



Listening Tour area report

Hastings

February to May 2025

Published: June 2025

Listening Tour – Hastings

Healthwatch East Sussex has previously undertaken an annual Listening Tour to a single part of East Sussex to engage local people on their experiences of health and care. For 2024/25 we have adapted our approach to the Listening Tour and are visiting three areas to increase our reach and understand the priorities of a range of local communities.

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, and listening events. 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 in our Listening Tour in Hastings between February and May 2025.

The Hastings District Integrated Community Team Population Profile Pack states:

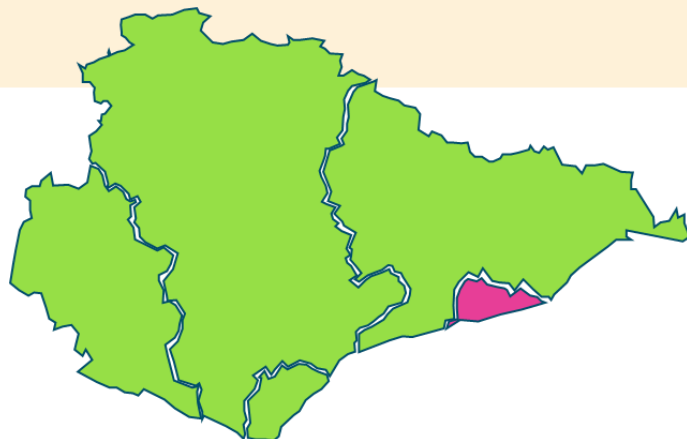
- Hastings has an older age profile, with fewer people under the age of 45 compared with the rest of England
- There are 23 Core20 neighbourhoods in the Hastings area
- More people live with a disability than the national average
- There is a high prevalence of anxiety and depression.



During the Hastings section of the tour, we visited a range of local groups including:

- Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) Age Friendly Coffee Morning
- Care for the Carers Carer Group
- Parents and Carer Forum
- East Sussex Recovery Alliance Drop-in

We also held a **Listening Tour drop-in** for the public at Central Hall, and a **Listening Tour Workshop** for stakeholders at the Isabel Blackman Centre.



Hastings: Individual Surveys

During our tour we used a simple feedback form that captured:

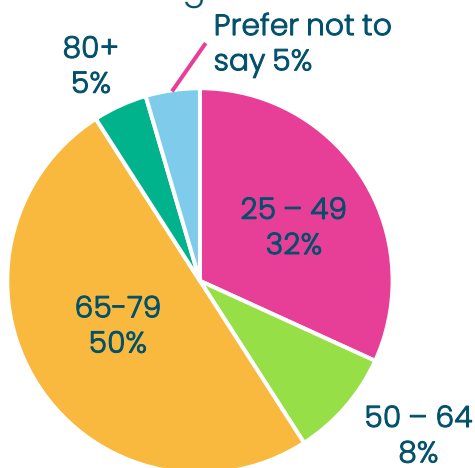
- Impacts on people's health and wellbeing
- Views and experiences of primary care
- The impact of social isolation
- Views on the social determinants of health
- Demographic details of survey respondents

We engaged **90** people on our tour, of which **23** completed individual surveys.

Who completed individual surveys:

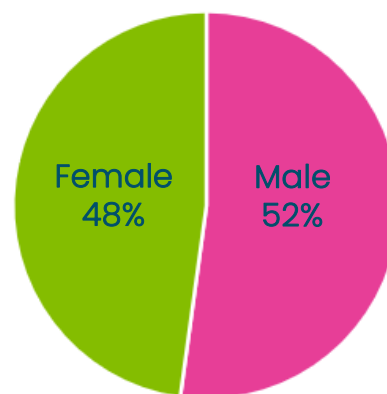
Age:

We spoke to adults of a range of different ages



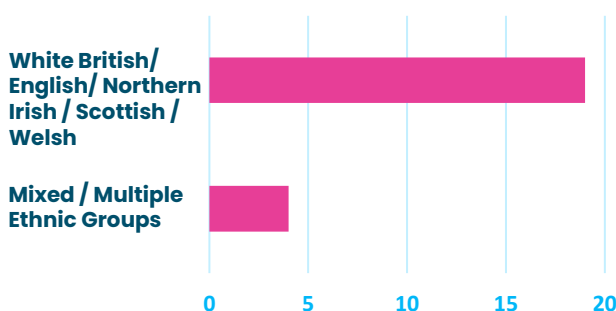
Gender:

The majority of those we surveyed were male



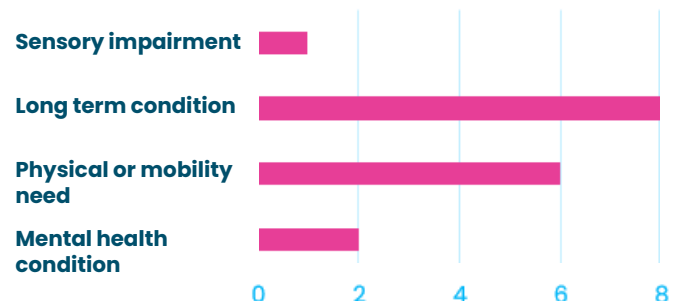
Ethnicity:

The majority of those surveyed identified as White British



Disability:

Survey respondents reported a range of disabilities and long-term conditions



These figures are drawn from the 23 people who completed individual surveys during our listening tour in Hastings. We also engaged people in group discussions during our outreach activity.

Hastings: Feedback Centre

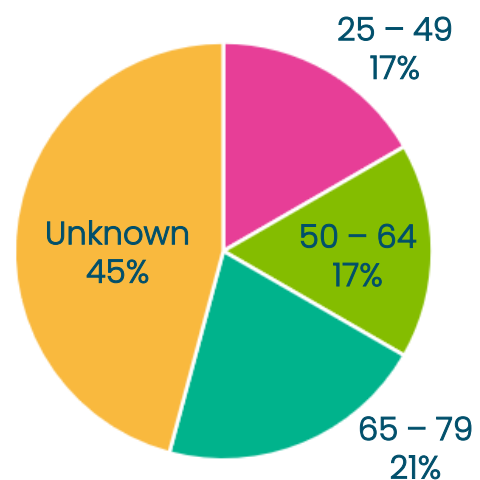
Healthwatch East Sussex offers an online Feedback Centre, allowing people in East Sussex to leave feedback about their experiences of health and care services. We also offer an Information and Signposting (I&S) service, which provides information to support people to navigate the health and care sector.

During our listening tour timeframe, we received 13 pieces of feedback via our online Feedback Centre, and 11 enquiries to our I&S service.

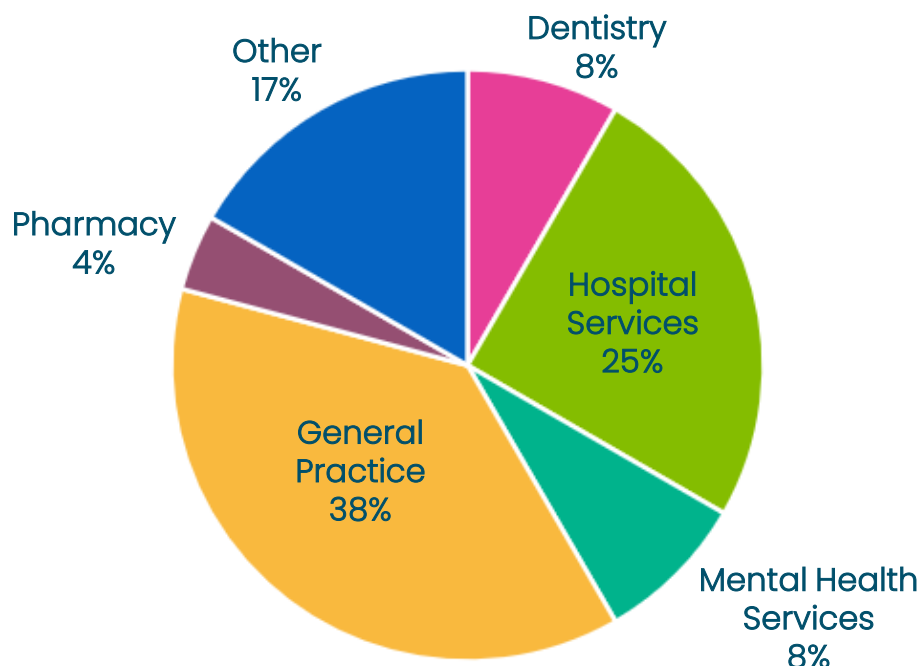
Feedback Form Demographics:

Those leaving feedback were of a range of ages, with all those leaving feedback being adults over the age of 25.

All of those who completed demographic information reported that they were female and white British.



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. A range of other healthcare services including dentistry, mental health services, and hospital services including A&E were also mentioned.



What we heard in Hastings

Health and Wellbeing

- Access to health and care services was a particular issue, with people reporting that it was difficult to get appointments, particularly with their dentist and GP practice.
- People valued the support provided by voluntary and community organisations in supporting their health and wellbeing, however shared that information about what support is available can be challenging to find, particularly for those who don't know what kind of support to look for.
- Transportation was a barrier for those relying on public transport, particularly for appointments outside of Hastings and/or first thing in the morning. People shared that buses can be unreliable, and they are often told to book a taxi if they cannot get to their appointment by public transport, which for some is unaffordable.

Primary Care

- Feedback about GP services accessed was generally positive, however many people shared that they find it very difficult to get an appointment at their GP practice, leading to them giving up.
- People shared that online services are not accessible for those who struggle with or cannot access digital services, making some people feel as though they are being “left behind”.
- People highlighted the importance of being able to access services face to face, with this being particularly important for those who are older, have communication needs, and/or have multiple conditions.
- The timing of appointments was a barrier, with common feedback being that it is difficult to attend appointments which are early in the morning, or during working hours.
- Having a range of different methods to contact your GP practice was useful, with people sharing that how they contacted their GP practice depended on the urgency of their need. Many people said that they would call their GP practice if they needed a same-day appointment.

What we heard in Hastings

Social Isolation

- People shared that they did not regularly feel connected to their community, with caring responsibilities and lack of confidence being the most commonly shared reasons for this.
- Throughout our engagement, people shared how important the groups they attend are in supporting them to connect with others. Groups which connect them with people who have similar experiences to them (e.g. carers groups) are greatly valued.
- Free activities such as sport clubs that used to be available no longer exist, or if they do there is now a booking system and fee to attend. This means that people are not able to go out as much as they used to.
- People shared that there are not enough public toilets available, which can limit how much people are able to go out, with this being a particular issue for those who are older, have a health condition and/or have younger children.

Social Determinants and Equality

- A lack of understanding of different health conditions, the impact they have, and the kind of support that is needed is a barrier for people when attempting to access healthcare services. People shared they find themselves having to explain their health condition and what support they do and don't need, with some people saying that it would be easier for them not to disclose their health condition.
- The cost of living is continuing to impact people's health and wellbeing, with people sharing that they struggle to afford food and bills. One couple shared that throughout the winter they were only able to heat one room in their home, because it was too expensive to heat the whole house.
- Some people felt that they were not receiving appropriate support for their health conditions because they are older, with people sharing that they are sent away without having a proper investigation into their health issue.

Hastings Listening Workshop:

What we heard

Accessing Primary Care

- It is very difficult to access primary care services, particularly GP and dentistry services. It was reported that some people with complex needs self-medicate with illegal street drugs.
- The use of technology, for example being able to book appointments online, is very useful for younger generations. However, it should not become the only way to access services.
- Many GP practices have been developing their websites, making it easier for patients to find information and access different services. Many patients are not aware of what they are able to do on their practice's website, and more needs to be done to promote this.
- Many GP appointments are phone calls, but patients are only given a day and timeframe for the call, rather than an exact time. This is inaccessible for a wide range of people, who end up missing their appointment and having to rebook.
- Being a GP practice receptionist is a very important and skilled role, however people shared that they did not feel that receptionists were always appropriately trained and were being asked to triage patients without the medical knowledge to do so.
- People are commonly advised to "talk to your GP" if they have a medical issue. This makes people think that they can only see a General Practitioner. It was suggested that this should change to "talk to your surgery", which may be more helpful.
- People shared that although patients may be sent for tests (e.g. blood tests) to look at what might be causing a medical issue, there is often no follow up unless the patient contacts the surgery after having the tests done.

Hastings Listening Workshop:

What we heard

Social Isolation

- Organisations shared that although people can be signposted to community activities, attending groups alone is a barrier. People need someone who can attend groups with them, but this is difficult when the service cannot provide this support, and the person does not have a support network.
- Coffee and chat groups are useful but having an activity to do is very important for some of those who are socially isolated, as they may not feel comfortable attending a talking-based group..
- There are high levels of deprivation in Hastings, and this can cause people to experience high levels of stress and anxiety, impacting their motivation to connect with others.

Social Determinants of Health and Wellbeing

- Many people can struggle with their health and wellbeing due to anxiety and other mental health conditions, which makes it difficult for them to reach out and access support. Some GP practices use withheld or unknown numbers, which is a barrier for people with social anxiety who may struggle with phone calls.
- Transportation is a barrier for people when attempting to access services or activities to support their health and wellbeing. Public transport is often unreliable, and often multiple modes of transport are needed, particularly to attend appointments outside of Hastings.
- Many places in Hastings require you to pay for parking, and there is a push towards using parking apps, with some areas removing their machines, meaning there is no option for cash payment. These issues create barriers for those who do drive but struggle to afford parking, and/or are unable to use digital payment methods.

Hastings Quotes: What we heard

"I always go in to make an appointment, I have a hearing impairment so I can't hear over the phone well and don't use internet."

"I don't like answering the questionnaires [the doctors] send you. I want to talk to a human being so they understand how I'm feeling."

"Bills are going up, we can't afford to heat the whole house so we just heat one room."

"I have been told I cannot access healthcare services because of my condition."

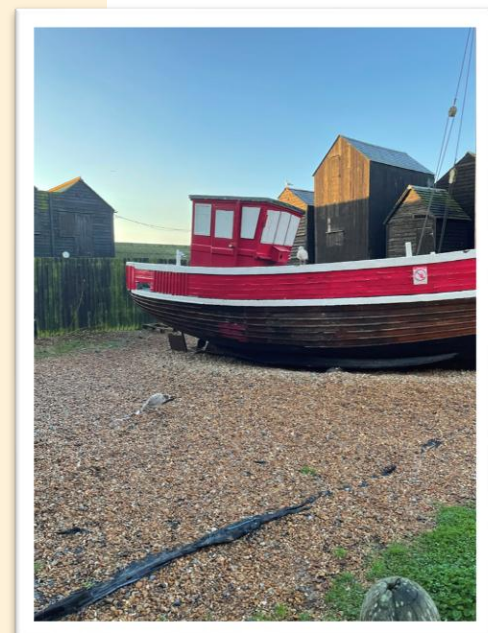
"A bus route that I had relied on for many years ... was suddenly withdrawn. Now I can't afford to easily get to the doctors as I have to take a taxi."

"The team at Conquest are fantastic and the GP service at the Plaza is good."

"It's easier to get drugs than a doctor's appointment."

Listening Tour – Hastings: What happens now?

1. Healthwatch will look at how best to promote GP practice websites and what people are able to access on them. Healthwatch will discuss with NHS Sussex how to make the messaging around using GP services clearer.
2. Healthwatch will raise awareness of the need for healthcare staff in all settings to be mindful of different health conditions and disabilities, including how this can impact on accessing appointments. We will highlight the importance of accessing the right level of support with NHS Sussex and the Integrated Community Teams.
3. Healthwatch will raise the issue of the removal of public toilets and cash payment options at pay and display car parks, and the impact this is having on people's ability to access their community.
4. Healthwatch will highlight issues accessing patient transport for people in Hastings with EMED, the new provider of non-emergency patient transport services (NEPTS). Healthwatch will undertake a project to review people's experiences of NEPTS in our work programme for 2025-26.
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 2025.





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