

Experiences of NHS services of people escaping domestic abuse

Findings of research in partnership with Valley House

February 2023

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Introduction

Healthwatch Coventry is the independent champion for NHS and social care. Our role is to represent the interests of patients and the public in local NHS and social care services. We gather views and feedback and take this to those who run and plan services to work for change. The Healthwatch role is set out in legislation.

Our Steering Group sets a programme of work and priorities to focus our work. This includes priorities to understand:

- Digital access (exclusion/ inclusion) in changed approaches to accessing for NHS services eg phone appointments, online services
- Access to GP appointments
- Better quality (relevant and understandable) information for the public about local NHS and care services.

About this piece of work

Why we did it

The Healthwatch Coventry mission is to hear the experience of NHS and social care services from those in Coventry who are less heard or do not have a strong voice. We wanted to reach new people by trying different ways of hearing the experiences of groups of local people. We have long established links with voluntary and community groups in Coventry and are hosted by a local Charity, so we ran a small grants application programme to selected community research projects led by voluntary groups.

We asked for applications in relation to our work priorities and to gather experiences of health and care or of barriers to health and care from less heard groups of the local population. Five applications were successful.

This piece of work was led by Valley House a local charity which supports people fleeing domestic abuse.

About Valley House

Valley House is a charity working with disadvantaged individuals and families in and around Coventry. Valley House provides safe, confidential and supported accommodation for individual and families escaping Domestic Abuse. Valley House provides 24 hour support with staff available in an emergency or crisis.

How it was done

Valley House conducted 30 surveys with their clients. Surveys were done through phone contact at a time that suited people or were completed face to face by the Wellbeing Co-ordinator. The survey was conducted between 20 October and 1 November 2022. Surveys were analysed using Excel.

Those who took part were women of different ethnicities and in the following age groups:

Ethnicity	Count
African	2
Bangladeshi	1
Caribbean	1
Gypsy/ Roma	1
Indian	3
Other Ethnic group	4
Pakistani	1
White British	15
White European	2
Total	30

Age	Count
18 to 24 years	5
25 to 49 years	24
50 to 64 years	1
Total	30

A group discussion was also run on 9 November 2022 with six of the survey participants in a women's group setting. A transcript of the discussion was produced.

Participants gave their permission for findings and data to be shared with Healthwatch Coventry.

Healthwatch Coventry provided support to Valley House for the piece of work through one of the Healthwatch Team. We shared good practice information about gathering information through surveys and focus groups, GDPR etc; gave support with data validation, analysis of the findings; and produced this report.

What we found

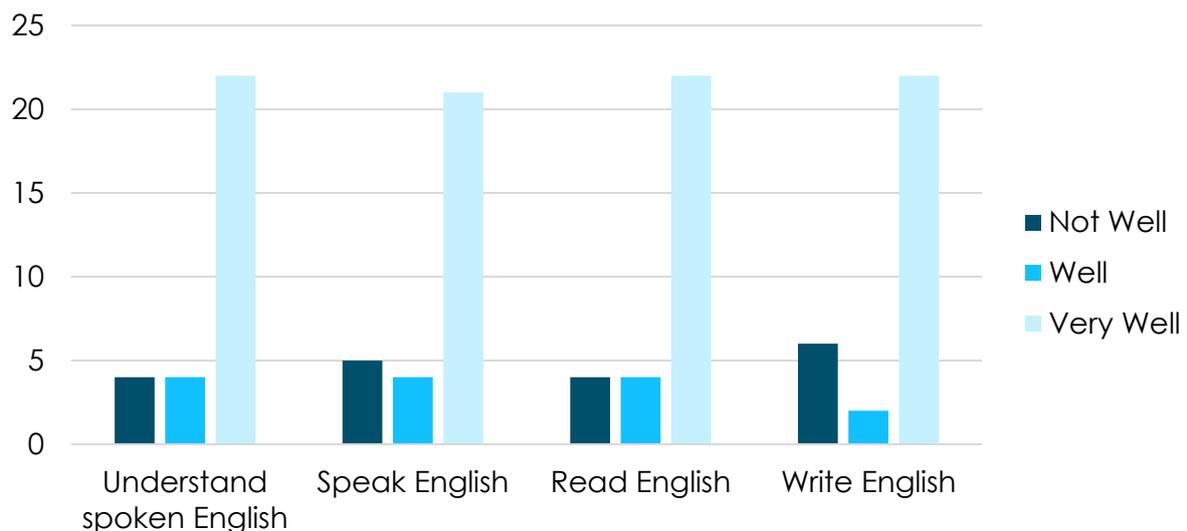
About our participants

Sexual orientation	Count
Bisexual	2
Heterosexual/Straight	26
Prefer not to say	2
Total	30

Internet access	Count
No, I have no access to the internet	1
Yes, on a mobile network (eg smartphone, tablet) with a SIM	28
Yes, on home Wi-Fi/Broadband	1
Total	30

Income source	Count
Disability benefits (eg: Attendance Allowance, Personal Independence Payment)	2
Means-tested benefits (eg: Universal Credit, Tax Credit, Pension Credit)	25
Wages/salary	2
Other	1
Total	30

Understanding of English



GP services

28 people who completed the survey were registered with a GP and two were not. The list of GP practices people were registered with can be found in appendices.

The women who took part in the focus group identified these thoughts and feelings when they were asked "What thoughts come to mind when you think about GP's/Doctors surgeries/GP services?"

- *That they're there to help you.*
- *Guide you in the right directions*
- *Just make appointment to see the GP and get prescriptions for any other problems*

Two people said they had not yet used their new GP practice.

Issues identified

GP registration

Some service users found it difficult to register with a GP if they fled domestic abuse without any photo identification:

- *"Can't register as kids are registered with old GP, due to have DA, can't change GP due to risk of father to [the] children tracking GP"*
- *"Couldn't register kids as didn't have identification"*
- *"Had problems registering with a GP - they required photo ID which we had to find. Registration takes a couple of weeks and was a lengthy process. Reception kept saying not registered. Filled in online registration form 3 times."*
- *"On the first one in Tile Hill, and in the last 4 or 5 surgeries we were not able register".*
- *"I give the form, they say 6-8 weeks. They said if it urgent you can try for a different GP, but this one is walking distance of only 5-10 minutes. So, any emergency between this time I go to walk in centre."*

One was having problems finding a GP practice:

- *"Couldn't find a local GP local to address. Have been in city for 3 weeks and [children and mum]"*

Appointment system and access to appointment

There were comments about accessing appointments at GP practices from both the surveys and discussion group.

Those taking part in the discussion thought GP services were 'sometimes accessible'.

The phone system and requirement to phone on the day were flagged as issues, along with communication:

- *"Getting appointment can be difficult as have to ring up on the day, Had to take daughter to walk in centre as could not get a GP appointment."*
- *"Since COVID it has been difficult getting appointments, Called 08:30 am in the morning, was advised to ring later, still no appointments, had to ring daily at 08:30 am for 3 days in order to get appointment."*
- *"Lack of communication with us as to whether face to face or telephone appointment"*.
- *"Very often early in the morning when you ring and you're first in the line, you're waiting at least number 20 in line, so that's like around an hour or over waiting and very often the call is cut off."*
- *"When you call again you are more back in the queue, yes that's quite hard."*
- *"I think normally, all GP here, you call in morning for appointment, I'm waiting for half an hour on phone line and then I'll get through and they will say sorry no appointments"*.
- *"They say if very urgent you go to walk in centre, if not urgent you are told to call tomorrow morning early, so 8 am phone them, 08.30 still waiting, by 9 am no appointments. I think there needs to be a bigger window of opportunity to call, between 08.30 – 09.30 am"*.
- *"Appointment making, I see the doctor face to face, she sees me for only 10 minutes, sometimes the doctor, I explain for my problem, there's not enough time in the 10 minutes, she says next person waiting, she says, 'quickly then', there's a lot of pressure."*
- *"Doctors will say only see you for the one problem, I have two different problems but only one talk about in each appointment"*.

- *"I've always had good experiences to be fair".*
- *"There is positive experiences [Sic] they're kind, gentle".*

Communication issues and getting through to the GP practice led to issues accessing medication for two people, with one stopping taking medication as a result:

- *"Problems switching GP medication. When I signed up when I first moved in July, they have only just been able to prescribe me medication two weeks ago – this was a long delay. The line is always busy to get through on the phone .I have sent an email requesting medication, and then the medication got sent to the wrong chemist, and then was told this could not be done over email."*
- *"GP didn't put medication on repeat. Couldn't get hold of GP, waiting for longer than hour, then got cut off, and quit medications as a result of this"*

Another experience lack of understanding:

- *"Can be rude on reception and they were not helpful over the phone. GP brushed off enquiries into mental health services and GP wouldn't authorize a sick note despite all the things I have been through."*

Admin issues

A focus group participant commented about the pressure on reception in their surgery:

"One more problem from me for GP receptionist, 2 or 3 people working for the doctors reception - 5 or 6 people outside waiting on reception, they are still on phone, they are talking to people on the phone first before talking to people in front of them face to face. They should have one person on phone and one person for face to face".

Two people said their child's red book had been misplaced by their GP practices. A focus group participant said their blood tests results were lost by the GP practice.

Things people would change about GP services:

<p>Access to appointments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Be able to book appointments with GP in advance instead of ringing up on the day as if someone has work they would like to be able to know they have an appointment booked" • "Easier access to appointments at GP as you have to call up on the day to get an appointment which doesn't work for everyone and others might be working." • "For services to be timelier especially GP services as people will not have to sit in walk in centre and hospital due to not being able to get into GP " • "When calling GP for appointment, the appointments take a long time to be made over the phone and get into the doctors. Make appointments easier for people" • "Booking on the day can be inappropriate, lack of communication from GP regarding appointments, texts/calls reminders to confirm appointments." • "To get appointments quicker, most of the time cannot get appointments on time, with GP and hospital appointments can take a long time – would like appointments to be quicker and more easily accessible. Have to book a separate appointment to discuss separate symptoms, they treat what you say on reception and not exploring in depth causing more appointments."
<p>Speed of GP registration</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Making appointments quicker process for GP surgeries as waiting long time to get an appointment and having to ring early in the morning to get through and to register GP takes 6-8 weeks which is to long" • "Register GP takes 6-8 weeks which is to long"

<p>Understanding of Domestic Abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "More understanding of domestic abuse as I did not have children identifications to register and my children's health and GP was delayed" • "GP could be more professional and listen appropriately, there was no privacy when asking my address and I had to say it in front of other people, lack of understanding surrounding domestic abuse awareness and address needing to be confidential." • "My GP I would like to be more accommodating and listen more about your problems so you can get them sorted"
<p>Attitude</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The behaviour of the receptionists" • "The receptionist they were impatient and rude" • "Some receptionists not being nicely [Sic], sometimes the older people coming they don't talk nicely" • "They are not patient"

Mental health services

Those who had used mental health services or sought help for their mental health were mainly positive about their experiences. Most thought waiting times were acceptable although some experienced longer waits and would have liked help sooner.

Nine women said they were not aware what mental health support services were available until they got information from Valley House eg:

- *"I wasn't familiar with the mental health services in Coventry, was only through Valley House that I came to know about MIND service"*

From comments there was some variation in how long it took to get mental health support:

- *"A matter of days. Home visit was very quick from crisis team, transferred to maternity health team"*

- "Took a long time to have an assessment, however they were accommodating in that I could do first assessment over Zoom due to my disability".
- "Crisis team came to see me after a hospital admission, after a week then had counselling, Time frame was adequate."
- "Long wait and still waiting for the service, has been 6 months."

IAPT

- "My wait has been relatively quick, MIND have been really quick, only a week and IAPT were months wait, so I no longer am with them."
- "Have accessed IAPT service a number of months ago, on waiting list for 6 months and waiting to be seen."

CAMHS

- "Was at CAMHS was waiting a long time for appointments and didn't find them very helpful"

Examples of positive experiences:

- "Mind, very positive experience"
- "I`m linked in with MIND for counselling, I`m happy with MIND service, been efficient service."
- "Had Counselling, Barnardo`s, MIND, IAPT, counselling has always been really good and positive"
- "Experience was amazing, initially went to GP for help, first approached by crisis team who visited at home. Staff were compassionate, understanding, staff felt like a safe space."
- "Accessed out of hours, crisis team. Had counselling for four weeks, Crisis team was good and had a positive experience".
- "Have accessed women`s aid mental health and IAPT, they were helpful and supportive, positive experience using these services"
- "They were really, really interested about daughter problems. They were consistent by contacting her, they made our problems their problems, you know like really being you know helpful and yeah listening carefully". [It was GP, mental health team through GP.]

One person had a negative experience they shared:

- "One Counsellor said `you've got nothing to be depressed over`. Not good experience - they sent different counsellors every week and so it

was the service user explaining the same bits of information repeatedly”.

Things people would change about mental health responses and services:

Waiting times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Shorter waiting times for mental health services” • “Wait with IAPT - would like this to be quicker than 6 months, maybe shorten this to 2 months.” • "My son may be autistic and the waiting list is too long for me and it needs to be changed, the waiting list is one year." • Had also to wait over 3 months for my MIND appointment which was long for someone who wants support."
Quality of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "With regards to mental health services, I think they need to listen more, putting in more care, being prompt with appointments." • "Mental health services being more readily available when urgent mental health issues arise and GP`s listening properly and getting support straight away." • "To give doctors more training on mental health so they have a better understanding and the right support can be sourced."
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "More knowledge of mental health services for everyone, know how to get support for mental health and how to access this, perhaps more information on TV/Local Services information."

Hospital services

Twelve people had experienced outpatient appointments. The feedback was positive:

- *“Very good experience, staff were very helpful, staff interact really well”*

- *"My experience was good, appointments were on time, staff were nice and helpful"*
- *"It was good experience, appointments were on time, staff helpful"*
- *"Yes, the UHCW was very good and prompt, did not wait long for appointment, easy to speak to."*
- *"Really good positive experience with pain management, good communication and prompt service"*

Maternity services

There were four pieces of feedback related to hospital and community services:

- *"Bad experience – doctor who received me when waters broke, doctor seemed distant/cold, and made me feel uncomfortable."*
- *"Once had a midwife appointment, you know when you have an appointment at 10 am, you go there for 10 am but you wait there for hours, and you don't get seen at the time you have an appointment for".*
- *"When I was pregnant, I had long waits, sometimes they don't even get to see you".*
- *"Nice experience with doctors, when I lost my daughter, they were very good, they came to see us one on one in our home, they didn't quit, they were consistent in coming to see you, they listened to me for however long I needed. The bereavement of a child midwife, she was sometimes staying for hours to help me and this was a positive experience for me".*

Communication problem:

- *"Not good, I was supposed to be called into outpatient a few times, I just never got the appointments given, I was never contacted again. Also, on hospital discharges I never got hospital discharge reports and so no one could ever follow us up. The couple of times that we went to hospital this year we didn't get discharge reports. It was as if our visit never existed. Even though I had countless tests and scans, quite urgent things, but I didn't exist anymore as there was not discharge or follow up".*

Do you find it easy to find where you're going in hospital?

All focus group participants said they found it difficult to find their way within the hospital eg:

- *"Looking for signs but there is so many signs and it is very difficult"*
- *"End up in the wrong place"*
- *"I get lost in university Coventry hospital"*

Urgent care - A&E and NHS 111

14 provided comments on using A&E and /or NHS 111 and the majority said they had a good experience of these services.

- *"A&E long wait, autistic son doesn't understand about waiting, wait was over 5 hours, short staffed, only had baby changing facilities, had to go through to a room for this. 111 positive experience, answered questions and communicated well"*
- *" A&E – one time after a suicide attempt, doctor came in and closed the curtain and then turned round and said I've seen you far too many times, you just need to do it or stop coming in"*

Sent in a circle

- *"The wait in A&E was very long, it is short staffed. Used 111, just got told to try this try that, 999 told me to ring 111, and 111 told me to ring 999, lack of communication and lack understating thresholds. Was told that illnesses was not severe enough. Asked many questions when in and out of consciousness and just needed to be in hospital."*

Lack of response

- *"Have used 111 – called them and they advised they would call back within 12 hours and it has now been 3 days. [I] took child to walk in centre instead"*

We asked about access to the hospital. Respondents answered this question regarding how easy it was to find to location of A&E and said they had no issues with this.

Things people would change about hospital services:

Location

"More hospitals as it's all centralized to UHCW, sometimes for people they are a bit far away from"

	<i>it and it's less accessible for them, perhaps a hospital in more of the city centre area."</i>
A&E waiting times	"The wait time in A&E to be reduced"
	<i>"Waiting times for A&E are very long, need more doctors or quicker service."</i>
	<i>"More staff at A&E more finances to be able to facilitate this."</i>

General comments

Other things that people said they would change in NHS services are:

"Having more services available, more locally to everyone, many seem to be struggling with appointments and so more services offering these would be useful."

"If phone up want to speak to someone urgently, this can't be done currently."

"In Poland, if something was wrong with child they do allergy tests, these are not being offered in the UK as part of routine checks."

"To have a separate place to deal with mental health issues, eating disorders and sometimes A&E the wait is so long and it should be tackled separately."

"Would like to have more staff as some people are in desperate need of staff in both hospitals and GP surgeries."

"Doctors and receptionists need more training and patience. Receptionists need more communication with nurses/doctors. I think every 6 months or so receptionists need training".

"There should be checks more regularly, I think they get too much in a routine into a habit as to how they treat patients. Sometimes the most fresh [Sic] students are sometimes the best. With the older receptionists although I can understand it's a taxing job but it's just a shame to get given to someone who doesn't see you as a human being anymore as they are jaded by their job".

Conclusions

Access to GP services was the biggest area of concern for those who took part in this piece of work. This had a knock on impact on access to other services.

There were some specific challenges related to domestic abuse in terms of confidentiality concerns.

Due to fleeing from domestic abuse, many women and children do not have photo ID or documentation. Some women were told by Coventry GP practices that they needed this information in order to register at the practice. Others were told that registration took a period of weeks.

This is not in fact the case. The information about GP registration from the NHS website states that:

“You do not need proof of ID to register with a GP, but it might help if you have one or more of the following:

- *passport*
- *birth certificate*
- *HC2 certificate*
- *rough sleepers' identity badge*
- *hostel or accommodation registration or mail forwarding letter*

If you're homeless, you can give a temporary address, such as a friend's address, a day centre or the GP surgery address”

Using a GP surgery you're not registered with

You can contact any GP surgery if you need treatment and:

- *you're away from home*
- *you're not registered with a GP surgery*
- *it's a medical emergency*
- *You might need to register as a temporary resident or permanent patient if you need treatment for more than 14 days.*

You can register as a temporary resident for up to 3 months. You'll still be registered with your usual GP surgery if you have one.¹

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/gps/how-to-register-with-a-gp-surgery/>

Understanding of domestic abuse and compassionate interactions with staff at GP practices were highlighted as areas for improvement. Access to appointments, waits to get appointments, challenges of phone queues and on the day appointment systems were highlighted.

Mental health support received positive feedback although waiting times varied and four women told stories of delays to access which they saw as significant. Valley House played a valuable role in enabling women to understand and access mental health services such as those provided by MIND. The people Valley House support are often new to the area and comments showed they did not know how to find out about services or what to expect.

Experiences of hospital services and urgent care were largely positive. Waiting times in A&E were a problem for some. Navigating the layout of University Hospital Coventry was an issue for discussion group participants.

Two women were not able to navigate urgent care services due to poor communication by services.

One woman had very poor maternity experience and two others were concerned about waiting times.

Recommendations

The experiences shared in this piece of work highlight

- Barriers to GP registration and inconsistency in experience of the process
- Challenges accessing appointments at GP practices
- The importance of staff understanding the situation of people moving house/location as a result of domestic violence
- The importance of compassionate interactions
- The importance of information provision about local health services including mental health services so that people can navigate services and understand what to expect

This research adds weight to other evidence and recommendations Healthwatch Coventry has already published and shared with local decision makers regarding: access issues to GP services and challenges in accessing the right information to navigate local NHS services.

Healthwatch Coventry makes the following recommendations to the Coventry and Warwickshire Integrated Care Board (which is responsible for local NHS money and the commissioning of services such as GP services).

1. Coventry and Warwickshire ICB to ensure that all local GP practices follow the national guidance on registering new patients including that photo ID is not required for patient registration. Also to address the variation in the time taken for new patient registration by setting a benchmark locally and working with GP practices to avoid people being left without GP access or gaps in medication.
2. Access to GP services – getting an appointment or getting through to a GP practice are common issues raised with Healthwatch Coventry. There needs to be more capacity, improvements to appointment booking systems and the needs of vulnerable groups must be recognised.
3. Regular training should be in place to ensure that GP reception staff understand domestic abuse and recognise that choice in how to access GP services will be important, for example phone appointments may not be appropriate or the best route.
4. Work should be done to develop the information available to local people about mental health services: what they are; what they provide and how to access them. Local people should be involved and the needs of domestic abuse survivors and other vulnerable groups should inform this work.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Valley House and its staff for completing this piece of work and to the women who gave their time to take part and share their experiences.



Appendices

GP practices of participants

Bedworth Health Centre	1
City of Coventry Health Centre, Stoney Stanton Rd, Coventry CV1 4FS	2
Clay Lane Health Centre, 5 Clay Lane, Coventry, CV2 4LJ	3
Copsewood Medical Centre, 95 Momus Blvd, Coventry, CV2 5NB	5
Crossley Practice, 16/18 Henley Road, Coventry, CV2 1LR	1
Engleton House Surgery, Engleton House, 2 Villa Road, Coventry, CV6 3HZ	1
Foleshill Surgery, Livingstone Road, Coventry CV6 5AR	3
Harnall Lane Medical Centre, Harnall Lane, Coventry, CV1 5AE	2
Holbrooks Health Team, 71-77 Wheelwright Lane, Coventry, CV6 4HN	2
Holyhead Surgery, 1 Chester Street, Coventry, CV1 4DH	1
Kenyon Medical Centre, 108 Brandon Road, Binley, Coventry, CV3 2JF	1
Longford Primary Care Centre, Longford Road, Coventry, CV6 6DR	1
Oasis Medical Centre, Quinton Park, Cheylesmore, Coventry	1
Willenhall Oak Medical Centre, 70 Remembrance Road, Coventry, CV3 3DP	1
Windmill Surgery, 150 Longford Road, Coventry, CV6 6DR	1
Woodside Medical Centre, Jardine Crescent, Tile Hill, Coventry, CV4 9PL	1
Woodway Medical Centre, 201 Wigston Road, Coventry, CV2 2RH	1
No GP	2
Total	30

Survey questions

1. Are you registered with a GP?
2. Have you had any problems with your GP including issues booking appointments?
3. Have you accessed mental health services?
4. Were there any barriers to you accessing mental health services? If so what were they?
5. How long was your wait in accessing mental health services,
6. Have you been a hospital outpatient if so what was your experience of this?
7. Do you have any feedback on their level of service?

8. How would you describe your experience of care?
9. Have you had any barriers in accessing hospital services?
10. Have you access A&E and NHW 111 if yes what was your experience of A&E and NHS 111
11. Do you have any feedback on their level of services?
12. How easy was it to find information about the A&E department?
13. How would you describe your experience of care?

Focus group questions

Healthwatch are looking to gather experiences of people in Coventry of GP's, Mental Health, and Hospital services, they are looking to gather experiences to try and suggest any improvements to these services

- What thoughts and feelings come to mind when you think about GP's/Doctors surgeries/GP services?
- Do you think GPs are easily accessible?
 - Can you expand on that for me?
- Did anybody have any problems registering with their GP?
 - how long did it take to register?
- When did you last see your GP?
- If there was one thing you could change about GP services, what would it be?
- Anyone else got anything they would like to add?
- Has anyone here ever accessed mental health services?
- What was your experience of using mental health services?
- What services have you accessed?

- Was it quick to get your appointment?
- Anyone else got anything they would like to share about mental health?
- Do you have any suggestions on how to improve mental health services?
- Have any of you used out of hours, so A&E or had to call 111?
- What was your experience of using 111?
- Anyone else got an experience of using these services?
- What are your views on outpatient appointments? So, going back to hospital for blood tests or any appointments?
- Would you say there was a lack of communication between hospital and yourself?
- Anyone else shared a similar experience or has a different experience?
- Do you all find it easy to find where you're going in hospital?
- Are there any other points that you would like to make based on what we have spoken about today or any of the services we have spoken about that you feel we haven't covered?



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