

The value of listening

Healthwatch Cornwall
Annual Report 2023–2024



healthwatch
Cornwall

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Since I joined in December 2023 Healthwatch Cornwall has been demonstrating the significant impact of listening to people's views on their care. By amplifying these voices, particularly from those facing the most serious health inequalities, we are helping the NHS unlock the power of community feedback and drive meaningful improvements in health services.

Debbie Gilbert Chief Executive Officer, Healthwatch Cornwall



Message from our Chair

My journey with Healthwatch Cornwall began in October 2023 when I joined the Board of Directors after nearly two years as a community volunteer. It is now my great privilege to present the Chairman's Report for Healthwatch Cornwall for the year 2023-24.

During my time as a volunteer, I developed a deep appreciation for the remarkable work undertaken by our small but committed team at Healthwatch Cornwall, each role making its own contribution to our research projects. Their exceptional efforts have significantly influenced both local and national health and social care policies, and their dedication continues to inspire.

Our Partnership Boards have facilitated direct representation for their members, ensuring their firsthand experience is positive and that their issues are heard and addressed. Additionally, the stories and perceptions of people with lived experience have strengthened the boards' activities and initiatives, ensuring the outcomes are relevant and effective. Their input has helped to tailor services and interventions to better meet the actual needs of the community, by ensuring that their perspectives and insights are directly represented in discussions and decision-making processes.

Our comprehensive research findings, detailed elsewhere in this annual report, have had a significant impact on Healthwatch England's national recommendations. I am particularly proud of how our findings have shaped national policy, especially in the realm of maternity services. Our research has provided evidence and insights that have directly influenced improvements and reforms, ensuring that the voices and experiences of our community are at the forefront of national health and social care discussions.

These accomplishments are particularly noteworthy given the strategic transitions we navigated this year. Following the CEO's departure, the Board, led by Chair Anna Pascoe, managed the transition until the new CEO Debbie Gilbert's arrival in December 2023.

Debbie's appointment has already had a significant, positive impact. Under her leadership, we have relocated to new premises, welcomed new team members, secured a new five-year contract (signed in May), and streamlined our staff structures to better position us for future success.



'To everyone who has contributed to our work – whether as part of our team, as a volunteer, or by sharing your views – thank you. Your involvement has driven meaningful change, and your efforts are greatly valued. For service providers, your willingness to listen and respond is equally appreciated.

The next five years will undoubtedly present both opportunities and challenges. With NHS and social care services under considerable strain, and with the potential for new government policies and funding changes, our role remains critical. We are committed to being here for you, championing your stories and ensuring your voices are heard by government and service providers alike.



Keith Judkins, Chairperson

About us

Healthwatch Cornwall is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.



Our values are:

- **Listening** to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- **Including** everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- **Analysing** different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- **Acting** on feedback and driving change.
- **Partnering** with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.



Year in review

Reaching out:

780 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1068 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and the cost-of-living crisis.



Making a difference to care:

We published

2 reports

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was

Emergency Department Feedback Report

which highlighted the struggles people face to determine whether people are seeking out advice from other services prior to arrival at ED, and anything that might improve their experiences whilst there.



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

5

outstanding volunteers who gave up **94 hours** to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.
In 2023 – 24 we received

£496,500



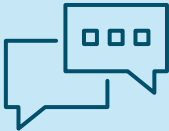



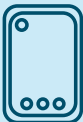

We currently employ

8 staff

who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring	 <p>We drew attention to the “hidden waiting list” created by delays to GP referrals.</p>	 <p>We took steps to get people the support they needed, whilst driving impactful changes in local healthcare practices.</p>
Summer	 <p>We responded to feedback on the lengthy waits within the emergency departments, pressures on healthcare and healthcare services .</p>	 <p>Our E & D report not only provided an opportunity for other service providers to use our information and enhance their services but also fostered closer collaboration with those providers</p>
Autumn	 <p>We held an Ageing Well Workshop to highlight common age-related health issues and preventive measures to help seniors manage their health proactively.</p>	 <p>We used this feedback to inform our future strategy for our Partnership Boards and enhance services.</p>
Winter	 <p>We collected feedback from over 400 individuals about the inequalities worsened by financial hardships.</p>	 <p>We wrote a report on the impact of the soaring cost of living on healthcare.</p>

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborated with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) & other organisations to ensure the experiences of people in Cornwall influence decisions made about services.

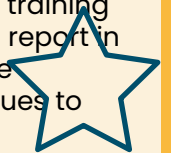
This year we've worked with organisations across Cornwall to achieve:



Achievement One: Healthwatch Cornwall collaborated with the ICB to amplify community voices at significant events including GP surgeries, Pride, and with Hearing Loss Cornwall. Over 40 participants shared invaluable healthcare insights at this event, culminating in substantial service enhancement recommendations..

Achievement Two: Police Sub Group

In June 2023, the Autism Partnership formed a working group to review Devon & Cornwall Police interactions with neurodivergent individuals. Concerns were raised about officers' lack of training in communicating with Autistic people, especially during distress. The group presented a report in September highlighting issues and good practices, which was then shared with the Police Community Reference Group. The sub-group, now including various stakeholders, continues to address these concerns and will share findings with relevant bodies.



Achievement Three: Natalie Swann, Research and Evidence Manager at Healthwatch Cornwall, attended the NHS 75th anniversary at Westminster Abbey for her work on **the 'Hear Our Voice' dementia report**, which included a survey, focus groups, interviews, and 40 recommendations now part of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Dementia Improvement Programme.

Achievement four: The Cost of Living Crisis and the Department for Work and Pensions Working Group

Members of the Learning Disability and Autism Partnership Boards formed a Working Group to address DWP service accessibility. They submitted questions, advocated for improvements, and saw progress such as autism accreditation for Job Centres and improved site signage. The group continues to engage with the community and expand its efforts.





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Emergency Department report

Through our role in collecting public feedback, we increasingly hear about the pressures on hospitals and health and care services. Locally and nationally, people face challenges accessing services like GPs, mental health care, Minor Injuries Units, and social care, often leading them to Emergency Departments. Public advice, such as the NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly 'Where is best for you this winter?' campaign, helps guide people to the right services, reducing avoidable pressures. However, long waits at Emergency Departments remain a concern. Improving the waiting experience, considering health equality, and addressing the impact of waiting lists for planned care are crucial areas for improvement.

In our project, we revisited the Emergency Department at Royal Cornwall Hospital (Treliske) using a revised methodology from 2016. Across two days we conducted 15 hours of observations and surveys. Informed by a pilot survey and discussions with the Patient Experience Team at Royal Cornwall Hospitals Trust, our focus was on patient experiences in waiting areas, particularly Majors One and Two. While not clinically validating conditions, we explored referral routes, NHS waiting list impacts, and facility conditions. This snapshot analysis informs future service improvements, including public advice campaigns.



87%

sought out information and advice from another service(s) before coming to ED, with only 13% of the 92 people we spoke with referring themselves (self-referral)

What difference did this make?

Our report aims to drive meaningful changes in healthcare services and public engagement by:

- Raising awareness about digital services for real-time MIU and emergency service updates, local pharmacy hours, GP availability, and health advice like the NHS Quicker App.
- Advocating for improved support and information for NHS waiting list patients, especially those accessing Emergency Departments.
- Highlighting the need for additional support for recent ED visitors.
- Promoting strategies to address health inequalities in urgent and emergency care access.
- Integrating patient feedback to meet NHS Long Term Plan goals and reduce access disparities.

Through these efforts, our report aims to make a tangible difference by informing policies and practices that enhance healthcare access, quality, and patient experiences across Cornwall.

Healthwatch Partnership Boards

Healthwatch Cornwall facilitate independent Partnership Boards that bring together individuals with personal health and social care experience and representatives from various organisations. These Boards collaborate with the local authority and Integrated Care Board (ICB) to co-produce local strategies and monitor their implementation. Their main goals include improving services through user-provider collaboration, involving service users in service development, valuing their expertise, celebrating achievements, and informing residents about service progress in Cornwall. The Boards create an engaging space for serious discussions.

Currently, Healthwatch Cornwall facilitates four Partnership Boards: Carers, Learning Disability, Autism, and Older Persons. Recognising a need for broader representation, a fifth Board for individuals with mental health experiences and supporting organisations will launch in Autumn 2024. Additionally, the Older Persons Partnership Board has been rebranded as 'Ageing Well' after consultations revealed a preference for a positive, proactive approach to ageing.

The Boards meet four times a year, with additional workshops, and operate inclusively in line with the Equality Act and the Nolan Act. Meetings are hybrid, allowing in-person and online participation, ensuring accessibility and flexibility. Agendas, minutes, and updates are available on the Healthwatch Cornwall website.

What difference did this make?

- **Collaborative Environment:** Service users and providers work together to improve health and social care services.
- **Inclusive Involvement:** Individuals with lived experience are involved in service development, ensuring services meet community needs.
- **Empowerment:** Provides a platform for individuals to voice concerns and influence healthcare decisions.
- **Enhanced Quality of Life:** These efforts collectively improve the quality of life for Cornwall's residents.

Healthwatch Cornwall's initiatives, such as launching the Mental Health Partnership Board in Autumn 2024, effectively address mental health needs. Rebranding the Older Persons Board to 'Ageing Well' promotes positive aging and reduces stigma. Hybrid meetings, accommodating both in-person and online participation, ensure broad accessibility. Transparency is maintained through online availability of meeting agendas, minutes, and updates. These efforts lead to better-informed policies and a more responsive healthcare system.



"I think that the learning disability partnership board has been through some change over the past couple of years.

'I feel the partnership board is growing stronger & stronger as changes have been made so that the board ensure people with a learning disabilities have a voice in what they do & holding those in charge to account'..

Steve D, Participant

Three ways we have made a difference in the community

Throughout our work we gather information about health inequalities by speaking to people whose experiences aren't often heard.

Creating empathy by bringing experiences to life

It's important for services to see the bigger picture. Gathering people's experiences at events like the Royal Cornwall Show creates empathy by humanising healthcare issues. Sharing personal stories and experiences allows decision makers to connect emotionally with the challenges faced by individuals. This firsthand perspective goes beyond statistics, making the impact tangible and immediate. It helps decision makers understand the real-life implications of their policies and actions, fostering empathy and prompting them to consider changes that directly benefit the community's health and well-being.



Getting Services to Involve the Public

Our commitment to public involvement is evident through initiatives like community consultations, public forums, and feedback surveys. By actively engaging local people, services can gain valuable insights into patient experiences and identify areas for improvement. For instance, Kernow Maternity Voices Partnership conducted the third 15 Steps for Maternity Challenge at Royal Cornwall Hospital Trust, gathering direct feedback from patients and families to enhance maternity services. This collaborative approach ensures that services are more responsive, equitable, and effective in meeting the needs of everyone in the community.



Improving care over time

Change takes time. We often work behind the scenes with services to consistently raise issues and bring about change.

Our Cost of Living report reveals the severe impact of rising costs on health and access to healthcare in Cornwall. Surveying over 400 residents, we found significant health inequalities, with low-income households hardest hit. These households have experienced a substantial decline in disposable income since 2019, and their living standards are not expected to recover until 2027. By highlighting these disparities, the report underscores the urgent need for targeted support and ongoing advocacy to address the critical challenges faced by our community.





Hearing from all communities

Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.

By actively engaging with diverse and underrepresented communities, we have ensured their voices are heard, leading to more inclusive and responsive services. Our outreach efforts, such as collaborating with Transparent Presence CIC and hosting events like the Pain Café and End Poverty Newquay Church, have fostered a greater sense of community and informed local NHS leaders and Integrated Care Systems about the unique needs and challenges these groups face.

Supporting Fisherman's Mission at Mevagissey

Healthwatch Cornwall actively engaged with the community at the Smile At Sea event, attentively listening to individuals' stories and experiences. By gathering and analysing their valuable feedback, we ensured that their voices were heard within the Patient Experience Group and communicated effectively to the Integrated Care Board (ICB). This effort underscores our commitment to incorporating public input into health and social care decision-making processes, ultimately driving improvements in service delivery and patient care.

Healthwatch Cornwall committed to:

- **Providing Clear Guidance:** helping navigate the dental care system, offering advice on where to find the services needed and how to access them easily.
- **Listening & Acting:** Your feedback is crucial. We make sure your voice is heard by healthcare leaders.
- **Bridging the Gap:** We're working hard to ensure everyone, especially those who might feel overlooked, gets the care and attention they deserve.

Attending and supporting the Transparent group, Truro

Healthwatch Cornwall actively participated in and facilitated the transgender event, offering valuable signposting and support within the community.

These include:

- **Attendance:** Healthwatch Cornwall's presence at the transgender event, indicating their commitment to engaging with and supporting the transgender community.
- **Support:** Providing information, resources, and guidance to attendees, aiming to address their healthcare needs and concerns.
- **Signposting:** Directing individuals to relevant services or support networks, ensuring they have access to information and assistance.
- **Community Engagement:** Attending and signposting at the event, we demonstrated our role in advocating for inclusive healthcare practices and supporting marginalised communities.

Healthwatch Cornwall's engagement with transgender and fisherman communities revealed significant challenges in accessing appropriate healthcare. Many transgender individuals reported administrative barriers and insensitive treatment during care, such as misgendering and lack of shared decision-making. Fishermen highlighted limited access to dental services, impacting their overall health and well-being.

Healthwatch is advocating for systemic improvements and better provider training to address these issues. By highlighting these concerns, Healthwatch Cornwall aims to ensure equitable access to respectful and comprehensive healthcare services for these marginalised communities in Cornwall. Healthwatch Cornwall continues to collaborate with NHS providers and GPs to address gaps in healthcare for marginalised communities.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- **Providing Up-to-Date Information:** We offer current, reliable information that people can trust, ensuring they stay informed about health and social care services in Cornwall.
- **Signposting to Essential Services:** We guide individuals to access the services they need, helping them navigate the healthcare system effectively and efficiently.
- **Supporting Carers:** We provide tailored advice and resources to both carers and those they care for, ensuring they receive the necessary support and assistance.
- **Enhancing Health Literacy:** We empower people with the knowledge to understand their healthcare options and make informed decisions about their wellbeing.

Collaboration with ICB at the Hearing Loss Centre, Camborne

It's essential that people have information around accessible health services.

Healthwatch Cornwall collaborated with Hearing Loss Cornwall to plan and deliver an engagement event for individuals with hearing loss. This initiative followed a "Your Story, Shapes Our Future" filmed experience produced with Hearing Loss Cornwall, highlighting the challenges a young man faced in accessing health services.

The event saw participation from the Integrated Care System (ICS), ICB engagement and communications, Healthwatch Engagement Team, the Royal Cornwall Hospital's Trust patient experience team, and the Primary Care Programme Support Manager.

Attendees shared diverse experiences and feedback about accessing health and care services in Cornwall, discussing both positive and negative aspects and suggesting improvements.

Frank* shared his struggles with isolation and loneliness; Sarah linked him with the Community Maker to find local groups offering BSL translation services.

The collaboration between HWC and ICS successfully provided a platform for individuals with hearing loss to voice their experiences and concerns, highlighting the importance of accessible health services.

*name changed

Health & Wellbeing Event with Truro JCP

Empowering Community Connections through Health & Wellbeing Initiatives

In collaboration with Truro Job Centre Plus (JCP), Healthwatch Cornwall (HWC) participated in a Health & Wellbeing event to provide information and gather data for the Cost of Living report. At the event, HWC staff engaged with attendees, offering support and completing surveys.

One attendee, Peter* shared his challenges with our officer. Initially signposted to a food bank, Peter felt undeserving of this support and revealed he was surviving on just one meal per day. Understanding his complex situation, our officer took further steps to assist him. Peter was signposted to his Mental Health Practitioner through his GP to address underlying issues.

Additionally, he was connected with Community Energy Plus to explore discounts on his energy bills. Our officer also informed him about free cookery classes to help him make the most of limited resources. Importantly, Peter learned about the Community Fridges, a service providing access to surplus food without the need to register. This initiative reduces food waste and supports those in need. Empowered with this knowledge, Peter felt more confident in accessing the available resources without feeling undeserving.

This case highlights how HWC's involvement in the Health & Wellbeing event effectively addressed individual needs and provided practical support, improving Peter's overall well-being. By offering tailored information and connections, HWC ensured Peter received comprehensive support, turning his challenging situation into a positive experience.



Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

This year our volunteers:

- Visited communities to promote their local Healthwatch and what we have to offer
- Collected experiences and supported their communities to share their views
- Visited hospitals and GP's to gather feedback
- Attended events such as the Royal Cornwall Show and Blue Light event.



Healthwatch Cornwall Volunteer

'I feel as a volunteer its my role to ensure people know the importance of the work that Healthwatch does.

It's all about talking to members of the public about the experiences with services & gathering information so that it can be gathered & stored for reports.

Most of all I enjoy meeting new people & being involved in such a worth while thing.

It feels like I'm giving something back to the Community'.



Steve-
Healthwatch
Cornwall



'As a volunteer for Healthwatch Cornwall, I enjoy engaging with the public and hearing their experiences, both positive and negative.

Often, people express relief knowing someone is genuinely listening to them. This is crucial because Healthwatch Cornwall values every voice and piece of feedback, which informs the Integrated Care Board (ICB).

While I find fulfillment in my role, it saddens me that access to GP appointments remains a common complaint.

Despite this, I believe our work is vital in highlighting these issues and driving improvements in our healthcare system'.






Kathy-
Healthwatch
Cornwall

Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

-  www.healthwatch.org/Cornwall
-  **01872273501 or 0800381281**
-  **admin@healthwatch.co.uk**



Finance and future priorities

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual Cornwall Council Core Activities Contract	£300,000	Expenditure on pay	£379,322.62
Annual Cornwall Council Partnership Boards Contract	£64,000	Non-pay expenditure	£93,608.46
Kernow Maternity Voices Project	£130,000	Office and management fees	£62,864.85
CQC	£2,500		
Total income	£496,500	Total expenditure	£535,795.93

Next steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

- 1. Mental Health**—Our Cornish Communities in Mind Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Research Report 2022 will serve as a cornerstone for our upcoming initiatives. We aim to use this report to engage diverse communities across Cornwall and Isles of Scilly (CloS) and determine if our findings and recommendations have informed strategy and decision-making. By understanding the current landscape of mental health and suicide prevention post-COVID, we can identify what is working well and what needs improvement. Our goal is to work collaboratively with local communities and the voluntary sector, ensuring our efforts are inclusive and effective in addressing the needs across all demographics. Continuous engagement is essential for refining our approach and providing robust support.
- 2. Widening Participation**—Understanding and Enhancing Healthcare Services Across Diverse Communities in Cornwall. To conduct a mixed-methods research study utilising both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively understand the healthcare experiences and needs of minority groups in rural and coastal areas of Cornwall, specifically focusing on Black and minority groups, LGBTQ+ individuals, gypsies/travellers, and those that are marginalised. This study aims to gather actionable insights that reflect the diverse demographic composition and inform the development of inclusive and effective healthcare strategies.
- 3. Cost of Living**—To expand on our previous Cost of Living 2023 survey by conducting a comprehensive mixed-methods research study using both qualitative and quantitative data. This study aims to investigate the long-term effects of the cost-of-living crisis on healthcare and healthcare services, with a specific focus on its impact on access, quality, and outcomes. We will evaluate whether our previous recommendations have been actioned and addressed, identifying ongoing challenges and opportunities for improvement..

Healthwatch Cornwall's vision for 2024/25 is to work alongside our communities to ensure their voices and stories are heard and amplified. We aim for the design and delivery of health and care services in Cornwall to be inclusive and co-designed by the people who use them. Our goals are to improve access, tackle health inequalities, empower positive change, and enhance overall wellbeing. Together, we can achieve these goals more effectively through collaboration and shared effort.



Statutory statements

**Healthwatch Cornwall, Suite One, Calenick House, Heron's Way,
Truro, Cornwall TR1 2XN**

**Healthwatch Cornwall uses the Healthwatch Trademark when
undertaking our statutory activities as covered by
the licence agreement.**

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Healthwatch Cornwall Board consists of 6 members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Board met 4 times and made decisions on matters such as preparing an effective and focused strategy to ensure that Healthwatch Cornwall has a clear focus for the future to enable it to achieve growth and that it has a sustainable business model.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

Throughout the year, we employed a range of methods and systems to gather people's experiences effectively.

These included phone interviews, email correspondence, a user-friendly web form on our website, and engagement via social media channels.

Additionally, we participated actively in community group meetings and forums to directly connect with diverse stakeholders.

Our approach ensured comprehensive insight into service users' perspectives, facilitating informed improvements and transparency in our annual reporting.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using our services.

Responses to recommendations

There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

In our local authority area for example, we take information to patient experience and quality groups at Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust, Cornwall Partnership NHS Foundation Trust and University Hospitals Plymouth NHS Trust, as well as the Health & Wellbeing Board at Cornwall Council.

Our Business Plan, Annual Report and research reports are shared with decision makers to inform commissioning priorities. We present our work to the Cornwall Council Health & Adult Social Care Overview & Scrutiny Committee to inform and shape a work programme based on the service user and carer voice. Relevant research and reports are presented to the Integrated Care Partnership (ICP), its Programme Boards and forums.

Data and insight are also shared with the Citizen Engagement Committee (part of the ICP) and with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.



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