



# Making a GP appointment

**healthwatch**  
Southend

# Introduction

We heard many people saying the way in which they make GP appointments was difficult. The Covid-19 pandemic made every practice change the way appointments were made and took place.

We asked people what they thought about using a computer or mobile phone to make appointments. Not everyone can or wants to use them to make appointments, but it can free up phone lines for other patients to reach the surgery.

The NHS wants GPs to make more use of online or virtual consultations – where patients use their computer or phone. Locally, groups of practices, called primary care networks, are making plans to improve access.

326 people replied to the survey on our website. We know that we will not have heard from people who cannot use the internet.

# The Delivery Plan for Recovering Access

In May 2023, NHS England published the **Delivery plan for recovering access to primary care**.

This recognised the changes forced on general practice and patients by Covid-19, as well as patients' frustration at long waits to speak to a receptionist, only to find no appointments were available. The Plan has four main aims:

1. Helping patients take more control – more use of the NHS app, or access to services from a community pharmacy, for example
2. Better access to the surgery through improved telephone systems and better booking systems
3. More funding for general practice
4. Improving the way GPs and hospitals etc work together, so that GPs have more time for patients

# What did we ask?

We asked people whether they could use a computer or mobile phone to contact the surgery for appointments, and what they thought about it.

Where practices were not using online system, we asked whether this would be helpful for patients.

So that we could also see if different groups felt the same way, we also asked about issues like disability or long term conditions like asthma.

# What did you tell us?

We looked at all the feedback you gave us.

The charts on the next slides try to pull out the key messages.

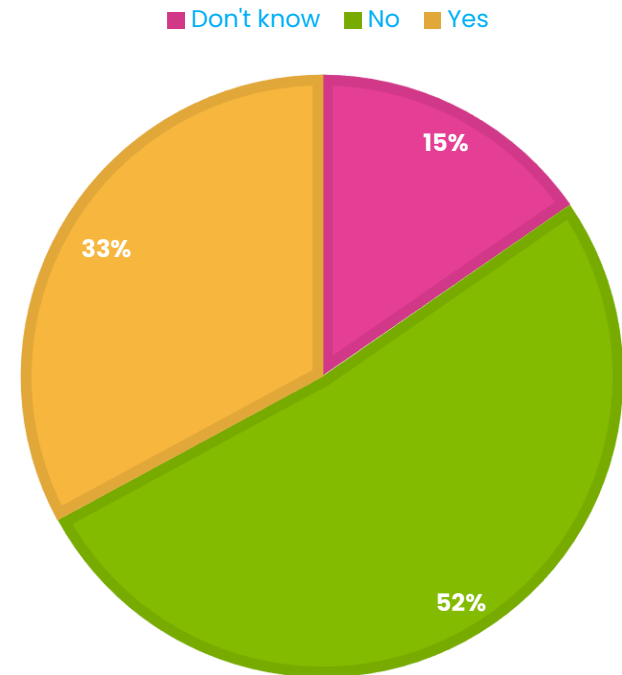
The last section of the slides includes some of the actual comments you shared with us about making appointments.

We have also included some results from the National GP Patient Survey, which was released on 13 July 2023.

At the end, we look at who responded, to see if we are reaching across our community.

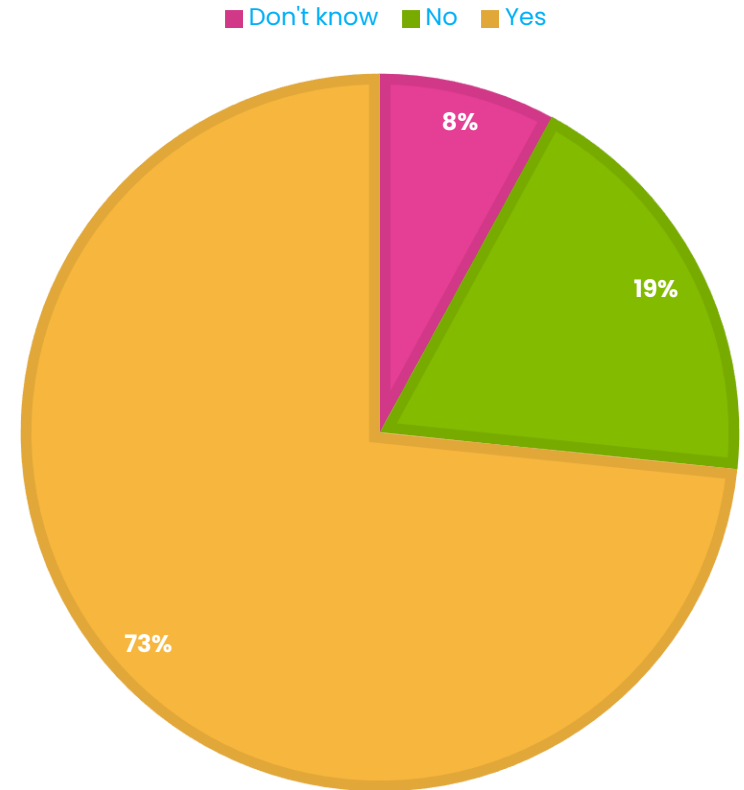
# Does your practice encourage you to contact them on-line (by computer/tablet/mobile phone) to make an appointment?

At the time of writing, only one-third of respondents were clear that they could make appointments on-line.



# Would you find it easier to contact your GP for an appointment if you could do it on your computer/tablet/mobile phone?

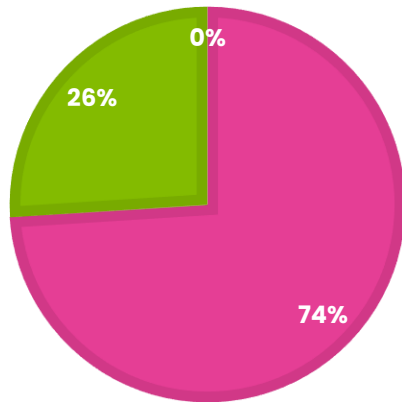
The answer here was an overwhelming “yes”. Of course, this was an on-line survey, so people who replied would probably be more confident. However, almost 1 in 5 were not convinced.



# Would you find it easier to make appointments online?

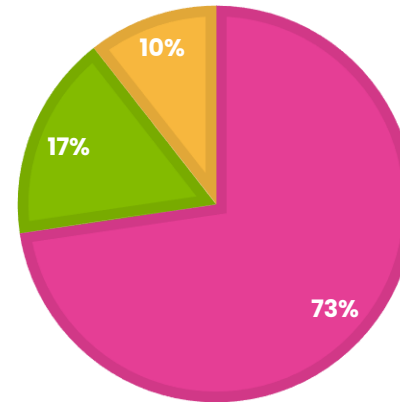
## DISABLED

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know



## NOT DISABLED

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know



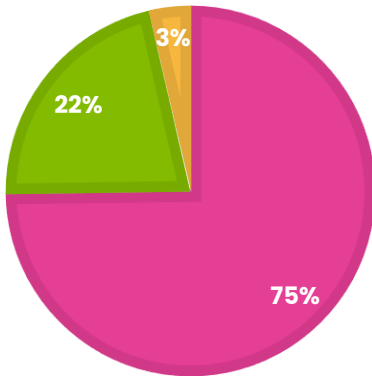
About the same percentages of patients in both categories were in favour of online booking. More patients with a disability were clearly against online booking, than those without a disability, where 10% were uncertain.



# Would you find it easier to make appointments online?

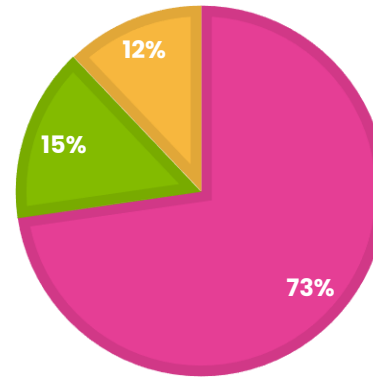
## WITH LONG TERM CONDITION

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know



## NO LONG TERM CONDITION

■ Yes ■ No ■ Don't know

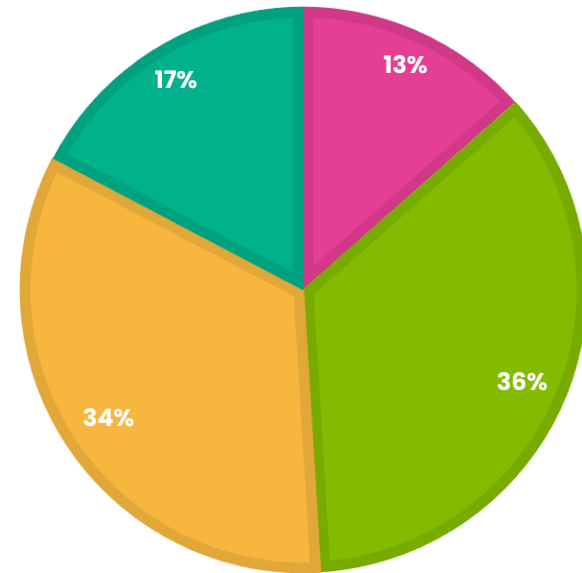


The results for people saying they had a long term condition are similar to those with a disability.

# How easy is it to use the online form to contact your practice?

Where patients did book appointments on-line, about half of them found it extremely easy or very easy. Practices need to understand why 17% of patients found it hard to use the forms on-line – are the forms too long? Too complicated?

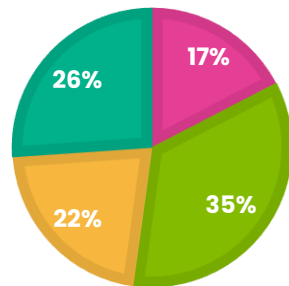
■ Extremely easy ■ Very easy ■ Not so easy ■ Really not easy



# How easy is it to use the online form to contact your practice?

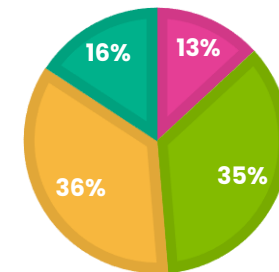
## DISABLED

■ Extremely easy ■ Very easy ■ Not so easy ■ Really not easy



## NOT DISABLED

■ Extremely easy ■ Very easy  
■ Not so easy ■ Really not easy

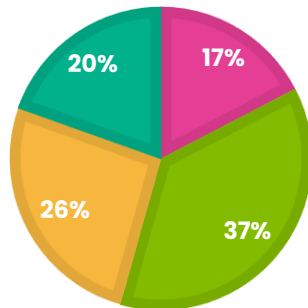


Although slightly more people who said they had a disability found it extremely or very easy to use online forms, compared to people without a disability, 26% of those with a disability found it really not easy to use them. This compares to 16% of people without a disability. Practices need to work with disabled patients to make this easier.

# How easy is it to use the online form to contact your practice?

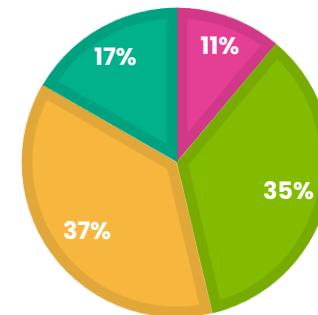
## HAVE A LONG TERM CONDITION

■ Extremely easy ■ Very easy  
■ Not so easy ■ Really not easy



## NO LONG TERM CONDITION

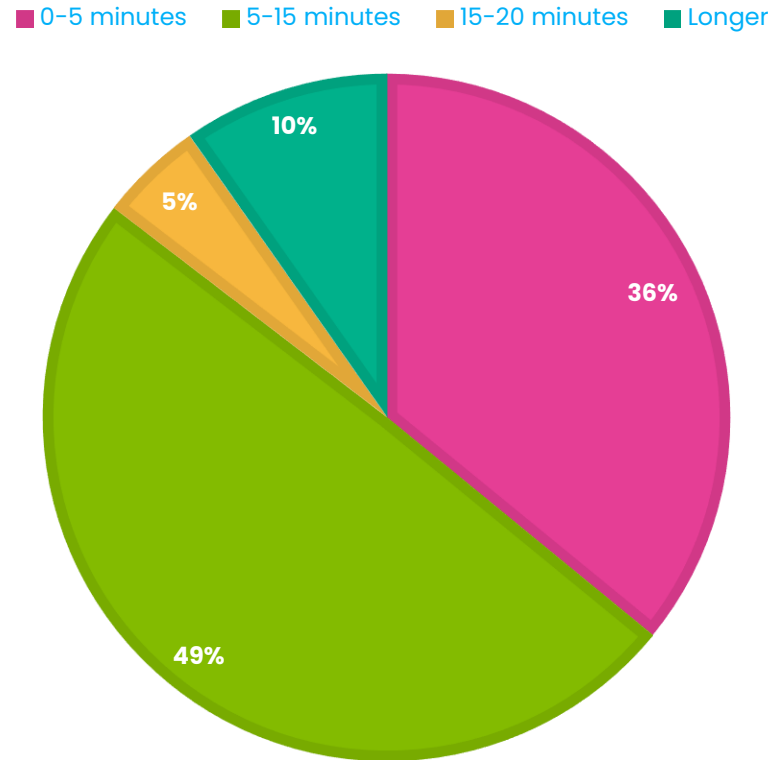
■ Extremely easy ■ Very easy ■ Not so easy ■ Really not easy



More people with a long term condition (eg diabetes) really struggle with on-line forms (20% v 17%), although more find it extremely or very easy to use (54% v 46%). Given the reliance many patients with long term conditions have on their practices, we need to understand why 20% of them find the form unhelpful.

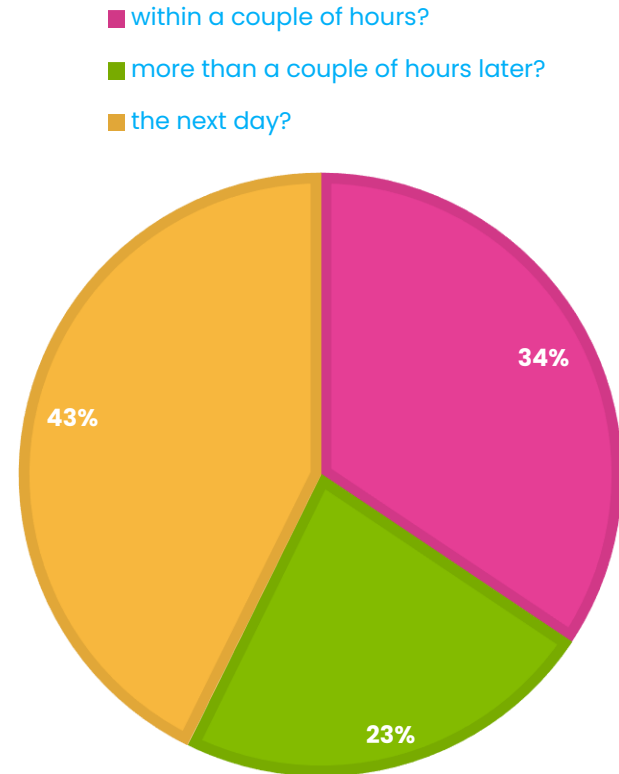
# How long does it take to use the on-line form?

85% of patients were able to complete the forms within 15 minutes, but 10% needed more than 20 minutes. Times could depend on a number of things, such as ease of using technology, or the amount of information a patient needed to include.



# How quickly did you get a response?

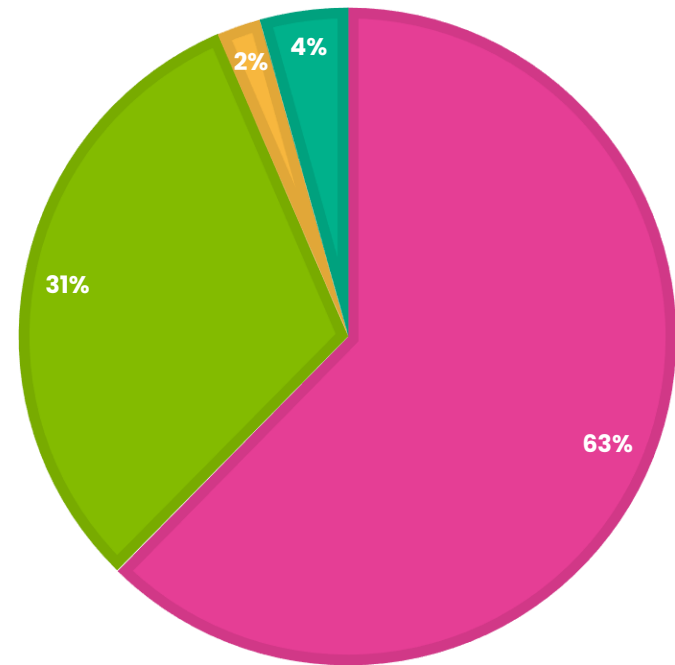
Just over half of patients seem to have had a response on the same day. Of course, this may depend on what time of day they submitted their request.



# Who was your consultation with?

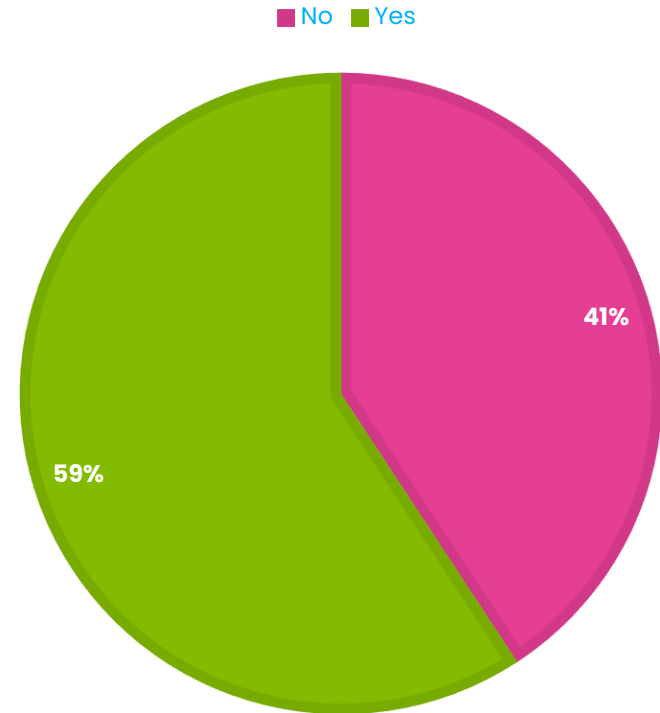
6 out of 10 people went on to have a consultation with a general practitioner and 1 in three with a nurse.

■ a GP? ■ a nurse? ■ a pharmacist? ■ a physiotherapist?



# Were you happy with the outcome?

Just under 60% of patients said they were happy with the outcome of the on-line process. This still leaves 4 out of 10 patients who were not happy with the outcome.





# Patient feedback

We asked patients to give any other feedback on contacting their practice. Common messages included:

- The 8am rush to get through on the phone each morning
- The length of time waiting for a call to be answered (with some commenting on the cost of lengthy calls)
- Phone systems which cut callers off
- Getting through, only to be told that no appointments were left and to ring back the following day
- Getting an appointment, but having to wait what felt like a long time
- Patients who were able to go to the surgery were positive about receptionists
- Not being able to see a GP, but seeing a nurse or pharmacist instead

The next slides are quotes from people who replied to our survey.

# Patient feedback

*“My surgery uses e-consult to make appointments which I find really annoying as you have to repeat yourself on the online form . It asks you to self diagnose & sometimes the questions asked are difficult to answer. There is an outline of a body for you to circle where you have a problem but it doesn't allow to always pinpoint the area After taking ages to complete the form , the message at the end said that e-consult couldn't help & I should contact the surgery. So frustrating! I rang the surgery only to be told by the receptionist that e-consult was wrong & I shouldn't be calling ! She told me she would have to fill out the form online and asked me all the questions I'd already filled in myself. It's exasperating & you don't need that when you are worry about your health.”*

*“I don't really know how to make an appointment now. I have used the online form twice for different things and both times it said it couldn't help and I needed to speak to someone. The surgery phone says I need to use the online system. I am going to go into the surgery next week when I am off work and find out how I make an appointment.”*

# Patient feedback

*"The practice is easy to contact on the phone. It's easy to get a face to face apt to see my GP. Me and my husband prefer to have face to face contact"*

*"The mixture of phone & computer works well"*

*"We are pleased that the surgery receptionists answer the phone promptly and are very polite and helpful"*

*"They have just started to use the E Consult and they don't push you to use, but encourage you to try - very efficient"*

*"I have used the econsult service a number of times and found it to be excellent"*

*"Much easier to use online than ringing - get the right response"*

*"I'm computer literate so was able to complete the E consult form but it was lengthy and a bit repetitive"*

*"Excellent service only concern is that some patients might find this difficult and might not have use of a computer but hopefully they have help for these patients"*

# Patient feedback

*“The questions on the on-line form don’t allow for things that don’t ‘fit’ the criteria-so many times I’ve lie about my symptoms to be able to move onto the next question.*

*Another patient I know doesn’t have access to on-line and feels that the system doesn’t cater for her, as I have to fill in the forms for her. The lack of privacy is not acceptable.*

*Would not recommend this as a way forward - maybe I’m the wrong generation, but I’m not dead yet, so my needs should still be met with a face-to-face meeting with a doctor by an appointment made on the telephone”*

*“It's like scoring tickets for Glastonbury to get through at 8am or 11am. Takes 2 people on 2 mobile phones (landline ended up costing us £22 in redials) to get a telephone call, at some point during the day, so if you are working or if you are driving when they call, you miss the appt.”*

# GP Patient Survey 2023

## Your overall experience of making an appointment



Each year, a sample of GP patients are surveyed about their experiences of their practice.

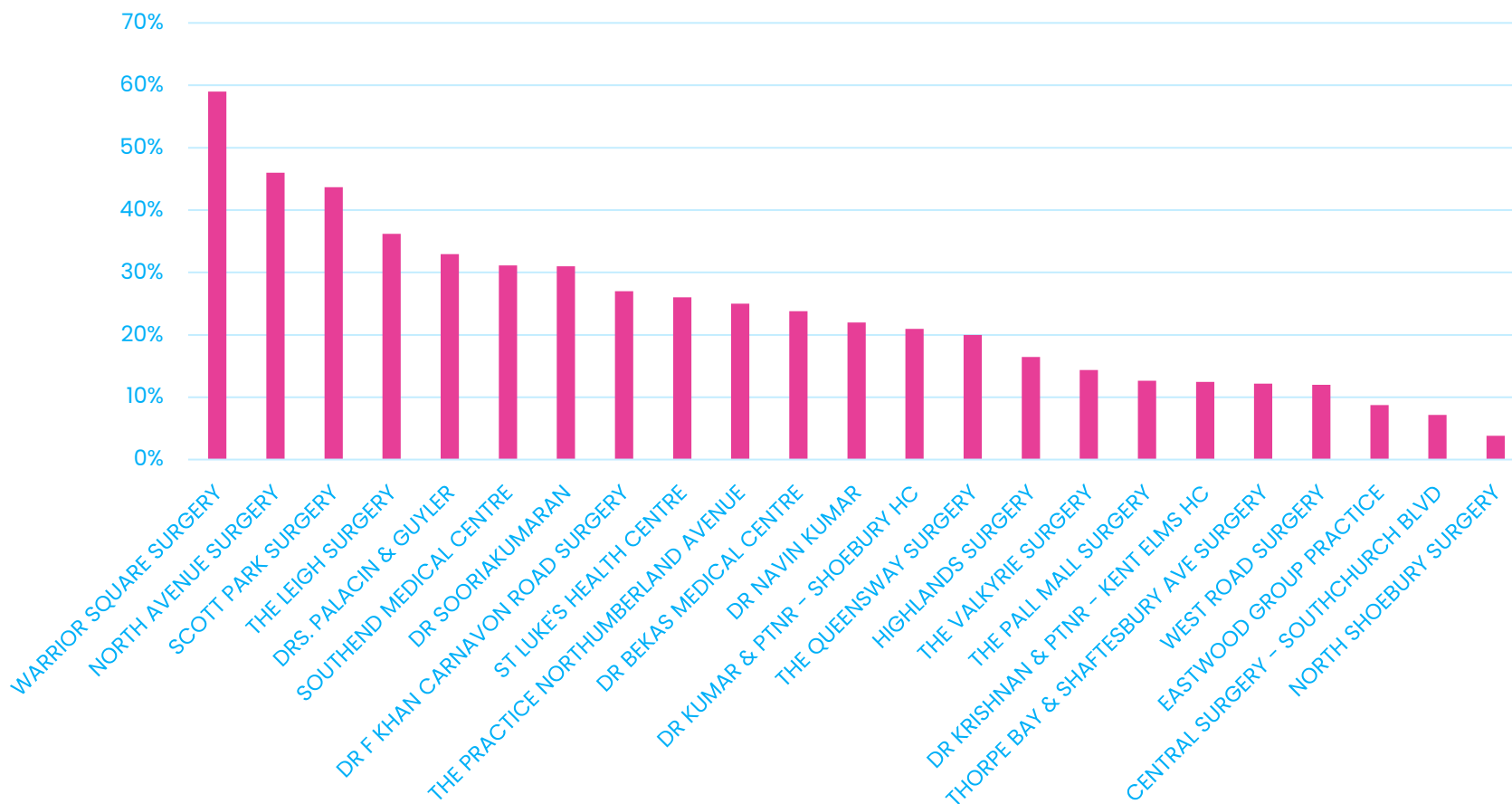
This chart shows the responses for the 4 primary care networks in Southend; these are groupings of local practices, working together.

The next slide shows all the practices in Southend, where patients felt they had a very good experience overall. This shows the range of positive scores.

Full results can be found here:  
<https://gp-patient.co.uk/practices-search>

# GP Patient Survey 2023

Overall experience of making an appointment – very good



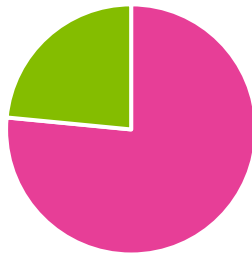
# Conclusions

We want to share this feedback with Mid & South Essex Integrated Care Board, which funds GP services. Plans are being developed in Southend to improve access and we hope that these responses will help.

- All patients must be offered a choice of how to make appointments
- Where patients have been told there are no appointments available that day, what safeguards are in place to ensure that they are not stuck in a “revolving door”?
- Practices need to work with their patient participation groups to get a good understanding of how patients view the internet and what concerns they may have about using it to contact their practice.
- Again, working with their PPGs, practices need to understand how the full range of functions could be introduced – triage, for example – for those who are happy with more online services

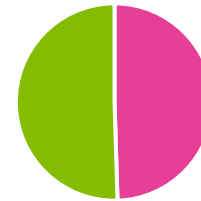
# Who responded?

Do you have a disability?



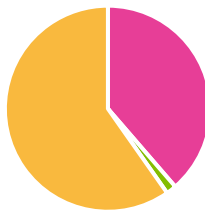
■ No ■ Yes

Do you have a long term condition, like asthma?



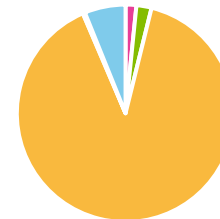
■ No ■ Yes

What is your gender?



■ Man ■ Prefer not to say ■ Woman

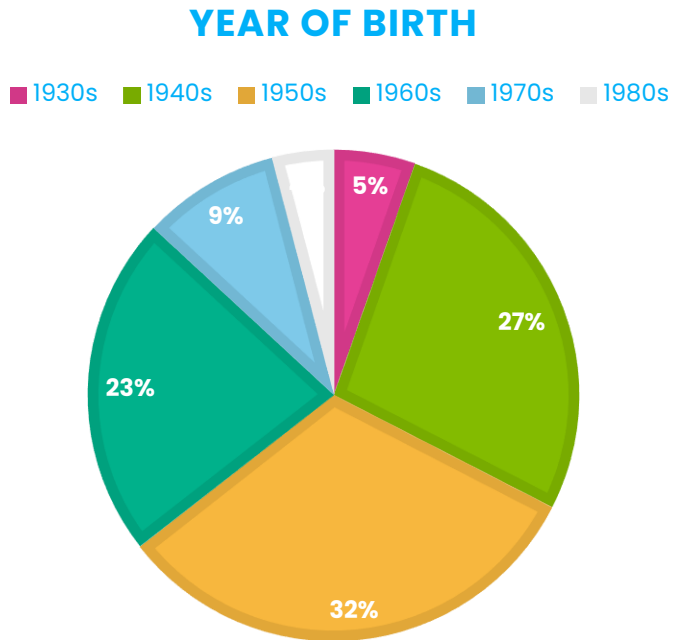
What is your sexual orientation?



■ Bisexual ■ Gay man  
■ Heterosexual/straight ■ Lesbian/gay woman  
■ Prefer not to say



# Who responded?



85% of responses came from white people

# For more information

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