

Living Well Impact Report

The Cost of Living and Health Inequality in Cornwall May 2025

Executive Summary

This Impact Review Report presents the outcomes and influence of Healthwatch Cornwall's Preliminary Cost of Living Report (published 30 September 2024), which captured the real-life experiences of over 400 people across the county. These "400 Voices of Cornwall" shed light on the growing crisis of healthcare access amid rising living costs. From dental care to GP access, medication affordability to travel barriers, the evidence highlights a system under pressure—and a population struggling to engage with the services it needs.

More than half of respondents identified as either "just getting by" or "really struggling," with many avoiding or delaying essential healthcare due to financial strain. The impact was particularly acute among those in rural areas, people with disabilities, unpaid carers, and families on low incomes.

Healthwatch Cornwall's role as the county's statutory health and care champion has been pivotal in elevating these stories beyond individual hardship to evidence of systemic need. By feeding this insight into key strategic forums—including the Integrated Care Board (ICB), Cornwall Council, and public health task groups—Healthwatch Cornwall has driven tangible policy conversations around transport, dental access, and hardship support.

The report has already catalysed:

- **Winter hardship planning updates by Cornwall Council to reflect urgent cost-of-living needs.**

Pilot transport schemes initiated by local GP practices in response to appointment drop-offs linked to travel affordability.

- **New collaborations between Healthwatch Cornwall, Age UK Cornwall, and voluntary sector providers to co-design targeted support interventions.**

This is not just a reflection of community feedback—it is an example of how Healthwatch Cornwall translates public voice into policy influence and service innovation. By identifying barriers early, presenting evidence credibly, and working across sectors, Healthwatch Cornwall plays an essential role in ensuring the health and social care system listens, learns, and acts.

This report satisfies one of the six required contractual Impact Review Reports and contributes directly to long-term system learning. It will inform the full Cost of Living Report due in early 2025 and shape continued work to improve access and equity across Cornwall.

Key Findings

Changes to Services:

- Raised awareness led to emergency prioritisation of dental access in hotspot areas.
- Health appointment avoidance findings prompted NHS ICB to review transport subsidy strategies.

Stakeholder Influence:

- Cornwall Council integrated findings into its Winter Hardship Plan.
- NHS ICB cited the report in a December 2024 policy brief on reducing health inequalities.

Amplifying Public Voice:

- Testimonies influenced Mental Health Strategic Board and GP Access Task Group.
- Feedback on treatment avoidance shaped public health messaging.

Preventing Issues:

- Data on delayed medication use led pharmacies to introduce safety-net outreach.
- Early warning signs shared with service commissioners for rapid response.

Partnership and Collaboration:

- New co-designed outreach work launched with Age UK Cornwall and Volunteer Cornwall.
- Cross-sector action planning initiated through report dissemination.

Case Study Spotlight



Challenge:

A single parent reported skipping vital GP and optician appointments due to unaffordable transport and prescription costs.

Action:

This case was included in the Cost of Living report, drawing media attention and being shared with the Cornwall & Isles of Scilly ICB.

Result:

A local GP surgery piloted a transport reimbursement scheme for financially vulnerable patients. Early signs show an 18% increase in appointment attendance among participants.

Stakeholder Feedback



"Healthwatch Cornwall's cost-of-living insights were instrumental in shaping our emergency winter provision strategy."

- **Cornwall Council Officer**



"The report highlighted critical blind spots in our understanding of appointment drop-offs—it changed how we flag financial vulnerability."

– **Primary Care Network Manager**



"This important report highlights how increases in cost of living are impacting some local people. We continue to build on the fantastic work already in place across our communities to support local people and deliver on the important recommendations that Healthwatch Cornwall have made"

– **Aisling Crombie, on behalf of Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care System**

Recommendations

1. Expand Subsidised Access Schemes:	Introduce region-wide pilot projects for subsidised dental care, prescription costs, and travel for high-need groups.
2. Integrate Cost-Screening into Routine Appointments:	Equip frontline professionals to identify and refer individuals facing financial barriers.
3. Commission Longitudinal Research:	Track the long-term impact of cost-of-living pressures on chronic illness management and patient outcomes.

Next Steps

- Integrate findings into the full Cost of Living Report (2025).
- Monitor uptake and outcomes of pilot access interventions.
- Continue public engagement through digital and in-person events.
- Share findings at ICB, Council, and voluntary sector forums to shape ongoing system responses.

NHS ICB Response and System-Level Alignment

The NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Integrated Care Board (ICB) has formally acknowledged the importance of Healthwatch Cornwall's Preliminary Cost of Living Report (September 2024) and is actively integrating its findings into system-level planning.

Key system responses include:

Integration of the report's insights into the Joint Forward Plan to inform future strategic direction.

Prioritisation of primary care transformation, especially to improve access to dental and GP services.

Alignment with the Prevention Coordinator for Better Mental Health to address mental health impacts linked to financial strain.

Healthwatch Cornwall's evidence-based insights have served as a catalyst for these strategic shifts. By representing over 400 voices from across Cornwall, the organisation has ensured that lived experiences directly shape healthcare priorities. These developments underscore Healthwatch Cornwall's pivotal role in bridging public experience and policy reform, ensuring that health and care strategies are grounded in the real needs of communities.

[Considering Healthwatch Cornwall cost of living report – NHS Cornwall and Isles of Scilly](#)

[A Real Living Wage to Challenge Poverty in Cornwall | Cornwall Voluntary Sector Forum](#)



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