

GP registration in Hackney, the right to access health care (Third review)



I have the right to register and
receive treatment from a GP practice

I do not need a fixed address.

I do not need identification.

Anyone in England can see a GP.



If I have any problems I can call 0300 311 2233
If I need more information I can visit www.nhs.uk/register

- I may need help filling in forms.
- I may need help reading and understanding.
- I would like to speak to someone confidentially.

February 2023

Introduction

“Under the terms of their primary medical services contracts, GP practices cannot refuse an application to join its list of NHS patients on the grounds of race, gender, social class, age, religion, sexual orientation, appearance, disability or medical condition (...) In addition, **when applying to become a patient there is no regulatory requirement to prove identity, address, immigration status or the provision of an NHS number in order to register.**”

Proof of ID is **only** required should the patient wish to gain online access to their medical records, due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of the information. While the majority of patients are able to provide ID and proof of address, some people are legitimately unable to produce these. [NHS England Primary Medical Care Policy and Guidance Manual \(V4.0\)](#)

The NHS guidelines are clear, these reasonable exceptions **must** be considered, and the individual registered with sensitivity to their situation. The guidance even goes so far as to require practices to record the name of any patient who was refused registration, as well as the date and reason for the refusal, all within 14 days.

NHS policy is quite clear on these points, no one living in the practice area is to be refused registration with a GP practice because they are unable to produce documentation. Following our initial report on [GP registration, published in May 2021](#), NE London Clinical Commissioning Group sent out letters to all GP practices in Hackney, highlighting how the policy of asking patients wishing to register for their documents constituted a potential obstacle that could lead to a denial of healthcare for some.

Why would a registration be refused?

A GP surgery can refuse to register you because:

- they are not taking any new patients¹
- you live outside the practice boundary and they are not accepting patients from out of their area
- you have been removed from that GP surgery register before
- it's a long way from your home and you need extra care, for example, home visits

Healthwatch Hackney conducted a follow-up review of practices some six months after the initial findings of the 2021 report and a [second report was published in Jan 2022](#). The second report also included a website review. Our findings were

¹ GMS (and PMS in England) practices can apply formally to close the practice list if their workload is impacting their ability to provide safe care for their registered patients or to carry out their contractual obligations to meet their patients' core clinical needs. This is permitted by [The National Health Service \(General Medical Services Contracts\) Regulations 2004](#)

encouraging, as a good number of the practices reviewed had updated their registration policy and no longer required patients to provide ID or proof of address when registering. This improvement was welcomed as registration is key to a patient's overall health outcomes, ensuring early diagnosis and treatment.

Healthwatch Hackney regards requesting ID or proof of address from patients wishing to register with a GP as a significant concern, as this will likely result in people potentially being denied access to the healthcare they are entitled to. Of the groups potentially affected, the ['Refugee and migrants' access to health care in Hackney](#) report (2020) showed that together with the language barrier, demands for documents were a barrier to accessing basic health care for these communities.

A range of further groups could also be affected:

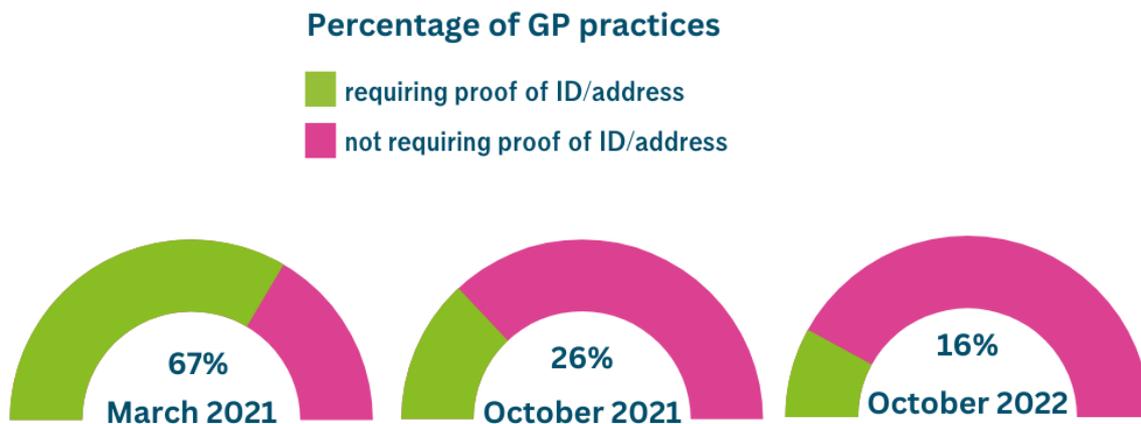
- People fleeing domestic violence staying with friends or family
- People living on a boat, in unstable accommodation
- People staying long term with friends but who aren't receiving bills
- People victims of modern slavery whose employer has taken their documents
- People trafficked into the country who had their documents taken on arrival
- Children born in the UK to parents without documentation
- Prison leavers

A third review was therefore carried out in October and November 2022 and the following is a report of our findings.

In June 2022, as a result of our recommendations from the previous report, GP practices in Hackney have been offered a training on the Registration Process. The training provided information about:

- Legal considerations
- Protocol
- Out of area registration
- Type of registration
- The registration process
- Registering patients of no fixed abode or no formal ID
- Online access

The chart below illustrates the outcome of the work carried out by Healthwatch Hackney since March 2021 to ensure better access to primary care services.



This achievement brought us [Healthwatch England's 2022 National Impact Award](#), which celebrates the difference made by local Healthwatch staff and volunteers to improve NHS and care services.

Presenting the Healthwatch Impact Award, the Chair of Healthwatch England, Sir Robert Francis KC, said:

"It's an honour to announce Healthwatch Hackney as the winner of this year's Healthwatch Impact Award. The award recognises Healthwatch Hackney for having a positive and tangible impact on people in their local area. Everyone at Healthwatch Hackney should be proud of how they've helped to ensure more vulnerable people in their borough can see a GP. But this award is also a testament to the local people who were prepared to speak up and the health professionals who listened. It just shows what can be achieved when we work together to improve care."

How we did it

From October to December 2022, Healthwatch Hackney carried out a review of the GP registration process at all the 38 GP practices in Hackney to determine whether, when registering new patients, these GP practices were following NHS guidance

Throughout October and November, Healthwatch Hackney volunteers anonymously telephoned all the 38 GP practices in Hackney to enquire about the new patient registration process posing as a service user or a friend of the service user. Each practice was called twice.

Two volunteers also physically visited two GP practices as 'mystery shoppers'.

The two practices were selected among those who told us that proof of ID and or address was required for registration. One of the practices was consistent in its approach throughout the 3 reviews. The other practice demonstrated a negative change in comparison with the last review in October 2021.

Practices were contacted again in December 2022 by volunteers on behalf of Healthwatch Hackney.

We decided not to place extra burden on GP phone systems during the morning peak opening times/busy period. Therefore, on both occasions, we made our calls between 10am and 5pm and avoided the lunchtime period as many practices close during this time.

Before each of the calls, we identified a postcode close to the GP practice to be contacted. This was to ensure that if the caller was asked for their details, they could provide a postcode within the practice's catchment area so that registration could not be refused on the basis of catchment area.

We found that the majority of practices asked for the caller's address before answering questions, to check that they resided in the practice's boundary area.

Mystery shopping calls:

We asked the same questions to each practice:

- 1) *I am new to the area and would like to register with a GP. How do I register?*
- 2) *Is there anything I need to bring with me, or that you need to see?*

Supplementary question if required: What if I do not have any of these?

- 3) *Is there any other information I need to know?*

Official HWH calls:

- 1) *What information is required from patients willing to register?*
- 2) *What if they don't have these documents?*

Acknowledgment

We would like to thank all the staff at the GP practices for their time and contribution.

We would also like to thank the volunteers who took part in this review for their excellent and indispensable contribution.

Nikki Khalesi, Norah Adesoyi, Ahmed Aljohani, Fabien Decodts

We would also like to thank Richard Bull, The Primary Care Manager NHS NEL for his continuous support for our work, improving the patient experience.

Limitations

Although all volunteers were given the same data collection sheet, there were a few inconsistencies in the recorded/collected data which made it at times difficult to analyse. This meant that we had to make clarifying calls to some of the GP practices after November 2022.

Another limitation was the conflicting or unclear information provided by some receptionists, which made it again difficult to analyse.

To avoid any extra pressure on GP practices we are not publishing individual responses from each practice under 'needs improvement'. However, the complete details are shared with the NEL ICB so that appropriate recommendations can be made and actions taken.

Key findings

We spoke to 38 GP practices. The following percentages are based on the reports of our telephone mystery shoppers:

- 84% (32 out of a total of 38) of the practices did not require proof of ID/address for registration. One practice had closed its patient list but still confirmed that no proof of ID/address would be required.
- 16% (6 out of a total 38) of the practices required proof of ID and/or address to approve registration.
- On all occasions during the mystery shopping calls, the questions were answered by the person who picked up the call.
- When calls were made on behalf of Healthwatch Hackney, questions were responded to by the receptionist on 37 occasions, with one conversation taken over by a practice manager.
- Throughout both exercises, holding the line waiting for the call to be picked up took anywhere between 4 minutes to over an hour on a few occasions.



Compared with the last review ([October 2021](#)) the calls made for this review showed that:

- 25 practices were consistent in their approach of not asking for proof of ID and/or address for registration
- 7 practices made a positive change to their registration policy and no longer required proof of ID and/or address for registration (compared to October 2021)
- 5 practices had made a negative change to their registration policy and were now requesting proof of ID and/or address for registration (compared to October 2021)
- 1 practice remained consistent in its approach of requiring proof of ID and/or address for registration

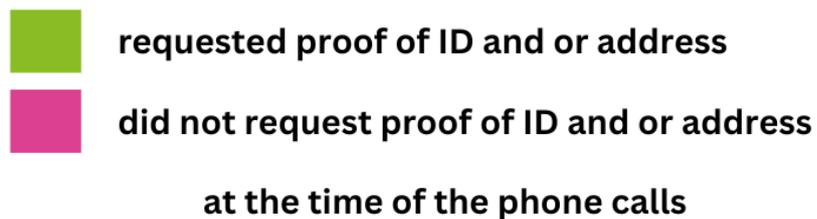
A good news story

The initial findings of this third review were most encouraging, with our volunteer mystery shoppers confirming that 84% (32 out of a total of 38) of Hackney's GP surgeries were no longer requesting ID or proof of address from potential patients seeking to register at their practice.

However, during the phone calls we found that of the total surgeries a handful (16%) were still requesting these, despite having been contacted by the North East London NHS England commissioning team. It was also confirmed by the NEL ICB that regular reminders have been sent to the practices by the NHS England about GP registration requirements and the training.

We also found that while the majority of practices had indeed improved their approach in line with NHS guidance, there were still some discrepancies around the registration process that could well impact on peoples' motivation and ability to successfully register as new patients.

Percentage of GP practices



Examples of ‘best practice’

Analysis of the responses received on the day of the calls, showed that 32 out the 38 GP practices in Hackney were not requesting either ID or proof of address from potential patients seeking to register. In just 3 cases, receptionists specified that proof of ID would be required but *only* if requesting access to online services (i.e. access to confidential information held). This is in line with NHS guidance.

Examples of ‘best practice’ included the following GP practices:

Examples of best practice	
Allerton Road Medical Centre	Somerford Grove Practice
Athena Medical Centre	Spring Hill Practice
Barretts’ Grove Surgery	Stamford Hill Group Practice
Barton House Group Practice	The Clapton Surgery
Cranwich Road Surgery	The Dalston Practice
Healy Medical Centre	The Elm Practice
Elsdale Street Surgery	The Gadhvi Practice
Kingsmead Medical Centre	The Greenhouse GP Surgery
Latimer Health Centre	The Heron Practice
London Fields Medical Centre	The Hoxton Surgery
Lower Clapton Group Practice	The Lawson Practice
Queensbridge Group Practice	The Nightingale Practice
Richmond Road Medical Centre	The Riverside Practice
Rosewood Practice	The Well Street Surgery
Sandringham Practice	The Wick Health Centre
Shoreditch Park Surgery	Trowbridge Surgery

Findings - ‘Needs improvement’

Of the total of practices contacted by our volunteer mystery shoppers, 6 still required either ID or proof of address. In almost every case, the information given to our mystery shoppers conflicted with that shared with Healthwatch Hackney’s official callers. Where HWH had been advised that no proof would be required, mystery shoppers were told that proof was needed, with some advising callers to try walk-in centres and even a different practice.

On two occasions, the mystery shoppers made in-person visits to their local practices (see appendix for details). In both these instances, ID and proof of address were required and the patient was initially told they could not be registered without them. Only after insisting (and receptionists had checked with their managers) were they told they *could* be registered but not without providing proof of address and ID of those they were living with and being presented with various obstructive requests. It was felt by the mystery shopper that the message communicated seemed to be ‘yes, we can (and should) register you but actually, we’d rather not.’

Examples of 'needs improvement'	
The Cedar Practice	De Beauvoir Surgery
The Lea Surgery	Brooke Road Surgery
The Statham Grove Surgery	Beechwood Medical Centre

What we were told:

- Documentation was required. The caller was also asked how long they had lived in the country and why they did not have any documents.
- ID/proof of address was required. No proof no registration.
- Proof of ID/address was required. The call handler was unable to confirm if in-person paper registration was available. **Visit to the practice** - The mystery shopper was advised that proof of ID and/or address was required. The volunteer was also refused a paper copy of the registration form. The Practice Manager advised the mystery shopper that another GP practice was available where no proof would be required (see appendix A for full details).
- The mystery caller was advised that proof was needed but that they could still be registered as a temporary patient if none was available. They were also signposted to a walk-in clinic. Registration was only available online. When the caller said that they had no internet access, the receptionist asked them *"well how did you find our number then?"*
- ID/proof of address were required. **Only when** queried as to why proof of ID/address are required, the caller was told this is required of everyone for online services. **Visit to the practice** - The mystery shopper visited the practice and was asked for ID/proof of address and was told that registration was not possible without proof. The mystery shopper was signposted to another surgery that did not require ID. When pointed out that on an NHS registration leaflet this was not required, the receptionist checked with their manager and then requested a letter from the friend they were staying with, to include the friend's ID/proof of address. They were told that without ID, only Primary healthcare would be provided and NHS required ID for referrals to Secondary care (see appendix B for full details).
- **First call:** Proof of ID was required. The mystery shopper was told that they could be registered as a temporary patient, but that they would need to provide proof of ID/address further down the line. **Second call:** The mystery shopper was advised that they could not register without ID/proof of address. The caller informed the receptionist that they had no passport and was asked *"What happened?"* The caller responded that it had been lost and was then asked whether this had been reported and told it was important to do so. The caller agreed and was then signposted to Homerton Hospital's walk-in clinic, if needed to see a doctor urgently.

Finally, the review’s findings highlighted that while the greater majority of practices had improved their approach towards registration in line with NHS guidance, some discrepancies were noted, with conflicting information regarding communication on the registration process given to callers. It is felt that this could cause confusion and impact negatively on people’s motivation to register at a given practice, potentially erecting barriers to primary healthcare in Hackney Borough.

Findings – conflicting information

When the three practices listed below, which are examples of best practice (i.e. did not require ID and/or proof of address - see above) were contacted, there were nonetheless discrepancies in the advice they gave to callers. This is important to note as it could cause confusion for potential patients, becoming a barrier to their registration.

Examples of ‘needs improvement’	
Allerton Road Medical Centre	Athena Medical Centre
Cranwich Rd Surgery	

Practice 1

HWH call: The receptionist was unaware of the NHS guidance regarding registration and had to ask their manager for confirmation. No proof is required but the volunteer caller was told that without at least one form of ID there would be a 50% chance that the new application would be rejected.

Mystery shopper call: No proof of ID and or address is required.

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Practice 2

HWH call: No proof of ID and or address is required. The receptionist was unaware of NHS guidance regarding registration and had to ask their manager for confirmation. The volunteer caller was advised that an initial registration could be made without proof but that this would eventually need to be provided.

Mystery shopper call: No proof of ID and or address is required.

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Practice 3

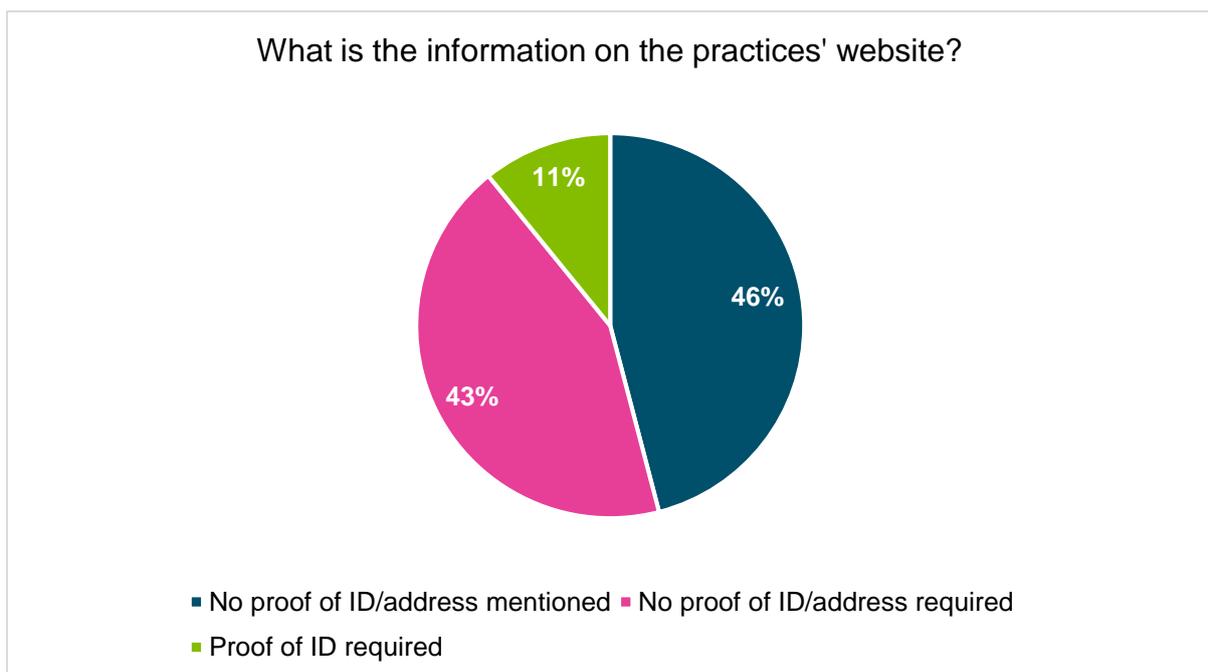
HWH call: No proof of ID and or address is required.

Mystery shopper call: No proof of ID and or address is required. The caller was advised that paper registration in person was preferable. However, practice answerphone message asks potential registrants to provide photo ID/proof of address.

The discrepancies highlighted by our [first](#) and [second](#) reviews of GP registration and the right to access healthcare in Hackney were confirmed in this third review and point to continuing training needs for many of the GP practices contacted. As had previously been pointed out by Richard Bull, the Primary Care Manager NHS NEL in his letter to GP practices following our first review, *“there is often a disconnect between what management believes is happening and what actually happens at the front line”*.

This gap between policy and practice was evidenced by the need for some receptionists to check with their managers regarding the registration process and the fact that our callers at times received conflicting information, depending on the day they called and who was answering the phone.

During our first review, one of the practices asking for proof of ID informed us that they had had a number of what they called ‘fraudulent’ applications to join the practice which were later declined by the NHS Digital Patient Demographic Service (May 2021). While we understand that to avoid duplication of records, proof of ID may be requested to ensure the correct patient details are entered into the database, this is still not an official requirement, based on NHS guidance.



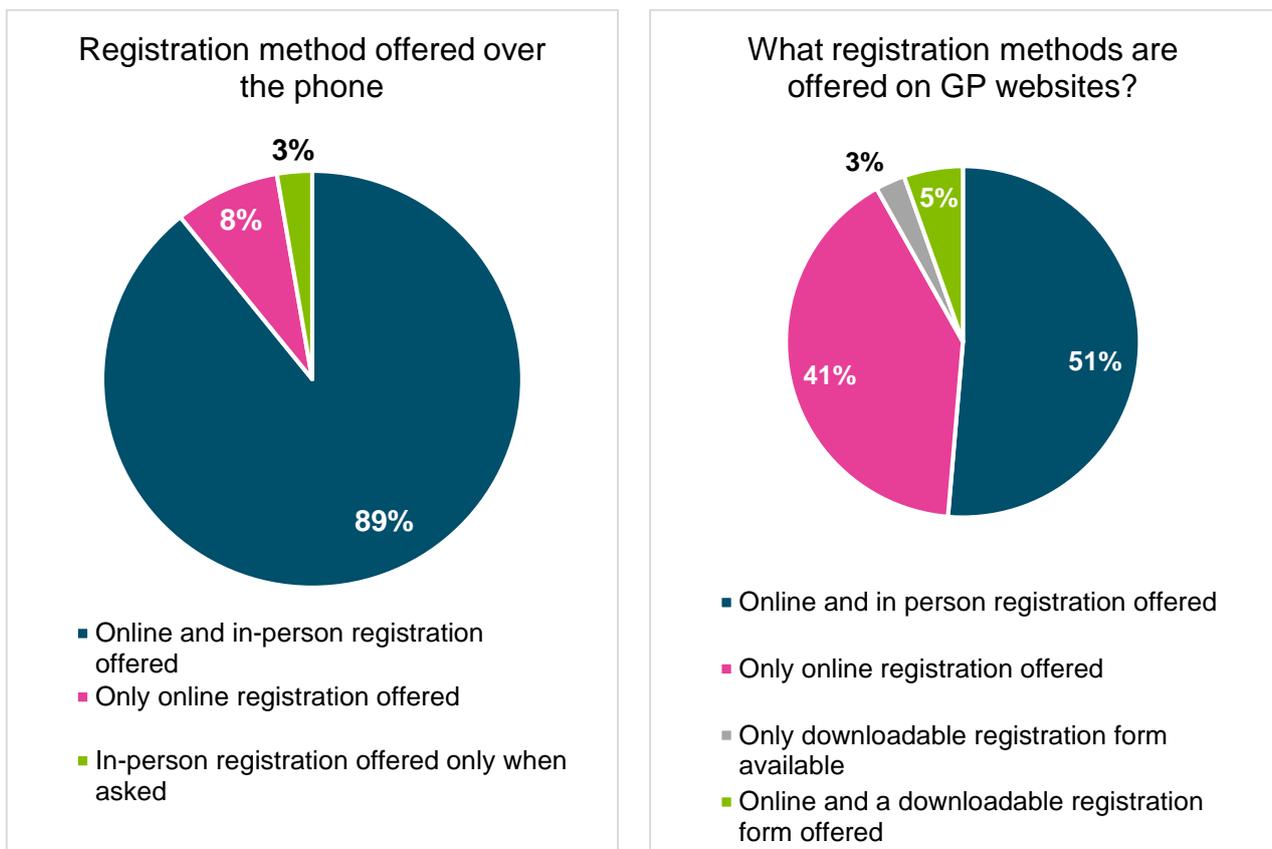
Almost half of the practices make it clear on their website that proof of ID and/or address is *not* a requirement for registration, with most displaying the following message: *‘We may ask to see proof of ID and/or address in order to ensure we register you with the correct details - however we will register you even if you do not have these documents.’*

However, some 10% of the practices (4 out of 38) included a requirement for proof of ID and/or address in their registration information, displaying the following message: *‘You can also do this [register] in person by visiting the practice with a Photo ID and Proof of Address.’*

How to register

The majority of practices contacted (89%) offered both online and in person registration to our mystery callers, although most offered the online registration first. Often, the non-digital option was only offered *after* the volunteer informed the receptionist that they had no internet access.

Although the majority of practices offered registration options in line with NHS policy/guidance, a small number appeared to insist on patients registering online without providing a paper/non-digital alternative.



“The call handler was unable to tell me if a paper copy was available. He insisted I needed to register online.”

“I was told that the registration was only online. When I said that ‘I don’t have access to the internet’ the receptionist asked me ‘how did I find their phone number then?’ She asked me to ask a friend to give them a call on my behalf.”

The lack of full options to register constitutes a potential barrier to registration. Should someone be without online access, they *must* be given the opportunity to register in person and supported in the process. Equally, those unable to attend in person (for whatever reason) should not be obliged to do so but be given the option to register online. It is important that *both* these options be made available and not one favoured over the other.

We understand that the 'NHS Digital' service is currently implementing a modernisation of GP registration, to alleviate what it considers '*an intensive, high volume data entry process for general practice to administer*'. However, it also states that though this '*online solution will help reduce the administrative burden for general practice and improve accessibility for patients (...)* The non-digital option will continue to be available.' <https://digital.nhs.uk/services/demographics>

Reporting on our findings

The initial findings of this report were shared with the NHS NEL ICB (the commissioners of the Primary Care services) for their official response and an improvement action plan.

The six practices under 'Need Improvement' were individually contacted by their commissioners and were asked for their comments and responses.

Some practices were surprised by our findings as they were confident that their staff are following the right process. Others were more willing to accept the findings, referring to the changes in staff turnover at the practice.

Some managers shared the concern related to the delay in the receipt of our initial draft which did not give practices **many opportunities** to investigate this with staff or to review their voice recordings.

On 20/03/2023 after informing the NEL ICB, we made follow-up mystery shopping calls to the 6 practices under 'Needs Improvement' to check if we will be given the right information this time. All calls were recorded for reporting purposes.

4/6 practices have now told us that no proof of ID was needed for registration and no proof of address was mentioned during the conversation.

2/6 practices invited the mystery shopper to visit the practice and discuss their circumstances with the Practice Manager.

We immediately reported back to the two practices where the receptionist referred to confirmation from their Practice Manager.

As it is important for all partners to work together in order to ensure efficient access to services for those who need them, we invited the six practice managers for a meeting to listen to their concerns and further discuss our findings and methods before publishing the final report.

The meeting on 12th of April 2023 was attended by five of the six practice managers (PM) of the surgeries under 'Needs Improvement'. Richard Bull, the Primary Care Manager NHS NEL was also at present.

All participants were appreciative of our work and have shown a real commitment to cooperating and improving the communication and staff training.

PM: *“Thank you very much for this work you are doing, I think it is really important work and really necessary that we don't put up any barriers and it's communicated to all our staff.”*

PM: *“We are learning as we go along with this and how we actually deal with it.”*

Richard Bull: *“It is great to see that improvements have been made, but further improvements are still required and this is something that requires constant vigilance and attention.”*

At the meeting, Practice Managers confirmed that the initial findings from our draft report have been reviewed and discussed immediately at their team meeting and used as a training tool.

However, managers were concerned that the delayed receipt of our initial draft did not give practices **many opportunities** to investigate this with staff or to review their voice recordings. Many had issues with the high reception staff turnover and some reported on the limited time of keeping their telephone records.

“Staff turnover has gone up in the last three years because of the demand and pressure they are feeling on the frontline.”

Lesson Learn for Healthwatch Hackney: Where a similar exercise is to take place, we will make sure voice recordings are made so that these can be used as immediate evidence as well as a learning tool for practices.

Question was also raised whether future mystery shopping exercises are carried out pre-informed.

All attendees were in agreement that ensuring access to healthcare is a sensitive issue that requires constant attention. Reception staff should be prepared with the necessary information at all times, rather than only when expecting a mystery shopping call. This should be a standard practice, not just for the next few months but indefinitely. It's crucial to act on this as soon as possible because limited access to medical care can have severe consequences.

Richard Bull: *“I completely recognise the pressure that frontline staff are under. It is an incredibly challenging job. However, it is fundamental that staff get this right all of the time. It's not about victimization and finger-pointing. It's a basic and essential part of the job, therefore, it needs to be done correctly all of the time.”*

Practice Managers shared another mutual concern about recognising fraudulent registrations. Some were confused as to where and how this can be reported.

PM: *“We have seen cases where a patient picked up a prescription from one practice but was registered with another. People may also try to access services in someone else's name.”*

PM: *“Another issue that comes up is people wanting to register who aren't within the area and similar cases, where we would challenge them after registration and ask for proof of address. These things do come up as issues sometimes.”*

Richard Bull: *Practice will be dealing with this on an occasional basis. Where the receptionist does have concerns they should and would think to ask the practice manager if there's a suspected fraudulent registration. The guidance is to accept the registration and then process it as fraudulent."*

In cases of suspected fraud, GP practices and other healthcare professionals can report fraud against the NHS in England and Wales by using NHS [online reporting form](#) or calling NHS free phone line 0800 028 4060. More information can be found here <https://cfa.nhs.uk/reportfraud>

Why it's important

Access to primary care services is key to an individual's overall health outcomes, as it ensures early diagnosis, intervention and treatment. Refusing registration without proof of address and/or ID could result in individuals without the required documentation being denied access to the healthcare that they (and their families) are entitled to.

This is of significant concern to Healthwatch Hackney. Proof of ID should only be required if the patient requests online access to their medical records, due to the sensitivity and confidentiality of the information, and this should be clearly communicated with the patient.

It is worth noting that NHS England's latest Primary Care bulletin (Jan 19th 2023) encourages GP teams to '*check that new patient demographic details have been recorded correctly when registering with a GP practice*'. Practices were reminded that inaccurate details lead to the duplication of records, and delayed access to treatment, and this is of particular importance when registering newborns (see below for details).

However, while the bulletin encourages practices to '*take extra care to double-check the spelling of names, the date of birth and addresses of new patients*', it is *not* suggesting the policy of requesting ID or proof of address from these patients. However, nor does it remind practices that the inability to provide these should *not* be a reason to refuse registration (see appendix C for more information).

The obstructive responses and conflicting information at times received by our volunteers constitute a barrier limiting certain local, vulnerable residents' access to primary care services.

Again, some of the groups that could be affected by this are:

- Refugees and migrants
- People fleeing domestic violence staying with friends or family
- People living on a boat, in unstable accommodation
- People staying long term with friends but who aren't receiving bills
- People victims of modern slavery whose employer has taken their documents
- People trafficked into the country who had their documents taken on arrival

- Children born in the UK to parents without documentation
- Prison leavers

The impact of this could potentially lead to worsening health outcomes and inequalities in accessing healthcare, as well as the inappropriate and ineffective use of NHS resources (i.e. higher use of A&E by vulnerable groups putting pressure on already struggling NHS services).

We appreciate that often practices have to deal with NHS Digital if patient details are incorrectly recorded. However, the [NHS guidelines](#) are clear that patients do not need proof of address or immigration status, ID, or an NHS number to register for the service but it is always helpful if these are available to ensure correct details are recorded.

Recommendations

We would like to thank all GP practices in the “examples of best practice” section for keeping up the good work and making their services accessible to Hackney residents.

However, as a result of the findings in this mystery shopping exercise, Healthwatch Hackney is recommending that: North East London NHS (NEL NHS), Integrated Care Service (ICS), Integrated Care Board (ICB) Partnership in City and Hackney consider the following actions:

- NEL ICB Primary Care Commissioning and the Local Medical Committee in conjunction with the Local Training Hub to continue supporting practices with best practice training and to take individual practice-level action where required.
- The ‘best practice’ findings on PCN level to be shared with other GP practices to ensure consistency in the approach.
- To reflect the turnover of staff at GP practices and to ensure the consistency of information provided to patients, the GP practices under ‘needs improvement’ to ensure ongoing training programme and regular checks on staff knowledge and experience of Patient Registration Policy and Guidance.
- Existing reception staff to receive periodically a refreshment training on registration with a GP practice to keep the staff up to date on the process and identify knowledge gaps and training needs.
- GP practices to provide leaflets in the waiting area with information on how to register.
- Posters with information on how to register to be displayed across the surgery and on front windows. Healthwatch Hackney can support GP practices with designing and distributing posters to individual practices.
- Practices that are currently not using the standard GMS1 registration form to be encouraged to adopt this. Healthwatch Hackney suggests the CMS1 form as it is sensitive to the inability of some residents to provide proof of ID and/or address.
- GP websites to be changed to reflect best practices regarding patient registration.
- GP practices to be encouraged to sign up to Doctors of the World’s ‘Safe Surgeries’ initiative to tackle the barriers faced by many migrants in accessing healthcare². We recommend that GP practices’ clinical and admin staff attend a [free ‘Safe Surgeries’ training session delivered by Doctors of the World](#).
- Where a similar exercise is to take place, **Healthwatch Hackney** to make sure voice recordings are made so that these can be used as immediate evidence as well as a learning tool for practices.

² Currently only 7 practices in Hackney have signed up to the network. The last practice registered in July 2021. We do not want to share the list of Safe Surgeries to prevent GP practices that are not Safe Surgeries from referring patients without documents to Safe Surgeries without engaging and improving their registration policies.

- Healthwatch Hackney to communicate concerning findings with the service provider directly to minimise the risk of more patients face barrier when accessing services.

Response from Richard Bull, Primary Care Manager NHS NEL

“It has been a pleasure collaborating with Healthwatch Hackney on this third report on GP registration requirements. I am delighted that it shows further improvement on the previous report but there is still a way to go before any patient wanting to register with a City and Hackney practice can do so confident in the knowledge that they will not be required to show any form of ID or proof of address. For those practices who continue to provide barrier free registration and for those who have shown an improvement on the previous report I thank you. Practice staff in City and Hackney are working very hard and demand on practices is currently very high but constant care and attention needs to be maintained in order to allow all patients barrier free access to primary care. I am confident that the fourth report will show this is the case for all practices as I know that is what all practices are striving to deliver”

Final words...

As your local health and social care champions, one of our goals is to highlight challenges faced by Hackney residents to improve the standards of care in the borough and to support healthcare providers in delivering the best possible service. This includes being able to register yourself and your family at a GP practice close to where you live.

Healthwatch Hackney will therefore continue to review policies and practices of GP registration, with a view to reducing the percentage of ‘needs improvement’ poor practice to 0%.

Appendix

Appendix A

Report of Healthwatch Hackney mystery shopper experiences in two GP practices

Mystery shopping visit 1 - Thursday 3rd of November 2022

Our mystery shoppers were initially refused entry into the practice as they had not made a prior appointment. They were told that only online registration was available and instructed to go to the local library to register. They were eventually allowed inside, after expressing that they did not understand the directions given to the library. The receptionists were found to be unhelpful and unable to advise regarding the loss of ID without checking with their manager.

The mystery shoppers were asked about their nationality, and which country they came from exactly, which left them feeling unwelcomed and wondering if they might have had a different response had they been from a different country. Furthermore, a letter from the friend they said they were staying with was requested, with supporting evidence of the friend's address and ID.

Finally, after sharing their address, the mystery shopper was informed that this was not within the catchment area of the practice and told to register with another GP practice closer to it, after which no further support was offered. When Healthwatch Hackney followed up with a call to the practice, the address given was verified to be within the practice catchment area.

The following is an account of their experience:

"I firstly rang the bell and the receptionist asked me if I had an appointment, I told her I had come to register. I was told that I could only register online and no printed form was available. I explained my situation and told the receptionist that I didn't have Internet access and didn't know how to register. I was then advised to go to the local library to register from there, however when I informed the receptionist that I didn't know where the library was she allowed me inside to give me directions to the library as well as try to explain how to register online. I asked her if she could print the form or maybe help me fill it out on her computer but she refused, although no-one was in line behind me. I asked her what information I would need to register and she inform me that I needed proof of address and ID. I then told her that my luggage had been stolen at the airport, which had contained my passport and all my information. The receptionist left her desk to ask her manager for advice, came back and asked for my nationality, then went back to inform her manager. She then returned and told me that they could

register me but that I would need to bring a letter from the friend I was staying with, which would need to include his information. I was then asked if I lived in this area, showed her my address but she then informed me but this GP surgery did not cover where we lived and she therefore could not help us. She advised us to go to the nearest GP to us but offered us no further assistance.”

Healthwatch Hackney contacted the practice after the mystery shopper’s visit, providing the same postcode given by the volunteer and this was confirmed within their catchment area.

Appendix B

Mystery shopping visit 2 - Thursday 3th of November 2022

The receptionist team was described as very welcoming and supportive. The mystery shopper was asked if they needed any help after being handed a paper registration form but told that ID and proof of address was required. The patient informed them that these had been stolen and, after the receptionist had checked with their manager, signposted to a different GP practice that would register them without the required documents.

When shown an NHS registration leaflet, stating that these documents were not required, the receptionist checked with their manager and advised the patient that they would need a letter from the friend they were staying with, with supporting evidence of this person’s address and ID. Finally, the patient was told that without ID no referrals to Secondary Care could be made and that this was an NHS requirement.

The following is an account of their experience:

“I entered the GP practice and informed the receptionists that I wanted to register. They handed me a printed form, asking me to complete it. I inquired about the information they would need from me and they told me that I needed to provide a proof of address and ID. I informed them that my luggage had been stolen at the airport and had contained my passport and all other information. I was asked if I had any other form of ID and said no. They then told me that they couldn't help me and signposted GP surgery that could register me without the required ID. I felt like this was going to be the end of the conversation so I showed them a GP registration leaflet and pointed out that this leaflet has the NHS's logo on it and doesn't include ID and proof of address as part of the information required to register with a GP. The receptionist took the leaflet and, without even reading it, went straight to her manager to ask about my situation. When she came back she told me that I would need

a covering letter from my friend, confirming that I live with him and which should include the friend's information and proof of address. She told me that without ID, if I needed medical attention, they would be able to provide this but that they would be unable to refer me anywhere else unless I provided ID as the NHS requires this."

Appendix C

'Primary Care bulletin – January 19th 2023

GP registrations – ensuring correct details are recorded

GP teams are encouraged to check new patient demographic details have been recorded correctly when registering with a GP practice. Inaccurate details may result in duplicate records and additional NHS numbers being allocated to individual patients. In addition, the process to amend duplicate or incorrect records can result in delayed access to treatment.

This is particularly important for newly registered babies who may require newborn bloodspot screening. The laboratories will not accept the newborn bloodspot screening sample without all the correct demographic details, including the correct NHS number.

Practices are reminded to please take extra care to double check the spelling of names, the date of birth and addresses of new patients.'