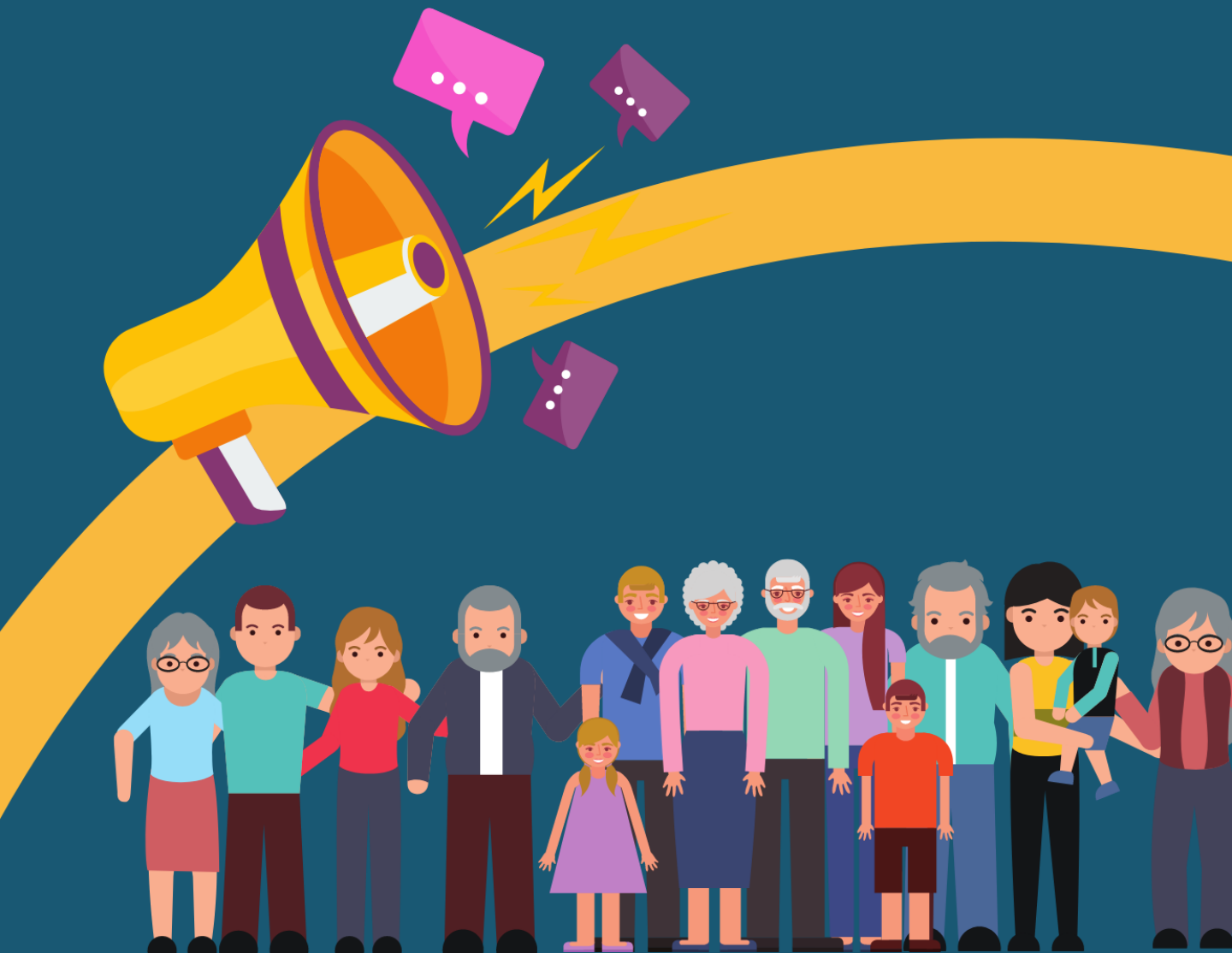


Championing what matters to you


Healthwatch Medway
Annual Report 2021-22



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We're out and about again!



For most of this year, we have been confined to our desks. This is an alien concept for Healthwatch and one we have struggled with. Our best work is done when we can visit groups and communities to listen to their experiences. We love to hear personal stories about the experience of different people, when they last visited the hospital, a care home, or tried to get a GP appointment. So, it's very exciting that we are now starting to talk to people face to face once more.

Although we did hear from people online during the pandemic, it is not a route that we want to rely on. It also doesn't appeal to everybody and the number of people who contacted us has decreased over the past year.

It's not all been bad though. In a gap between lockdowns, we visited a soup kitchen to chat to people who are living on the streets of Medway. They talked to us about their struggles to get healthcare.

We also spent time chatting online to community pharmacists who shared their unique role during lockdown. We returned to them to hear if our report from last year had generated an improvement. I'm delighted to say that for many it had.

Celebrating our hard-working NHS and social care staff has been a theme this year and we recently held our first ever Healthwatch Recognition Awards. Over 200 people joined us including volunteers, community groups and professionals to celebrate those who had gone the extra mile this year. It was a special evening for us all and the first time many of us had been together in one place for 2 years.

This report gives you a snapshot of our year. We hope you find it helpful.

Do get in touch if you would like more information, or if you want to work with us this year. We would be delighted to hear from you.

Every blessing,

Reverend Graham M Trice

Volunteer and Chair of the Healthwatch Medway Steering Group.



About us

Your health and social care champion

Healthwatch Medway is your local health and social care champion. From Rainham to Cliffe and everywhere in between, we make sure NHS leaders and other 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.



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.



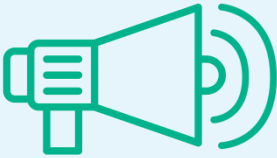
Our values

- 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.

Our year in review

Find out how we have engaged and supported people.

Reaching out



551 people

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

16,468 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and COVID-19.

Making a difference to care



We published

6 reports

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

Our most popular report was

our homeless report

which highlighted the struggles homeless people face when trying to get NHS care.

Health and care that works for you



We're lucky to have had

15 volunteers

who gave up their time to make care better for our community this year.

We're funded by Medway Council. In 2021-22 we received:

£121,555

which is **the same** as the previous year.









We also currently employ

2.6 staff

who help us carry out this work.

How we've made a difference throughout the year

These are the biggest projects we worked on from April 2021 to March 2022.

Spring	 <p>We gave accurate information & supported the vaccination programme.</p>	 <p>We shared a snapshot of what it is like to be homeless in Medway. Our findings have shaped the conversation about supporting people.</p>
Summer	 <p>With online appointments becoming the norm, our top tips helped professionals and patients get the most out of digital appointments.</p>	 <p>We supported community pharmacists to be heard by decision makers about their experience during Covid.</p>
Autumn	 <p>We shared the reality for people in Medway living with asthma. They wanted more support & information which we helped them to get.</p>	 <p>We urged the Government to act after reporting a 42% increase in people struggling to see an NHS dentist.</p>
Winter	 <p>When people struggled to see their GP face-to-face we asked the NHS to confirm this right for all patients, resulting in updated guidance to practices.</p>	 <p>We helped the NHS to hear from a range of people about plans to move Ruby ward from Medway to Maidstone and also proposals to change vascular services.</p>

Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why over the last year we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feedback to services to help them improve



Making life a little better for pharmacists

Thanks to over 100 community pharmacists sharing their experience of what it was like working during the first Covid lockdown, we've been able to help system leaders understand their reality and make life a little easier.

Working with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee, we went back to 40 community pharmacists to understand what had changed since our initial report.



55% of pharmacists
told us that morale had improved since our first report.

Since our initial report we have been working to make sure people and organisations across the health and care system, hear and understand the reality of working as a pharmacist during that first lockdown.

- 87.5% told us that they can get equipment and PPE much easier now
- 80% said that access to primary care has not improved for them and remains a big issue
- 52.5% of pharmacists raised concerns with us about members of their communities who are prevented from accessing services due to digital exclusion
- The need for mental health support for staff was raised by some

The issues in our report were raised directly with Members of Parliament, Rishi Sunak and Matt Hancock, as well as in negotiations with NHS England to influence a national approach for pharmacies.

More locally, our report was broadcast across local TV, radio and newspapers helping people across the county to understand the pressures faced by pharmacists.

What happens now?

We continue to raise the issues on behalf of community pharmacists. We are also working on specific issues raised in the report including better relationships between pharmacies and GP surgeries.



"Thank you for supporting the pharmacy community and giving us a voice."

Kent & Medway Local Pharmaceutical Committee.



The reality of being homeless in Medway

Thanks to people talking to us about what it's really like to live on the streets, we have been able to throw a spotlight on reality and help decision makers to understand what people need.

They told us about the challenges that they face to get healthcare and the unique difficulties that homeless women experience.



"I had a miscarriage a short time ago. I couldn't get a GP appointment. When I tried, they just offered me a phone consultation but I don't have a phone."

Debra, who lives on the streets in Medway



The people we spoke to told us they found it difficult to travel to services, so we are encouraging Medway services to offer more outreach sessions.

Women particularly told us they find it hard to access services in the daytime. They told us that they often sleep in the daytime because it's safer to be awake at night. Although we know there is already an outreach team working in Medway outside of working hours, the women we spoke to had not yet benefited from it.

What difference did this make

We took our findings to Medway Council, the Medway Homelessness Forum and presented to the Health & Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee. These meetings are attended by a wide range of organisations, Councillors and decision makers and we wanted to make sure as many of them as possible heard the stories of the homeless people we spoke to.

Their stories have helped these decision makers to understand what it is like to be homeless and ensure they can make good decisions as a result.

Three ways we have made a difference for the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.



Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

It's important for the NHS and social care services to step back and see the bigger picture, through hearing personal experiences, and the impact on people's lives. This provides a deeper understanding than using data alone, can challenge assumptions and motivate people to think and work more creatively.

As part of our campaign "Your Care, Your Way", we highlighted stories we've heard from the Deaf community. They had experienced difficulties getting same day GP appointments as translators aren't available so quickly. Hospital appointments are routinely cancelled due to lack of translators and they told us about challenges communicating due to absence of text or email options.



Getting services to involve the public

Services need to understand the benefits of involving local people to help improve care for everyone.

We gave advice to a local GP practice to help them set up a Patient Participation Group which enabled them to collect the views of local people directly and improve services as a result.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with health and care services to consistently raise issues and push for changes.

We have known about dental problems for a long time. In 2016 we published our report highlighting that some people were struggling to access dental care. Over the years we have continued to hear from the public about access problems. Last year we called for reform of NHS dentistry, co-signing a letter to the Chancellor of the Exchequer calling for NHS dentistry to be accessible and affordable for everyone. We continue to campaign for better access to dentists.

Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch Medway is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, how to make a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we helped people by:

- Providing up to date information on COVID-19
- Linking people to reliable information they could trust
- Supporting the COVID-19 vaccination and booster programme
- Helping people to access the services they need



Helping people to get their eye injections

When a GP surgery in Gillingham suddenly stopped providing eye injections, many of you called us. You told us that the surgery had told you to pay privately for treatment.

We got in touch with the Clinical Commissioning Group who commissions GPs, and talked to them about your stories.

As a result, eye injections are once again being offered to patients while the surgery finds a better long term solution.



Registering with a GP, what are your rights?

Many people come to us because they can't get registered with a GP. The reasons vary, but the impact on people can be huge.

Bill came to see us because he had recently been released from prison and didn't have the right identification. All his local GP surgeries had refused to accept him as a patient.

When he came to us he was anxious and agitated because he was living with his Mum and he wanted to ensure he got the Covid vaccine so he could protect her. Without being registered with a GP, he was told he couldn't book a vaccine appointment.

Firstly, we helped him to understand his rights to register with a GP and gave him information which he could share with his local GP practice.

Secondly, we found a vaccination clinic 5 minutes walk away from his home which was offering walk in appointments. That meant he could get his Covid vaccine straight away offering protection to him and his Mum.

Finally, we made sure that the right people heard about Bill's story. Our role is to ensure decision makers hear about your experiences and make changes as a result.



Volunteers

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

This year our volunteers:

- Helped people have their say from home, carrying out surveys over the telephone and online.
- Created digital content on our website and social media.
- Carried out website and telephone reviews checking that all our website links and phone numbers are working correctly.
- Assisted as part of the Steering Group, making decisions about our priorities and what we should focus on.





Harrison

"I was job hunting for hours each day so I changed tactic and volunteered with Healthwatch Medway. I learnt loads, benefited from training and was able to share my views as a Medway resident. I wouldn't have got my paid job if I hadn't been a volunteer!"

Kelly

"I have an 18 month old daughter, who I want to make proud, and give her an understanding that she can do anything she sets her mind to, so to be able to manage volunteering, a full time job, and a full time toddler makes me think one day she'll be proud of me. I research and write articles for the Healthwatch website. It makes me feel good that I am helping people."



Maggie

"I've found volunteering for Healthwatch Medway very rewarding so far. I attend meetings on their behalf which are usually online so I can be flexible around my work. I've got lots of experience attending meetings so I can use my skills to help. That way, I feel good and I get some variety in my day, but other people benefit too. Everyone wins!"



Do you feel inspired?

We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.



www.healthwatchmedway.com



0800 135 656



enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com

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.

Income		Expenditure	
Funding received from local authority	£121,555	Staff costs	£106,617
Additional funding	£208	Operational costs	£23,946
		Office costs	£2,277
Total income	£121,763	Total expenditure	£132,840

Top three priorities for 2022–23

1. Supporting Patient Participation Groups to be the best they can be
2. Proactively hearing feedback from more people from a range of Medway communities
3. Visit Care Homes across Medway to understand how they have implemented our recommendations

Next steps

The pandemic has shone a stark light on the impact of existing inequalities when using health and care services, highlighting the importance of championing the voices of those who all too often go unheard.

Over the coming years, our goal is to help reduce these inequalities by making sure your voice is heard, and decision makers reduce the barriers you face, regardless of whether that’s because of where you live, income or race.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has thrown long-standing health inequalities into stark relief. With NHS and social care facing even longer backlogs, the unequal outcomes exposed by the pandemic are at risk of becoming worse. Local Healthwatch play an important role in helping to overcome these adversities and are uniquely placed to make a positive difference in their communities.”

Sir Robert Francis QC, Chair of Healthwatch England

Statutory statements

About us

EK360 holds the contract for Healthwatch Medway.

Healthwatch Medway 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 Steering Group consists of six members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our Steering Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2021/22 the group met nine times and made decisions on what we should focus on and our priorities.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. We do that by analysing the themes and trends in the feedback that you share with us, but also from the discussions that we are part of either online or face to face.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2021/22 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a webform on our website,, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media. We also send a monthly newsletter to encourage more people to get in touch.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. This year we have done this by proactively chatting to people in community venues, public places and high streets.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We publish it on our website and we have printed copies available to anyone who wants it.

Responses to recommendations & requests

We had zero providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations.

This year, due to 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.

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

Healthwatch Medway is represented on the Kent & Medway Health and Wellbeing Board by our volunteer Maggie Cane. Another volunteer, Pat Gulvin, has been our representative for many years and we would like to recognise her involvement. During 2021/22 our representatives have effectively carried out our role by offering constructive challenge when public consultations aren't available in other languages or formats for people who need it. We've also consistently reminded services and organisations to listen to people and communities who are often harder to reach and don't have the loudest voice.

Thank you to EVERYONE who has taken the time to share your story with us this year.

Your story is powerful and we make sure it is heard by the right person in the right way to ensure they can make changes based on your feedback.

Keep telling us your stories and together we can change lives.

You can share your story via our [website](#)

Contact us:



Online:

www.healthwatchmedway.com



By Telephone:

Healthwatch Medway Freephone
0800 136 656



By Email:

enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com



By Text:

Text us on 07525 861 639. By
texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's
British Sign Language interpreter
will make contact.



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