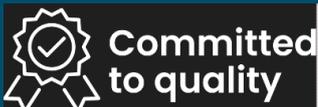




Helpline enquires to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2023 – March 31st 2024

April 2024



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Helpline enquiries to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2023 – March 31st 2024 – Headlines

- Between April 1st 2023 and March 31st 2024, we received 365 enquiries to our helpline (an increase of 52% from last year).
- These were mostly a combination of phone call messages (42 people), feedback through our website (142) and emails (126).

The majority of people contacting the helpline were:

- Raising a concern or negative experiences about a service (197).
- Raising formal complaints (31).
- Requesting information (92).
- Making compliments about a service (40).

The five leading areas of concerns and related complaints raised, in descending order were:

1. Poor quality of care from a GP (49).
 2. Poor hospital care including ambulance waiting times, treatment waiting times and poor communication of cancelled appointments (46).
 3. Poor access to a GP appointment – including waiting times for appointments (34).
 4. Lack of an NHS dentist including emergency dental care (26)
 5. Concerns about the Emergency Department at the Royal Sussex County Hospital (13).
- Comparing the first and last six months of the 2023/2024 year, comments about the poor quality of care from a GP and poor access to a GP have become more common. The same trend applies to poor hospital care including ambulance waiting times, treatment waiting times and poor communication of cancelled appointments.
 - Concerns over a lack of NHS dentist have been less common during the last six months of the year.
 - Compliments were made about the quality of care from a GP, the overall hospital inpatient and outpatient experience (including the Emergency Department), antenatal and postnatal care, dental practices, speed at which the ambulance arrived, Brighton Station Walk In Centre, GP practices, the

mobile vaccination at the Hove Polyclinic and the quality of NHS 111. This illustrates the mixed nature of responses where people have been critical of the same services.

- As a positive outcome from using the helpline, a total of 198 people (54%) contacting the helpline were signposted for further advice and support. Also, as a further indicator of outcome, approximately 50% or 100 of those who provided demographic information were described as seldom-heard.
- The helpline invites people to voluntarily add their demographic data (the figures below are from the up to 193 people who answered these questions, not from the total number of enquiries):
 - Most people contacting the helpline were women (131 or 68%), of a White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh background (81 or 80%), and between the ages of 50 and 64 years (64 or 34%).
 - Just over one-third (64 or 38%) had a disability, and 22 or 55% of those with a disability had a long-term condition.
 - The majority said their sex was the same as that assigned at birth (134 or 80%) and 72 or 49% said they were heterosexual, with a notable 46 or 32% saying 'not known'. 22 (15%) people were Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual.
 - Data on marital and civil partnership status, pregnancy, and religion were also provided.



"Based on this annual report of helpline data, it serves as a useful benchmark to see how the helpline activity changes annually. It is also hoped that the progressive capture of demographic data will build over time and provide a clearer picture of those raising issues and also those benefitting from signposting support."

"Patient feedback helps us determine whether issues need to be escalated or explored in more detail through our projects. Healthwatch would therefore like to thank everyone who has contacted us over the past year and shared their story with us."

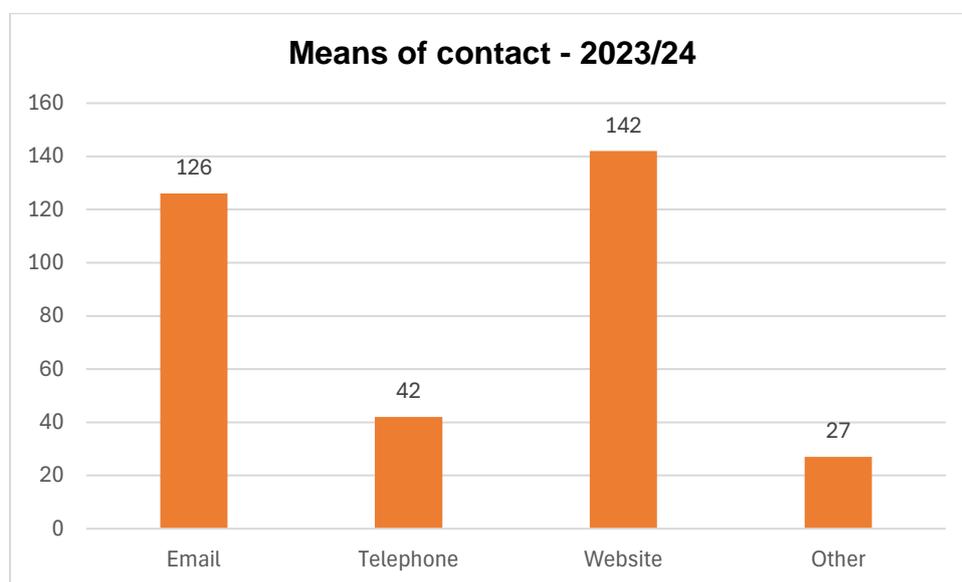


- Dr Lester Coleman, Head of Research at Healthwatch Brighton and Hove

Helpline enquiries to Healthwatch Brighton and Hove: April 1st 2023 – March 31st 2024 – Main Report

Between April 1st 2023 and March 31st 2024, we received 365 enquiries to our helpline.

These were a combination of phone call messages (42), feedback through our website (142) and emails (126). All enquiries are handled by two experienced, trained and DBS checked Healthwatch volunteers. The remaining were through Enter and View visits, in person (at our office or at an engagement event), via post, or social media. For the purposes of this report, we refer to the term ‘helpline’ for all these enquiries.

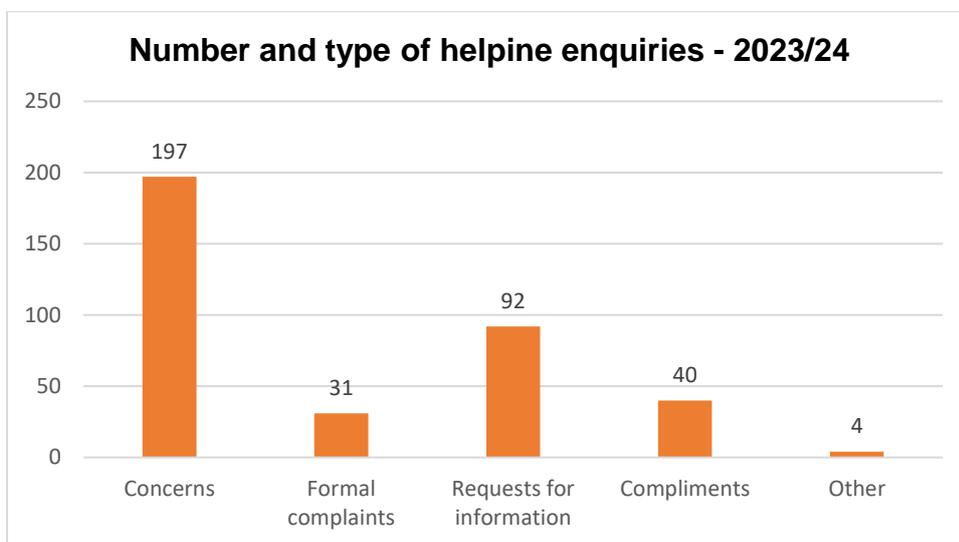


In this report, we summarise the variety of concerns, complaints and requests for information. We supplement the data with direct comments from people contacting the helpline. We also present an outline of people’s demographic profile (for those that offered this information), and whether people were ‘seldom heard’¹.

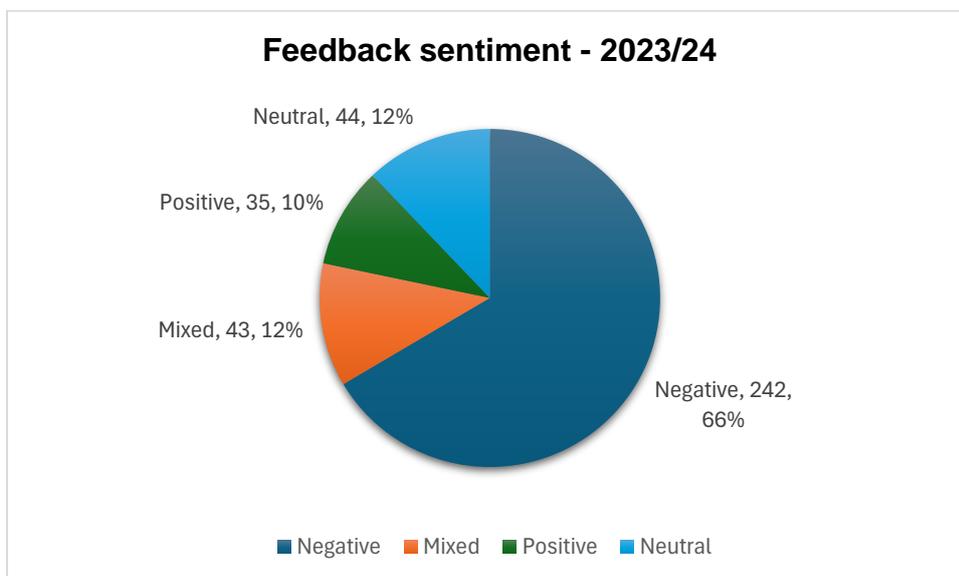
¹ This term refers to under-represented people who use or might potentially use health or social services and who are less likely to be heard by these service professionals and decision-makers. These groups used to be described as hard to reach – suggesting that there is something that prevents their engagement with services. Seldom heard emphasises the responsibility of agencies to reach out to excluded people, ensuring that they have access to social care services and that their voices can be heard, and is preferred for those reasons. Examples of seldom heard groups could include: Particular ethnic minority groups, carers, people with disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, refugees/asylum seekers, people who are homeless, younger people and people with language barriers.

1. Reasons why people contacted the helpline

The majority of people contacting the helpline were raising a concern about a service (197). 'Concerns' were people reporting negative experiences such as difficulties in accessing a GP or a poor experience at a hospital. These were distinct to the 31 people who raised formal complaints, which included how to make a complaint, or following up the process of making a complaint – usually to the University Hospitals Sussex [Patient Advice and Liaison Service](#) (PALS). A total of 92 people requested information and were sign-posted accordingly. Some people (40) took the time to raise compliments about a service. Other responses including exploring volunteering opportunities or advertising events.



Of those that could be classified, there were 43 mixed comments, 242 negative comments, 44 neutral, and 35 positive comments.

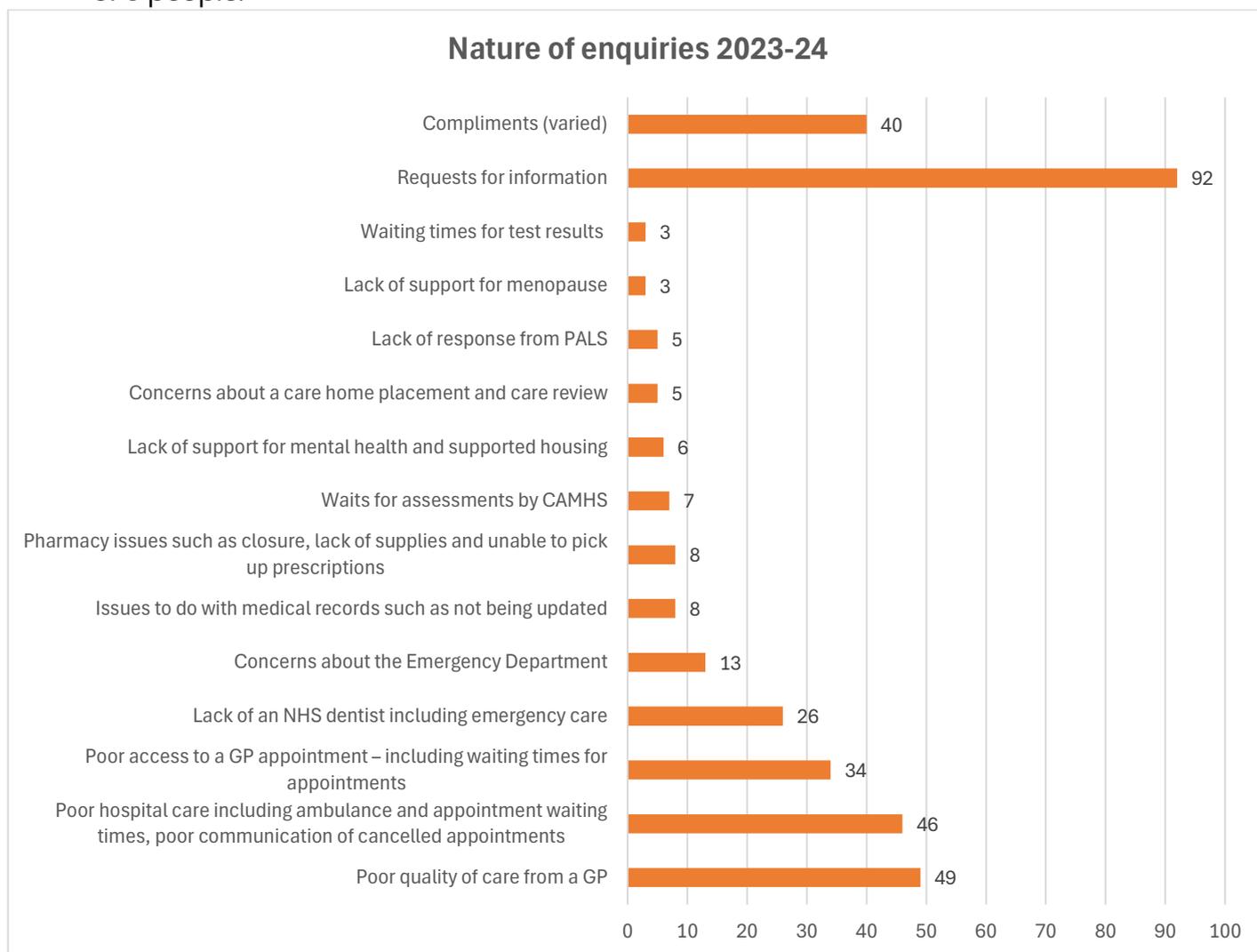


2. The nature of issues raised about NHS services

Overall, the 12-month period saw most concerns or complaints in a range of areas. The five leading areas of concerns and related complaints raised, in descending order were:

1. Poor quality of care from a GP = 49 comments.
2. Poor hospital care including ambulance waiting times, treatment waiting times and poor communication of cancelled appointments = 46 comments.
3. Poor access to a GP appointment – including waiting times for appointments = 34 comments.
4. Lack of an NHS dentist including emergency dental care = 26 comments
5. Concerns about the Emergency Department at the Royal Sussex County Hospital= 13 comments.

The chart below shows these leading and additional issues raised by a minimum of 3 people:



Although there are recurring themes as shown above, there were several more isolated concerns. Raised by between 1 and 2 people, these were:

- Inability to get a blood test.
- The Covid vaccination reaction.
- Poor quality of care from a dentist.
- Optician long waiting times and cost.
- How to access to Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT).
- Being re-traumatised in a Trauma stabilisation group course.
- Problems with the NHS App.
- Waiting times to see a Gender Identity Clinic.
- Poor quality of Speech Therapy treatment.
- Difficulties with wound treatment.
- Lack of privacy in a pharmacy.
- Waiting for a private review meant stopping ADHD medicine abruptly.

3. People's comments about their concerns

To complement the findings above, below are some direct quotes that relate to the services where most comments were received.

a) Poor quality of care from a GP (49 comments):

"GP looked at my records and said 'you're a bit of a mystery aren't you' - I wished I had said, 'I'm not a mystery, I'm a person in pain wanting to find a way to feel comfortable' as I didn't feel I was treated as such. I felt listened to and heard up to a point but I also felt rushed and defensive and that I didn't have time to think and relay all the symptoms."

"I work within the health sector and cannot fathom how treating patients [GP] via a text message is safe medically and have concerns over information safety."

"Absolutely appalling. I was in tears on the phone with my doctor [The Avenue Surgery], telling him I wasn't coping at all, I told him I couldn't go on like this. He said he needed to go as he had other appointments and hung up on me. I was literally sobbing on the phone."

b) Hospital care (46 comments):

Poor hospital care also included waiting times for surgery (and ambulance waiting times) and poor communication of cancelled appointments:

"My hospital inpatient experience was awful."

"After having my operation on the 1st February 2023 Hiatus hernia operation in Brighton. I've ended up worse than I was before my operation. It's left me not being able to eat a meal without being sick."

"My one criticism was that the effectiveness of the painkillers wasn't really assessed - they kept giving me more oxycodone for example which just sent my head a bit dizzy but didn't actually reduce the pain."

"If all parties involved in your care are not aware of all relevant facts, how can they make informed decisions about your care?"

"I've been waiting for both knee replacements for over four years in absolute agony."

c) Poor access to a GP appointment – including waiting times for appointments (34 comments):

"Our GP surgery is now only taking phone calls in the morning."

"It is very, very difficult to get Drs appointments! To see or speak to the same Dr who knows my health history. Everything is done via the internet it is horrible. It is a total lack of staff."

"It is Monday lunchtime and there is no econsult possible and no online appointments for the next month. I know this lack of appointments is a common issue and the situation seems at breaking point regards offering care especially for those who are unable to leave their homes and rely on online appointments."

"I haven't been to access my doctor over 3 years, tried many times to get an appointment but there's always a huge queue."

Some GP comments were related to specific surgeries, with Woodingdean Medical Centre mentioned most frequently and within the last two months:

*"I want to lodge my dissatisfaction with being able to make an appointment with a GP at **Woodingdean Medical Centre**. Basically, you can't. No matter how often I try at 8:30am, by the time I get through listening to the recorded messages, all the appointments are gone by 8:35am."*

*"I am just emailing to complain about the lack of appointments at **Woodingdean Medical Centre**. I phoned dead on 8.30 this morning for an appointment for my little boy and they were already at full capacity leaving an instant message saying there were no appointments."*

*"It is getting very difficult to get a Drs appointment at **Woodingdean Medical Practice** due to the availability of GPs."*

*"I live in **Woodingdean** and have used the Medical Centre for many many years. The availability to see a Dr has gone down considerably and is increasingly frustrating bordering on ridiculous. Today I find my last nerve tweaked. I received a text from them asking me to book an appointment to confirm a new drug they want to put me on. I called at 8:30am as this is the only means to contact the surgery if you need an appointment. As soon as my call connected 8:31am the voice prompt says all appointments have been taken."*

*"I am contacting you with ref to **Woodingdean Medical Centre**. I phoned today at 08.31 pressed the option for a GP appointment and an automated message stating all appointments for today have gone, one minute after opening all appointments are gone."*

*"I have phoned the GP practice **Woodingdean Medical Centre** every single day at opening times for the last 6 weeks and still unable to get an appointment! I've had an appointment with a specialist postponed on three separate occasions and have had ongoing cancer symptoms for over a year (and not even one step closer to a diagnosis as I keep being postponed or denied appointments). I understand there is staff shortage via the NHS but surely this is ridiculous having more chance of winning the lottery than getting a GP appointment."*

*"Can't get an appointment at **Woodingdean Medical Centre**. Phoned at 8.30 and by 8.33 all appointments had gone for the day or you are 30 in a queue and then all appointments are gone."*

At the time of writing, we are meeting practice staff and the Head of Primary Care (Brighton & Hove) to inform an approach to engaging patients from Woodingdean Medical Centre.

d) Lack of an NHS dentist including emergency dental care (26 comments):

"I'm trying to find a new NHS dentist around Brighton - I understand it's very difficult at the moment, and I have contacted the places found through the NHS website. I was just wondering if you had any other ways to find an NHS dentist, or

general advice when looking. I just wanted to ask before I find a private dentist and spend a lot of money!"

"It seems impossible to register with an NHS dentist in Brighton even if you can find one."

"On Saturday 27 Jan 2024, my daughter woke up with a greatly swollen face which was obviously a tooth infection - having been to the dentist two days earlier...she phoned the emergency dentist number, where you could not leave a message or get a ring back and was cut off 12 times. By late morning she was in considerable pain even with very strong pain killers and exhaustion."

e) Concerns about the Emergency Department at the Royal Sussex County Hospital (13 comments):

"I was appalled at the conditions in the Majors part of A&E. Very concerned about what would happen in the event of someone needing resuscitation or if there was a fire because of the severe overcrowding...trolleys stacked alongside touching each other with no way of staff getting to the patients without manoeuvring other trolleys in and out again."

"My experience after being admitted from A&E [Royal Sussex] for treatment for an infection of my Gall Bladder - a ten day stay - It was a frustrating and miserable experience. Information was sparse and 'care' blighted by the feeling of being a nuisance rather than a patient. The wait for my discharge letter was excruciatingly long."

"He was again admitted via the A&E Angels (their patience, kindness and care) in the face of appalling overcrowding and, from some patients, appalling behaviour."

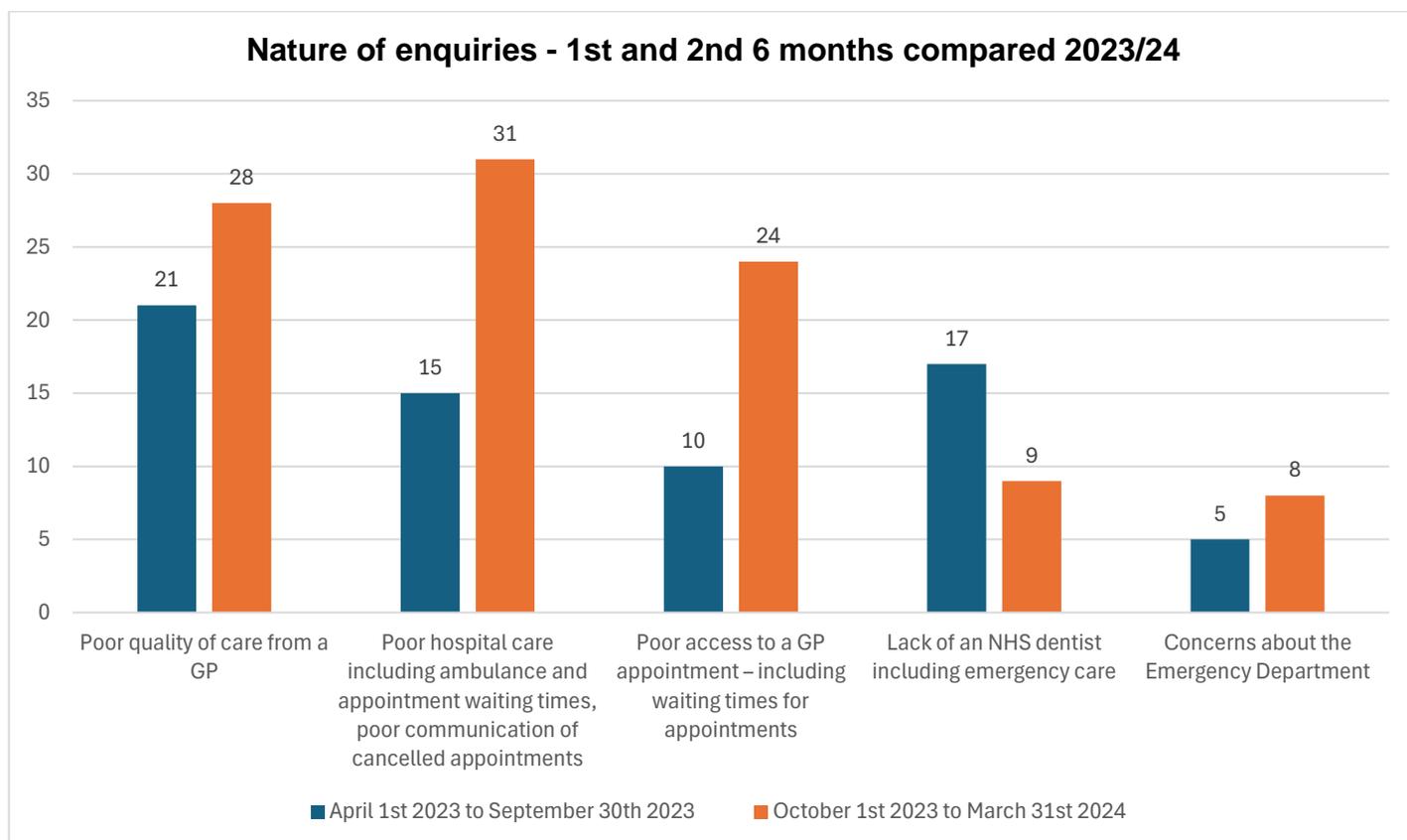
"Attended ED at Conquest hospital and was admitted - excellent care. Was later transferred to ED at RSCH - it was like a war zone. When is the system going to start getting the basics right?"

Although comments regarding health care were most common, there were a few relating to social care, for example:

"Really difficult to find disability personal assistants. They are underpaid, keep getting ill, I haven't known who's going to turn up or if they are going to be well enough to continue. Social Services portal gives no reply."

4. Trends in issues raised

Interestingly, it is possible that a year-long portrayal of the helpline may reveal trends over issues that are becoming more or less mentioned. Comparing the first and last six months of the 2023/2024 year, comments about the poor quality of care from a GP and poor access to a GP have become more common. The same trend applies to poor hospital care including ambulance waiting times, treatment waiting times and poor communication of cancelled appointments. Equally interesting, concerns over a lack of NHS dentist have been less common during the last six months of the year.



5. Requests for information

The requests for information were rarely mentioned by more than one person. They were:

- Information about a PPG group.
- About a postmortem.
- GP service for homeless people.
- Information about the CQC.
- How to obtain feedback from children’s cancer services.
- How to make a complaint and an advocacy service.

- Moving care to a new GP.
- Transferring care to a hospital near home.
- Eligibility for a Covid vaccination.
- Where to get a Covid vaccine booster.
- General information about the Royal Sussex County Hospital.
- Information for benefits to support their need for medical equipment.
- Personal Independence Payments.
- How to reach 'seldom heard groups'.
- Information about the council serving an eviction notice, with concerns over the mental health of an individual.
- Recycling equipment.

6. Compliments about a service

Compliments were made about the quality of care from a GP, the overall hospital inpatient and outpatient experience (including the Emergency Department), antenatal and postnatal care, dental practices, speed at which the ambulance arrived, Brighton Station Walk In Centre, GP practices, the mobile vaccination at the Hove Polyclinic and the quality of NHS 111.

Although the compliments are less prevalent than the concerns and complaints, they do illustrate the contrasting experiences (mixed sentiment) noted previously. Moreover, the high quality of health and social care services are understandably an underestimate as the very nature of the 'helpline' invites more negative than positive sentiment.

Positive comments included:

"THE BEST surgery I have ever experienced...The staff are knowledgeable, cheerful, polite and caring. The doctors are sympathetic, patient and painstaking. The care is person-centred, empathetic and holistic."

"The midwives on the ward have been brilliant."

"Care in A&E was superb."

"I haven't had my hip replacement yet - on waiting list. But I've been amazed that I've been able to choose to have my op at Spire Healthcare on the NHS, 20 minutes from my home. The alternative was to travel to the NHS unit about 45 minutes away...Well done NHS for giving me patient choice."

"My GP surgery has been outstanding in referring me due to concerns. I received an endoscopy appointment within 2 weeks. This morning had a triage call from digestive diseases and told I need a colonoscopy and will be seen within the next 2 weeks. Everything very quick and efficient."

"Excellent recent service using 111. Call was answered quickly by knowledgeable call handler, who passed our information on to the doctor on call who phoned us back within the hour."

"999 ambulance was a good experience as this arrived within 15 minutes."

"I visited A&E [Royal Sussex County Hospital] because I thought I broke my wrist. I was seen really quickly and the nurse at the minor injuries clinic was great - knowledgeable and caring."

"Please could you add that all the medical staff working in A&E [Royal Sussex County Hospital] were actually amazing."

Some people praised specific services:

"I received a text from my GP practice [Seven Dials Medical] telling me I can now go to the pharmacy for 7 minor conditions. It provided a link to further info. I wanted to say how impressed I was to receive this message."

"My GP [Stanford] is fantastic - responsive, compassionate, really listens & respects my views, collaborative decision making regarding my health needs."

"Very good treatment [Brighton General]."

"The place [Hove Polyclinic] was convenient, the staff very helpful and the whole operation carried out in a professional way."

Several people commented on the **new Atrium at the Louisa Martindale building** at the Royal Sussex County Hospital.

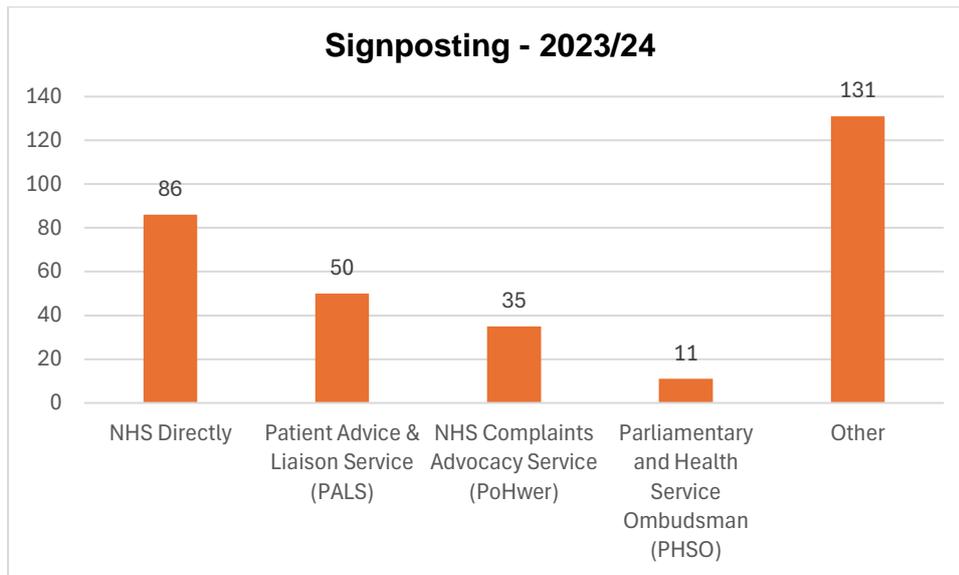
"Very impressive design and so spacious and calm. No comparison! The whole space and atmosphere are different and so much better. I think the staff seem more relaxed as the building is calm."

"Every member of the ambulance staff I have met with who attended myself or a member of my family have been absolutely wonderful. Calm, humorous, when needed & incredibly reassuring."

7. Outcomes from using the helpline

As a positive outcome from using the helpline, a total of 198 people (54%) were signposted for further advice and support.

The chart below shows the number of people who were signposted. It was possible to be signposted to more than one service.



The 'Other' category was mostly to contact the Practice Manager at a GP surgery or to visit the dentistry information on the Healthwatch website about rights and charges for treatment. Additional services within the 'Other' were signposting to Change Grow Live, CQC, Mind, Possability People and members of the Healthwatch team.

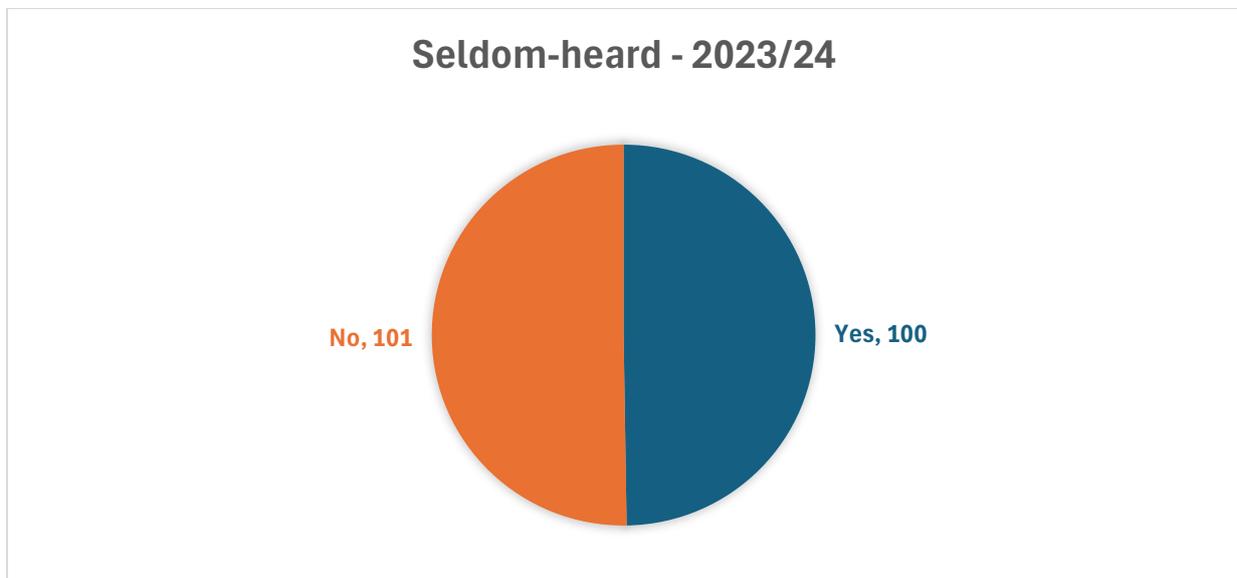
The following two examples show the effectiveness of this signposting:

[Example 1 - From the helpline moderator] *"A teacher contacted us as they were unable to get in to see their regular GP but suspected they may have Strep A. They struggled to get to appointments due to their work. We signposted them to the Brighton Station Walk In Service which they attended around 6pm. They waited 10 mins to see a GP (hardly anyone else was waiting) and were given antibiotics."*

[Example 2 – From an email enquiry] *“Can you help me find an NHS dentist please? My current surgery (Regency dentist) has told me that as I’ve only visited once in 2019 and the dentist is retired if I want an appointment I have to go private. I cannot afford that. Please can you advise me on dentists in Brighton and Hove taking new patients.”*

The helpline moderator provided this person with the website link to the information provided about dentists from Healthwatch Brighton and Hove, and the routinely updated dentist availability list published by South East Dental. These Additional Hours Scheme sessions are updated every two weeks. They also shared the link to an NHS site that allows people to search for a dentist near their location: [Find a dentist - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk).

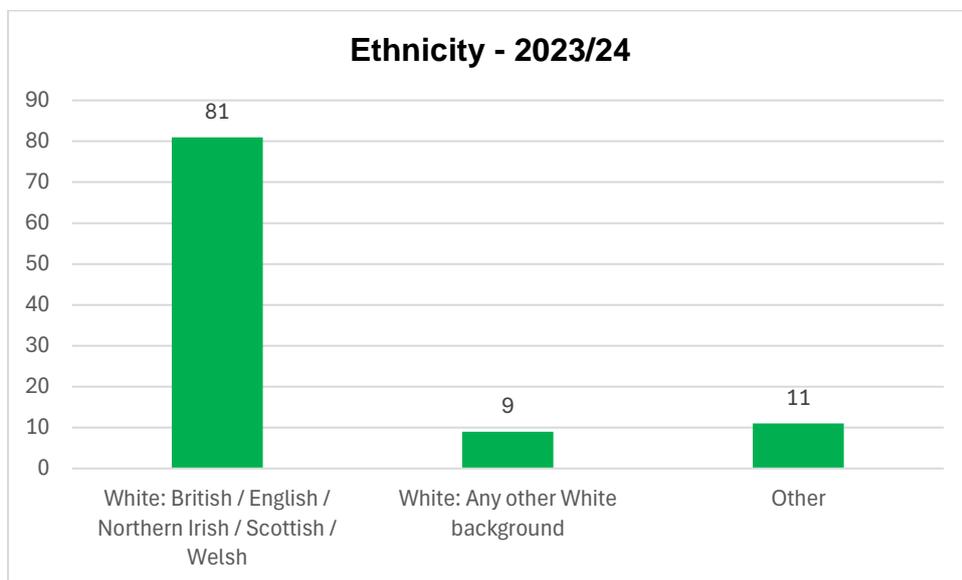
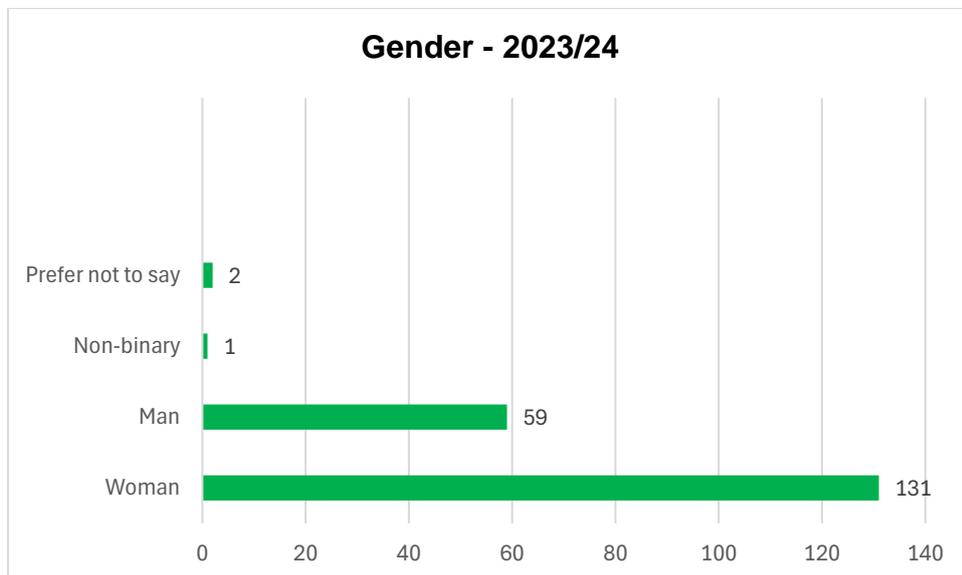
As a further indicator of outcome, the enquiries were of value to those described as seldom-heard. This term was explained earlier but could include particular ethnic minority groups, carers, people with disabilities, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer people, refugees/asylum seekers, people who are homeless, younger people and people with language barriers. As shown below, approximately 50% or 100 of those who provided this information were described as seldom-heard:



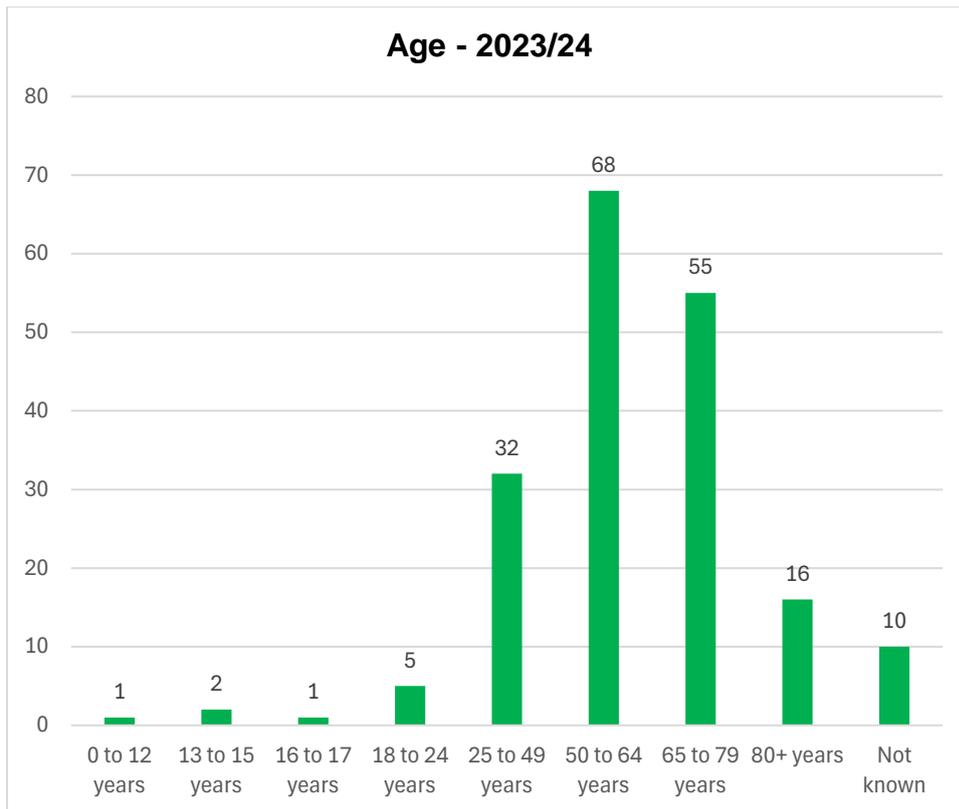
8. Demographic profile of people contacting the helpline

Up to 193 of our enquirers added at least one indicator of their demographic profile – the most common response was regarding their gender.

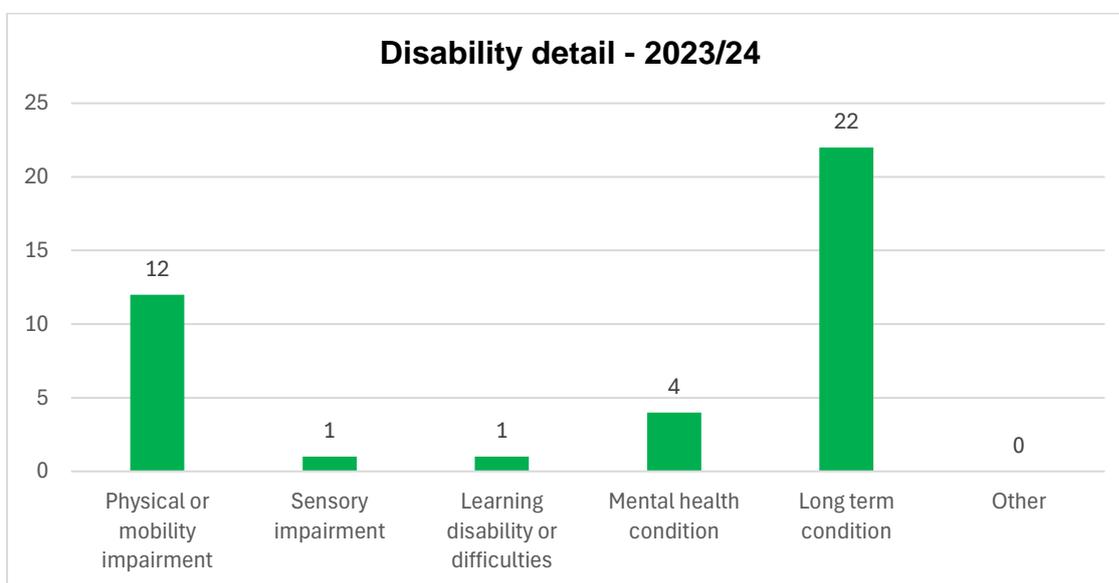
Of those contacting the helpline, and who provided their demographic data, most were women (131 or 68%)², of a White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh background (81 or 80%), and between the age of 50 and 64 years (64 or 34%).



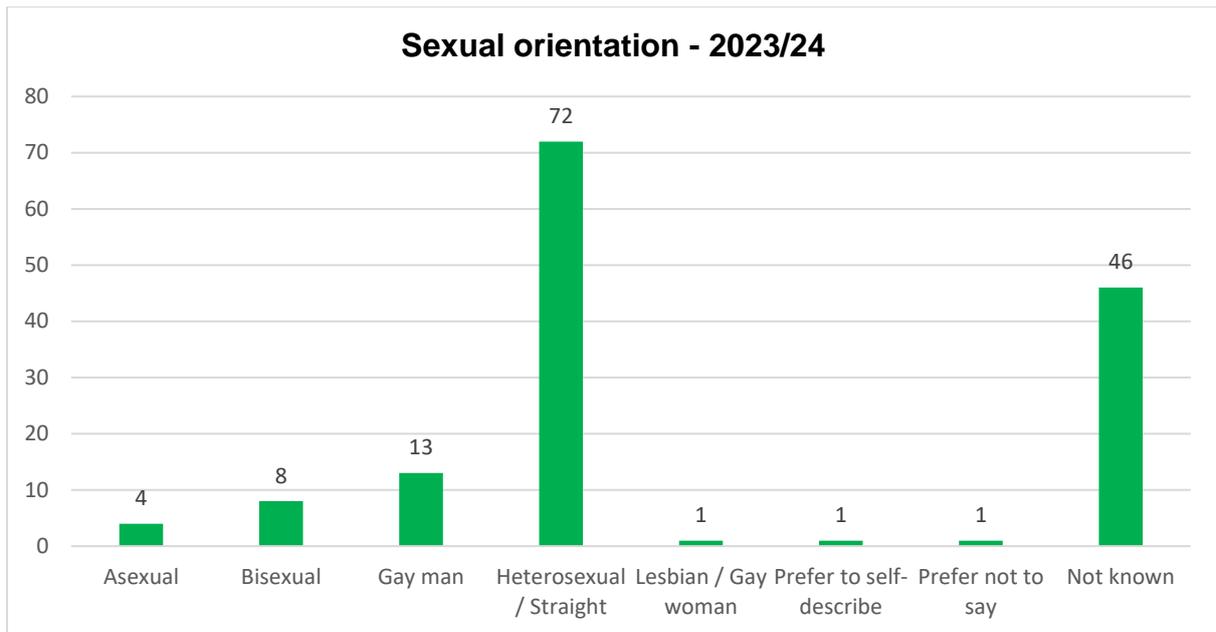
² % calculated from those that provided an answer to this question.



Just over one-third (64 or 38%) had a disability, and 22 or 55% of those with a disability had a long-term condition.



The majority said their sex was the same as that assigned at birth (134 or 80%) and 72 or 49% said they were heterosexual, with a notable 46 or 32% saying 'not known'.



The questions on marital and civil partnership status, pregnancy, and religion showed fewer responses to the questions above. Nonetheless, marital and civil partnership status and pregnancy are of particular value because they are rarely asked in other studies.

