
- It would be beneficial to get help more quickly if possible.
- If you could make an appointment before the day.
- Give appointment on the day.
- Length of time we wait on the phone.
- Doctor is far too booked.
- There needs to be more acknowledgement that many older people are not digitally savvy.
- Basic app to make appointment - needing to fill out no more than 5-10 questions.
- Being able to make an appointment in person at the practice.
- Phone calls need to be answered quicker, not just you are 10th in line or the box is full.
- Being given a definite time for a telephone call back.

- To be able to book advance appointments with my own doctor and not have to take a chance that after waiting on the phone for 30/40 minutes there are no appointments available or at a time in the day that is inconvenient.
- There should be option to have an appointment for the next day, if the appointment is not available for same day.
- I wish I could access their online system in the evenings and at weekends at least to alert them to the fact that I need to make an appointment. The system is open during working hours only.
- My repeat prescriptions are rarely complete.

General Practice

- Need some improvements in the waiting room.
- The old fashioned way.
- Stop taking more patients when the system at the practice is so overstretched.
- Maybe longer hours to accommodate more appointments/patients.
- They are building lots of new flats but not providing more GP Surgeries to service the new people moving in.
- Employ more staff.
- I had a problem which has been much improved by private physiotherapy without the use of any painkillers. On the NHS I was only offered painkillers. I think that's a dreadful state of affairs.
- Having been prescribed medication follow-up procedures need to be addressed. Patients receiving medication are not checked sufficiently. Can be hazardous as well as wasting NHS funds. Improved communication skills.
- More stability in terms of the recruitment and retention of medical and administrative personnel.
- Longer hours of availability including Saturdays.
- The check-in machine has not been working for quite some time which means have to wait in line to check in with the receptionist. This makes more work for them and delays them answering the phone.
- Privacy.
- Trip hazard in the waiting area - worn out carpet.
- More online information.
- Communication between the practice and hospital.

GPs & Nurses

- If we had more GPs, they will not be so inundated with work and we won't need to wait so long.
- I prefer to see my own doctor.
- Face to face appointments where you can explain your problems properly - which is not possible on the phone.
- Actually to have a face to face appointment.
- GPs should be more knowledgeable about mental health issues.
- Less waiting and chance to see my own GP for appointments and less waiting for referrals.
- We should be able to see our own GP for our ailments and should be referred asap to the hospital. I had to wait for almost 5 months for physio and was in pain. Frozen shoulder, still can't lift my hand.

- The musculoskeletal practitioner - his role is not effective.
- What could work better is if they could see you in person.
- They could read the notes rather than provide a history each time.
- It would be nice to see the same doctor each time but do not mind seeing a locum.
- I feel the service would work much better if returned to face to face consultations and where possible going to surgery in person to make your appointment.
- I think the emphasis should be more on consultation in person, rather than telephone. Yes, there is a case for telephone consultation, but often patients need reassurance.
- Faster timeframe to see doctor of your choice.
- More face to face appointments with the doctors.
- They need more mature GPs, with patience and understanding. Also they need longer than 10 mins to treat you.
- More face to face appointments.
- More doctors needed.
- Same doctor.
- More time for consultations.
- Being able to see your own GP most of the time particularly if you suffer from ongoing conditions.
- Same sex conversation.
- More nurses and specialist nurses who could run more clinics.
- Do the things old way, see the same doctor.
- I need to be face to face as having a hearing problem, I lip read. One doctor has understood.
- Knowing times and name of GP on duty on specified days.
- If I could meet a doctor face to face, it could work better.
- It is quite usual for appointments to be a half an hour late.
- Older people should be encouraged to have a face to face appointment with their GP.
- The doctor needs to see their face - see their body language.
- Go back to the days before Covid, when you could make an appointment with a GP of your choice & have some continuity.
- They only have one nurse 4 days a week so that could be improved upon.

Staffing

- They need more receptionists to answer the phones.
- The reception staff are not proactive often. I have to get their attention when I arrive at the surgery. Poor customer service.
- Proper training for the front desk staff.
- Front desk staff need to be more patient. I know some public are difficult to handle, but not all.
- Reception staff - totally ignored for several minutes. Can understand if they are on the phone, but this also applies to those on the computer. Unfortunately, most are trainees but "customer service" is totally ignored. Leaves you feeling even more depressed than when you walked in!
- Receptionists who speak the language of the patient who does not speak English.
- Receptionists should have people skills. Sometimes they don't even look at you.
- Reception staff need to have more empathy and have a caring manner. They are not medically trained so should not have full responsibility when preventing patients from speaking to a doctor.
- Having receptionists who speak clear comprehensible English.

Location & Mobility

- To have blood test facilities on site.
- I am able to walk to the surgery but perhaps others are not so mobile.
- When I have needed blood tests, I get the paperwork from my surgery yet have to go to a different clinic or surgery for the blood tests, would like to have them at my own surgery as was once the case.
- Feel return of home visits for very elderly or sick or infirm.
- Doctors could make more call outs.
- Weekly visit by nurse.

6.15 Any other comments about your GP Practice (prescriptions, referrals etc)?

Finally, we asked participants to share any other comments about their practice. We detect themes on booking, general practice and clinicians.

Selected Feedback

Booking

- Always dealt with quickly.
- Was told by reception staff yesterday that there are lots of appointments. If so why aren't the appointments given out. Told if I cannot get an appointment to ring NHS 111 and I will get an immediate appointment. Definitely totally wrong.

General Practice

- I think they do well considering the capacity pressures on the surgeries.
- The whole surgery team working very well together.
- It would be good if more use could be made of email to and from the surgery.
- It would also be very useful to be able to access my medical records online.
- Recognise the difficulties I experience with my hearing impairment.
- I would like to know the results of my blood tests.

GPs & Nurses

- Needs better services provided by the nurse. If a qualified & experienced nurse is available every day by appointment it would be fine and save GP time as well.
- Appointments should be allowed to last longer. If you have 2 problems, they have to allot you 2 bookings. Half the time allotted is the doctor having to look up the patient's history & then fill in what has been discussed with the patient at that time. 10 mins altogether is not enough.
- Referrals take ages, long waiting. I had to go abroad to get my surgery done. Wish it improves. It makes the patient's condition worse.
- The GP doesn't refer.

- I would much prefer to be seen by the same doctor, I hate having to see new doctors and nurses.
- Very difficult to get a referral to a local hospital.
- It seems referrals are always given as a last resort.
- As I said they have started seeing patients in person again. They took a long time.

Other Comments

- Reception staff are good listeners and are very well trained to meet patient's needs.
- Receptionists don't always understand your needs with referrals.
- There is no consideration of how far, or difficult it is to attend an unfair distance when it could be more local. obviously sometimes no alternative!

Additionally, we receive a lot of feedback about repeat prescriptions.

Selected Feedback

Prescriptions (Positives)

- I have just started to order my prescription online. This saves a trip to the pharmacy.
- Routine repeat prescriptions are handled efficiently.
- When my prescriptions are ready the assistants from the pharmacy connected to the surgery telephone me.
- Prescriptions work well being sent directly to the pharmacy.
- Very good delivery service from our local pharmacy. Ring the surgery and prescription delivered to door within 48 hours.
- Repeat prescriptions ordered online usually very quick.
- My local pharmacy orders my repeat prescriptions & are very helpful.
- Reordering prescriptions is easy, I phone my chemist, they send to the surgery, chemist delivery service delivers medication to me.
- I order my repeat prescription online on a Sunday afternoon. I usually get a text from Tesco pharmacy on Monday to collect it. Could not be any quicker.
- Repeat prescriptions work well - call the pharmacy and usually prescription is ready in 3 days.
- I book prescriptions on line and it works really well.
- My surgery has introduced an annual call from a pharmacist to discuss the medication I am taking. This is a marvellous idea as it is easy to continue taking medicine for a condition which has improved. I hope this service can continue.
- Book GP prescriptions using NHS App & can collect them using their despatch box at any time. Get a text to notify me when prescription is ready for collection.

Prescriptions (Negatives)

- If the doctor hasn't sent my prescription to the chemist, I have to walk to the surgery to tell them I can't get my prescription & they then say they will get the doctor to sign a new one and go back to surgery the next day.
- They take a long while to send out repeat prescriptions.

- Prescriptions go directly to the pharmacy - information that comes with the prescriptions - print much too small.
- Prescription requests are taking longer to process.
- I order my medication online. Often I find I can't order and have to phone to get them. This is a problem. It is difficult to get through.
- Always problems with my prescription.
- I would like my medication posted to me as I have monthly prescriptions but apparently I am not in that category.
- Have allergies to pills by prescriptions, so would like to consider this when deciding medications.
- Repeat prescriptions weren't always at chemist.
- The receptionists will not accept telephone requests for prescriptions. As I am not online I have to phone the pharmacist at the dispensing chemist and ask him to email my GP for a prescription, which is then delivered to me.
- They never seem to get right what you order on prescription.
- No medication delivered to my door.
- When prescribed new medication the renewal dates do not line up so it is difficult to keep track of repeat prescription.
- They used to give 3 months' supply. Why now 2 months?
- There is sometimes a mix up between the surgery and the pharmacy. Can be very confusing.
- I had medication prescribed to me which was not recorded on my medical file.
- When I put in a repeat prescription why does it nearly always get lost between the post box in the surgery and the office meaning my prescription is late because I have to make another trip to get it written out.
- There's an ongoing problem with information not being passed between hospitals, clinics and doctors. Sometimes the information is sent but not accessed by GPs, due to their system. Sometimes the information sent is incorrect, but that's all they have to go on.
- When prescriptions are changed I've often been told by the chemist

6.16 Comparison with our 2022 Survey

In the Autumn/Winter of 2022 we conducted a very [similar survey](#), with 203 responses.

We have compared the response for each question. to establish what has improved, and what has not.

6.16.1 What has improved, since 2022?

	% 2022	% 2024
Get through within 10 minutes	18%	23%
Offered a choice of appointment method	33%	39%
Seen the same day for emergencies	47%	59%
Seen within a week, for routine appointments	66%	68%
Appointment/callback is on time	77%	80%
Remote consultation has met needs	44%	51%

When comparing with the 2022 survey, we find that respondents are now more likely to get through within 10 minutes, and to be offered a choice of consultation method.

On access, respondents are being seen quicker for both emergency and routine appointments, with better punctuality of callbacks. A greater proportion of remote appointments, have suited needs.

6.16.2 What has deteriorated, since 2022?

	% 2022	% 2024
Appointment is with preferred GP or Nurse	35%	29%
Feel respected by staff, when booking	73%	70%

We also find that respondents are less likely to see their clinician of choice, and feel less respected by staff, when booking.

6.16.3 What else has changed?

	% 2022	% 2024
Have had a remote appointment	60%	91%

We note that use of remote appointments is now considerably more widespread - with 60% of respondents attending one in 2022, rising to 91% in 2024.

	% 2022	% 2024
Book appointments by phone	87%	83%

Use of phones, to book appointments, has declined marginally by 4%.

7. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of all feedback, Age UK Redbridge, Barking & Havering would like to make the following recommendations:

We make 2 recommendations on telephones.

7.1 Telephones

A clear majority of respondents (83%) usually book their appointments by phone, with just 10% visiting the practice and a similar number (7%) using online services.

7.1.1 With 8 out of 10 older people preferring, or using the phone, we urge practices to maintain a good level of telephone access now and into the future. Regardless of the move towards online/remote booking, there will always be a significant percentage of telephone users.

Just a quarter of callers usually get through within 10 minutes, with a clear majority experiencing long waits or issues - such as being cut-off.

7.1.2 We feel that this level of access is inadequate, causing widespread discomfort and frustration, while delaying potentially important treatment or care. While acknowledging that this is a difficult systemic problem nationwide, we know there are solutions, such as working more effectively at PCN (Primary Care Network) level to facilitate access, enabling more people who prefer online booking to do so (easing congestion), or providing an automated call-back service to avoid long waits. We know there is much good practice to observe.

We make 2 recommendations on online systems.

7.2 Online Systems

It is a common experience that once getting through on the phone, callers are advised to complete the online booking form.

7.2.1 We hope that callers are not directed to use online booking, without first having a discussion to see if this is appropriate. It is a well-known fact, backed up locally by this survey, that a large proportion of older people do not have the ability, inclination or indeed opportunity to use computers, devices or the internet.

For some, the online forms are 'straightforward' to use while others feel they are complicated, contain too many - including 'irrelevant' questions, not always easy to find on the website, and sometimes give misleading or inaccurate information. Having to remember passwords can be a challenge.

7.2.2 If online systems are not easy to use, convenient or effective, people will continue to use the phone. We also know that those who have found the systems to be difficult, are less likely to revisit them. To better understand the variety of issues, as highlighted, we recommend that older patients are encouraged to give their feedback - perhaps through topical sessions at Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) or by completing practice wide surveys.

We make 4 recommendations on patient preferences and support.

7.3 Patient Preferences and Support

NHS England and the Royal College of GPs have urged practices to discover and respect patients' preferences, and to see a greater proportion in-person. However, findings suggest that just a third of respondents are usually offered a choice of consultation method.

7.3.1 While not commenting on clinical or safety protocols, we would echo this advice and hope that those clearly preferring face-to-face appointments will be accommodated. It remains the case that for diagnosis, many patients prefer to be seen in-person, and would choose this if available.

It is also the case that many patients prefer to see a clinician of their choosing.

7.3.2 As choice is important for some patients, we hope that preferences are discussed when booking - perhaps flagged in the patient record, so that continuity is addressed and facilitated, wherever possible.

Reception staff members are widely found to be compassionate, polite and helpful, however some patients are not comfortable with triage by receptionists, who 'may not be qualified, or trusted to uphold confidentiality'.

7.3.3 Clearly there has to be some level of triage at the point of booking, and we know that staff are trained and/or qualified to undertake assessments. It might be the case that staff need to explain the procedure, in clear and basic terms, to give reassurance that the process is planned, methodical and safe.

On reviewing feedback we note that patients have a wide variety of basic needs, such as in ability to book or get to their appointments, support at the practice itself while waiting or booking in (long queues and touch screens have been problematic for some) and many have had potentially avoidable issues with medication, test results and referrals.

7.3.4 Whatever the service or setting, treatment and care should be 'wrapped around the person' and as holistic as possible. We hope that all patients have an opportunity to discuss their needs and circumstances, and that staff are trained to identify barriers and issues. We urge practices to also make full use of their social prescribing services, and specialists.

8. Glossary of Terms

BAME

Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

9. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public, and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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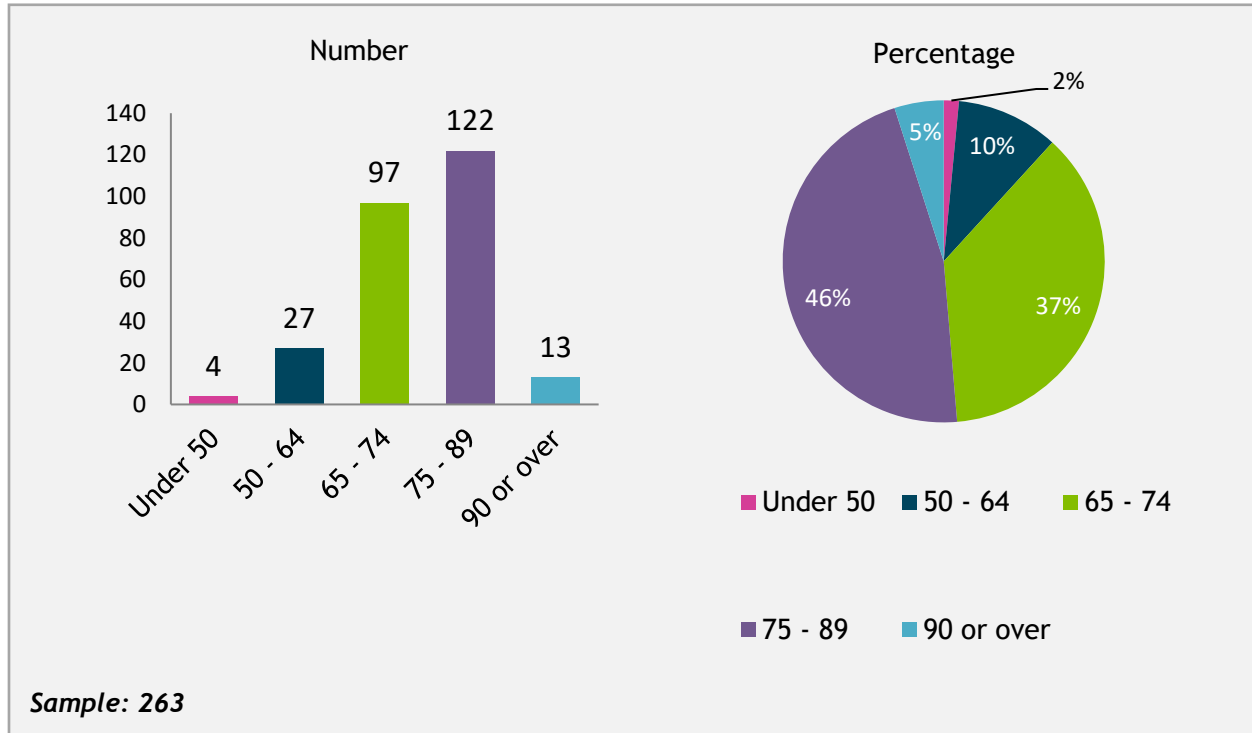
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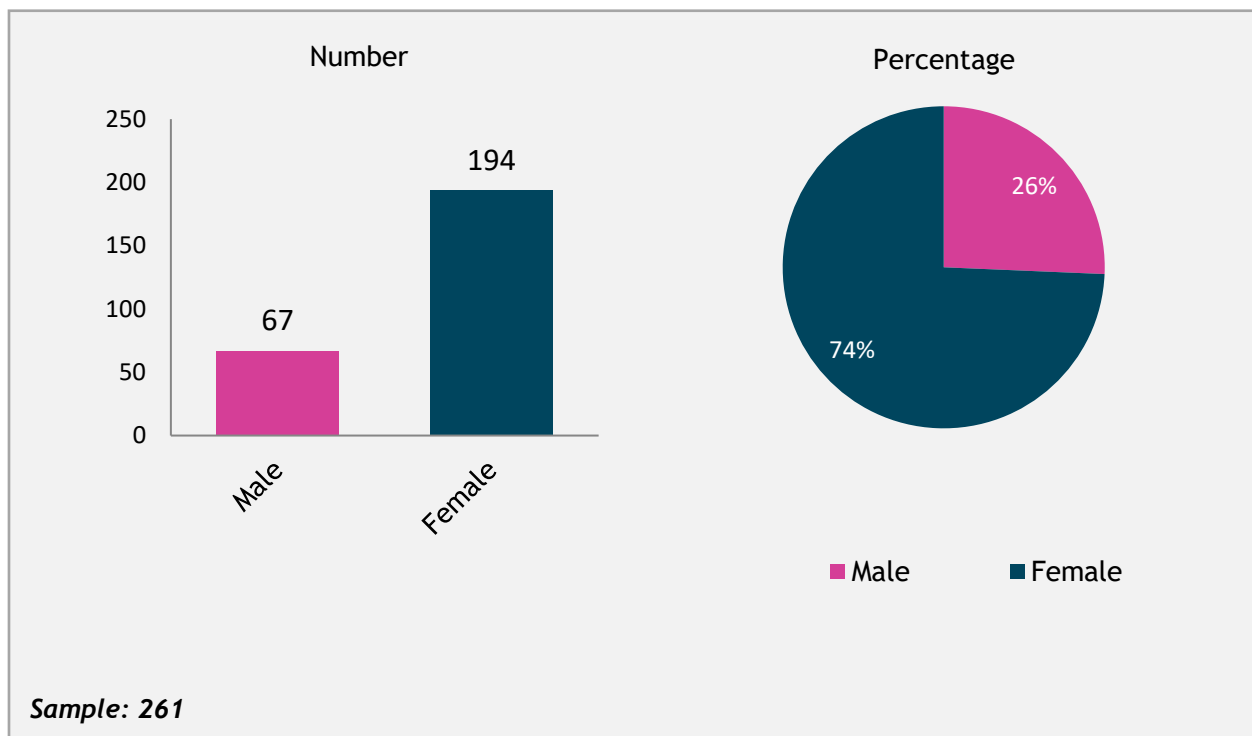
Appendix - Demographics

The demographics of participants are stated as follows:

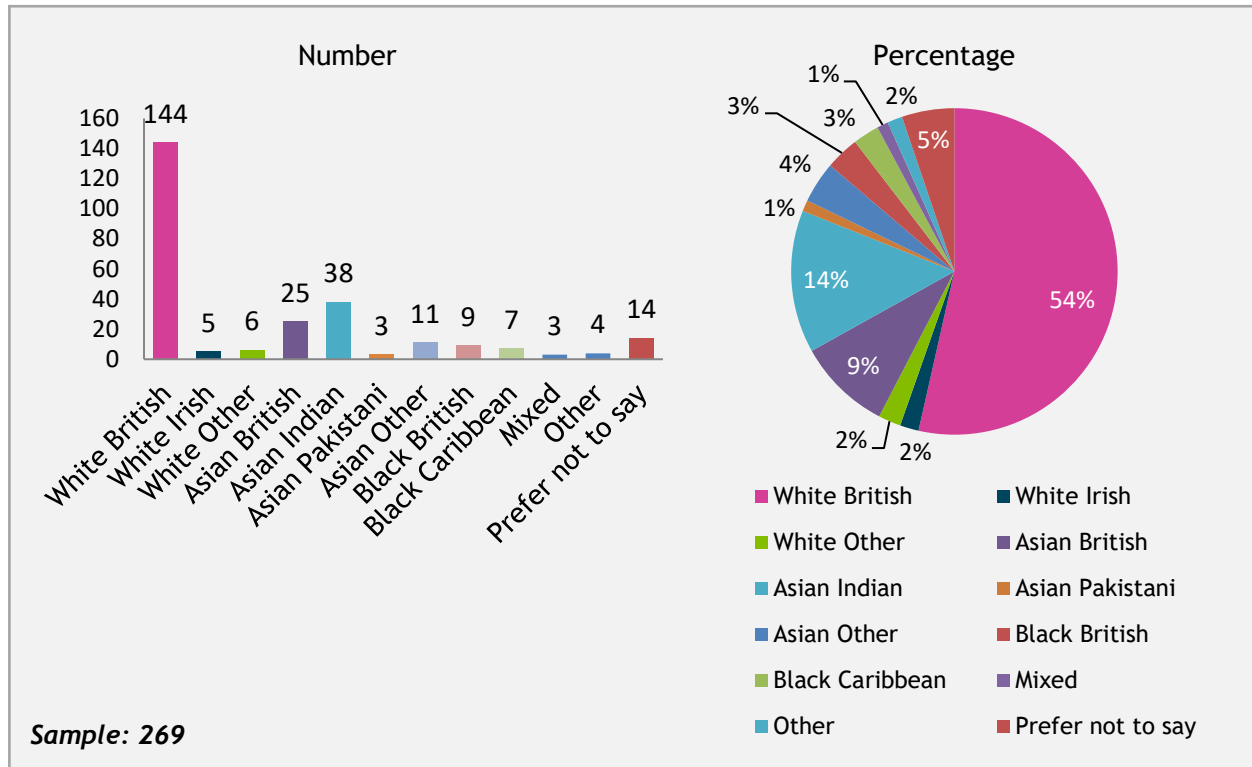
Age



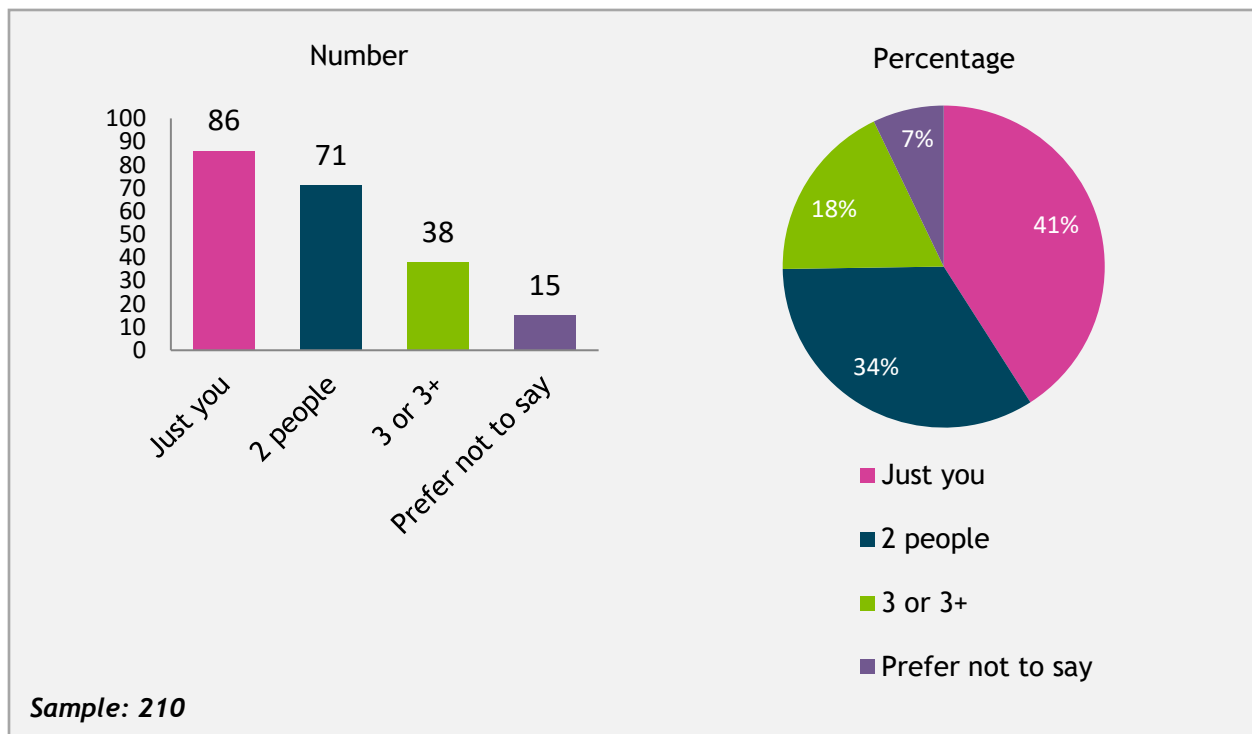
Gender



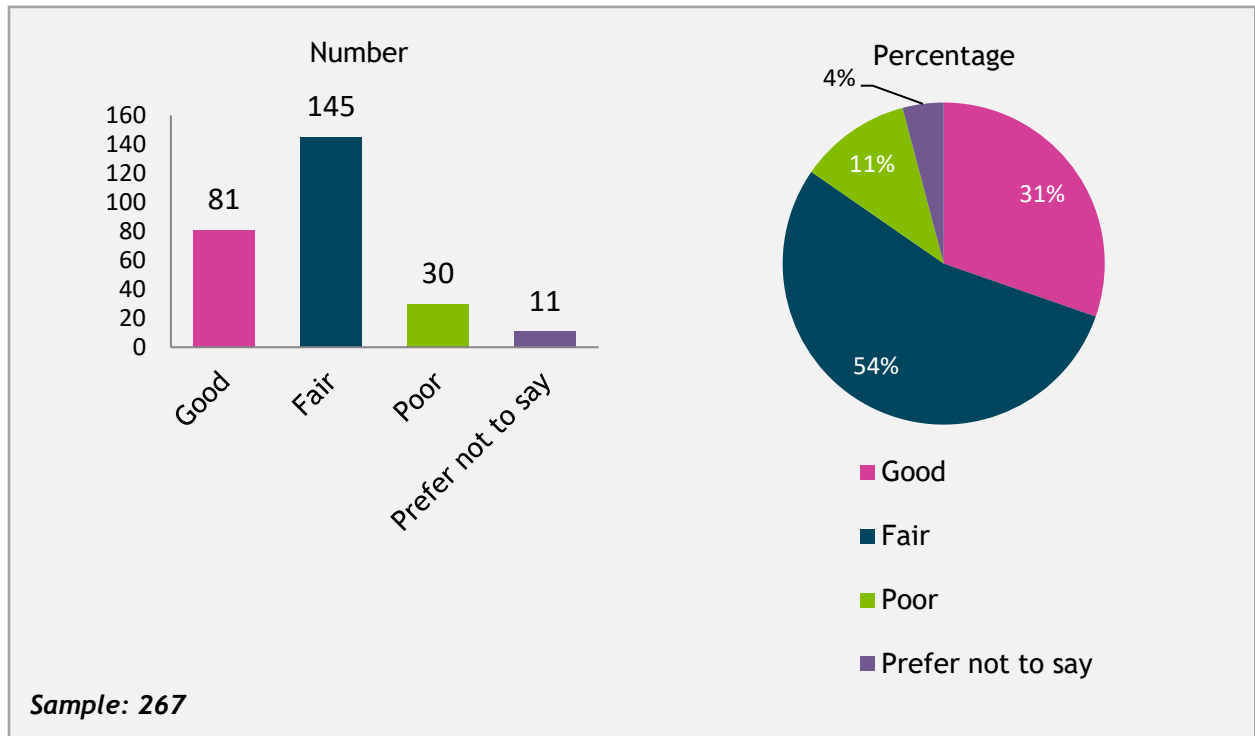
Ethnicity



Household



Health



“I have never been able to book appointments on the phone. Impossible to get through.

At times, a message says ‘you are 15th in the queue’, then gradually it comes down to zero.

Then nothing happens.”

Local GP Patient