

Homeless and Rough Sleepers Report

December 2023



Engaging
Communities
Solutions

healthwatch
Walsall

Contents	Page
Introduction	2
What we did	2
Who took part	2
Findings	5
Acknowledgements	5

Introduction

Healthwatch Walsall is the independent voice of the public in health and social care issues in Walsall. Healthwatch Walsall collect feedback from the public in Walsall about their experiences of using health and social care services and use that feedback to work with service providers and commissioners to find ways to improve services.

Healthwatch Walsall was successful in a bid for a microgrant from the Black Country ICB to undertake engagement with the homeless and rough sleepers in the Borough of Walsall. The aim of the work was to ascertain the views around planned and urgent care.

What we did?

We visited homeless and rough sleepers on the streets within the Borough and held a focus group at The Glebe Centre on 14 December 2024. This event was promoted through the Centre and by the Outreach Workers.

In order to encourage as much participation as possible we offered a small incentive to take part in this work.

Who took part?

5 people in total took part.

Ethnicity

4 White

1 Mixed or multiple ethnic groups

Age Category

2 x 30-39

2 x 40-49

1 x 50-59

Gender

4 Male

1 Female

One of the service users was diabetic, **one** had mental health issues and was alcohol dependent and **one** person told us they had been homeless for 5 years which was out of choice.

Question 1 – Patient Experience

When asked – What aspects of your experience, as a patient, are most important to you when you are feeling unwell?” We were told the following:

- A&E Waiting times
- Good communication
 - No language barriers
 - Being understood
 - Being listened to
 - Not being scared to speak up
- Treated with respect
- Not being discriminated against
- Transport
- Being warm
- Feeling safe and good security in place if the public are causing me distress
- Staff understanding my circumstances
- Getting a change of clothes due to my personal hygiene
- Transport
- Family support
- Make sure my state of mind is clear
- Access to my medical records
- Having a good rapport with the people who are looking after me

Two service users had a good experience of emergency care and praised the service they received when they had visited A&E Department at Walsall Manor Hospital.

The importance of being understood/understanding what you are being told is paramount as **“need to understand what is being said about own health”**.

We were also told that on one occasion a service user had communication issues and had asked to speak to an English-speaking Doctor. They were then accused of being racist. There was also a comment that there is a need to be persistent in order to get understood and when you are feeling unwell this can lead to frustration. One service user told us that they had been in this situation and had walked out without treatment.

Question 2 – Deciding which healthcare services to use

When asked “When you’re unwell, how would you decide which service to use” we were told the following:

- Would depend on what is wrong with me.
- If I felt really unwell, I would go to the Pharmacy.
- Would go to the Chemist first as things have changed and Pharmacists can do a lot more.
- Would have to by dying to go to A&E.
- Would only go to A&E if I had a broken bone.
- Try not to use emergency healthcare services, it would have to be really serious.
- Use Homeless Charity to get advise on where to go.
- NHS 111
- Would be signposted by my Church
- Sometimes the Soup Kitchen provides services and support
- Referred by mental health outreach worker
- Go to the Manor Hospital and wait to be seen (if I have the money to get there)
- As a diabetic without a GP, I find myself having to go to the Hospital a few times a week to get my insulin jab. It is important I get it early because if I don't I become very ill very quickly.
- Go straight to the Walsall Manor Hospital A&E due to not having a GP.
- At least in A&E I know I will be seen, and I will be warm
- When I have gone to a Pharmacy in the past, because of my drug history they tell me to go to A&E and wait.
- I get advice from people I speak to in everyday life.
- Word of mouth

Question 3 – Barriers to accessing the care that you need

When asked “What has stopped you from accessing care and treatment when you’ve needed it” we were told the following:

- Transport, particularly getting back from the Hospital.
- Communication and language barriers and need to be persistent in order to be understood and to understand what is being told about your own health
- Waiting times
- Lack of GP appointments
- Not having a mobile phone
- No registered GP
- Lack of money
- Financial costs of getting to the Hospital
- Not wanting to give up a paid bed to go to the Hospital
- As a homeless person with a history of drug problems, I have found that the Hospitals make it harder for people to get the help they need as they say it's down to mental health and will not treat people until they have got over their drug or alcohol problem.
- Being judged.
- Not being able to access mail from NHS as I have no address.
- Not being able to get my insulin jab because I have no GP which means no prescription.
- Depression due to circumstances
- Having to try and raise money for food first.

When asked “What steps should be taken by the NHS to ensure that everyone has equal access to emergency or planned care” we were told the following:

- More staff
- Less language barriers
- Reduce fear of being accused of being racist
- NHS tries its best to ensure equal access

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Walsall would like to thank The Glebe Centre for their support in promoting the focus group, to hosting the event on 14 December 2023 and for their hospitality and welcome.

A huge thanks go to the service users who gave up their time to share their views.

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Walsall

Share your health or social care services experiences
by visiting our 'Have Your Say' section of our website
<https://www.healthwatchwalsall.co.uk/share-your-views>



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