



Listening Tour Area Report

Eastbourne

January to April 2026

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Listening Tour – Eastbourne

Healthwatch East Sussex previously undertook an annual Listening Tour to a single part of East Sussex to engage local people on their experiences of health and care. In 2024/25 we adapted our approach to the Listening Tour, visiting three areas to increase our reach and understand the priorities of a range of local communities. In 2025/26 we chose to continue with this new approach to our Listening Tours, visiting a further two areas of East Sussex, with our most recent tour focusing on Eastbourne.

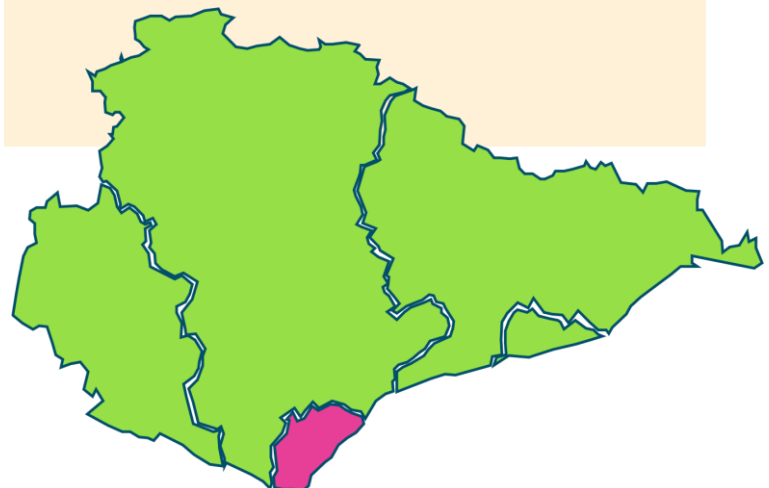
Our Listening Tour uses a variety of activities to hear people's experiences of accessing and using health and care services. We do this through surveys, discussion groups, listening events and our information and signposting mechanisms, with a focus on gathering qualitative feedback. We use the feedback received to make recommendations to health and care partners to support positive changes to local services. This report relates to what we heard during our Listening Tour in Eastbourne in 2026.

The Eastbourne District Integrated Community Team (ICT) Population Profile Pack states:

- Eastbourne has an older age profile, with fewer people under 45 than the national average
- More carers and individuals living with disabilities than the national average
- Highest rate in Sussex of people attending A&E from care homes
- High rates of anxiety and depression compared to the rest of Sussex

Some of the groups visited as part of the Eastbourne Listening Tour included:

- Matthew 25 Mission Eastbourne
- Amaze Parent and Carer groups
- Compass Arts groups
- Eastbourne Age Concern Shed
- Listening Tour stakeholder event at Emmanuel Church



What we heard in Eastbourne

We heard from **131** people, with **69** sharing feedback through public engagement

Primary care

- People shared examples of attempting to access primary care services such as GPs and pharmacies for their healthcare need, only to find the service is unavailable or unable to support them, resulting in them having to attend A&E
- Communication with healthcare staff in both primary and secondary care services can be an issue. Although some people shared positive experiences of empathetic support, others shared instances of feeling dismissed. One person reported being called “stupid” for looking into their symptoms on the internet ahead of their appointment
- People are not always aware of services and how or when to access them. This included people being unsure what minor health conditions pharmacies can help with, and when to contact NHS 111 and what they can help with
- Working age and young people can struggle to book a GP appointment as they are often unable to call their practice at 8am. Appointments outside of school or working hours are limited, which can also make attending appointments more difficult
- Anxiety can have a negative impact on individuals' ability to contact services and book appointments. Those with phone-related anxiety can struggle to place or answer a phone call, and we heard if they do manage to call, they end up hanging up if they are on hold for too long
- Digital options such as Engage Consult were useful, but we also heard preferences from some about making appointments face-to-face

Secondary care

- Concerns were raised about the number of messages that are put out about A&E being very busy, as frequently seeing messages that you should avoid A&E can result in individuals avoiding this service even when they genuinely need to be seen
- Experiences of hospital care were largely positive from those we spoke to, however, waiting times in A&E were an issue for many
- People shared experiences of long delays following referrals, (such as delays to scans and diagnostic testing, as well as ongoing care) with people reporting that in some cases they had forgotten they had been referred to another service, as they hadn't received any communication about the progress of their referral

What we heard in Eastbourne

Secondary care

- Accessing mental health support can be challenging, with long waiting lists and people sharing examples of being turned down for support due to not meeting the threshold for that level of support, or because they had recently accessed mental health support
- Often mental health support, such as talking therapy, can be time limited, which can result in people being discharged before they feel ready for this
- Mixed feedback was shared from those with experience of living in supported accommodation. While some shared their positive experiences and highlighted how accommodation supported them to maintain their independence, others did not feel they were supported in a way that was appropriate for their needs
- Individuals highlighted examples where they felt different services were not joined up or communicating with one another effectively, with this having a negative impact on their experiences of care, as well as resulting in delays to their treatment. This related to a range of different primary and secondary care services such as GPs, hospitals and A&E, mental health services and community services, amongst others

Social determinants

- Being asked for your preferred name was very valuable, particularly for people identifying as being transgender or non-binary, helping to ensure that people feel their identity is being recognised
- Community groups were very valuable in supporting people to maintain their health and wellbeing, allowing people to build friendships and reduce social isolation
- Beachy Head continues to be a location people travel to when attempting to take their own lives, with a variety of social factors leading people to make these attempts. Although this has reduced over the years, more could be done to reduce this further, such as having a greater amount of clearer signage near cliff edges which displays local and national support services information
- Accessing health services can be more challenging for individuals experiencing homelessness, with people reporting being unable to get the care and healthcare support they need
- Poor experiences of healthcare services in the past can result in people being reluctant to reach out for support, leading to individuals' needs to becoming worse over time

Eastbourne: Information & Signposting Service and Feedback Centre

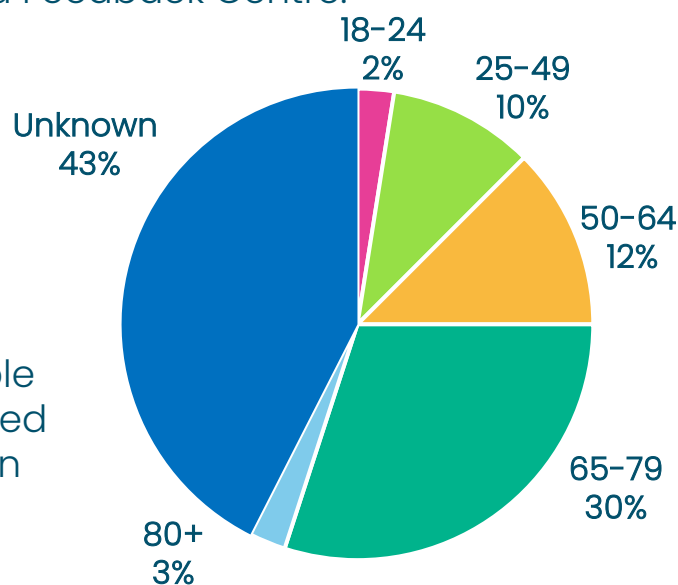
Healthwatch East Sussex offers an online Feedback Centre, allowing people in East Sussex to leave feedback about their experiences of health and care services. We also offer an Information and Signposting (I&S) service, which provides information to support people to navigate health and care services.

During our listening tour timeframe, we received 40 enquiries and pieces of feedback through our I&S service and Feedback Centre.

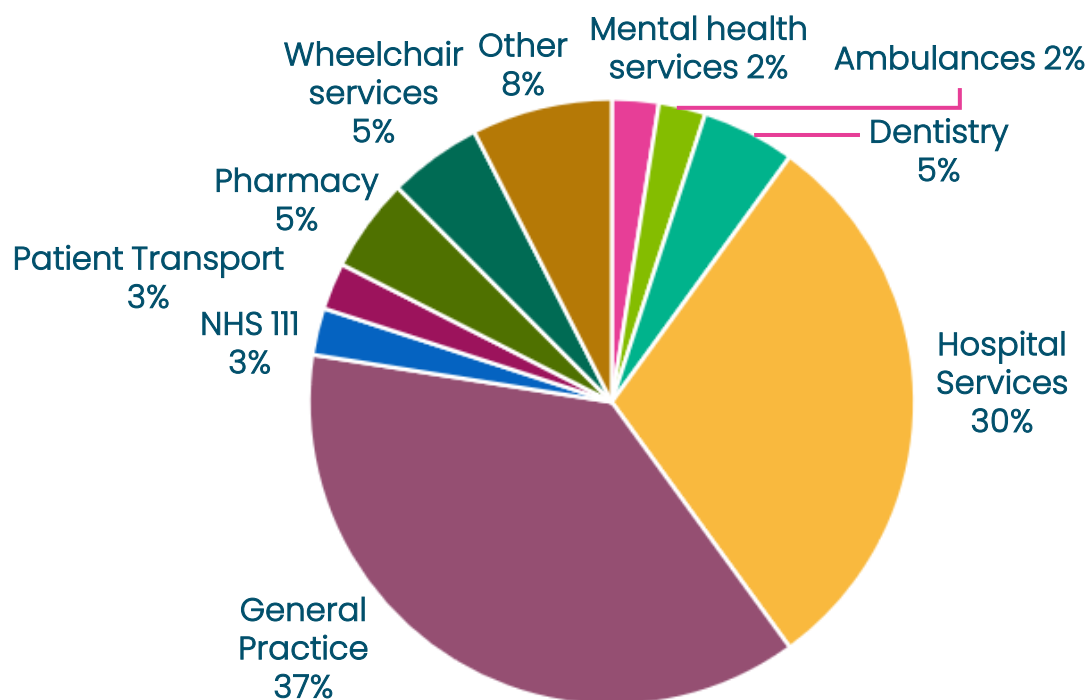
I&S and Feedback Centre Demographics:

Those leaving feedback were of a range of ages, including young people, working age adults and older adults.

21 people identified as a woman, 2 people identified as a man and 1 person identified as non-binary. Demographic information was not obtained from the remaining individuals.



Those contacting our I&S service or completing a feedback form contacted us about a range of healthcare services. The most common service mentioned in feedback was GP services, followed by a range of hospital services, including A&E. Other services such as dentistry, mental health services, and patient transport were also mentioned.



Eastbourne Listening Workshop

We engaged 10 individuals as part of our workshop

In February, we held a Listening Tour workshop with professionals and members of the public to hear about their experiences of health and care services. We presented on what we had heard through our work so far (a visual of this is shown on page 8) and held two discussion groups focusing on the following questions:

- What are your experiences of health and care in Eastbourne?
- The NHS has released it's 10-year plan, outlining their priorities for the year ahead. What do you think the NHS should focus on?

The responses to these questions are summarised below.



Experiences of Health and Care

- Concerns around services over-relying on online and telephone systems for booking (and in some cases conducting) appointments were raised. Many groups of people such as those who are digitally excluded, those with sensory impairments and people with mental health needs (including phone related anxiety) can find telephone communication more challenging, resulting in people being unable to access the care and support they need
- Many secondary care services require a referral from a primary care service for patients to access treatment. This can be a barrier for those struggling to get a GP appointment, leading to delays in their care
- It was highlighted that pharmacies have different opening hours, and closed pharmacies advertising where to find the nearest open pharmacy on their door would be useful
- Many services are only able to support individuals for a set period of time. This can lead to voluntary services "holding" individuals when services are no longer able to support them

Eastbourne Listening Workshop

Experiences of Health and Care (continued)

- Feedback was shared around the difficulties people are facing in getting through to audiology services, sharing stories of calls to the service not being responded to
- It was felt there is a lack of preventative care, with many healthcare services supporting people who have reached crisis point, but limited support for those needing assistance but not in crisis

What do you think the NHS should focus on?

- It was felt that the co-location of statutory and voluntary services, alongside more social activities such as exercise and art classes, would be useful to support people to better access services
- People shared it would be useful to have walk in centres to make it easier for people to access GP services rather than having to attend A&E. People highlighted the importance of these being walk in only services, without registered patients, to reduce waiting times
- Many voluntary services are facing their own challenges, including funding challenges. It is important for statutory services to consider how best to work with voluntary services to ensure people can receive the best care and support possible
- The language that is used when discussing services and service provision is important. Phrases such as “bringing care into the community” are often used, but it is important to consider what this actually means, as different professionals and members of the public are likely to have very different ideas on this
- Although the movement to digital systems is helpful for many, it is vital that digital forms of communication can’t replace face-to-face options, which are important to a large amount of people, whether they are digitally excluded or not

Jan '26 – Mapping showed all Eastbourne GP practices had posted **'You and Your GP'** guidance on their websites and most complied with required operating times for communication by phone/web/face to face

Nov '24 – **Dentistry in Care Homes** project found that people without private dentistry did not receive routine NHS dental check ups. People also faced long waits for NHS special care dentistry in Eastbourne

May '25 – Survey into **Women's and girls' experiences** of health and care. Lower proportion felt listened to, and transport was a bigger barrier in Rother than in other areas of East Sussex.

June '25 – **Pathways to ED** found that patients access A&E and UTC as they feel they cannot access primary care when needed

Difficulty accessing **NHS dentistry** and **emergency dental pathways**

Recent Healthwatch East Sussex Projects

Difficulties **accessing GP appointments** with particular issues around GP phone systems

Information and Signposting

Mixed experiences of **hospital care** with particular concerns around **A&E**

Jan '25 – **Discharge to assess** project identified people in Discharge to Assess beds who felt they were too young to be in residential care and wanted rehabilitation to return home

Aug '25 – **PPG mapping** found significant variation in the frequency and type of PPG meetings in Eastbourne

Eastbourne Listening Tour

Jan '25 – **Cost of living** survey findings showed 53% of Eastbourne residents expect their financial situation to get worse in the next 12 months

Eastbourne LT '22

Communication with patients was not always clear and accessible, and alternative methods were not always available

Importance of voluntary sector delivering flexible but targeted help and support

Physical access at some health and care services was an issue, with some locations not being physically suitable

People's appreciation of the NHS was clear, with positive examples of support, advice, treatment and procedures

Long waits for appointments, particularly for GP and mental health services

Eastbourne LT as of Feb 2025

People's **communication needs** not being met by services, particularly where only one form of communication (i.e. telephone) is available

A lack of communication between different services (NHS 111, GP practices and hospital services) often makes navigating services challenging

Issues with **inaccessible and inflexible appointment times** being given for some services, making it more difficult for patients to make appointments

ICT Data sets

More calls to 111 and 999 with more ambulance mobilisations and more ambulance visits to care homes compared to other areas of Sussex

Higher annual increase in GP registered patients, with lower levels of GPs nurses and direct patient care staff compared to other areas in Sussex

Older age profile, with fewer under 45s, more older people living alone and more care homes compared to the rest of the UK

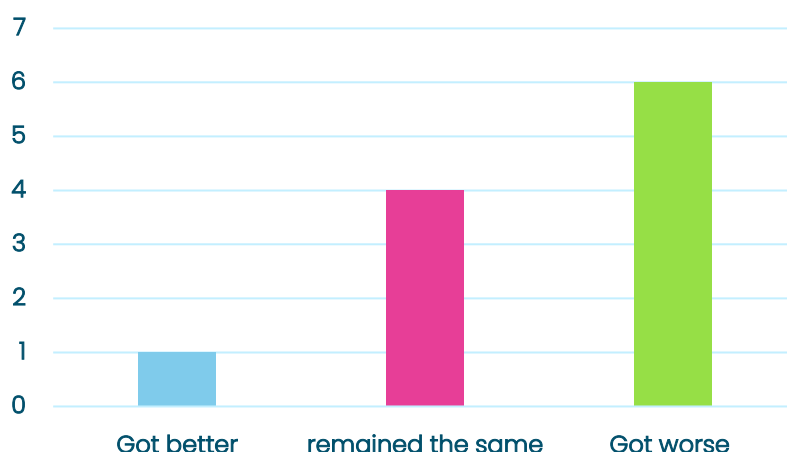
Eastbourne: Individual Surveys

12 individuals completed individual surveys

During our tour we used an online survey asking people to share their views and experiences on the healthcare services they had used over the last 12 months, including what worked well and what needed to be improved. Those completing the survey were also asked to share some of the things that impact their overall wellbeing. 12 people completed our survey in full.

- Of those who responded to the survey, **75%** of people shared they found the information they receive from health and care services easy to understand **all or most of the time**
- **54.5%** said they felt their overall experience of healthcare had **worsened** over the last 12 months
- **33.3%** felt that different services **never worked well together** to support their care

Has your overall experience of health and care services over the last 12 months:



Experiences of health and care services:

Individuals who completed our online survey were asked to rate their experience of the health and care services they had used in the last 12 months:

- **58.3%** rated their GP as **good** or **excellent**. **25%** rated their GP as **average**, and **16.7%** rated their GP as **poor**
- **54.5%** rated their experience of dentistry as **excellent** or **good**. **9.1%** rated their experience as **poor**, with the remainder saying they hadn't used this service
- **54.5%** rated their experience of hospital outpatient services as **good** **9.1%** rated it as **average**, with the remainder having not used these
- **63.6%** rated their experience of pharmacies as being either **excellent** or **good**

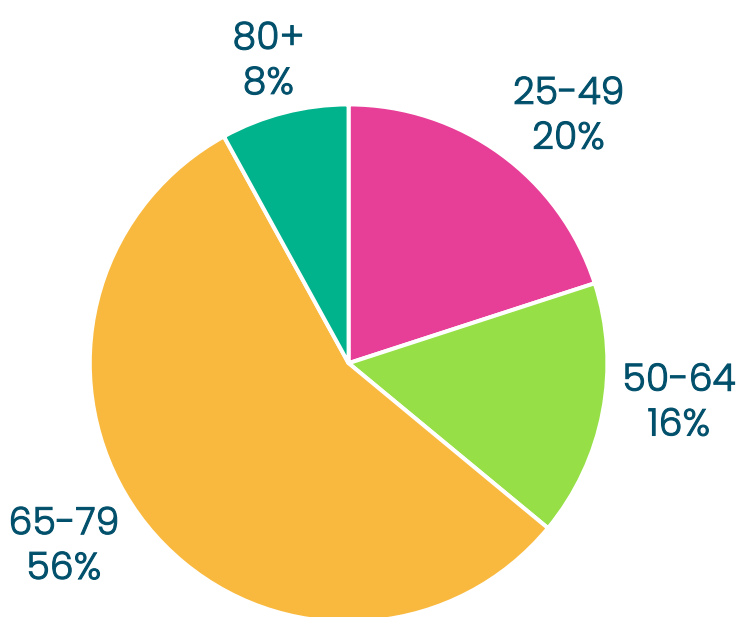
Eastbourne: Demographics

We engaged 131 people on our tour, of which 25 completed our demographics questionnaire

As part of our Listening Tour Survey, we ask individuals to share demographic information with us, to enable us to have a better understanding of what groups we are engaging with. Where possible we also asked people to complete demographic information forms during our in-person engagement, which were collected anonymously. In total, 25 people shared their demographic information with us, with analysis of this shown below.

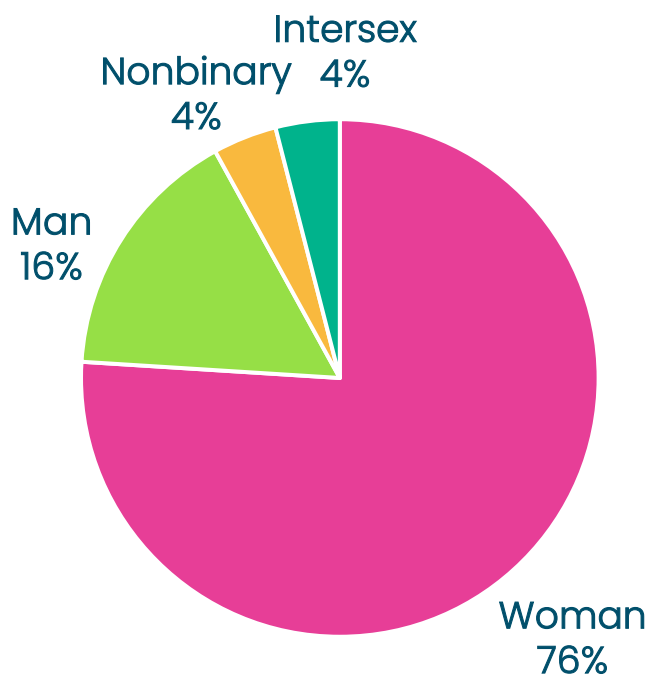
Age:

56% of those completing the questionnaire were between 65-79 years old

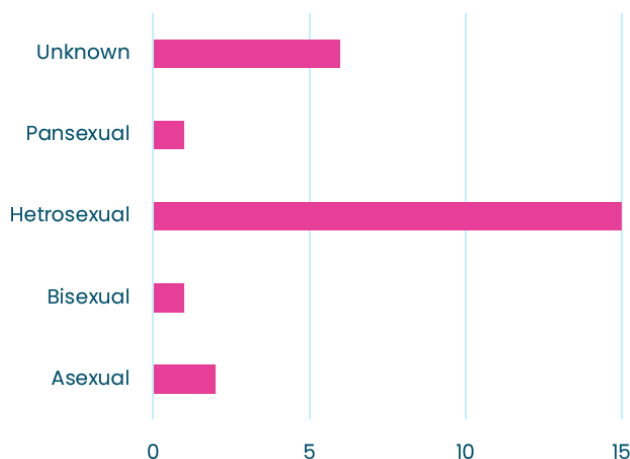


Gender:

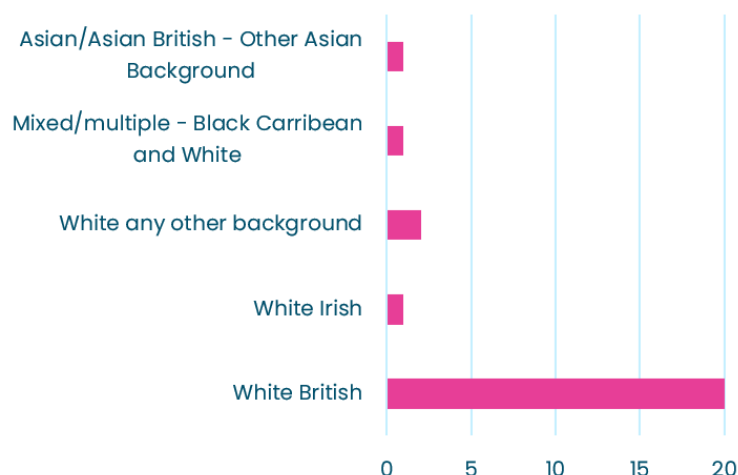
76% of those completing the questionnaire were women



Sexual orientation:



Ethnicity:



Eastbourne Quotes: What we Heard

"Had to wait 4 hours for mental health to first see me in A&E after booking in when [I was told there] was a one hour target"

"My dentistry service has been fantastic, couldn't fault. GP services have always been supportive and receptionists are helpful"

"Staff were predominantly caring and competent, but need to listen to patients"

"GP appointments can be a lottery needing several attempts even to get into the queue for a telephone appointment"

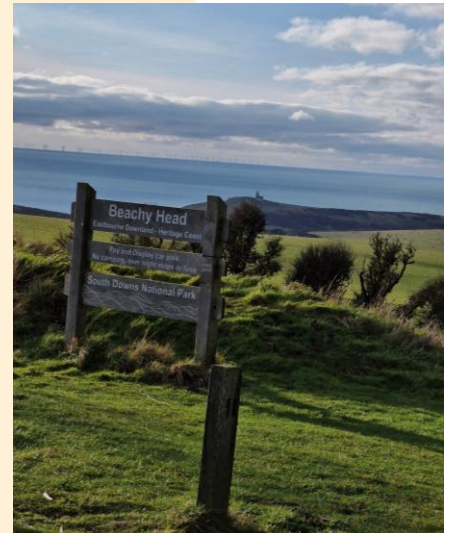
"I rang [my GP practice] to arrange a non urgent appointment and was told that they only arrange appointments on a daily basis and I would have to try again the following day, I could not book an appointment for any other day except the present one!"

"I feel like people use 111 because they don't want to go to their GP or to A&E, but that's pretty much where [NHS 111] always sends you anyway"

"A&E staff at Eastbourne District Hospital were kind and helpful despite pressure"

Listening Tour Eastbourne: What happens now?

1. Healthwatch will feed back to NHS Surrey and Sussex on the experiences shared regarding digital access to primary care, including the need to ensure services are accessible for those who are digitally excluded, have sensory impairments, and/or have mental health needs. We will also feed this into our work with GP practices across East Sussex later in 2026
2. Healthwatch will raise the issue of progressing referrals and patient communications to NHS Surrey and Sussex and NHS Trusts and the need to ensure people are made aware of self-referral options where these are available
3. Healthwatch will continue to work with community groups to capture their experiences of health and care. Later in 2026 we will work with Compass Arts in Eastbourne on a project focusing on men's mental health
4. Healthwatch will highlight the need to ensure that NHS services identify and refer to individuals by their preferred name
5. Healthwatch will incorporate the learning from this listening activity into a wider report on the Listening Tour of East Sussex, which will be shared later in 2026





healthwatch

East Sussex

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