



Who do people talk to when they have a health concern?



July 2023





In February 2023, Healthwatch Kent took to Maidstone town centre and spoke to people passing through the high streets and shopping malls.

We wanted to find out who people talk to when they have a health concern, what makes people feel listened to when they talk to someone about a health concern, and what makes people feel safe when discussing their health concerns.

We were in Maidstone for two hours and asked 73 people the above three questions.

Looking at the raw data, here's what people told us

53 people said they would speak to a GP

24 people said they would speak to family

8 people said they would speak to friends

6 people said they would call NHS111

4 people said they would contact or visit a pharmacy

3 people said they would speak to a private clinician

2 people said they would speak to a colleague at work

2 people said they would seek information online

1 person said they would speak to their mental health practitioner

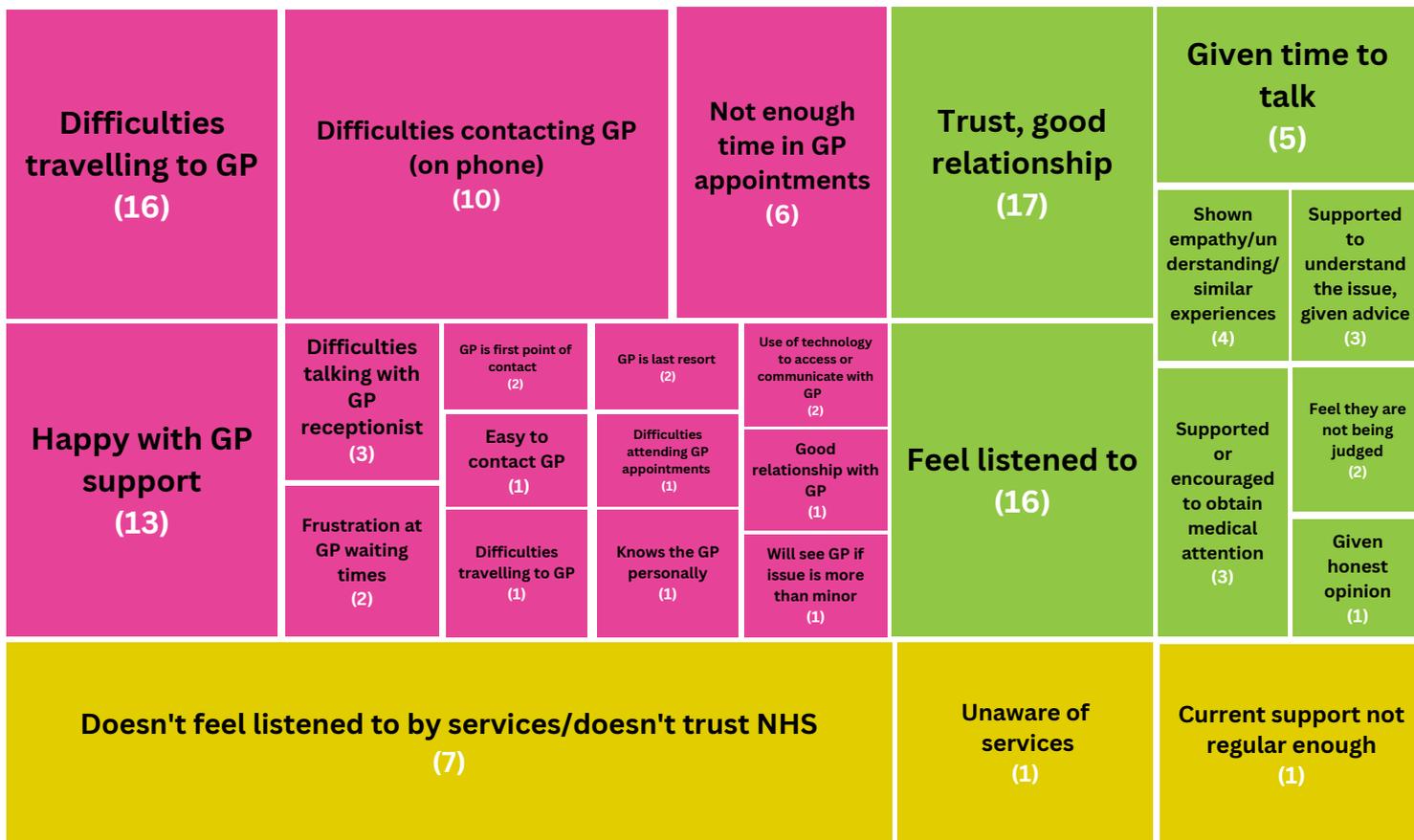
1 person said they would visit a local clinic

1 person said they would go to A&E

1 person said they would speak to a social care professional

What did people tell us about feeling safe and listened to?

GP themes
 Peer support themes
 Other themes



We have categorised these respondents into three groups. The third group includes the two people who said they would go online if they had a health concern.

People who would speak to a professional within the health and social care system (Group A)	People who would speak to peers (Group B)	People who would speak to a professional within the health and social care system and consult peers (Group C)
43	13	17

What makes people who would speak to a professional within the health and social care system feel listened to? *Group A analysis*

Positive comments

“The GP surgery provides groups and activities that patients can attend and be part of such as coffee mornings. I generally feel cared for”

“I know he’s listening to me as I get the follow up appointments. I get texts from my GP practice reminding me of appointments, blood tests and all sorts. So surely they are listening because they then contact me.”

“I trust professionals”

“I know they are there for me”

“They are polite and friendly”

“They give me eye contact and ask questions. They verbally show empathy, concern. That’s how I know someone cares.”

“They deal with my ailment and prescribe what I need”

“They have confidentiality policies which make me feel safe”

“The use of CBT. She listens and offers advice without being patronising. She offered meditation that was really helpful with my anxiety.”

“I have been with them for a long time”

“I find them reassuring and easy to talk to.”

“My doctor is able to give advice.”

“It’s rare that I go to see a doctor, when I do they give me the information I want.”

“They don’t gossip and share stuff to social media”

“I’ve been with my GP for 20 years so I feel I’ve built a good relationship with them.”

“In Africa, confidentiality is important and people take things to the grave and don’t share them. But in England the children today speak more openly with their parents, they reassure you and encourage you to go see a doctor and get things checked out.”

“They don’t judge me and don’t make me feel uncomfortable. I have a woman counsellor, I find it easier to speak to a woman about mental health things than a man. Women are easier to talk to. I did have a male person, but I found it difficult, the alpha male in me kicked in and I couldn’t open up to them. I changed back to a woman counsellor and it is much better.”

“She makes me feel relaxed, she is calm and I feel like she won’t judge me.”



Negative comments

"I don't feel listened to"

"Don't feel like I get through to anyone to be listened to."

"Sometimes they don't make much time for you so it's hard to feel they really chat, but I am sure he hears what's wrong with me."

"They don't do anything that makes me feel they are listening, in fact it feels more like they aren't listening. You need to phone them back all the time, it's very one way."

"They don't listen! they don't make time for you to talk. I used to know who I was seeing, now I never know what doctor I am getting. they don't listen to you, you are just a number"

"Don't feel like they have time for me, have been told all is fine more than once and turned out it wasn't and I was sick"

"I'm not listened to. The receptionist at the GP surgery dismissed me before I could get any help. I don't bother to try now"

"I think GPs need to be non-judgemental, they need to be good at communicating with people. Just because someone has a medical degree, it doesn't mean they are a good communicator so this is important. They need to have time for people, nobody wants to feel rushed when they are opening up about a concern they have with their health."

"My last GP I didn't feel understood me. They didn't seem to have the time."

"Some don't listen well. I have cultural differences too."

"I don't have a choice but to share things with him. It would be better if I understood what he was talking about sometimes. Last time I went they literally looked things up on Google then told me what it said. I could have done that myself. They told me just to wait a few weeks and it will cure itself. Not sure that I felt it was worth his time"

Negative comments

“Have no other choice”

“There's no other alternative - it's them or nowt!”

“I would try and speak to my doctor, however because of the cuts to local bus services it makes it very difficult to get there. A lot of older people who need to see a doctor more often are getting left behind in my village because of the lack of buses and a taxi costs £24 to take you there and back. This makes it very difficult to actually go and see a doctor. I also share my health concerns with my friends.”



Qualitative analysis

Recurrent themes from this data show peoples positive experiences relate to; long-standing relationships which allow trust to form; confidentiality; re-assurance; good body language and eye contact.

Recurrent themes from this data show peoples negative experiences relate to; not feeling listened to; doctors not having enough time; cultural differences; not being able to get an appointment.

Most respondents from this engagement activity said that they would speak to a GP if they had a health concern, however this does not mean those people are actively accessing support for their health from a GP and raising those concerns with a professional.

Whilst some respondents gave positive examples of what GPs have done to make them feel listened to and safe, 21 people (49%) from this category shared details of negative experiences when accessing or trying to access a GP and said that they do not feel like GPs listen and do not have enough time.

Some respondents shared that they would only speak to a GP as they have no other choice and would not bother trying to access a GP to discuss a health concern. This indicates that whilst most people from the engagement activity said the GP is the person they would speak to about a health concern, 49% said this as they do not know where else to turn and are not aware of other options, as opposed to seeing visiting their GP as an attractive option. This means it is likely that many people do not discuss their health concerns with anyone at all when they need to.

Solutions to explore

We recognise that solutions could include strengthening and expanding the GP workforce so that GPs are not overworked and had more time to listen to people's concerns. Whilst this might be a long-term goal, it does not offer a short- or medium-term solution to the problems people have told us about.

A solution to explore could be raising awareness about people other than the GP who can provide support with health concerns. Increasing awareness of community-based listening groups, peer support groups and alternative clinical resource to GPs including community pharmacies could increase the amount of people who seek support for their health concerns at an early stage. This outcome could contribute to the reduction of hospital admissions, demand on emergency care and could improve overall wellbeing by preventing late-stage intervention to health problems.

What makes people who would consult peers feel listened to? Group B analysis

Positive comments

"I trust them, that if I ask for help they would do all they can to help me. Trust is important. I don't have a relationship with my GP so there is no trust"

"She just kinds gets things out of me"

"If it is a friend they comfort me, they give me the time and they are nice."

"That I trust them and that they won't judge me. I think they would also give me an honest 2nd opinion."

"She listens to me. Doctors don't."

"They might have experienced the same issue, so they will understand me and can relate to me It's nice to speak to people who understand what you're going through."

"They're who I am closest to."

“My daughter listens – she's amazing and understands as she has health problems herself.”

“My manager makes me feel safe because she genuinely seems to care. She did an activity day recently, great way to get everyone together and talk about how we are feeling. She's just bubbly and kind”

“It's easy to talk to my mum. I need to tell stuff to CAMHS but I cant get hold of them. Seeing someone every three months is not enough, how can I tell them stuff if I don't see them?”

“I trust those in my close network. If it was a feminine issue I might not talk to my Dad but someone else.”

“Known each other a long time and he is my best friend.”

“My daughter knows everything about me and is always there for me.”

Qualitative analysis

When respondents from group B discussed what made them feel safe, 0% of people shared negative experiences. Every experience shared by someone who said they would talk to a peer as opposed to a professional about a health concern shared positive experiences in doing so. This contrasts to qualitative analysis of Group A which exhibited an even split between positive and negative experiences.

Recurrent themes from this data show peoples positive experiences relate to people trusting their peers, having long-standing relationships which feel familiar and safe, not feeling judged, peers being able to empathise and understand what they are going through, and peers having enough time to listen.

These themes are similar to those which exist behind people's positive experiences of speaking to a GP about their health concern. This indicates that peer support delivers the same level of psychosocial impact as consulting a GP.

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A solution to explore could be raising awareness about people other than the GP who can provide support with health concerns. Increasing awareness of community-based listening groups, peer support groups and alternative clinical resource to GPs including community pharmacies could increase the amount of people who seek support for their health concerns at an early stage. This outcome could contribute to the reduction of hospital admissions, demand on emergency care and could improve overall wellbeing by preventing late-stage intervention to health problems.

What makes people who would consult peers feel listened to? Group B analysis

If you would like to chat with us about the report, you can reach us through the following routes:



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Text us on 07525 861 639. By texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's British Sign Language interpreter will make contact and arrange a time to meet face to face



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