



Migrant healthcare experiences

Humber and North Yorkshire

healthwatch

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Report published in June 2024

Background

This report provides a summary of feedback that local Healthwatch across York, North Yorkshire and Hull have recently heard from people.

We listened to people at events, through phone calls, emails and our online feedback form.

We used the simple dictionary definition of migrant, namely a person who has moved from one place to another. We share anything we have heard from:

- People who are visiting the UK temporarily, for work, leisure or education purposes
- People who have come to the UK under other visa schemes such as the two Ukraine visa schemes for those affected by the war in Ukraine
- Refugees who have been forced to flee their country due to persecution, war or violence
- Asylum seekers who have requested protection as refugees but have yet to receive a decision on their claim



Feedback from York

Dentistry issues for migrants

People have shared frustrations with being unable to access dental care since arriving in the UK.

Personal Story: "I can't access an NHS dentist and can't afford a private one"



"I'm a single mum of a teen, on a Homes for Ukraine visa. I've experienced regular dental pain for a few months already. Check-up result: around £1,000 for treatment of teeth and gums needed. It's just not affordable for me."

Explored options:

"I tried to contact many dental clinics to become an NHS patient. I was told that the waiting list was for at least two years.

I'm not eligible for a financial plan from the clinic.

I was refused a credit card and overdraft from my bank because of a low credit score, no credit history and my status.

111 doesn't solve the issue. From what I understood I could get some urgent help if in terrible pain. They would do some emergency manipulations and send me to seek further help from private dentists.

I considered going abroad, but there were no affordable options found.

The issue is worsening and needs to be dealt with. The dull pain doesn't leave anymore. I'm afraid it will lead to a root canal issue if not or losing teeth. If I could please get notified if any dental clinic will be able to accept new NHS patients, that would be a great help!"

Story shared with Healthwatch York by email in February 2024



Painful braces that need removing

A woman at a hotel in York accommodating refugees is experiencing pain and difficulty eating due to braces on her teeth. After an unsuccessful visit to York Hospital, she called 111 again to schedule a dentist appointment.

They were told nothing could be done unless they went privately. They contacted Healthwatch York for assistance. They then contacted the local NHS who suggested getting seen by an orthodontist at Orthokind York for braces removal. Refugee Action York helped cover additional costs through their hardship fund.

Story shared with Healthwatch York in December 2023

Lack of interpreters for GP appointments

Healthwatch York are currently looking at primary care services across the city. Primary care services provide the first point of contact in the healthcare system, acting as the ‘front door’ of the NHS. Primary care includes general practice, community pharmacy, dental, and opticians.

Healthwatch York are asking people through a survey to tell them the best thing about their GP practice and to share one thing they would like to change.

There have been two responses so far from refugees living in a hotel. Both said the GP comes to the hotel which is convenient and means it is easy to see him. However, the need for translators/interpreters was raised as they are not provided so family members must translate.

Similarly, at a drop-in session with Refugee Action York no-one spoken to had ever been offered interpreters for appointments with GP practices. One person’s daughter was asked to translate and at another appointment the GP used Google translate.

Mixed experiences of hospital care

Some people who have been in York on holiday have shared positive experiences of care. However, negative feedback about feelings of discrimination when attending A&E and lack of care from midwives has also been raised.

Great service

Person is on holiday from Canada and realised they hadn't brought some prescription eye drops. They arrived and were sent to the GP out of hours service where it said there was a nine hour wait. But they waited less than 30 minutes, saw a great doctor and were given a prescription for the eye drops that they were about to go and pick up. They felt it was a great service.

Story shared with Healthwatch York (in person) in April 2024

Discrimination

Person's friend went to A&E with her daughter due to a hot water burn on the child. The mother is Brazilian. She felt like she was being blamed for the child's injury. She felt that she was treated poorly and almost accused of being a bad mother due to her ethnicity. When her husband arrived who is from Trinidad with darker skin, she feels the treatment was even worse and felt judged because of who they are.

Story shared with Healthwatch York in April 2024

Inadequate care from the midwife

A woman experienced a late term miscarriage after finding out her baby had passed away a week prior. She believes the inadequate care she received from her midwife may have contributed to her child's death. Despite being seven months pregnant, she only met with the midwife once on the 13th of November and didn't have any further appointments for six weeks. She had to go to the asylum hotel in York where doctors, not her midwife, performed a scan of her baby.

On the 5th of January she met with the midwife and the midwife told her she needed a scan and would call her back. She waited for the call from the midwife but did not get any call back. On the 10th of January she called the midwife but there was no reply. She texted the midwife who replied that she would check for a scan for her and let her know but again there was no call back.

She had an appointment with the midwife on the 12th of January, but she never showed up or responded to her text. The midwife unexpectedly showed up at the hotel on the 16th without an appointment. The baby, born at 2.29kg, passed away before she found out. She believes proper care was lacking and she did not receive any vitamins.

Story shared with Healthwatch York in January 2024

Difficulties staff face when supporting asylum seekers/refugees

York Hospital staff in paediatrics are struggling to help asylum seeker children receiving treatment in the city. Refugee Action York has informed them that asylum seekers, both children and adults, are primarily focused on securing their legal status.

Refugee Action York struggles to support refugees and asylum seekers in engaging with health professionals due to the uncertainty of being moved within the UK at any time. This makes disclosing health concerns difficult for asylum seekers as they are unable to build trusting ongoing relationships with health professionals.

Hospital staff also said they are aware that current debates in the media about refugees and asylum seekers can influence other staff members in their approach to providing care for this extremely vulnerable group.

Issues with transport to chemotherapy

Hospital staff working within cancer care raised concerns about transport for people receiving chemotherapy who live in York and are therefore expected to make their own way there. They do not live far enough away to routinely qualify for transport. Staff at the hospital have found a solution but it may not be a long term, universal fix.

Feedback from North Yorkshire

A project exploring barriers to healthcare and vaccine hesitancy amongst migrant communities*, was undertaken totalling 53 responses (via a survey and interviews). Most people were from Poland, Romania and Ukraine (39) with the rest from Latvia, UK and Portugal. Key findings are outlined below.

People returning to home countries for healthcare

People mentioned that they had to go back to their home countries to seek healthcare (notably some people had to go back to Ukraine) as they faced long waits in the UK, particularly for dental care.

Language barriers in appointments

The main barriers to attending appointments that were raised were the appointment being virtual and language barriers/translation issues.

Lack of trust and understanding

Patients feel doctors are guessing without tests, not listening, and being dismissive. Many lack understanding of healthcare processes.

People are unsure which vaccines are needed

Many participants did not know which vaccines they or their children are eligible for. People also said they would like better access to their own vaccination records as they cannot remember which vaccines they've had.

People don't feel vaccines are needed

People thought that vaccines are not always needed. Some thought that a healthy lifestyle is much more effective than vaccines. Others thought that vaccines are more important for some people (vulnerable people) as opposed to the general population.

People also noted they would like to see statistics around vaccine efficacy as they cannot just trust doctors.

Side effects of vaccines

Side effects of vaccinations have affected people's perception of them, as some mentioned children getting side effects after childhood immunisations which have led them to be scared to vaccinate their children.

Some reported children being affected by vaccines and "progressing slower" than their peers.

Information about vaccines not in the right language

Some people talked about receiving information on vaccines, mainly leaflets or online resources. However, most people did not receive information in their language (most resources were in English) although they could understand the information they received. People used Google Translate to read the resources and some felt that people who do not speak English would struggle.

* Note: this project was undertaken by North Yorkshire Council



Feedback from Hull

Language barriers

Many migrants are facing severe language barriers when attending GP and hospital appointments with a lack of interpreters available. This adds to the complications and problems being faced on a regular basis.

Unequal care

Some people have also said they feel that services tend to prioritise English speaking patients over non-native English-speaking patients.

Information only in English

Some said updates and cancellations are often sent out in English from hospitals and GP's.



Personal story



“I think it is different from one hospital to another. The hospital I’m registered I face difficulties about the appointment and sometimes when you ask for emergency appointments. They will not book it for me and there is a lot to say that I can’t write it in email. My friends are registering with another hospital and they always say that they are fine with everything.”



Migrant volunteer from Iraq

Personal story



“I am struggling to access an appointment with my GP. When I speak to the GP, they do not provide me with an interpreter. I need an interpreter for any communication.”





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