

# Community Research Report: Experiences of Romanian people accessing care in Brent



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## Introduction

Brent has a large Romanian population which has grown rapidly in recent years. Data from the EU Settlement Scheme tells us that, as of 2020, more than 21,000 Romanian people living in Brent had applied for settled status, showing a sizable Romanian community within the borough.

After meeting with representatives from local Romanian and Eastern European support groups, and hearing of the difficulties their clients faced when accessing care, we felt it was important to carry out a targeted engagement project. Our aim was to work directly with local community groups to better understand experiences with local health services and any barriers stopping people from accessing good care.

Many thanks to the Romanian and Eastern European Hub for partnering with us to make this work possible.

## Methodology

There were two separate strands to our engagement work. Firstly, we provided funding to the Romanian and Eastern European Hub to carry out an event for local Romanian families, gathering feedback about services and also offering health information and free health checks (for full report on their findings, see Appendix 1). In addition to this, we hired a Romanian Community Researcher from the local area. The Community Researcher's role was to visit local events and community hotspots and speak with people about their views on local healthcare.

The questions that we asked during our research were co-produced with representatives from the Romanian and Eastern European Hub, and with our

Romanian Community Researcher. Although the engagement was carried out in a range of different formats, all of our research covered the same key areas such as access to services and standard of care received.

# Key Findings

In total, we collected feedback from 50 people, with the following key themes:

- All participants were registered with a GP, and the majority (44/50) were registered with a dental practice.
- The majority of participants were satisfied with primary care services (31/50), giving neutral or positive ratings. However, this left a sizable minority (19 respondents) who had issues with services.
- The majority of patients were also satisfied with secondary care services.
- Most of the issues reported reflected the same wider concerns being faced by many different community groups across Brent. In particular, patients noted a lack of available appointments and long waiting times (11 responses).
- All of the research was conducted in Romanian, and we identified some issues with access to interpreters and translated materials. 14 people responded that they had to request interpreting or translation, and in 12 cases people shared that they had requested an interpreter but not been provided with one. In addition, 3 people told us they were not aware that the service was available.
- The biggest area of concern was lack of information provided about care and treatment. 21 people responded that they did not receive enough information from health services. In addition, 22 people said they were not sure if they were able to trust information from their GPs.
- A significant minority of respondents – 20 people – noted that they have chosen to either go abroad or access private healthcare rather than using NHS services.



“Care is okay, but not perfect.”  
“I do not really trust them %100”  
“I’m so happy with the healthcare system.”



# Recommendations

We have three key recommendations from our findings

Primary and secondary care services in Brent should ensure that information about translation and interpreting services is prominently displayed, and shared pro-actively with all patients for whom English is not the primary language

- Language barriers and literacy levels were identified as one of the primary barriers to accessing equitable care
- Healthwatch Brent will share recommendations with, and monitor, local service managers to ensure interpreting services and translated materials are signposted at their service.
- We request that system leaders also remind local services that: “It is the responsibility of NHS service providers to ensure interpreting and translation services are made available to their patients free at the point of delivery” (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/language-interpretation-migrant-health-guide>).
- Healthwatch Brent proposes carrying out a follow-up mystery shopping exercise with Romanian speaking volunteers to ensure that these services are available and well-advertised.

Collaborative work should be carried out to explore issues of trust and lack of information/resources. Co-designed resources explaining key aspects of the UK health system should be produced and circulated widely.

- In their research (Appendix 1), the Romanian and Eastern European Hub noted that we need to “Develop health care information campaigns and materials with and for the community. Peer led research and co-design are essential to reaching those in need of support and ensure a fair and proportionate representation of Romanian speaking communities in Brent.”
- Healthwatch Brent proposes a series of collaborative workshops bringing together Romanian patients living in Brent and representatives from our health and social care system. The aim of these workshops would be to produce resources aimed at explaining the healthcare system and addressing any myths or misconceptions.

Further research is needed to better understand why people are choosing to go abroad or access private healthcare, and to better understand the experiences of people whose circumstances make them more vulnerable.

- The Romanian and Eastern European Hub have also noted the importance of: “Further, more granular research on access to healthcare, including GP registrations for vulnerable people such as rough sleepers,

undocumented migrants, those that have arrived after Brexit, and children.”

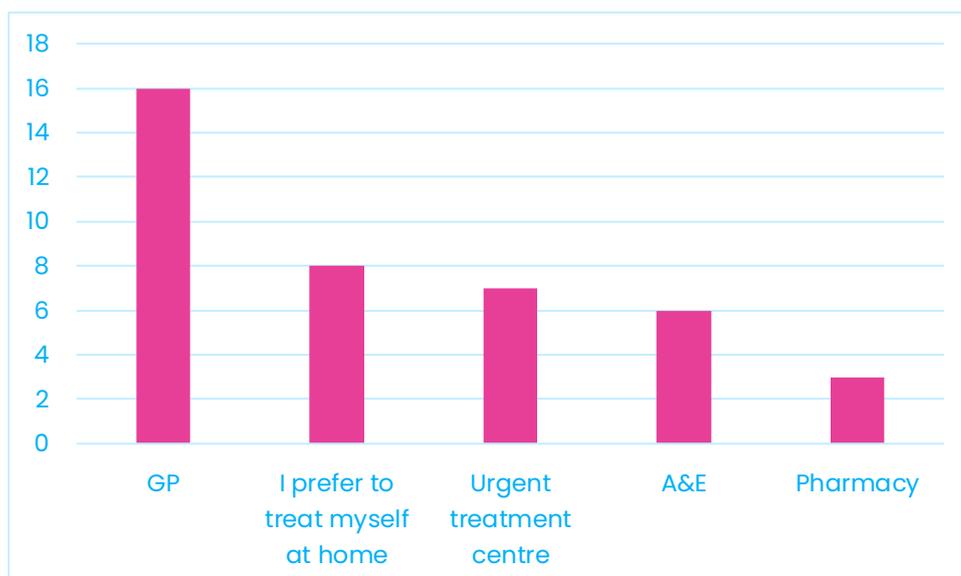
- Healthwatch Brent recommends that funding is made available to allow local Romanian and Eastern European organisations to carry out more in-depth work addressing the healthcare needs of their communities.
- We are pleased to see that engagement with Romanian people living in Brent is already a priority for the local Council and ICS, and recommend that this continues, with a focus on those facing multiple areas of deprivation and therefore more likely to be experiencing health inequalities.

# Detailed findings

Our findings are broken down into two sections. Firstly, responses from the survey conducted by our Community Researcher, and secondly a detailed report from the Romanian and Eastern European Hub sharing the findings from their events (appendix 1). Please note that our key findings and recommendations above combine the data from these two sources.

## Survey responses

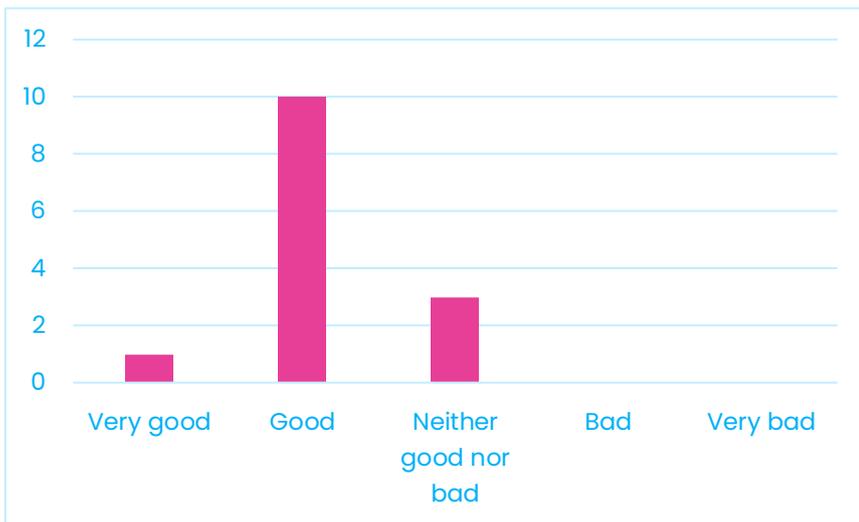
If you have a health concern, where do you go for treatment? (22 respondents with multiple responses per survey)



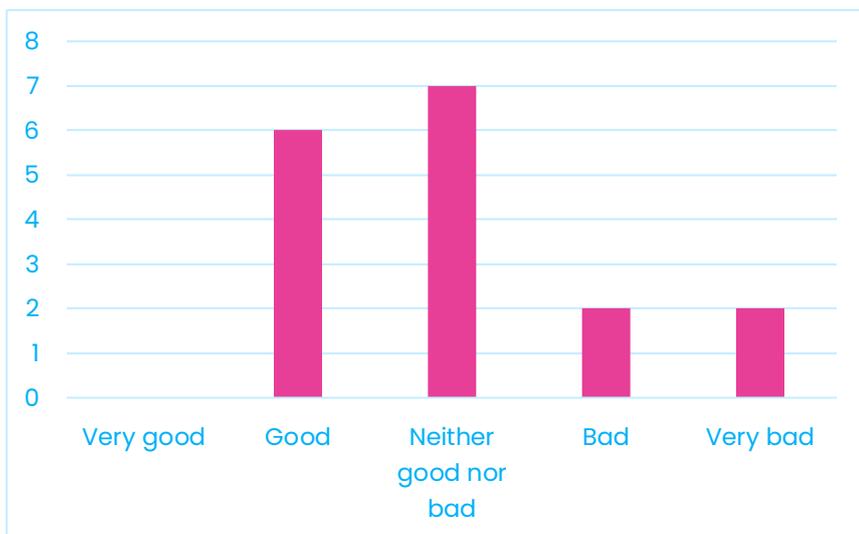
How would you rate the quality of care from your GP? (22 respondents)



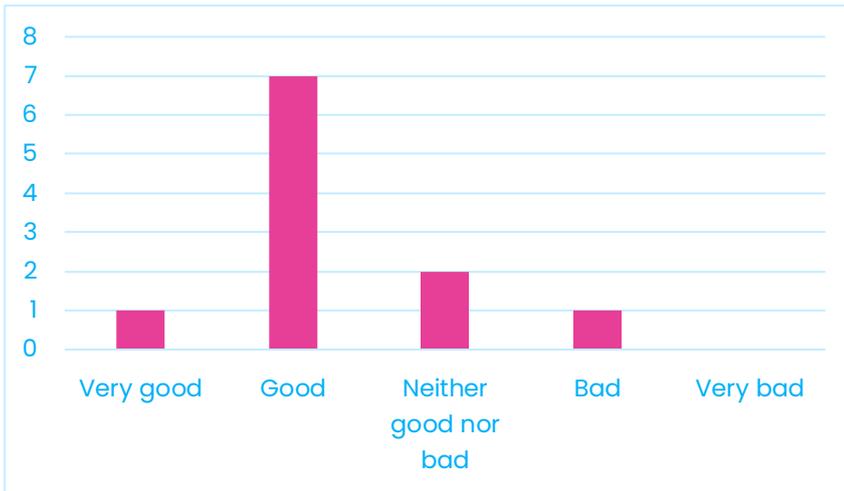
How would you rate the quality of care from dental services? (14 respondents)



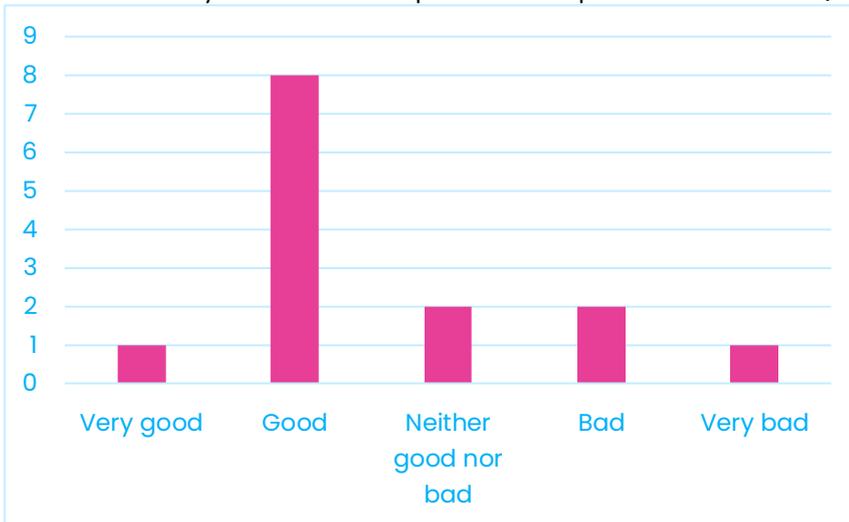
How would you rate emergency care services? (17 respondents)



How would you rate hospital in-patient care? (11 responses)

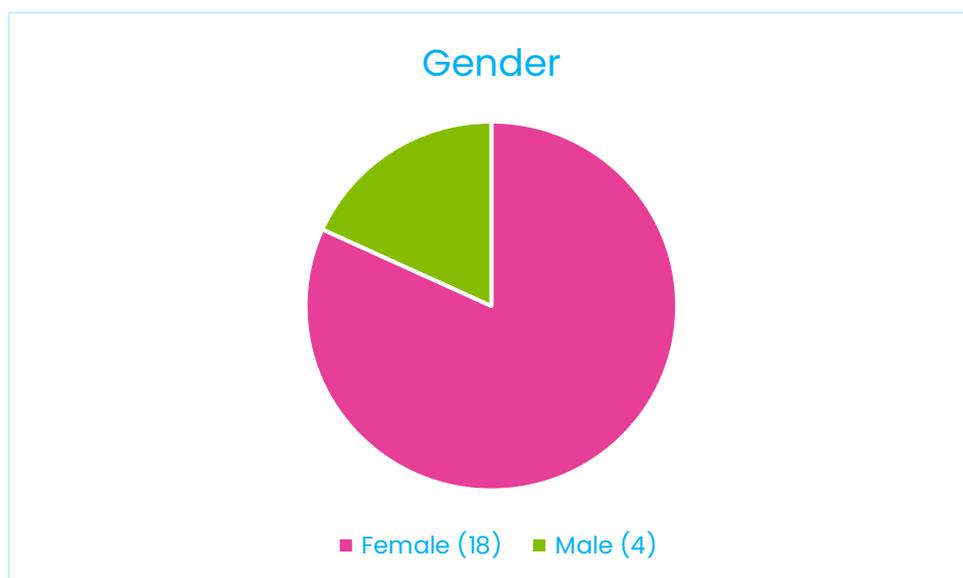
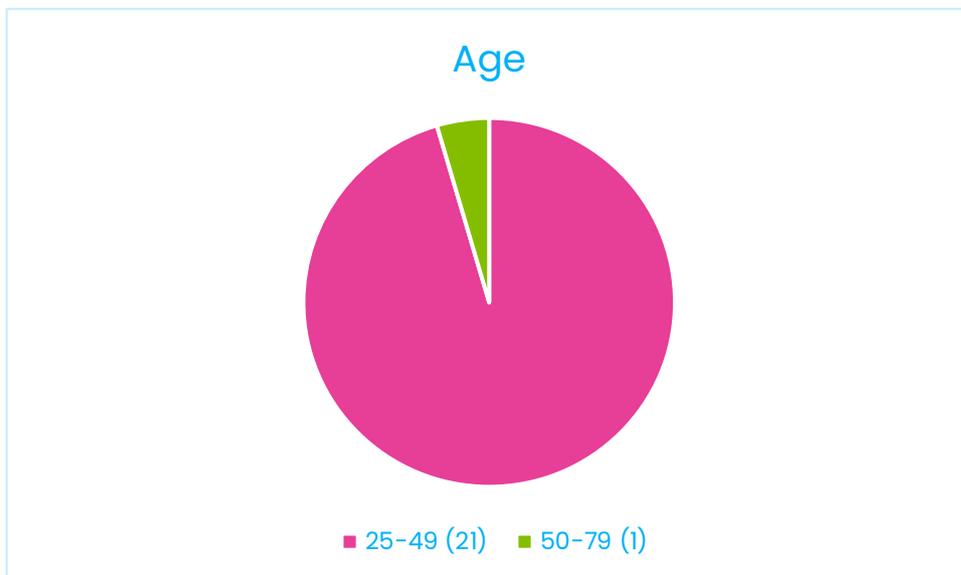


How would you rate hospital out-patient care? (14 responses)



Experience of accessing interpreting and translated materials. (22 responses)





## Findings from outreach events

Please see Appendix 1 for a detailed report sharing the findings from the Romanian and Eastern European Hub's Outreach Events.



**healthwatch**  
Brent

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Listening to the experiences of Eastern European Brent residents

The Romanian and Eastern European Hub Research report

## **Background information**

The latest EU Settlement Scheme data<sup>1</sup> shows that there is a large Eastern European (and mainly Romanian) presence in Brent. Covid has hit hardest minoritised groups and Eastern European communities already experienced deep health inequalities prior to the pandemic. In our work, we often come across cases of vulnerable Eastern Europeans not registered with a GP, pregnant women not seen by a midwife or knowing about health visiting services, people unable to book a GP appointment, or people refused access to healthcare due to insecure immigration status and a lack of awareness of health services staff on the rights to healthcare for migrants of European nationalities. Additionally, many face a mix of challenges through not speaking English, having reduced literacy levels, and no digital skills or means to access IT systems.

## **The research project**

Our front-line interactions are a significant part of our casework. Based on previous experience of running community outreach and engagement sessions, and performing community research actions, The Romanian and Eastern European Hub and Healthwatch Brent agreed to run a research exercise to interact with Romanian Brent residents and learn about their experience with accessing primary and secondary healthcare in the borough.

The research exercise included:

- A family friendly event that took place on 19 November 2022 at Wembley Library
- An outreach survey session at a Romanian restaurant in Willesden Green

## **Methods and Methodology**

Qualitative and quantitative information has been gathered through surveys.

To remove the language barrier, the survey questions were translated into Romanian and the volunteers on duty helped attendees complete these by answering questions for clarifications or supporting those with limited literacy skills.

Surveys have been completed in writing, on paper, to remove the digital barrier.

Surveys were anonymised and this information was reiterated on the survey forms to encourage people to respond and increase trust.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-march-2022/eu-settlement-scheme-quarterly-statistics-march-2022>

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Plain language and simplified wording have been used in Romanian for accessibility reasons.

Event attendance has been incentivised by offering free face painting for the children and free health checks for adults, the latter being provided free of charge by Brent Health Matters who attended with one of their Romanian speaking staff. 10 adults benefitted from free blood pressure, pulse and blood sugar levels checks and received personalised information about their wellbeing, as well as being referred to their GPs if serious issues were found by the health practitioners.

The data gathered through the surveys has been collated and is part of this report.

### Survey findings

17 responses have been received at the Wembley Library event and 11 during the outreach sessions.

The survey included 18 questions, as follows:

- Do you live in Brent? *Yes 28 responses*
  - Do you have children? *Yes 22 No 6*
  - Have you registered with a GP? *Yes 28*
  - Have you registered with a dentist? *Yes 25 No 3*
  - Did you experience any issues with your GP practice or appointments? *Yes 10 No 18*
- Can you tell us which practice? Burnley Practice 2*
- Ellis Practice 1*
  - Sudbury Practice 1*
  - Willesden medical 1*
- If you have a health concern, where do you go to receive care? *GP 22, A&E 7, Pharmacy 5*
  - How easy do you find it to access care at the following services – GP, dentist, local hospitals? *Very hard 9, Hard 7, Easy 12*
  - How would you rate the quality of care that you receive at these services? *Very dissatisfied 11, Satisfied 15, Somewhat satisfied 2*
  - Since living in Brent, have you always been able to access care when you've needed it? *Yes 19, No 6, I didn't need to 3*
  - If no, what challenges or barriers have stopped you from getting the care you needed? *Lack of available appointments 6*
  - Have you chosen to use private services or to go abroad for treatment due to issues accessing care? *Yes 11, No 13, Sometimes 4*
  - Have you been able to see a health professional face-to-face if you have needed to? *Yes 20, No 3, Only by phone 5*
  - Have you asked for an interpreter at your appointment? *Yes 7, I wasn't asked if I need one 4, I didn't need one 14, I didn't know I can ask for one 3*
  - If you asked for one, has an interpreter been provided? *Yes 10, No 12, no answer 6*
  - Do you trust the information that you receive about health and social care services or from your GP? *Yes 10, No 2, I don't know 16*
  - If you have received healthcare recently, do you feel as though you have received enough information and choice about your treatment? *Yes 5, No 17, I don't know 6*

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- Do you have any health concerns that you have not been able to seek treatment for?  
*Yes 8, No 17, I don't know 5*

Findings show that many Romanian Brent residents face some issues that are common to any other community or resident such as the lack of available GP appointments or levels of satisfaction with healthcare services generally. However, the link between migrant access to healthcare and the state of the healthcare system is more complex and needs further exploration.

A high number of respondents indicated that an interpreter was not offered when booking an appointment and that they did not know this type of support is available. Improved communication and an increased awareness of health care staff on language barriers is needed. Equally, training to raise awareness on the different languages people of Romanian nationality may speak or people of other nationalities speaking Romanian is required. For example, people of Gypsy Roma ethnicity may speak Romani as their main language, which is very different from Romanian and their Romanian may be very limited. Also, Moldovans also have Romanian as their main language, but this is almost like a dialect and it is hard for them to speak to a Romanian interpreter. People from Ukraine sometimes also speak Romania due to family and heritage links and the proximity of their homes to the Romanian border.

The lack of trust into their GPs or healthcare providers is high and needs further exploration. This matches findings of low covid vaccinations or child immunisation amongst migrant communities in the UK.

Health and care needs are complex and cover an array of medical specialisms. There are indications in the findings of this survey how access can also differ, depending on the health and care needs of the person. For example, dentist registrations are lower and than GP registrations. Anecdotally, our caseworkers have come across many cases where Romanian nationals were not aware of the dentist registrations being free and the oral health resources available through the NHS for children and adults.

Another important finding is that of being unable to address all health issues during their health care appointments. This also needs further exploration as underlying conditions may remain undiagnosed and a holistic assessment may not be possible. It also creates frustrations, lowers the trust into Health and Social care systems, which results in increased costs.

Another relevant point is that of using private healthcare abroad. Largely, this is determined by the lack of available appointments within the NHS and the lack of trust into UK health systems. However, this can lead to issues of miscommunication, inability to correlate diagnosis and treatment with their UK health records, which can present a risk of adverse effects, duplications of treatment, lack of awareness of medication prescribed abroad when prescribing medication in the UK and a risk of self-medication. Moreover, the use of private healthcare abroad comes with a high cost for those seeking treatment elsewhere while also contributing to the NHS wider and health care systems in the UK. This is a very concerning finding that also required further exploration.

On the question around receiving sufficient information during their medical appointments, worryingly over 60% of the respondents indicated they have not received sufficient information about their choice of treatment. This could be due to appointments being rushed (general pressures on the NHS may mean this is not a cultural issue, but a generalised service issue) or due to the language barrier where respondents were not confident enough to ask more questions and delve into their concerns with their GP or the respective health practitioner.

## **Recommendations**

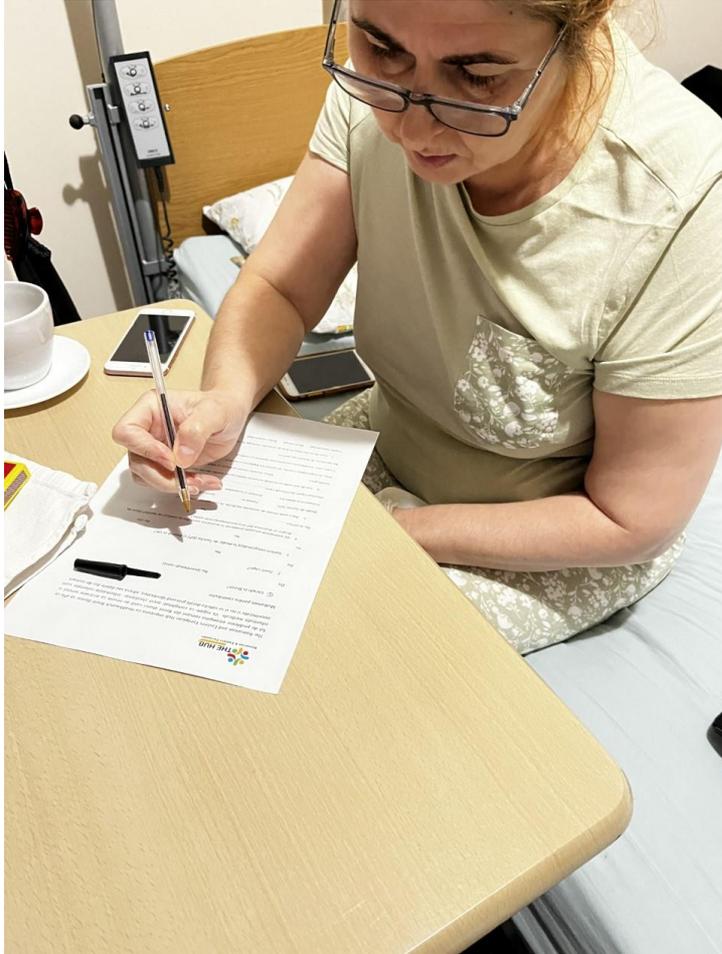
Based on the findings of the survey exercise we have conducted on behalf of Healthwatch Brent within the Romanian community in Brent, we recommend:

- Further, more granular research on access to healthcare, including GP registrations for vulnerable people such as rough sleepers, undocumented migrants, those that have arrived after Brexit, and children.
- Exploration of specific medical areas where needs are more acute, such as health issues for which Romanians pay for private health care abroad
- Exploration of roots of lack of trust in the NHS and health practitioners in the UK
- Developing targeted awareness raising campaigns on NHS dental care and the need for interpreters for appointments
- Develop health care information campaigns and materials with and for the community. Peer led research and co-design are essential to reaching those in need of support and ensure a fair and proportionate representation of Romanian speaking communities in Brent

## **Evidence of reach and engagement\***













## Serviciile de sănătate din Brent

Locuiți în Brent? Vă așteptăm la o discuție despre accesul la serviciile de sănătate

**Sambătă, 19 noiembrie de la ora 14:30**  
la **Wembley Library**, situată la parterul Brent Civic Centre .

**Intrarea liberă.**

Evenimentul include și activități pentru copii

- Atelier unde vor învăța despre corpul uman
- Picturi pe față (face painting)



Pentru mai multe informații, ne puteți contacta la [contact@ro-eehub.org.uk](mailto:contact@ro-eehub.org.uk)





\*Parental consent has been obtained for sharing the pictures featuring children. However, Healthwatch Brent and any third party would need to seek separate consent if they wish to share the pictures.