



We are here to help you find the best out of Health and Care services in your area such as dentists, GPs or care homes?

- Would you like some advice on health & care services in your area such as dentists, GPs or care homes?
- Do you need further information on these, or other health and care services?
- Our Information and Signposting Team can point you in the right direction



healthwatch
County Durham

Together
we're making health
and social care better

Annual Report 2022–23

healthwatch
County Durham

Cover page photo credit:

Thank you to our volunteer David Coombs and his wife Pam for allowing us to use the picture of their dog, Ben.

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“In the last ten years, the health and social care landscape has changed dramatically, but the dedication of local Healthwatch hasn't. Your local Healthwatch has worked tirelessly to make sure the views of local people are heard, and NHS and social care leaders use your feedback to make care better.”

Louise Ansari, Healthwatch National Director



Message from our Chair

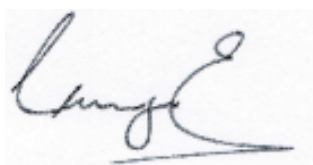
The last year was a transitional year for Healthwatch County Durham and for the development of the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care System (ICS). As Healthwatch celebrates its 10th anniversary, we are fortunate that we have been able to welcome new members to the team which will broaden our experience and provide stability as we move forward. We also thank those members of the team who have moved on for their contributions to our success.

We have been able to continue working within our community on topics detailed in this annual report, concluding some work that was suspended because of the pandemic, and launching our video diaries – an important and creative project, developed with inspiring and brave young people.

During this past year, our Healthwatch played a vital role in the development of the 'Healthwatch network', bringing together the Healthwatch organisations across our ICS region. Additionally, we are represented on the Adult Health and Wellbeing Board, focused on the health and wellbeing of the local population.

Over the next year our team are looking forward to being out and about talking to our communities and influencing improvements – look out for us and our gazebo at local events.

In the meantime, may I commend this report to you, and thank you for your continued support.



Chris Cunnington-Shore
Healthwatch County Durham Chair



“The Board will continue to ensure that there is an effective voice from our community, our work plan will consider areas where we can make a difference to health outcomes, and we will continue to work with commissioners and providers as your critical friend. We want to work with you on co-producing our recommendations – your views are crucial to our partnership.”



About us

Healthwatch County Durham is your local health and care champion.

We make sure health & care leaders and decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve services. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

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

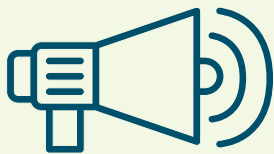


Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

Year in review

Reaching out: **848 people**



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

538 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as dentistry, mental health and GP services.

149 people

were signposted to the right service for their needs.

Making a difference to care:

We published

4 reports about the improvements people would like to see to health and care services.

Our most popular video project and report was

“So here’s the thing”

which highlighted 3 young people’s experiences of mental health services.



Health and care that works for you:



We’re lucky to have

25

outstanding volunteers who gave up **260 days** to make care better for our community.

We’re funded by our local authority. In 2022–23 we received

£183,704

which is **2% more** than the previous year.

We employ

6 (FTE 4.5) staff

who help us carry out our work.

How we've made a difference this year

Spring



We continued to provide health and care advice, using our bulletins and social media



We promoted the Healthwatch England campaign about the Accessible Information Standard

Summer



In Volunteers Week our volunteers got together and made a video about Healthwatch in British Sign Language



We joined engagement events across the county to hear from people about their concerns and discuss our work plan priorities

Autumn



Our homecare services report was published, and we shared our findings in a webinar with homecare providers across the county



We spent time with refugee families finding out about their experiences of accessing health services. We shared this information in our GP report

Winter



We published our GP report about the quality of the information provided on automated telephone messages and GP websites



We held a launch event for our video diaries and produced a report about the findings. There was a positive response from partners and stakeholders

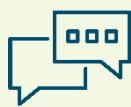
10 years of improving care

The year of 2023 marks a special milestone for Healthwatch. Over the last ten years, people have shared their experiences, good and bad, to help improve health and social care. A big thank you to all our Healthwatch Heroes that have stepped up and inspired change. Here are a few of our highlights:

How have we made care better, together?

Children & Young People

We gained a great insight into what mental health means to children and young people; we shared this with local stakeholders and service providers to help improve services.



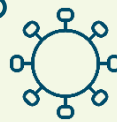
Improved cancer screening

We explored the barriers to accessing screening services; this led to clearer information and guidance about the importance of screening to build long-term consistent messages.



Guide to Health and Social Care

We created a free guide to all the GP surgeries, pharmacies, dentists, opticians, and domiciliary, nursing & residential homes in the county.



Support throughout COVID-19

We supported people during COVID-19 to access services, we provided information and signposting on GP services, pharmacies, dentists and mental health services across the region.



Vascular Services

When vascular services were reconfigured within the North East, we were able to assist in providing people's views on the services and make recommendations to help with the decision-making.





Listening to your experiences

Your views and feedback are vital to help services improve. Over the last year we have looked at ways to change how we hear and report your experiences. Using different approaches means we can reach more people and share your information in the best way possible to influence improvements.

'So, here's the thing!'

Our video diaries have raised awareness of how young people feel about mental health support.

The public told us that young people's mental health was one of the most important topics in our local area. We decided to look into the mental health experiences of people between the ages of 13 - 25.

We wanted to make sure young people could express their views and experiences in their own words, so we used video diaries of 3 young people as a way of bringing their stories to life.

In 2022, 18% of children aged 7 to 16 years and 22% of young people aged 17 to 24 years had a probable mental disorder" (NHS Digital)

One of the main issues that the young people raised:

Communication - All three young people said it would have helped them if information was explained better. They didn't like having to share the same information over again (especially on sensitive topics like self-harm). If services could share information with each other, this gave people confidence that they had been listened to and understood.

“Counsellors were very different to each other, the first often phoned in sick and only talked ‘at’ me, gave me medication. The second listened to me as a person rather than as an illness”

We said:

- Services should look at the most appropriate type of support to suit the individual - both formal and informal support.
- Services and staff need to be aware of possible ‘triggers’ and offer coping techniques to help young people manage their own mental health and emotional responses.
- Services should focus on treating the cause as well as the symptoms.
- Services need to ensure that staff members are approachable, friendly, have empathy, and are interested, in order to bring confidence and trust to a young person. Sharing information with relevant people should be a priority.

“**The young people have shown great courage in sharing their experience of services in County Durham. As commissioners of mental health services, we will challenge our providers of CAMHS services to address the important issues raised**” Rob Milner Quality and Development Manager, Northeast & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board



Home care services

We helped services understand the impact of staffing shortages

We wanted to hear about the experiences of people who use home care support and whether the COVID-19 pandemic had any specific impact. This included things that had worked well and if there was anything that could have been better, as well as finding out about how isolated people had felt. Although we received less replies than we had hoped for, we know this was an extremely difficult time for everyone. We also felt people might be worried about sending information as there was so much publicity about scams at the time.

Our recommendations:

As the number of people who responded to this survey was small, we felt we could not make recommendations. However, from what people told us, we had the following observations to consider:

- Ensuring office cover is available or an effective messaging system is in place would benefit service users, carers and professionals.
- We know that staffing is always challenging, but wherever possible trying to ensure clients have regular care workers is greatly appreciated by those receiving care.
- There is an opportunity to look at where support services already exist to tackle loneliness and isolation, and how they might be used to improve the lives of isolated people in the community.
- Sometimes things go wrong, and providers should make sure their processes to address issues are speedy and consistent.

What difference will this make?

Response received from Adult Social Care:

“The pandemic has had a huge impact on social care services and in particular the domiciliary care (home care) sector. Most of the issues raised appear to be as a result of workforce pressures. The shortage of staff has been the most challenging it has ever been during this period, and last-minute changes to packages of care have been exacerbated by the necessity for staff to be absent due to covid or the requirement to isolate. It is hoped that the market challenges will continue to see further improvement over the coming months.

- *To assist with recruitment and retention an increased inflationary uplift has been awarded to contracted providers of domiciliary care services to ensure all carers are paid above the National Living Wage and to compete with other sectors.*
- *Further financial support has been provided as a result of the increase in fuel prices.*
- *The Council’s Care Academy is working with providers to assist with the recruitment and training of new carers.”*



“Carers are responsible for all my personal needs; I rely on them. Having this daily makes me less anxious.” Local resident



Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information from people whose experiences aren't often heard, we challenge health inequalities and aim to make services more accessible to everyone.

Pharmacy



NHS England wanted to understand how effective digital screens in pharmacies are at getting information out to the public.

We worked with Healthwatch Sunderland to visit 20 pharmacies in the region – we looked at how they share health information and how easy this was for the public to access. We shared feedback on whether the screens were easy to see and hear, what messages stood out, and what other ways pharmacies made information available. This feedback will be used to improve access to health information for the public, and ensure it is accessible to everyone.

Online Financial Assessments



We did some work on behalf of Durham County Council (DCC), to look at their ideas for a new Online Financial Assessment system which would be used by people applying for certain benefits. We wanted to find out how easy it would be for people to use.

We spoke to people across the county, with a variety of needs and circumstances. We found out what problems people might have when using the system, what parts of the system worked well, and what could be better.

We reported our findings back to DCC with suggestions for improvements to make the system easier for everyone.

Over to you



In 2022 we attended 14 events across the county; they included events for carers, young people and some in more rural parts of our county. We listened to what people had concerns about. We also asked people about our current workplans and what they thought was most important. Mental Health services was their top concern. Young people told us there was a lack of information out there and people don't know where to go. This information will help us decide what topics we focus on in the future.



Hearing from all communities

Over the past year we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We know how important it is to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently, to gather their feedback, make sure their voice is heard and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Listening to Arabic speaking refugees about their experiences of health services.
- Making visits to a local community café to hear from people who were struggling with the cost of living crisis.
- Making links with d/Deaf communities across the region.
- Visited our rural and isolated areas to talk to people about health and care.

Unmet social care needs

We worked with Healthwatch England to talk with people who are concerned they aren't getting the social support they need.

We carried out a face-to-face interview to ensure we could explore the range of issues being faced. We were able to understand the frustrations of finding the right support needed when services are limited and how isolating this can feel. This awareness will form a large piece of work for Healthwatch England next year tackling inequalities.



“It's very frustrating, the system's very frustrating, if you don't know your way around the system and you don't know how to navigate it you haven't got a chance”

Local resident talking about accessing mental health services



Making links in communities

We wanted to gather the experiences of some of the small communities in the county that we don't normally hear from.

With the help of a local interpreter, we visited an English language course to talk directly to a group of refugees about their experiences accessing health services. What they told us was included in our GP access report.

Some of the refugees have contacted us for support with health enquiries. We have also made useful links with people supporting families in the community. We hope this is just the start, and we have employed a new member of staff to build on this, focusing on making sure we include representation from our diverse communities.

“We very much appreciate the NHS treatment, the medical staff are very helpful and supportive. I would like some help as the interpreter is our priority, even over the phone because our children are not available at any time to help.”

Local resident





Advice and information

Healthwatch is here for every person living within County Durham. We can provide confidential information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding the right mental health service, knowing how to make a complaint or choosing a care home for a loved one – we are here to listen and offer advice about health and care, whatever your concern.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up to date information people can trust
- Signposting people to the services they need
- Supporting people to resolve issues with service providers
- Representing public views with leaders and decision makers

Finding sensitive information at difficult times

Susan* called us to ask whether a Do Not Attempt Resuscitation (DNAR) is 'portable' between health and care settings, as the care home that a relative was admitted to said the form was not valid. This caused worry and concern for the family. We investigated further and it appears that in some areas it is policy for a DNAR form to travel with a patient if they move between settings. However, this is not the case in all areas. We contacted the Resuscitation Council UK for guidance and informed Susan* the advice is to review the DNAR when a person moves from one setting to another to ensure it is still the right decision in the new home. We felt Susan* might not be the only one who didn't know the DNAR needed to be reviewed, so we shared this information with the public and our stakeholders.

“Thank you so much for your helpful reply and I'll certainly follow your sound advice within minutes of receiving your email.”

Susan*, County Durham resident

**name changed to protect identity*



Using our contacts to improve your care



Mrs T contacted us as she had received a cancellation letter for a hospital appointment that had been an urgent referral from her GP. She was upset as she had not received an alternative appointment and could not get through to the relevant department on the telephone.

Our team contacted the hospital and experienced the same issues contacting the department. Using the relationships we have across the region we contacted another hospital in the same Trust and were able to get the contact details for the Team Leader for the department. They advised us that Mrs T's appointment had been brought forward and it was likely that the recent postal strike will have delayed the arrival of the appointment letter. Mrs T was extremely grateful that we were able to give her this information and was delighted that her appointment was much sooner than she expected.

“Thank you so much for listening to me.” **County Durham resident**





Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited 15 pharmacies in County Durham as part of a piece of work looking at the effectiveness of community pharmacies in promoting healthier lifestyles.
- Took part in a focus group talking about the 'Waiting Well' programme which aims to support patients who are waiting for planned care.
- Visited GP out of hours telephone services and websites, to review accessibility.
- Carried out 64 in-depth interviews to provide Durham County Council with data on how people feel about claiming financial assistance online.

Tia, Olivia and Phoebe

In 2022 we welcomed three new student volunteers

"Through volunteering, I hope to gain an insight into what a typical day as a healthcare professional is."

"I hope to help people have a better experience of Health care by learning from their past experience, through my volunteering."



Anne

"Having worked in a pharmacy during my working life, I was interested to see how I could use my time positively to improve services for people in County Durham. I was happy to sit in as a representative for Healthwatch County Durham at the initial SWAG (System Wide Advisory Group - pain management) meetings in order to feed back the important messages."



Judi

"I am a volunteer Board member, but I am also keen to talk directly to members of the public about their experiences of health services. So, during the past year, I took part in 'Enter & View' training to become a fully authorised representative.

The experiences that Healthwatch collect as part of the programme are invaluable in shaping and informing services."



Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today with Claire, our Volunteer Supporter.



www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk



07756 654223



claire.sisterson@pcp.uk.net

Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£183,704	Staff costs	£111,548
Additional income	£9,674	Operational costs	£35,016
		Support and administration	£19,290
Total income	£193,378	Total expenditure	£165,854

Additional income is broken down by:

- **£816 funding** received from Healthwatch England for Website Migration.
- **£1,500 funding** received from Healthwatch England for CRM Replacement.
- **£4,500 funding** received from ICB for ICS Funding.
- **£1,200 funding** received from Healthwatch England for Board Recruitment.
- **£1,250 funding** received from Healthwatch England for Social Care Unmet Needs Project.
- **£57.95 funding** received from Durham County Council for Advocacy engagement work.
- **£350 funding** received from Durham County Council for Financial Online Assessment Tool development.

Next steps

In the ten years since Healthwatch was launched, we've demonstrated the power of public feedback in identifying concerns and areas for improvement. Over the next year we will continue our role in collecting feedback from everyone in our local community and giving you a voice to help shape better health and care services for all.

We will continue working to tackle inequalities and to reduce the barriers you face when accessing care.

Top three priorities for 2023-24

1. Access to Primary Care (including looking at health inequalities)
2. Mental Health
3. Hospital discharge



Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch County Durham, Whitfield House, St John's Road, Meadowfield Industrial Estate, Durham, DH7 8XL.

The organisation holding the Healthwatch contract is the Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP), Pioneering Care Centre, Carer's Way, Newton Aycliffe, County Durham, DL5 4SF
Registered Charity No. 1067888

Healthwatch County Durham uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making:

Our Healthwatch Board currently consists of 7 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Throughout 2022/23 the Board met 6 times and made decisions on matters such as appointing our new Inclusion Lead, and how to improve our visibility in the county.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by using information from enquiries, we use feedback from public events, and by having a public vote to prioritise our annual workplan.

Methods and systems used throughout the year to gather people's experiences:

We use a variety of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of using services. During 2022/23 we have been available by phone, email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, as well as attending a wide range of community groups and forums across the county.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website, include links on our social media pages and can provide printed copies where requested.

Responses to recommendations:

All providers responded to recommendations or requests for information. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision makers:

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insight and experiences that have been shared with us.

For example, in our area we take information to the Adults, Wellbeing & Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the Local Authority, we take insight and experiences to decision makers in the North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Board, and we also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter and view

This year, due to the legacy of the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity.

Our Enter & View programme will resume for 2023/24.

Healthwatch representatives:

Healthwatch County Durham is represented on the County Durham Health and Wellbeing Board by Chris Cunnington-Shore, Chair of our Board. During 2022/23 our representative has effectively carried out this role by providing an annual update and responding to items under consideration by the committee.

The Healthwatch network for the NENC Integrated Care Board during 2022/23 included 13 Local Healthwatch who continue to work together to represent the views of service users, families and carers across the Integrated Care System. Local intelligence is gathered across the four sub-regional areas (Place), and at regional level, the Healthwatch Regional Coordinator represents the public voice at the NENC Integrated Care Partnership Strategic meeting, Quality & Safety Committee, Primary Care Strategy & Delivery sub-committee, Health & Fairness Advisory Group, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion meetings and System Quality Group meetings. The network of local Healthwatch has also been commissioned to undertake additional research to ensure local opinions are represented.

Healthwatch County Durham has been represented on the North East & North Cumbria Integrated Care Partnership in the Central Area by Rebecca Morgan, and the Regional representative is Christopher Akers-Belcher. The Integrated Care Board Participant for the network is David Thompson, Chair of Healthwatch Northumberland.



The team at Healthwatch County Durham would like to extend our thanks to all the partners and stakeholders who make it possible for us to carry out the important work of getting the best from health & care services across our county.



healthwatch

County Durham

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