

Same-day and urgent access to primary care

Listening activities March to May 2024 - Summary Report

October 2024

From March to May 2024, Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK ICB) undertook a series of listening events with residents in relation to same day and urgent access to primary care. The events provided residents with an opportunity to give feedback and share their lived experiences of accessing same day and urgent primary care, explain what was important to them, and what they felt could be done to help improve services. Online surveys also captured the views of young people and people with autism.

To inform the listening events, previous feedback from residents and system partners was reviewed. You can find previous insights in Appendix 1 of the full engagement report.

This document provides a **summary** of the key themes obtained during this listening exercise. A full report which includes the methodology and feedback from each of the listening events is available to view by scanning this QR code or alternatively visiting <https://bit.ly/PrimaryCareEngagementJune24>.



What we heard

The listening events and surveys (for young people and people with autism) provided a wealth of detail. The high-level findings are summarised in this report.

GP Practice teams

Timely access and types of appointment - Residents emphasised the importance of receiving timely advice or support. While some prefer face-to-face appointments, others prioritise convenience and flexibility in how the appointment is delivered. For some, seeing a GP is considered necessary, while others are open to any healthcare professional who can address their urgent health needs.

Simplified appointment process - Residents would like a straightforward process for same-day appointments. They emphasised the need for various booking methods to accommodate individual preferences. Waiting in phone queues causes frustration, and faster call answering is a priority for most.

Specific call-back times - Residents would like specific call-back times or shorter time-windows for responses from clinicians. Individuals with autism find waiting for ring-backs stressful and would prefer to receive a text or online message confirming the time they will be called back.

Clear communication - Conversations with healthcare professionals often feel rushed, which can hinder understanding and leads to many unanswered questions. Some residents would like longer appointments and/or for information to be provided in a written format to help them retain the details.

Dignity and respect – Residents emphasised the importance of being treated with dignity and respect, especially when communication is challenging.

Healthcare professional information – Residents want assurance that they are seeing a healthcare professional capable of offering the necessary support or advice. Residents found it frustrating when they see someone to be told they cannot help you and you have to wait to see someone else. They recommend sharing details about the various healthcare professionals who work in the practice team and what their specialisms are and the conditions they can support.

Community pharmacies

Pharmacist trust and convenience - Residents appreciate the convenience of walking into a pharmacy and talking to their pharmacist. While many trust their pharmacist's advice due to them having a good understanding of their medical history, others are sceptical and seek assurance that the pharmacist can and will offer quality advice.

Capacity and workload challenges – Residents recognised that some pharmacy closures have increased pressure on remaining pharmacies, with residents feeling they were understaffed and that any increase in workload would lead to longer queues. Introducing dedicated timeslots for Pharmacy First and after-hours prescription collection lockers was suggested for improving access.

Privacy and confidentiality - Lack of privacy was highlighted as a concern. Often discussions are held with a queue of customers, and this feels uncomfortable and unsafe for some residents when sharing sensitive information such as names, addresses, dates of birth, and medical issues. Private consultation rooms should be sound-proofed and clearly sign-posted, and patients should be able to ask to talk to a professional in a private space.

Information availability- Residents want more information about pharmacy services including opening times, services offered, clinical pharmacist availability and conditions that can be treated. This should be available at all pharmacists, accessible online and communicated through awareness campaigns.

Patient records and computer systems - Concerns exist about the systems in place for Pharmacy First. Residents were keen to know whether pharmacists have access to patients' medical records to understand their medical history before prescribing.

Accessibility for all – Residents want to ensure that all pharmacy services and information about them are available for non-English speakers and neuro-diverse individuals.

NHS 111 – telephone and on-line

Call handling and call-backs – Some residents are frustrated over long wait times for call answering and clinician call-backs. Some experienced delays of over 4 hours or received no call-back at all, leading to anxiety and confusion.

Comfort and trust - Residents emphasised the importance of feeling comfortable when talking to call-handlers. Some residents reporting feeling judged during these interactions which causes additional anxiety and confusion.

Quicker advice and confirmation - Residents seek faster advice and call-backs. They also want to receive confirmation that they are in the system and estimated call-back time. Individuals with autism would prefer to receive these notifications via text or online channels.

Challenges for homeless support - Homeless support organisations face difficulties due to delayed or long call-backs. Calls received after office hours make it challenging or impossible for the homeless person being supported to access the necessary medical support.

Sign-posting and service experience - Some residents reported feeling bounced around the system, while others praised the service for sending ambulances, prescribing medication and arranging appointments as necessary.

Online availability and accessibility - Many residents are unaware that NHS 111 services are available online. They suggest running a local campaign to promote the message that people can request language and British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters in order to use the NHS111 service.

Promotion and system confidence - Residents suggest that many people are unaware of what NHS 111 does and how it works, suggesting that more could be done locally to promote the service and encourage residents to use it appropriately. They suggest that improving processes and implementing promised actions would help boost trust in the service and encourage uptake.

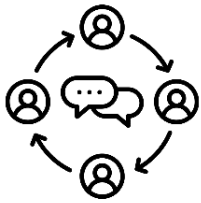
Walk-in Centres (WiCs), Urgent GP Clinics, Urgent Treatment Centres (UTCs) and GP Out-of-hours services.

Putnoe Walk-in Centre (WiC) - Residents find Putnoe WiC convenient for having a same-day appointment when they are unable to get one at their registered surgery. Residents felt that extending the opening hours should be considered. Residents can be left frustrated that clinicians from the WiC cannot make referrals, this leads to patients having to make a further appointment with their practice to request a referral.

After-care – There can be a lack of after-care with homeless people often being discharged back onto the street with no further offer of support.

Provision of services - Residents would like a UTC and/or a WiC based in Central Bedfordshire.

Cross-cutting themes



Communication

Communication is essential for ensuring patients are aware of the services they can access, how to access them, and when to do so.

Effective communication between different services is also crucial for the smooth functioning of the healthcare system which will lead to improved services for residents.

We need to provide better communication for residents to help improve their understanding of NHS111, pharmacy services, and the wide range of services provided by different healthcare professionals at GP practices. Residents have asked for clear information about the services available and guidance on when to use different services based on their conditions.

Meeting patients' communication preferences and needs is essential for equitable access and a better healthcare experience. Information should be clear, jargon-free, and available in various formats to suit different needs. Healthcare professionals must communicate efficiently with each other and be mindful of patients' communication needs, providing information in a format that meets their needs.



Appointments

Residents want better access to healthcare appointments through systems that offer multiple ways to book and attend, such as online, walk-in, and by phone.

The current system of waiting for call backs is problematic for some residents.

Simplifying referral processes across services is important to make systems easier for staff and residents to navigate.

Next steps

The [full report](#) will be used to shape how same day and urgent primary care is provided in a more streamlined way for residents across Bedfordshire, Luton and Milton Keynes. We are currently planning the next steps and will share more information soon.

Thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas. Your feedback is very valuable and will help us improve our services. We appreciate your support and will keep you updated on our progress.



At the sessions we mentioned a [short NHS video](#) - you may wish to watch this 2 minute video where three children go behind the scenes of a GP surgery to meet a range of health professionals who work at GP practices.

<https://youtu.be/vA56SW-PPV0>