



PRESS RELEASE - For immediate release

Access to services remains the key health and social care issue for south east London residents

Healthwatch – South East London, 1st August 2019

More needs to be done to improve access to NHS services in south east London, according to hundreds of people who took part in the region-wide survey.

In a survey carried out by the six south east London Healthwatch (independent health and care champions) it was revealed that residents do not have confidence they can access primary care services promptly if they feel unwell.

Most said they faced several weeks to book appointments with their GP Practices. One person said: **“Can’t get through to the doctor. Always on the answer phone, never call me back. Don’t know how to book online.”**

997 residents, patients, carers and their families shared their views as part of the “What Would You Do?” focus groups and surveys, that ran from March to June to encourage people across south east London to explain what matters most to them.

The public were asked to give their views on improving local services; share their ideas on how people can live healthier lives and what improvements they think could be made to help people access services quickly.

In addition to asking residents to fill out surveys, Healthwatch carried out focus groups with mental health service users and residents who have learning disabilities and autism.

Quick, easy and earlier access is vital for people with ill mental health, who told us they currently face barriers such as accessing support, long wait times, limited information and a lack of crisis support. One resident with chronic mental health issues said **“When I stick my hand out, and asked for help. No one did anything.”**

Adults with learning disabilities and or/autism also found it difficult to get appointments and experienced long waiting times to be seen. They would value clear explanations and to receive support with booking appointments. One person

told us that they had missed several appointments, because they don't remember them.

Other key issues raised and suggestions offered include:

- Residents wanted health professionals to treat their mental and physical health together.
- There is a need for better communication between patients, staff and organisations.
- Residents with learning disabilities and or autism would value accessible communication
- Residents wanted absolute confidence that their personal data is managed well and kept secure
- Residents supported the use of digital appointments, as long as the technology improved communication and didn't replace face to face interactions.
- South east Londoners wanted support to stay in their home as long as it is safe to do so, through community based support and better social care.

The feedback we have gathered from our engagement work will now be used in the development of the south east London response to the NHS Long Term Plan. The findings will help to ensure that the plans take into account what is important to the local population. Local Healthwatch's report has been presented to the Our Healthier South East London Board, who are responsible for the local plan.

The full Healthwatch south east London Long Term Plan report is available to download from each of the Healthwatch websites.

Ends

Notes

About Healthwatch

Healthwatch is the independent champion for people using local health and social care services. There is a Healthwatch organisation in every local authority in England. The organisations help to shape and improve local health and social care in the community. Local Healthwatch are part of the Healthwatch national network, established by the Government to ensure local patients and users have a greater input to shaping and designing local services.

For more information or any queries about Healthwatch or the SEL HW Long Term Plan Engagement Report please contact:

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About Healthwatch England

Healthwatch England is the independent champion for health and social care in England. The organisation was established under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf. Healthwatch England is also focused on providing leadership, guidance, and support to the development of the Healthwatch network.

About NHS Long Term Plan

In 2018, the government announced £20.5bn of additional funding for the NHS in England by 2023/24. The NHS Long Term Plan launched in January 2019 sets out priorities for how this money will be spent over the next ten years.

The plan is based on what the public and NHS staff thought the NHS needs to make care better; more easily accessible and close to where they live; and to get better at helping people to stay well.

NHS organisations have been asked to come up with a local plan explaining how these priorities will be delivered in their area. Our Healthier South East London is the NHS Sustainability and Transformation Partnership for south east London and is responsible for developing the plan.