



Mapping Patient Participation Groups in East Sussex

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healthwatch
East Sussex

Introduction

About Healthwatch East Sussex

Healthwatch East Sussex is your local health and social care champion. We make sure NHS leaders and local council decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



About this report

This report summarises the findings and recommendations from our short exercise to map Patient Participation Groups (PPGs) in East Sussex between May and July 2025.

It provides a countywide overview of PPGs at GP surgeries, including where and how they were identified as operating, and highlights some of the issues we encountered in undertaking this activity.



Overview of our project

GP practices are required by their NHS contract to have a Patient Participation Group (PPG).

A PPG is a group of volunteer patients, carers and GP practice staff who support the running of their surgery.

PPGs look at practice services, patient experience, and how improvements may be made for the benefit of patients and the practice. They provide links to the community.

Each PPG is different, but all have the aim of making sure that the patient and improving health are at the heart of everything the practice does.

Our project sought to understand the status of PPGs in East Sussex based on publicly available information.

Aims and objectives

Aim: To map which GP practices in East Sussex have a Patient Participation Group (PPG)

Objectives:

1. Identify the distribution of PPGs currently operating at GP practices across East Sussex
2. Gather contact details for PPGs to enable Healthwatch to contact them
3. Gather information to help understand how PPGs in East Sussex are currently operating

What we did

Between May and July 2025, five Healthwatch volunteers reviewed public/patient facing information across 55 GP practices in East Sussex using practice websites and follow-up requests.

Each volunteer was allocated and reviewed a batch of GP websites. We focused on websites as the most common means by which patients or the public may seek to find information about PPGs.

We used the information available to identify three specific facts for each practice:

- 1. Does the practice currently have a PPG?**
- 2. If a PPG is in operation, are contact details for it available?**
- 3. Is any other public information available on the operation of the PPG?**

Limitations

- We limited our review to information available from GP practices directly, and not from third-party means e.g. web searches.
- We recognise our snapshot is only accurate as of July 2025 and subsequent updates or changes may have occurred since.



**We reviewed
websites across 55
GP practices for their
content on PPGs**



**Where no website
content was found
about PPGs we
contacted practices
by phone or email
for more
information**

Key findings:

We found:

- Significant variations exist in the quantity, quality and accuracy of information that GP practice websites provide on Patient Participation Groups.
- Of the 55 practices reviewed:
 - 49 had information on their website or made available by reception staff which indicated they had a PPG.
 - 6 didn't have sufficient information on their website or available from reception staff to enable us to determine whether they had a PPG.
- Some GP practices provide excellent, clear and comprehensive information related to their Patient Participation Group on their website. These clarify their role, how they operate, what they do and how people can share their views or get involved.
- Unfortunately, we also found examples where information was either very basic or out-of-date, and in some cases no information about PPGs was present at all.
- We found PPG content and specific PPG webpages were inconsistently presented on GP websites, so too were the pathways to them from home pages. Not using 'Patient Participation Group' in page names and content can make content challenging to find.

Key findings:

- Some GP websites possessed helpful content on their practice's PPG, including one or more of the following:
 - Detail on the remit and role of PPGs
 - Clarity on the membership of the PPG, including the number of members and the make-up (patient, public, staff, community representative etc.)
 - Information on the PPG Chair or preferred point of contact (name), as well as personalised or PPG specific contact details
 - Detail on the frequency of PPG meetings, and a schedule of meeting dates, as well as minutes from previous PPG meetings and agendas for forthcoming meetings
 - Clarity on how to join the PPG, with information on what is expected of members and the application process
 - Information on how to share feedback with the PPG or practice directly about any experiences as a patient
 - Sharing of practice documents and information such as newsletters
 - Links to key documents such as patient surveys and CQC inspection reports

However, we found relatively few practices provided all or most of the items above.

Key findings:

- Contact details provided for PPGs varied significantly and this may affect people's ability to share feedback, raise queries or indicate an interest in joining.
 - Fewer than a third of practice websites (14) provided named contacts for their PPGs along with dedicated or personalised contact details.
 - 22 practice websites offered contact forms or other generic means of contacting their PPGs, often via a generic practice email address.
 - 19 practice websites offered no contact details or mechanisms to guide people on how to contact their PPGs.
- A lack of direct contact details may serve as a disincentive for patients to contact PPGs, and/or place additional pressure on phonelines or other methods of communication if they seek to use alternatives at the practice.
- Some websites have contact forms that enable people to ask queries, contact or apply to join their PPG. However, next steps are not always clarified, such as the timeframes to expect a response and from whom.
- In a few examples, we used contact forms and emails (as directed after phoning) to ask queries about PPGs at GP practices and received no responses.

Key findings:

Our volunteers reported experiencing a wide range of challenges in identifying the existence and status of Patient Participation Groups at GP practices in East Sussex. These included:

- Reception and other practice staff having mixed and often limited awareness of the existence and operation of a PPG at their practice. When contacted practice staff were not always able to provide or signpost to further information or contact details.
- PPG content and specific PPG website pages often haven't been updated for months or in some cases for several years. This may create doubt for readers over the accuracy of the information and potentially about the relevance, existence, and actions of the PPG.
- Only 22 of the 55 practice websites reviewed had a date for the most recent PPG page update or a document by which it was possible to determine when content was changed. Of these:
 - Nine had been updated during 2025
 - Half (11) had dates suggesting the last update was in 2023 or longer ago.
 - One PPG website page was marked as last updated in 2020.

Conclusion

Our mapping exercise has identified there is currently a diverse range of information on PPGs across the websites of GP practices in East Sussex. Whilst most GP websites have information about PPGs, we found this varies significantly in quality, clarity and accuracy.

Some GP websites provide clear and comprehensive information on what a PPG is, the activities of their PPG, how to contact it and how to get involved. However, others provide much less consistent content and for some practices we found no PPG content at all.

The presence of PPG related content on most websites is reassuring, however, from this information alone it is challenging to identify where PPGs are operating and how effectively.

Concerningly and surprisingly, when we contacted some GP practices seeking additional information about their PPG, some staff were unable to respond directly to our enquiries, which suggests awareness of PPGs and their functions may be improved in practice teams.

If, as outlined in the recently published [NHS Long-term Plan](#), there is an aspiration to increase patient experience as a means of continually assessing performance, then PPGs remain well placed to contribute to and support positive service development.

However, to do so, PPGs may require a greater profile to strengthen awareness of them and enable them to recruit participants, operate sustainably, relay feedback and provide links with local people. Whilst information and communication is only one part of this process, our findings suggest there is work to do to create a more consistent approach in how PPGs and their activity are presented to patients and the public on GP practice websites.

Recommendations

Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and GP Practices

1. PCNs and GP practices should work to raise staff awareness of Patient Participation Groups, including their role, activity and how patients may share feedback with them or seek to join, so they are able to pro-actively promote them and support enquiries.
2. PCNs and GP practices should work to ensure Patient Participation Group content can be identified by practice website search tools, and where possible be clearly accessible directly from home pages.
3. PCNs and GP practices should seek to provide the dates when website pages were last updated so the relevance or timeliness of content is clear to users.
4. PCNs and GP practices should ensure there are contact forms or contact details that enable patients or the public to contact practice PPGs directly to leave feedback, raise concerns or apply to join.
5. PCNs and GP practices should liaise with the PPG to undertake regular (annual) website audits to review navigability, clarity and content, including information related to PPGs.

Recommendations

NHS Sussex (Sussex Integrated Care Board)

6. NHS Sussex should explore opportunities to work with PCNs, GP practice staff and PPGs to co-design standard website text to support greater uniformity in the provision of PPG information across GP practices. This may include a list of suggested minimum content or a checklist of items to consider.
7. NHS Sussex should engage with PCNs, GP Practices and PPGs to better understand how PPGs are currently operating, how challenges may be overcome, and where opportunities exist to consistently embed them in practice activity.

Healthwatch East Sussex

8. Healthwatch should share this report with NHS Sussex and local GP practices to raise awareness of the issues related to PPGs.
9. Healthwatch should share this insight with Healthwatch England to support national intelligence on this theme.

For more information

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