

# GP Access Survey 2025

A report by Healthwatch Harrow



May 2025

“It should be much easier to make an appointment for those who have difficulty using computers.

I end up feeling like a second class citizen.”

Local GP Patient

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## 1. Introduction

Healthwatch Harrow is a statutory organisation that exists to make sure that the views of Harrow residents on health and social care services are heard and fed back to the people who commission services to ensure they improve. We listen, report, feedback and challenge.

## 2. Background

According to local, regional and national research, the ability to obtain a timely appointment to see a GP or Practice Nurse is becoming ever more difficult. This is due largely to unprecedented demand, with fewer clinicians available to see a growing number of patients.

To help with this, many services have switched to a remote (telephone or online) setting, rather than in-person. While this does help to manage demand, research also shows that a large number of people, including older or disabled patients, and those from ethnic minority communities, are now at a disadvantage when accessing services through these new systems.

We designed this survey as we wanted to know if patients are being treated fairly and equally, and whether any support meets the wide variety of needs and circumstances.

## 3. Methodology

Participants who were already on our mailing list were sent the link for the survey. In addition, those who required paper copies were given the opportunity to be sent paper copies on request.

The survey run for three months.

## 4. Strengths & Limitations

We were able to target existing mailing lists and encouraged people to forward onto their contacts to increase take up.

The survey was developed in English and was not translated into any other language.

## 5. Executive Summary of Findings

During March - May 2025, 59 local people completed our survey on access to GP services in Harrow.

This section summarises key findings - see section 6 for findings in full.

### Survey Response - In Summary

#### Appointment Booking

- Half of respondents (49%) usually book their appointment online, with 42% using the phone, and 9% preferring in-person.
- A marginal majority of respondents (54%) find it 'easy' to book appointments, while a significant 46% do not.
- A broad majority (81%) usually feel respected and supported when booking their appointments.
- A third of respondents (33%) can usually make telephone contact within one minute. Just over a quarter (27%) usually wait five minutes and a sizeable 40% wait for 'at least' ten minutes, when phoning.
- Around three quarters of respondents (73%) can 'easily' find the online form.
- A similar number (75%) find the form easy to complete.

#### Waiting Times

- Two thirds of respondents (67%) are usually seen the same day for emergency appointments. A fifth (22%) say they have waited 3 days or longer.
- For routine appointments, 71% wait 4 days, or more.

#### Consultations

- When booking, 58% of respondents have been offered a choice of consultation method (in-person, telephone, video) while a sizeable number (42%) have not.
- Just 36% are able to see their preferred GP or nurse.
- A clear majority of respondents (86%) have experienced a remote appointment.
- Two thirds (65%) feel that remote consultations have fully met their needs, while a significant minority (35%) feel they have not.
- A broad majority (79%) say they are usually called back within the expected time. A fifth of respondents (21%) say they are not.
- A clear majority of respondents (85%) express satisfaction with their practice, on the whole. 15% are not satisfied.

## Survey Response - In Summary

### What has changed since last year?

In the Spring of 2024 we conducted a very similar survey, with 63 responses.

We have compared the response for each question. to establish what has improved, and what has not.

### What has improved, since 2024?

- Responses suggest that compared with last year, patients find it marginally easier to book appointments, and feel better-respected by staff, when booking.
- There is now greater choice of consultation method (remote or in-person) and remote consultations are considered marginally more effective - compared with last year.

### What has deteriorated, since 2024?

- Compared with last year, patients are less likely to be called at the expected time, or to see their preferred GP or Nurse.

### What else has changed?

- We note that fewer patients are seen remotely, this might suggest that more in-person appointments have become available.
- Use of phones to book appointments has not declined - it has actually increased marginally (by 2%).

### Other findings

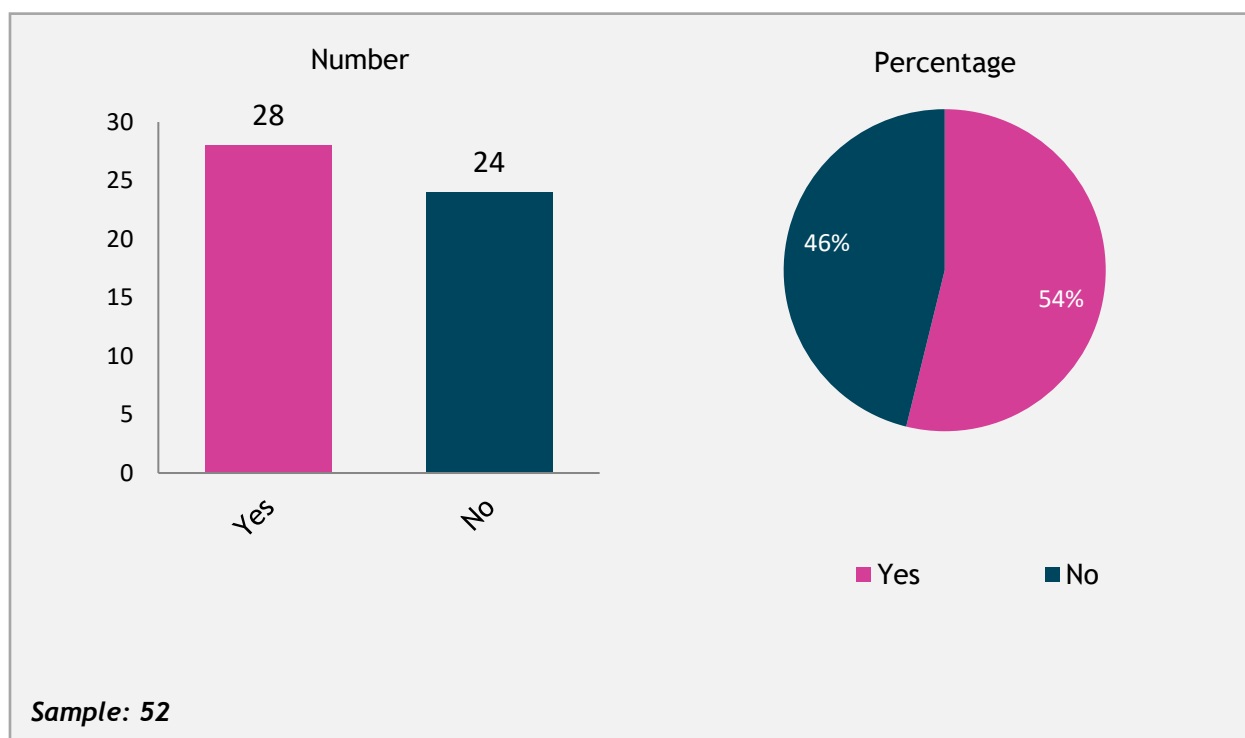
- Waiting times for routine appointments have not noticeably changed, feedback suggests.

## 6. Our Survey - Analysis of Feedback

During March - May 2025, 59 local people completed our survey on access to GP services in Harrow.

We asked questions on ability to book appointments including telephone, online and in-person access, waiting times, experience of reception services, choice and quality of consultation, and whether issues related to disability, physical or mental health, the move towards online/remote services, or language have presented any barriers.

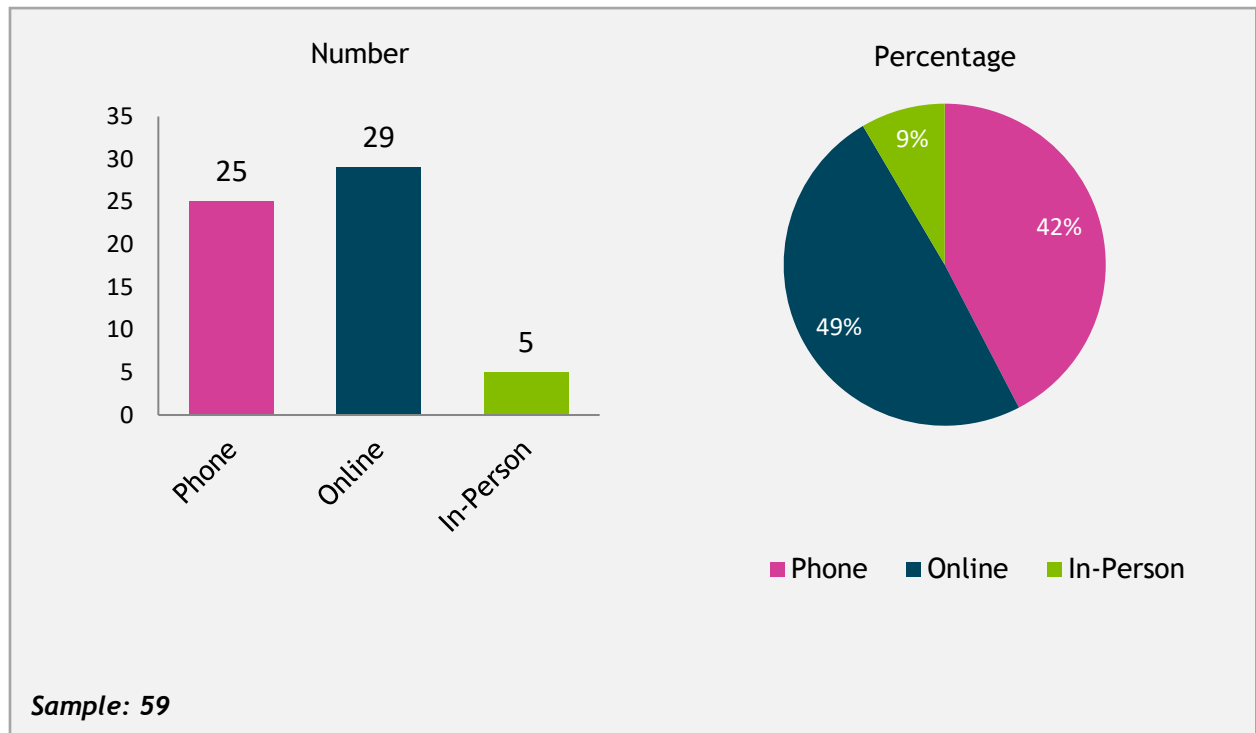
### 6.1 *Is it easy to book appointments, to see a GP, Nurse or other professional?*



A marginal majority of respondents (54%) find it 'easy' to book appointments, while a significant 46% do not.

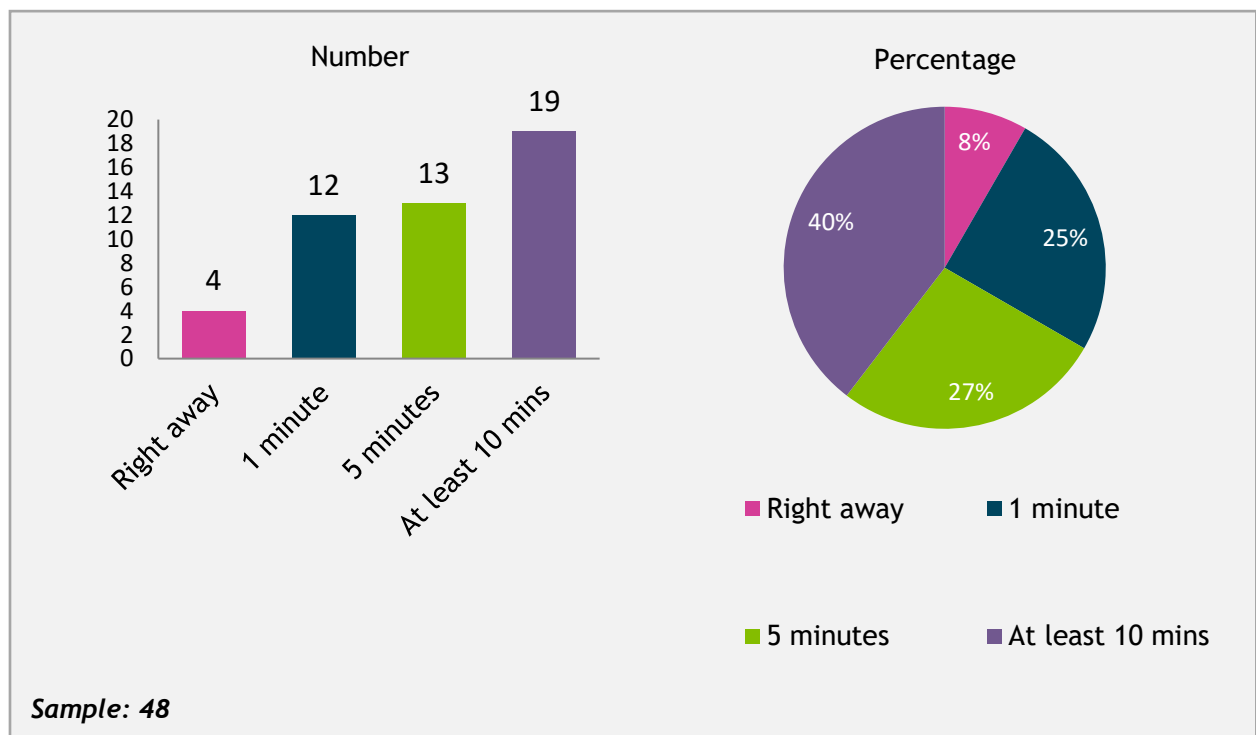


## 6.2 How do you usually book your appointments?



Half of respondents (49%) usually book their appointment online, with 42% using the phone, and 9% preferring in-person.

## 6.3 If by phone, do you usually get through right away? If not, how long does it take to speak with someone?



A third of respondents (33%) can usually make telephone contact within one minute. Just over a quarter (27%) usually wait five minutes and a sizeable 40% wait for ‘at least’ ten minutes, when phoning.

While some find it ‘easy’ to make telephone contact, others experience congested lines, long queues, and faults (such as being disconnected).

### Selected Feedback

#### Positives

*“Easy to contact.”*

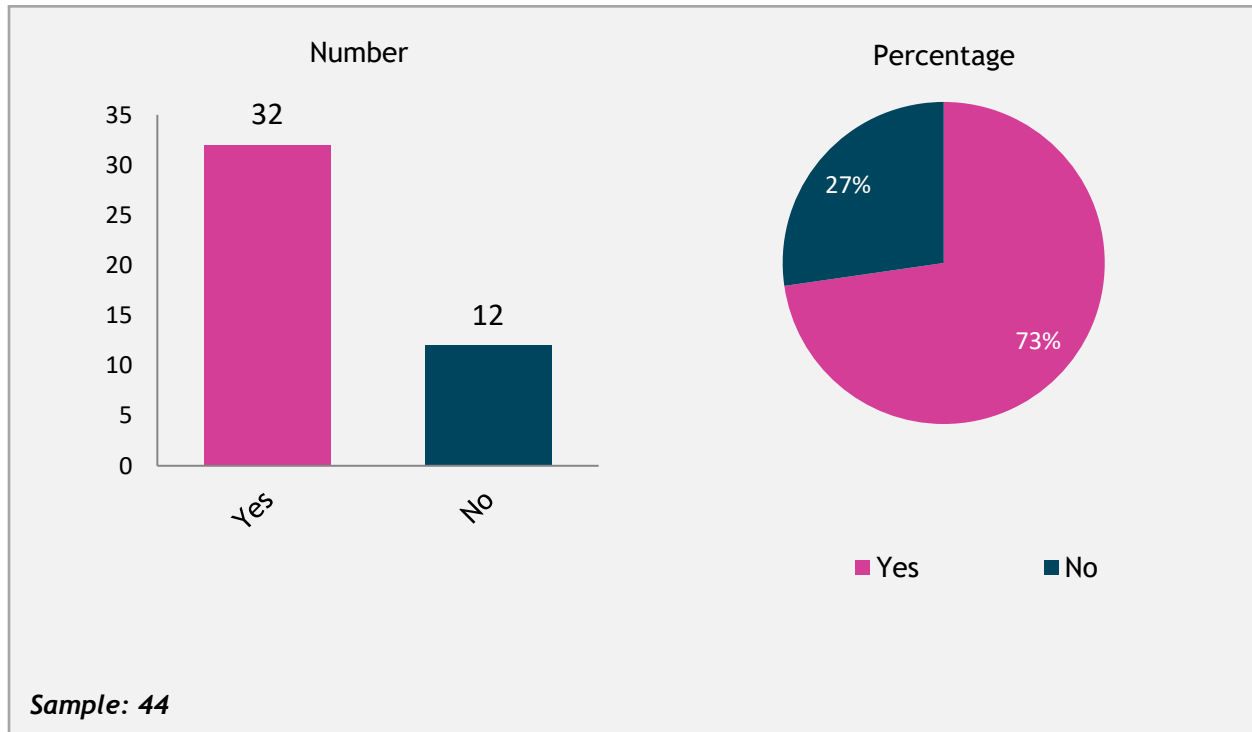
*“Easy enough to book appointments over the phone.”*

#### Negatives

*“You get an engaged tone and have to re-dial around 120 times before being placed in a queue for 30 minutes.”*

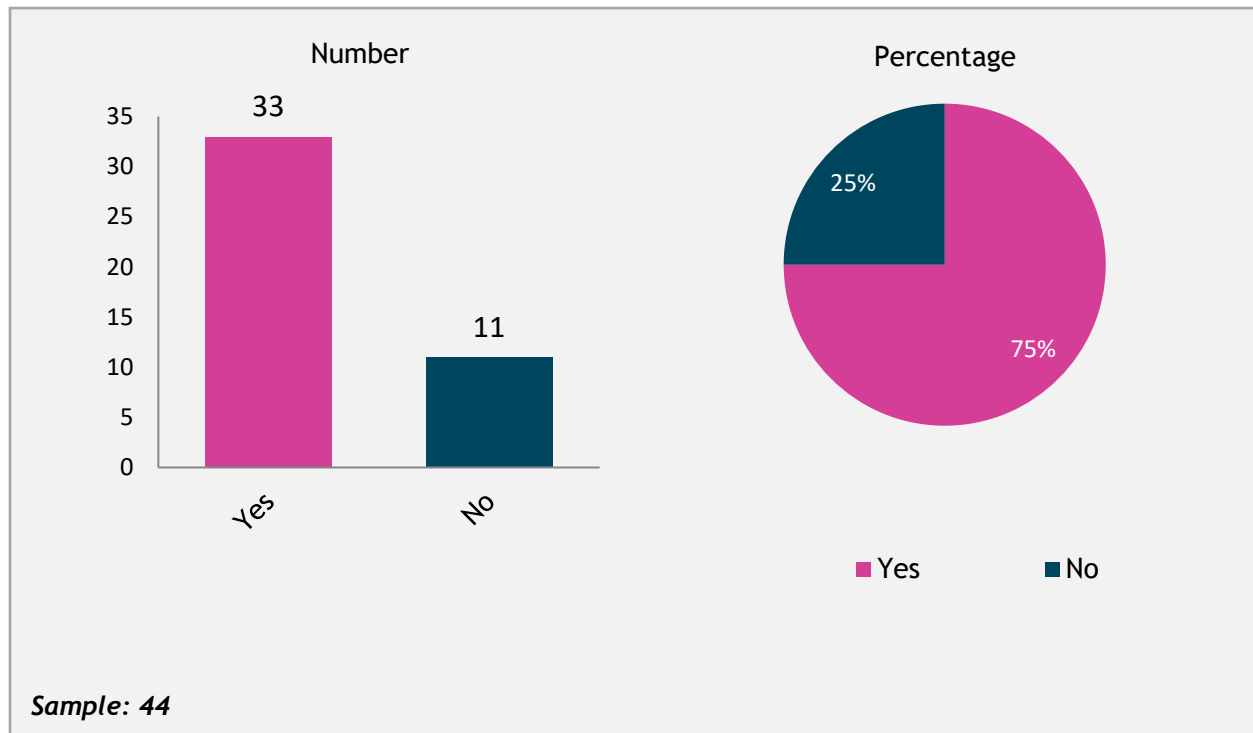
*“We cannot book online, so have to wait on the phone. Often get disconnected.”*

### 6.4a If online, can you find the online form easily?



Around three quarters of respondents (73%) can ‘easily’ find the online form.

#### 6.4b Is the online form easy to complete?



A similar number (75%) find the form easy to complete.

While satisfaction is at a good level, respondents outline a number of issues with the online form.

We hear that questions can be unnecessary (patients with physical health conditions are asked about their mental health) with questions also duplicated - later in the form. Those reporting multiple conditions say the form does not accommodate this.

There are also various issues, in using the form to obtain repeat prescriptions.

#### Selected Feedback

##### Positives

*"PATCHS is effectively used by my surgery."*

*"If I can get access to PATCHS I find the form easy and usually get a quick response if the matter is urgent."*

*"It's useful for test results."*

##### Negatives

*"On PATCHS, it's not the easiest form to fill out. There are detailed questions about your mental health (which are not necessary) and there's no easy option to ignore."*

*“When booking online, it’s not clear who you are seeing - a GP, nurse or someone else?”*

*“The PATCHS system for making a request is great, but when you have to contact them for more than one reason, completing multiple forms is frustrating. If you do it all in one form, things get missed or misread.”*

*“I use it for repeat prescriptions. It’s a very long password.”*

*“We need a simpler online form. It requires a lot of information, sometimes repeatedly entered because of the way the questions are asked. It also isn’t adequate for some scenarios (it could not handle a request for a prescription for a newly prescribed drug not yet on the repeat list).”*

*“Requesting a change of medication might work better if this request could be channelled through Patient Access rather than through PATCHS.”*

Booking appointments can be problematic - as slots are ‘gone within minutes’ and the form itself is only accessible for a ‘small window’ - around 8am and 2pm.

### **Selected Feedback**

#### **Positives**

*“Very responsive service and ability to book online is becoming available at various times during the day.”*

#### **Negatives**

*“PATCHS works well when you can access it but there is only a very small window at 8am and 2pm.”*

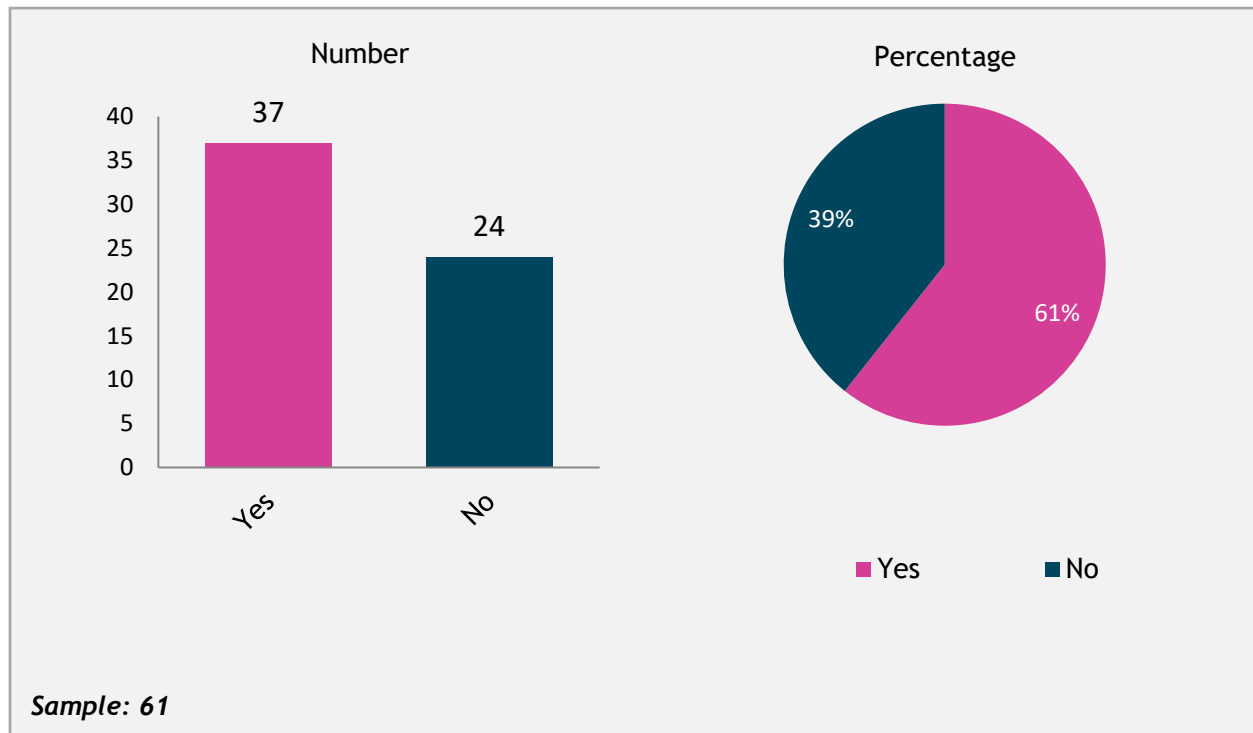
*“PATCHS is open for such a short window. It can be frustrating when you have to wait for next day to book an appointment.”*

*“Better access to PATCHS. Appointments go within one minute or less.”*

*“PATCHS is NEVER online, even at 8am on the dot.”*

*“They have extended the time PATCHS is available, but I still have to guess. Need more information.”*

## 6.5 Can you make an appointment in-person?



61% of respondents are able to book appointments in-person.

At some practices, we hear that in-person booking is no longer ‘part of the process’ and that reception staff will ‘insist’ on booking through PATCHS. For some, this is a frustrating policy.

Those unable to book online do receive assistance, comments suggest.

### Selected Feedback

#### Positives

*“The options available are to book online, by phone, or go into the surgery.”*

*“Reception staff always ask you to complete an online request but if you can’t do that then they will help you to do this - either in the surgery or on the phone.”*

#### Negatives

*“Not part of the process anymore.”*

*“Receptionists are not allowed to make in person appointments.”*

*“I can only make an appointment in person if the receptionist seems convinced that I have tried and failed via PATCHS.”*

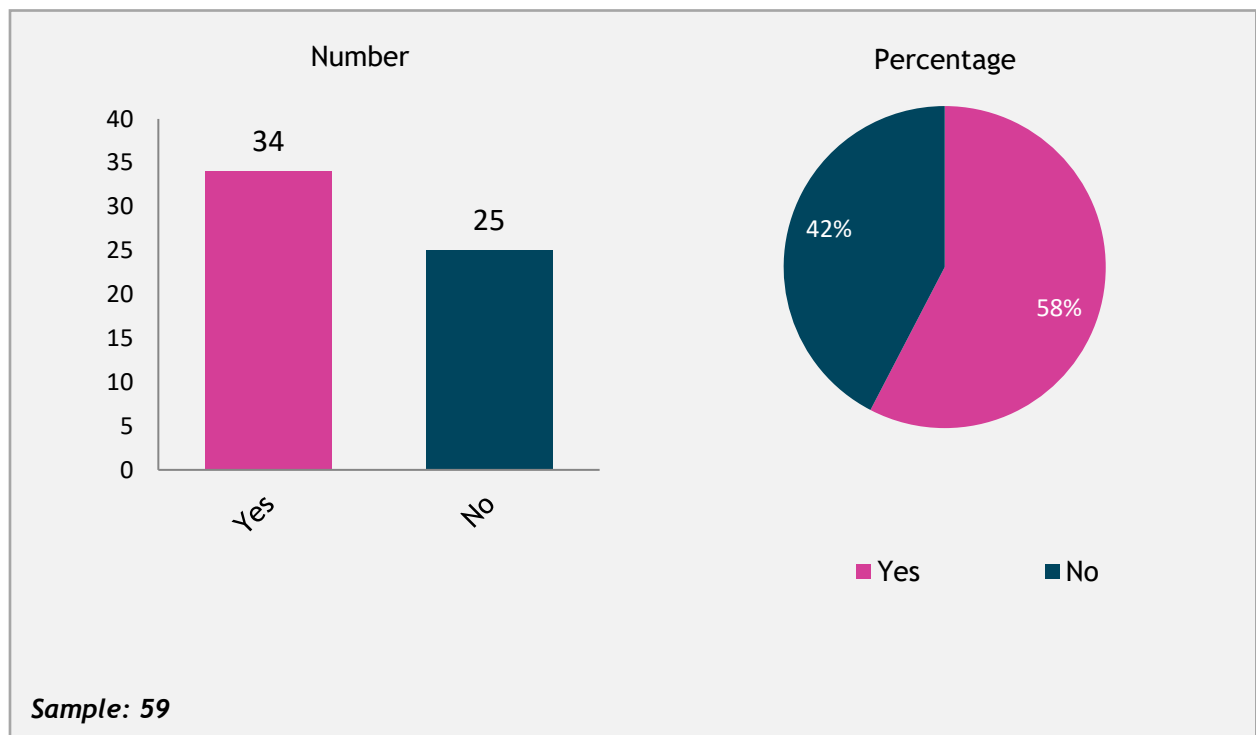
*“ONLY through PATCHS (it’s very frustrating).”*

*“Because my GP surgery does not allow it. They insist on PATCHS which I don't know how to access well at all - despite trying.”*

*“Booking appointments face-to-face would be a lot easier for me, and for older people.”*

*“Why not make an appointment in person if you are there - and not have to go back home and try to make an appointment on the phone.”*

## 6.6 Are you usually offered a choice of appointment method (in-person, telephone or video consultation)?



When booking, 58% of respondents have been offered a choice of consultation method (in-person, telephone, video) while a sizeable number (42%) have not.

In-person appointments are not always available, according to feedback.

### Selected Feedback

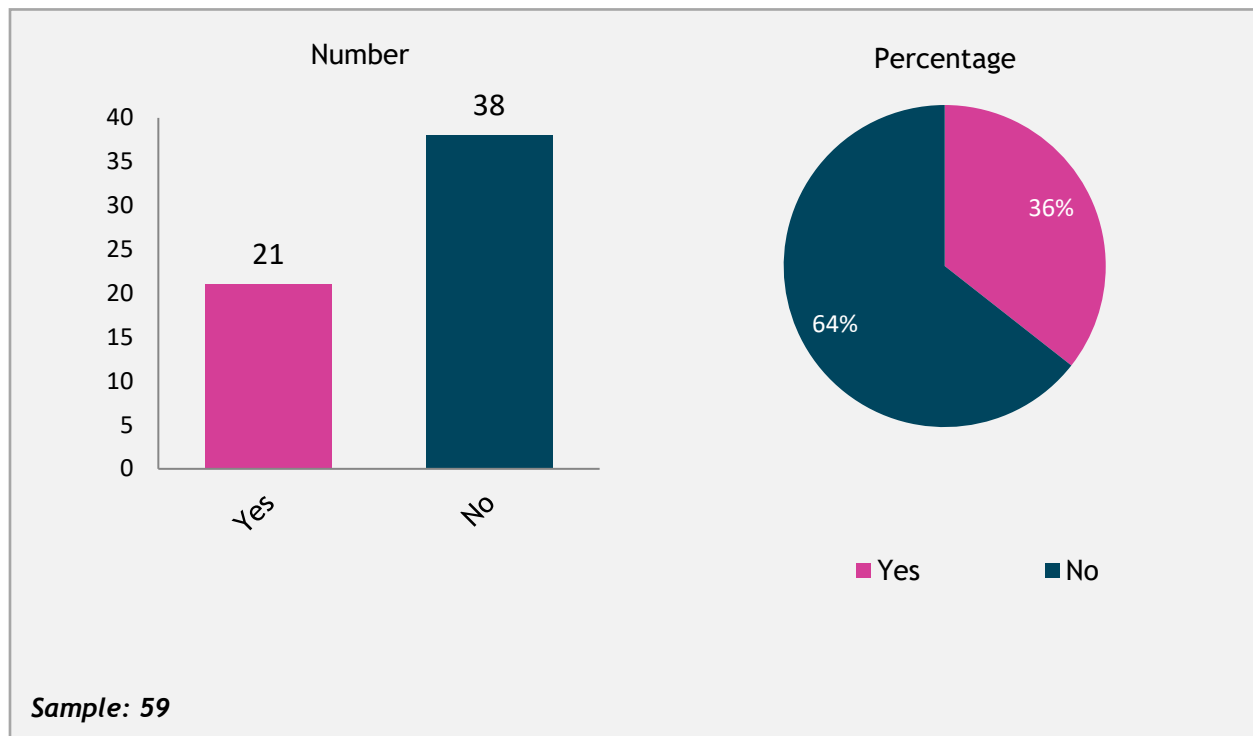
#### Positives

*“I get face to face appointments.”*

#### Negatives

*“We need more face-to-face appointments.”*

## 6.7 Is your appointment usually to see your own GP or preferred Nurse?



Just 36% of respondents are able to see their preferred GP or nurse.

We hear that continuity of care is important - especially for those with long-term conditions. Those requesting to see their own doctor, can expect to wait longer.

There is disappointment - at being allocated a physician associate or a nurse, instead of a GP.

### Selected Feedback

#### General Comments

*"Need to see my own GP."*

*"I need appointments with the same doctor."*

#### Positives

*"I see the same GP regularly."*

*"I can ask to see one of the 2 GPs who know me well, and I usually get to see them."*

*"If you have a specific reason for requesting a particular doctor or paramedic and your request is not urgent, it is usually possible to do this."*

## Negatives

*"I would like to have continuity with one doctor."*

*"With a long-term condition, sometimes you need to speak to your doctor about new symptoms or problems with medication. You used to be able to choose the doctor you see, which can be helpful."*

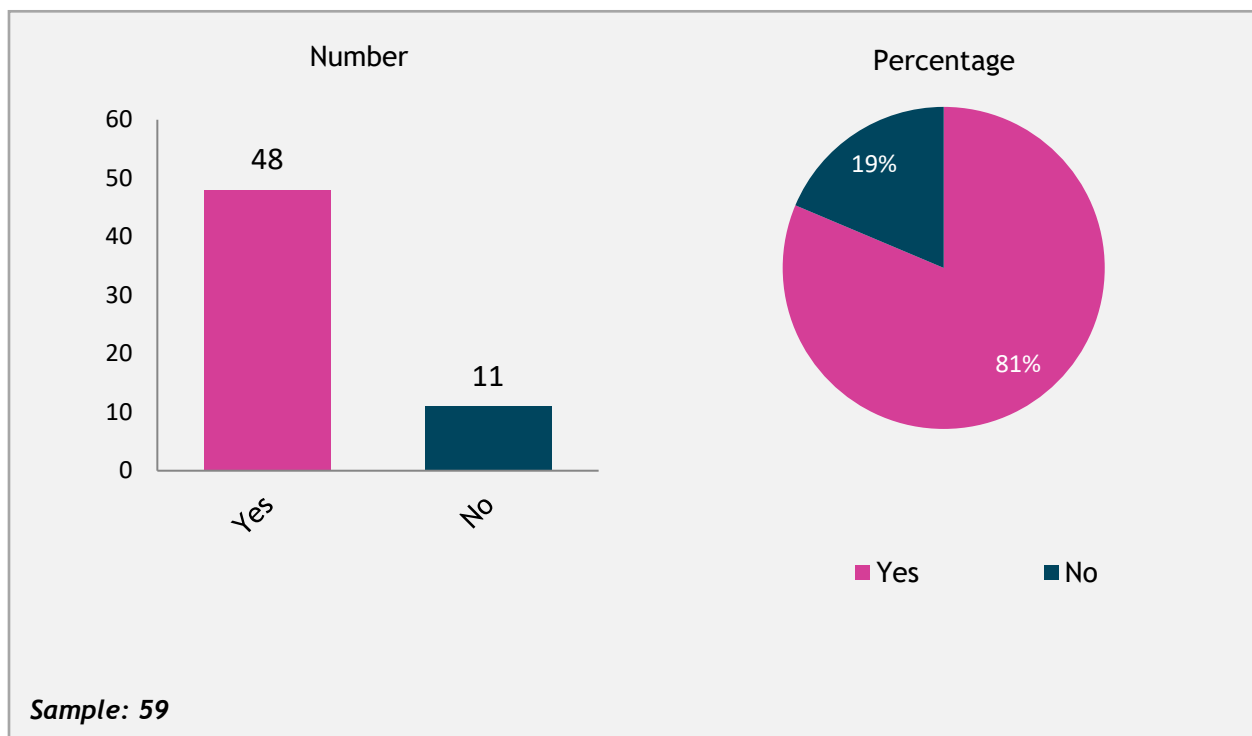
*"If I do get to see my regular GP, it is fine. But that is not always the case."*

*"It takes longer to see my own doctor."*

*"More slots needed. I don't always get to see the GP, it could be a nurse practitioner."*

*"I am less happy about seeing physician associates, even though those I have met seem quite good and to know when to consult a doctor. I think it would often be quicker and more efficient to see a doctor."*

### 6.8 When booking, how are you generally treated by staff members? Do you feel respected and supported?



A broad majority of respondents (81%) usually feel respected and supported when booking their appointments.

When booking, reception staff are generally considered to be polite, supportive and knowledgeable - effective at handling queries, or resolving issues.

The importance of good training and management is underscored.



One respondent with an online issue - has not been listened to or assisted, by reception staff.

### Selected Feedback

#### Positives

*"The staff at the practice are always efficient, polite, supportive and knowledgeable and triage effectively."*

*"Friendly and helpful staff who try their best to give you the earliest appointment."*

*"Staff are friendly and try to fit a patient in as early as possible when urgent."*

*"Any queries can be resolved to a satisfactory level."*

*"The reception team have endless patience and I get a lot of notifications about appointments."*

*"The receptionist reset my NHS App, to get it working. They're very helpful."*

#### Negatives

*"Better training for staff."*

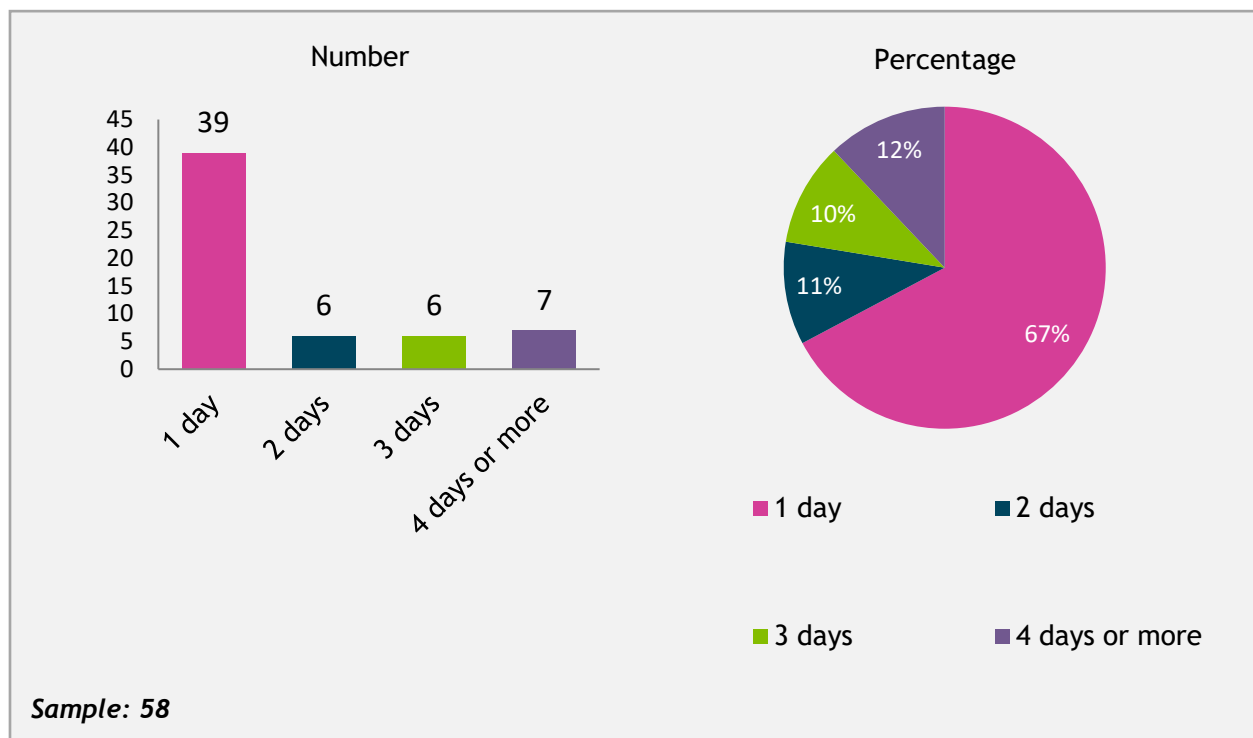
*"The clinical staff are wonderful. The administrative staff less so and some need further training."*

*"Receptionists need to be more aware of medical issues, since we have to explain to them."*

*"Need better management of reception staff when allocating appointments."*

*"PATCHS is usually not available when I am able to get online. I then have to phone and it takes a while to get through. Reception staff don't always allow me to make an appointment and ask me to use PATCHS."*

## 6.9 For urgent appointments, how long do you usually wait?



Two thirds of respondents (67%) are usually seen the same day for emergency appointments. A fifth (22%) say they have waited 3 days or longer.

Comments reflect varying success, in obtaining same-day appointments.

### Selected Feedback

#### Positives

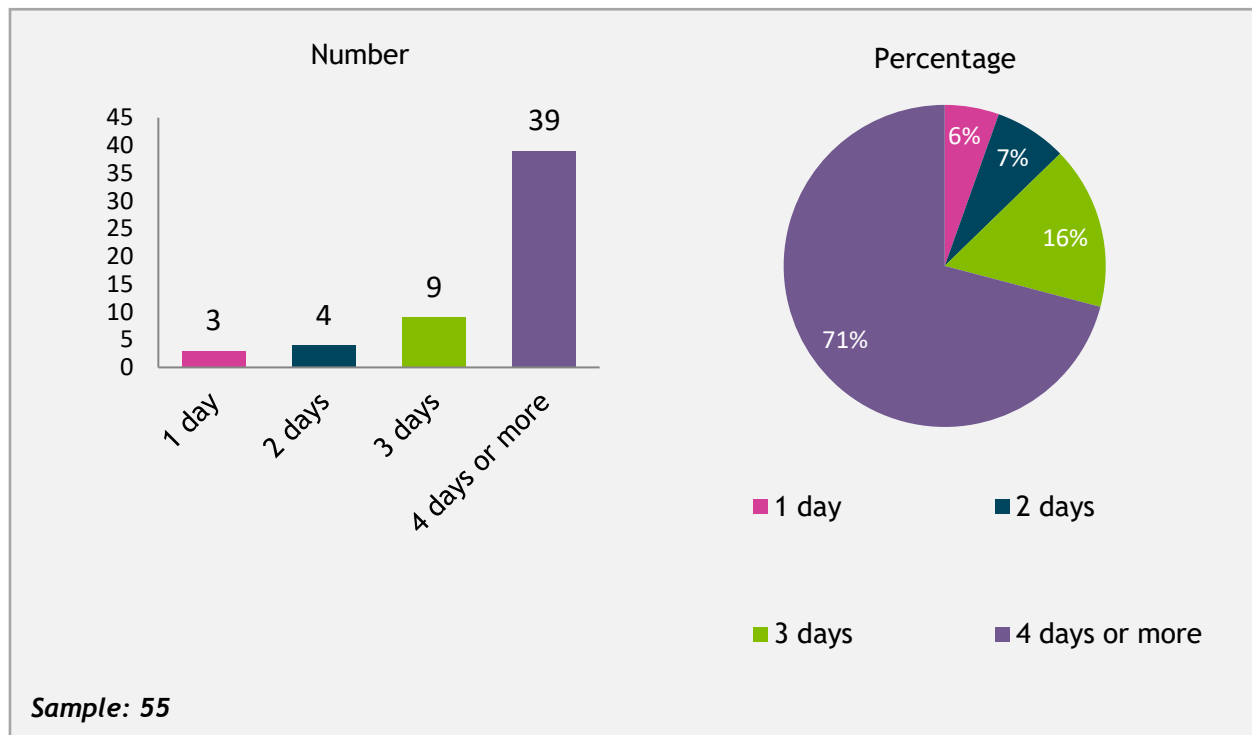
*"You can get same-day appointments if the issue is deemed urgent."*

*"I only call the GP for emergency appointments and I always get an appointment on that day."*

#### Negatives

*"A same-day request was denied."*

### 6.10 And for routine appointments, how long do you usually wait?



For routine appointments, 71% of respondents wait 4 days, or more.

Waits of 10 days, and in one case 'four weeks' are reported.

Booking systems are said to be 'rigid' - with patients finding it difficult to book in advance.

#### Selected Feedback

##### General Comments

*"If the doctor can see the patient within a week at least."*

##### Positives

*"Generally, you get an appointment to suit you!"*

*"All staff are very responsive. Even if I don't think the issue is urgent, the practice may decide to give a same day appointment."*

*"I can get appointments the same day."*

##### Negatives

*"My doctor is excellent. However, too busy and usually takes 10 days to get an appointment with him."*

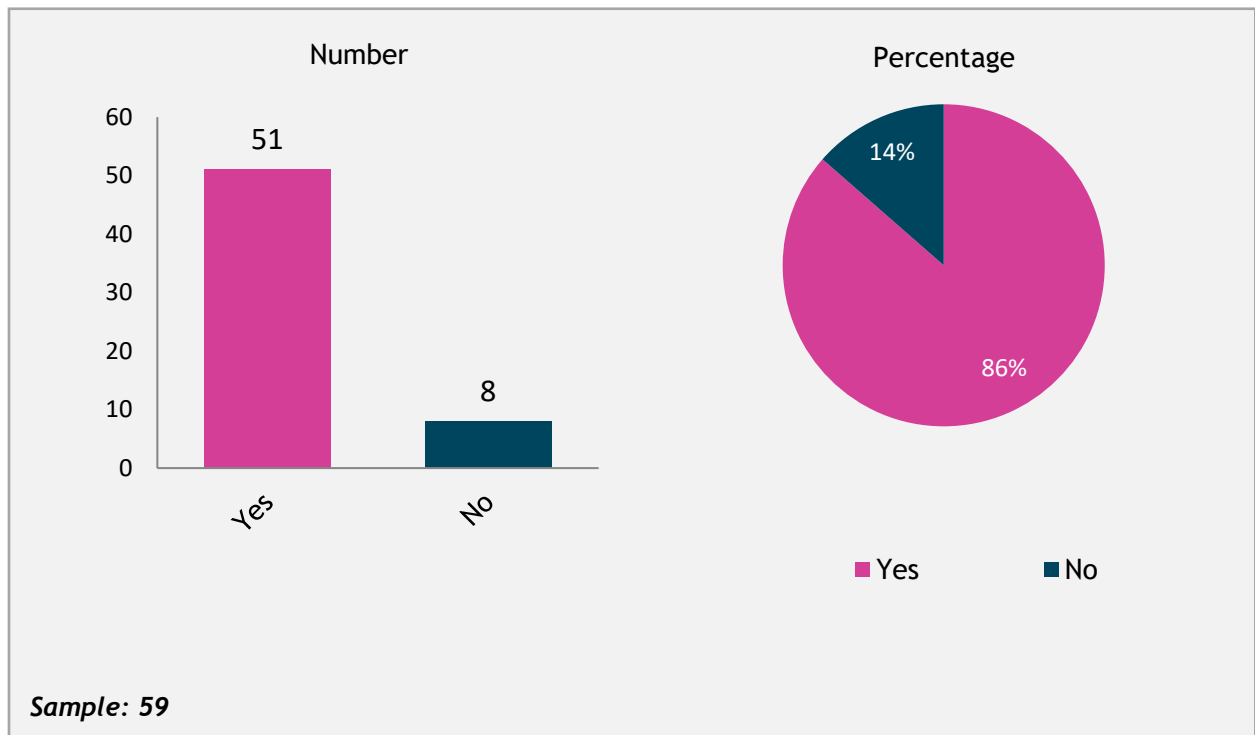
*“Timing of appointments - some can be 4 weeks away which I think deflects from the issue.”*

*“You cannot book a routine appointment, unless the doctor has requested that you book one. You can only book urgent appointments, nothing else, and you have to phone to do so.”*

*“I can’t book advance appointments. The system is so rigid.”*

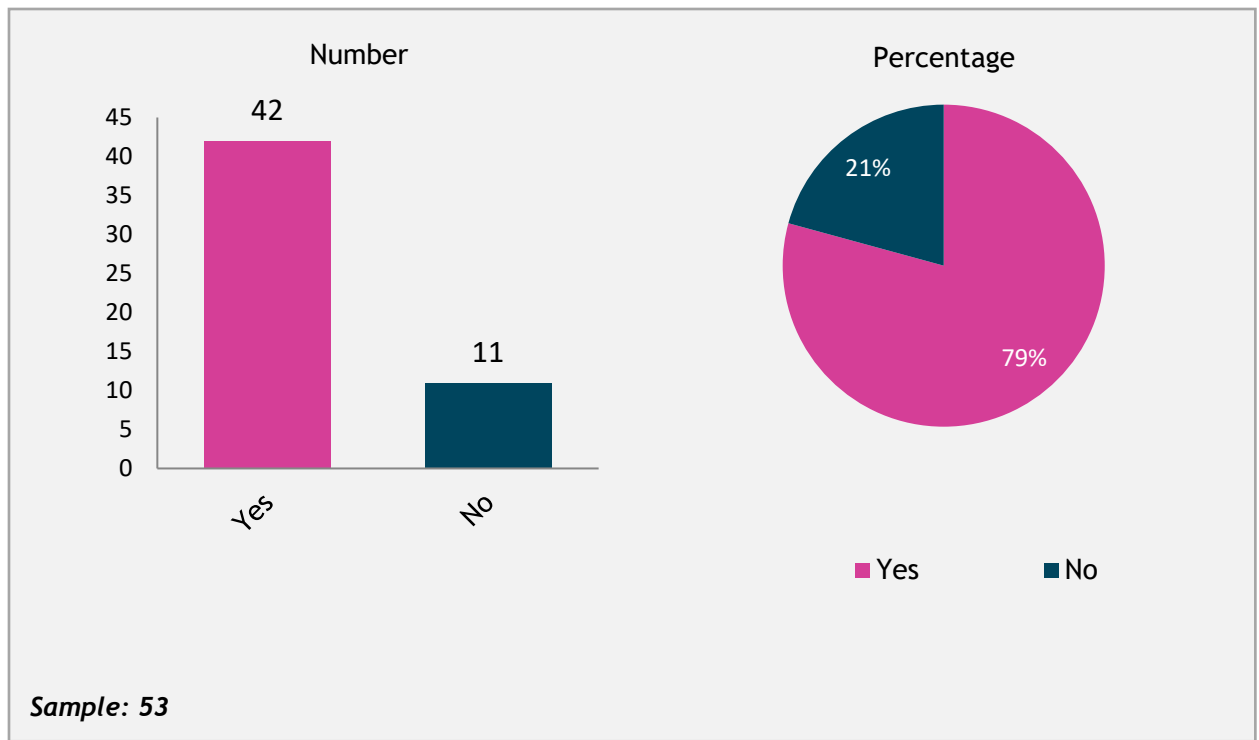
*“There are two 10 minute windows to make appointments - between 8am and 8.10am, and 2pm and 2.10pm. If you miss this you have to come back the next day. My surgery doesn’t seem to do anything other than same day appointments either.”*

#### **6.11 Have you had a ‘telephone triage’ or online appointment in the past?**



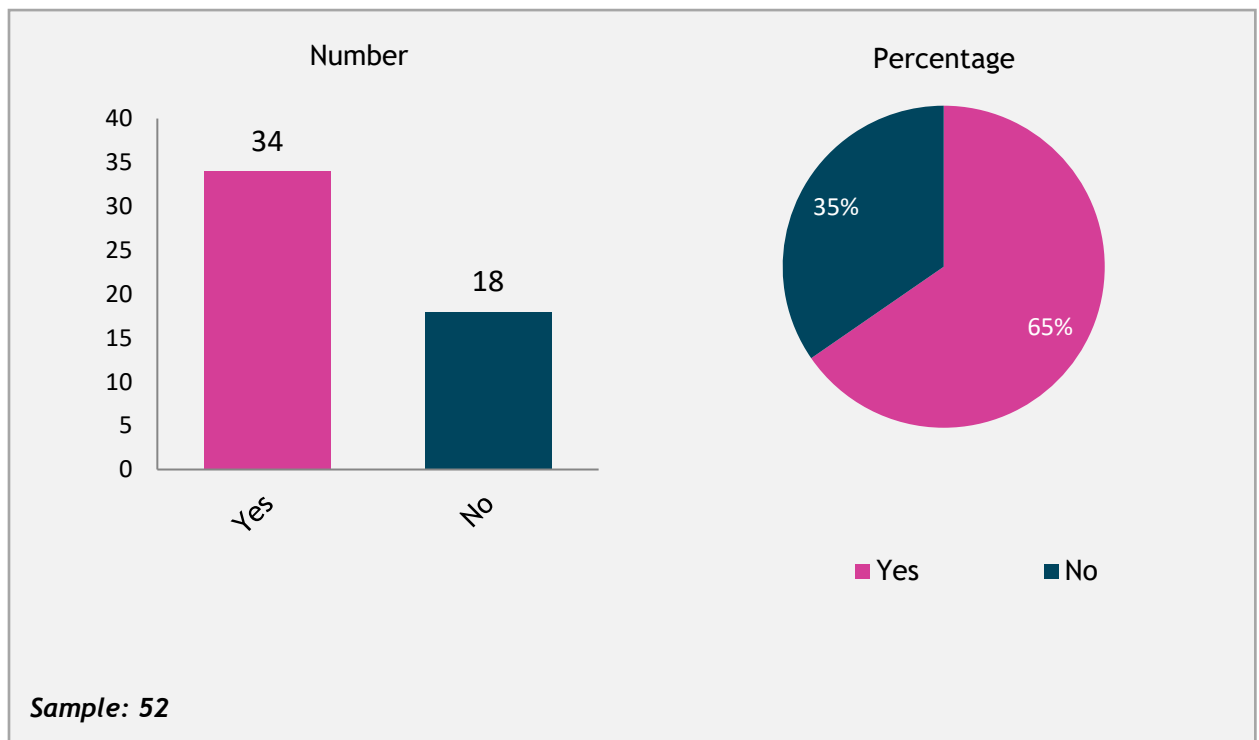
A clear majority of respondents (86%) have experienced a remote appointment.

**6.12 If so, does the doctor (or other staff member) usually call you back, when you expected them to?**



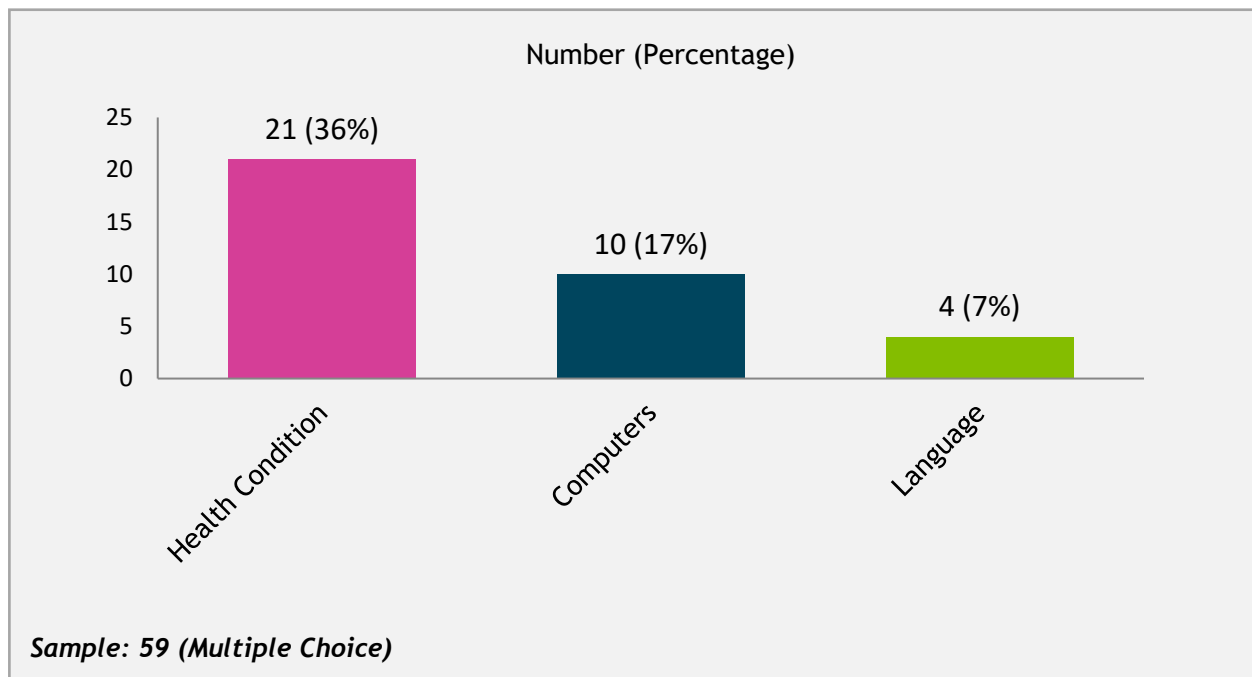
A broad majority (79%) say they are usually called back within the expected time. A fifth of respondents (21%) say they are not.

**6.13 If you had a doctor's consultation, does it usually meet your needs? Do you feel the doctor is able to diagnose accurately on the phone or online?**



Two thirds of respondents (65%) feel that remote consultations have fully met their needs, while a significant minority (35%) feel they have not.

**6.14 Potential Barriers: Do you have difficulties using computers, smart-phones or the internet? Do you have a disability or long term (health or mental health) condition? Is English not your first language?**



Over a third of respondents (36%) have a health condition or disability. 17% cite computers as a barrier, while 7% mention language.

We asked participants to outline any potential barriers. Those unable to book online express frustration, and highlight their reliance on others - often family members. One respondent with difficulties feels like a 'second class citizen'.

A disabled respondent says that 10 minute consultations are not long enough - since it takes additional time to reach the consultation room, and to get 'fully into' the conversation.

#### Selected Feedback

##### General Comments

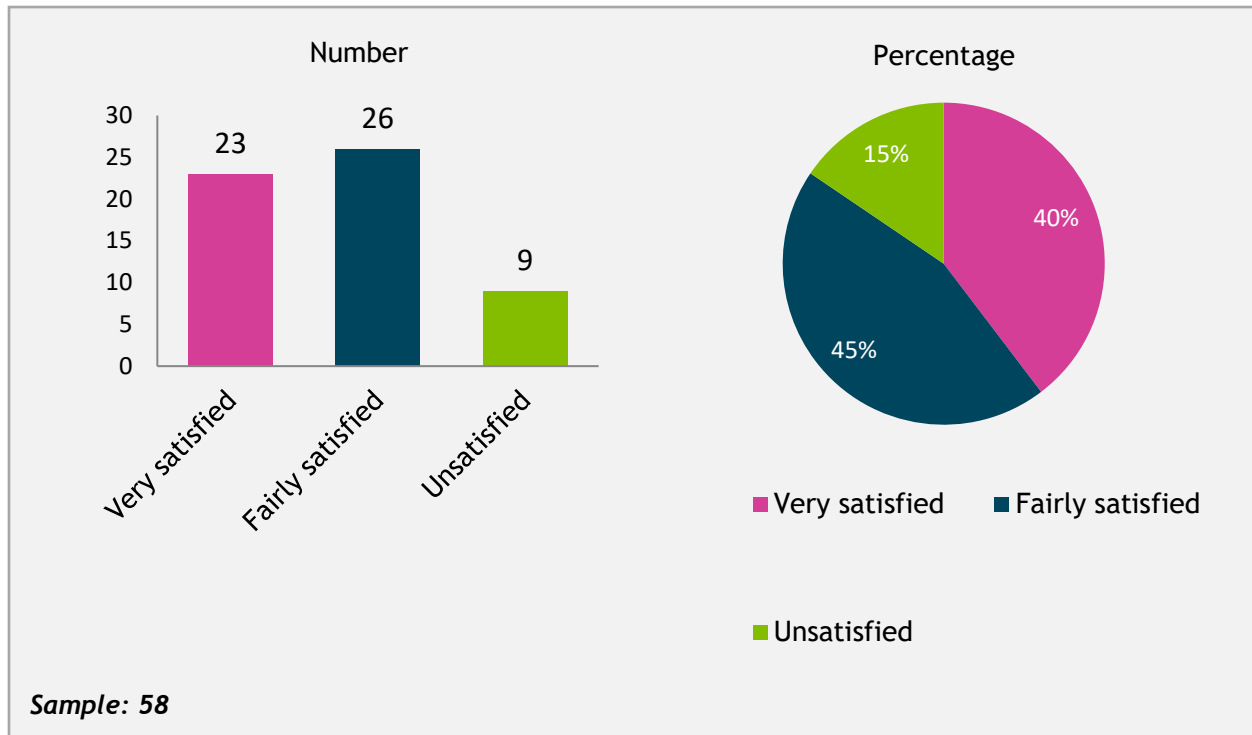
*"A decent phone line needed for those with mobility issues."*

*"It should be much easier to make an appointment for those who have difficulty using computers/the internet. We should not be made to feel like idiots. Many elderly lack the confidence to use this technology effectively, especially when feeling ill or worried and*

*end up feeling like second class citizens. I had to get my daughter to fill this in so my voice was heard.”*

*“Appointment times with a GP for someone with a disability should be extended, as 10 minutes is not enough time to get to the doctor's room or settle into the conversation before you talk about your needs. It should be easier to book a double slot with a GP.”*

#### 6.15 How satisfied are you with your GP Practice and the services they offer?



A clear majority of respondents (85%) express satisfaction with their practice, on the whole. 15% are not satisfied.

There is widespread praise for GPs, who are considered to be respectful, sympathetic and supportive, on the whole.

#### Selected Feedback

##### Positives

*“The doctors are respectful and helpful.”*

*“The doctors are usually excellent when I do get to see them.”*

*“The GPs are kind, helpful and professional.”*

*“Doctors and nurses do listen to patients’ concerns and sound sympathetic.”*

*"The GP's are excellent diagnosticians and provide excellent treatment."*

*"They always discuss the diagnosis, next steps and what to do if the condition worsens in the meanwhile."*

*"I had a good consultation experience with the GP who understood what my problems were. He promptly organised a blood test."*

#### **Negatives**

*"Care between GPs in the same surgery is inconsistent. One has threatened to override treatment provided by the other GP which caused unnecessary distress."*

*"Need GP access. Physician associates making clinical decisions - that they know nothing about."*

In other feedback, there is appreciation of ancillary staff and services, such as physiotherapists and blood testing.

Waiting and opening times are criticised, by some.

#### **Selected Feedback**

##### **Positives**

*"I think my practice is trying very hard to make improvements with the service and are offering a wider range of services and availability."*

*"Good range of medical specialists - not just GPs."*

*"A well-run surgery. A good range of doctors and ancillary clinicians, such as physiotherapists."*

*"Blood tests come back quickly."*

##### **Negatives**

*"The doctors are good but understaffed."*

*"Friendly staff. But sometimes the waiting is long."*

*"I have often been waiting 30 minutes after my appointment time to actually be seen."*

*"Surgeries need to be open longer."*

*"I need time to talk through overall health and wellbeing, not just deal with one presenting issue."*



### **6.16 Any other comments about your GP Practice (prescriptions, referrals etc)?**

Finally, we asked participants to share any other comments about their practice. We detect themes on booking, general practice, prescriptions and referrals.

#### **Selected Feedback**

##### **Booking**

- Recently I have had several problems and the response has been timely. Also, I currently have problems walking and I was offered a face to face consultation which was changed to a phone call at my request and without difficulty.
- I am very satisfied with the speed of response and responsiveness of all staff.
- I am not very keen on PATCHS, as it is not very intuitive and I find it difficult to work my way through. Often lots of repetitive questions, but I have now learnt a trick of giving all the information I want to say at the start, in case there isn't an opportunity later in the process. If you are late for 8am you have to try the next day - not helpful.
- I am on hormone treatment and I can't get another appointment with the doctor.
- 

##### **General Practice**

- Everything seems to work very well at my surgery as I myself experience but also as I hear from many of my fellow patients in the area where I have lived for most of my life.
- I wish I had a GP. In fact, I have any one of about 20, and feel I have lost the continuity of care I had pre-2020.
- Recently, when I had campylobacter, the doctor reacted with urgency. Very commendable.
- I think they are working very hard to improve the customer experience and doing a good job.
- They are very efficient.
- They use 'sticking plasters' such as painkillers all the time instead of looking into causes and addressing root causes.
- Generally a great service but let my husband down badly last week so I will be making a complaint.
- No social prescribing service at our practice.
- The GP is fine but you never see your own GP. There is a lack of continuity of care. Often I am sent to a neighbouring practice where the doctor knows nothing about me and it is a transactional conversation that often ends with the doctor asking me to go back to my practice.
- They do everything very efficiently.
- If I request to see a particular GP it can mean a wait of 3 weeks to speak to them on the phone.
- Usually OK but sometimes they disappear into a black hole and are not dealt with and I have to chase up and no one knows anything about it.
- 

##### **Prescriptions**

- Prescriptions given as fast as possible.
- I manage to get prescriptions through the NHS app.
- Repeat prescriptions work very well.
- The repeat prescription service usually goes well but when things go wrong they go very wrong.
- Prescriptions taking longer to get.
- The community pharmacy is good.
- Prescriptions are handled very speedily by electronic procedures.
- All the prescriptions are given quickly.

## Referrals

- Referrals are made quickly but appointments (when a referral is made) is out of the GP's hands since hospitals have long waiting lists. But the GP, if necessary will mark referrals with "urgent" or send patient to A&E.
- I'm not sure if it is a resourcing issue, but when a GP says they will do a referral, the referral team takes too long to do the administrative side of actually sending the referral and even chasing it up. This means that the GP surgery gets more phone calls from people having to follow up to see if referrals have been sent.
- GPs are often unsuccessful in obtaining a referral.
- Referrals are getting more difficult. Even when the community service conducts tests such as 24 hour cardiograms or skin tests, they never get back to you.
- In my case recently the referral was made swiftly.
- The GP can't refer to out of borough mental health support as you have to stay in borough.

### **6.16 Comparison with our 2024 Survey**

In the Spring of 2024 we conducted a very [similar survey](#), with 63 responses.

We have compared the response for each question. to establish what has improved, and what has not.

#### **6.16.1 What has improved, since 2024?**

	% 2024	% 2025
Offered a choice of consultation method	52%	58%
Feel respected by staff, when booking	76%	81%
Remote GP consultation has met needs	62%	65%
Found it easy to book an appointment	52%	54%
Got through (on the phone) within five minutes	58%	60%

Responses suggest that compared with last year, patients find it marginally easier to book appointments, and feel better-respected by staff, when booking. There is now greater choice of consultation method (remote or in-person) and remote consultations are marginally more effective.

#### **6.16.2 What has deteriorated, since 2024?**

	% 2024	% 2025
Called back at the expected time	88%	79%
Appointment is with preferred GP or Nurse	41%	36%

Compared with last year, patients are less likely to be called at the expected time, or to see their preferred GP or Nurse.

#### **6.16.3 What else has changed?**

	% 2024	% 2025
Have had a remote appointment	92%	86%

We note that fewer patients are seen remotely, this might suggest that more in-person appointments have become available.

	% 2024	% 2025
Book appointments by phone	40%	42%

Use of phones to book appointments has not declined - it has actually increased marginally (by 2%).

Seen within 3 days, for routine appointments	29%	29%
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Waiting times for routine appointments have not noticeably changed, feedback suggests.

## 7. Glossary of Terms

This report does not contain acronyms.

## 8. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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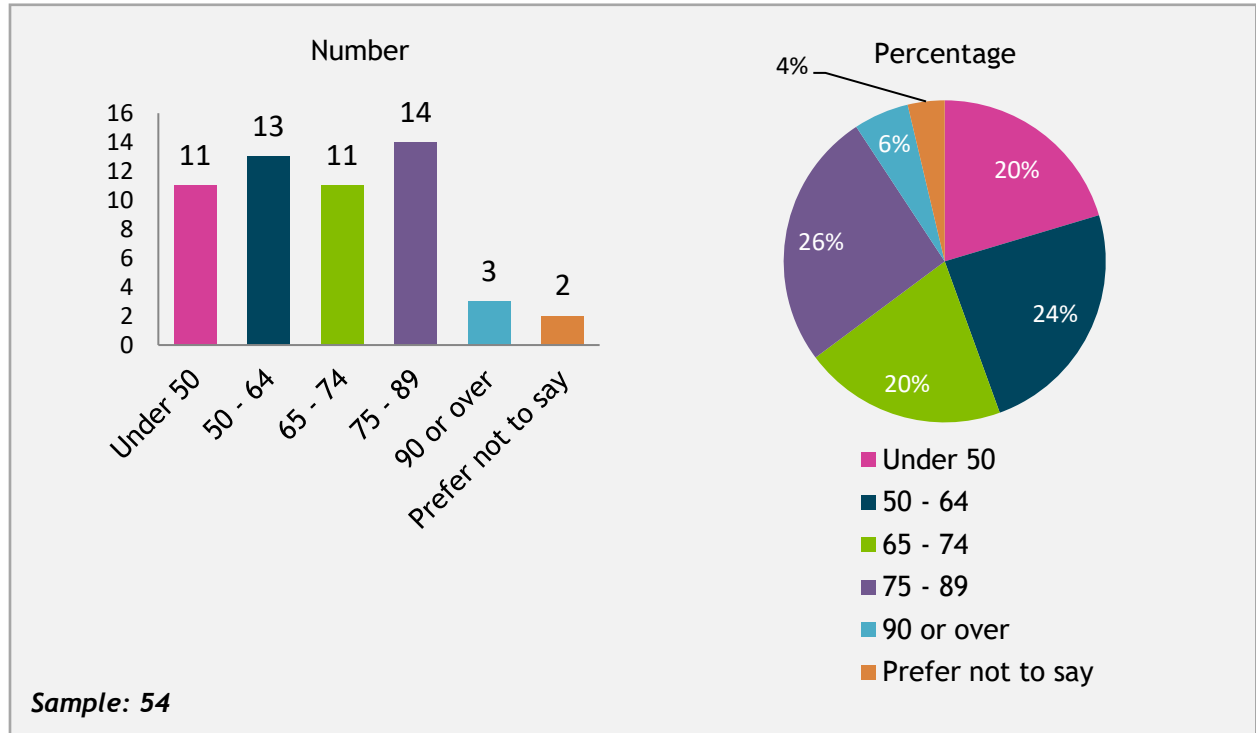
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/HWHarrow/>

Instagram: healthwatchharrow

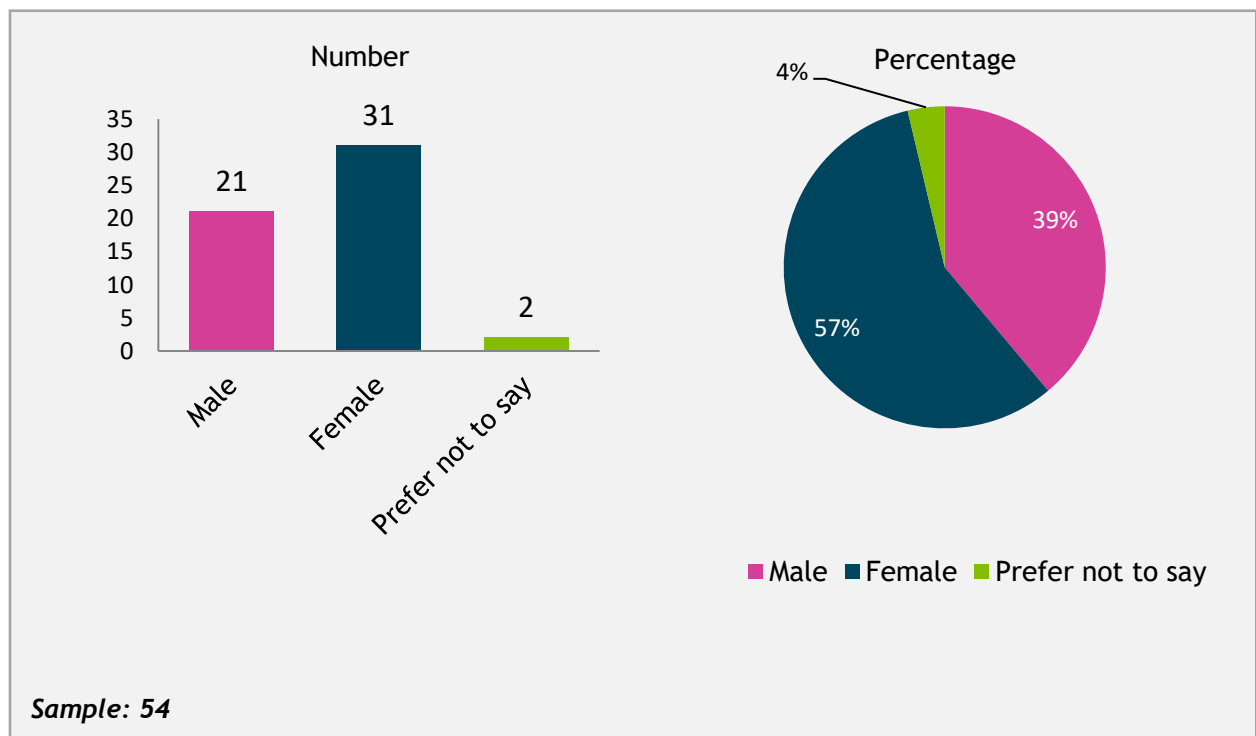
## Appendix - Demographics

The demographics of participants are stated as follows:

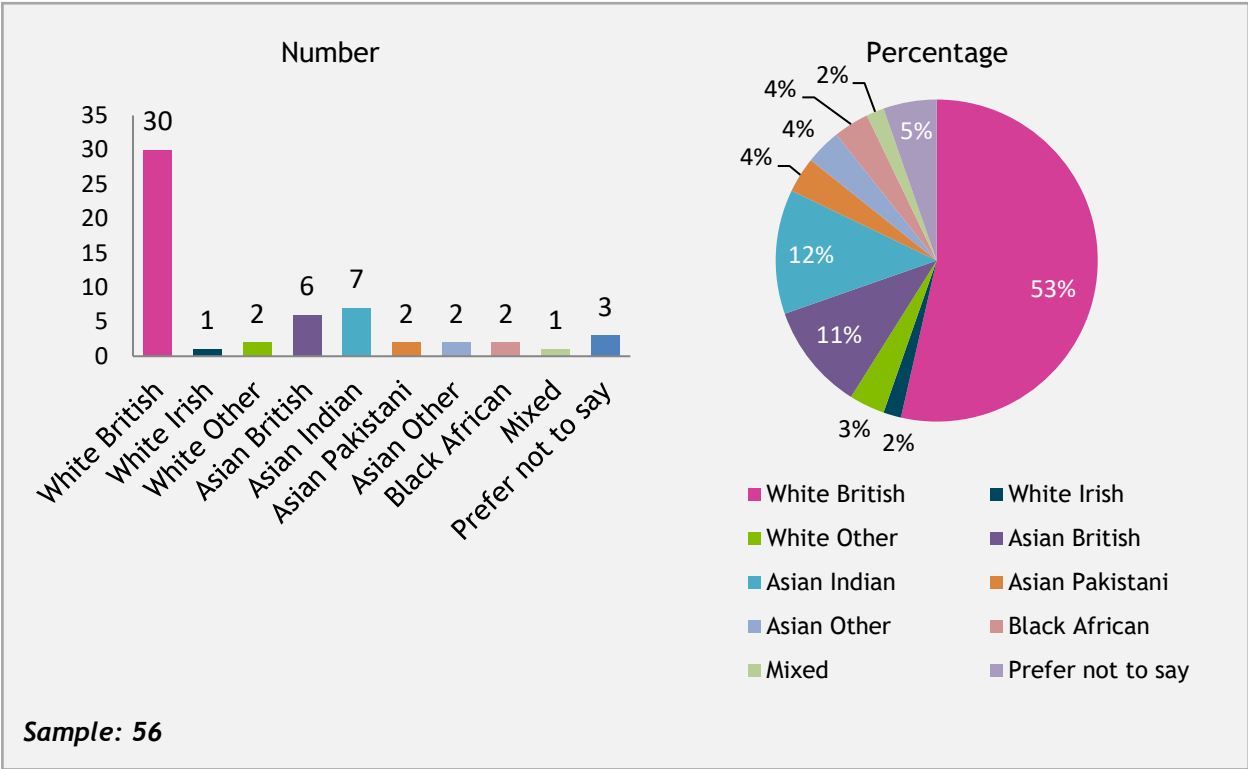
### Age



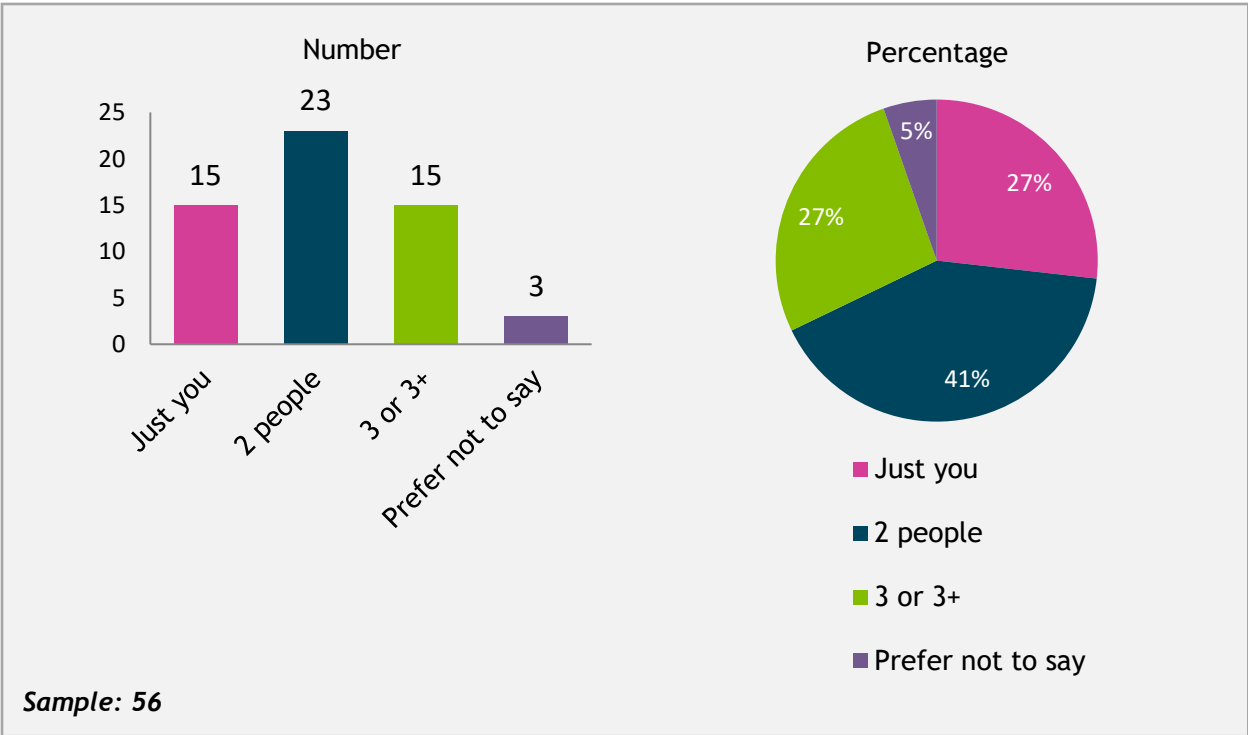
### Gender



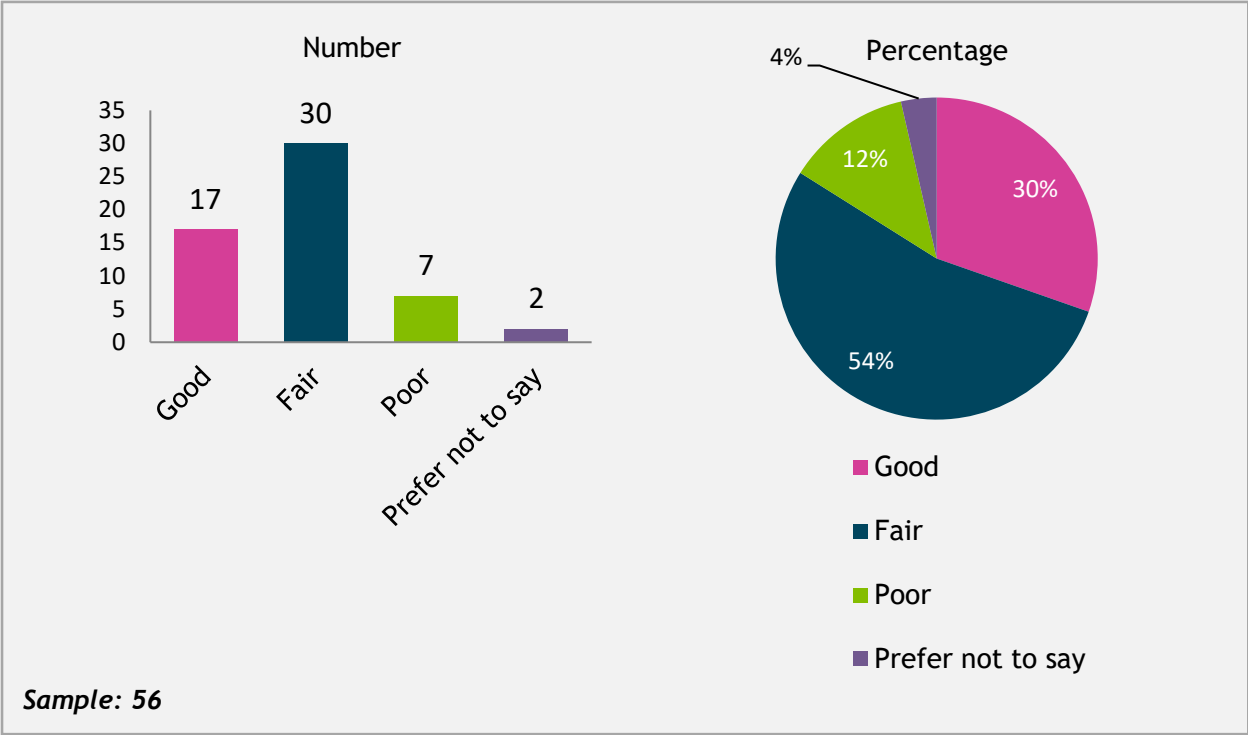
Ethnicity



Household



Health



“A very busy surgery but they don't compromise on quality.

Everyone is helpful.”

Local GP Patient