

Healthwatch Bucks update

July 2023

This paper summarises recent project work we have undertaken in relation to health and social care services, as aligned with the priorities of the Joint Health & Wellbeing strategy.

Live Well

GP surgery care when you're deaf, Deaf or hard of hearing

We wanted to find out about the experiences of people who are deaf, Deaf or hard of hearing when they try to access care from GP surgeries.

The aim of our research was to identify health inequalities that might affect deaf, Deaf and hard of hearing people so we could make recommendations on tackling them.

What we did

We asked people about their experiences of booking and attending appointments at their GP surgery in Buckinghamshire. In line with SignHealth guidance, we used the terms 'Deaf', 'deaf' and 'hard of hearing' as follows when we designed our research questions and reported our findings.

- deaf – used to describe or identify anyone who has a severe hearing problem
- Deaf – used to refer to people who have been deaf all their lives, or since before they started to learn to talk
- hard of hearing – used to describe people with less severe hearing problems.

We developed a survey which was online from 7 February to 30 April 2023. This was publicised via social media, as well as via community and service providers' newsletters. We also held three focus groups.

Altogether, 90 people who were deaf, Deaf or hard of hearing told us about their experiences of accessing GP surgery care in Bucks.

Key findings

We received feedback about a range of issues. People highlighted challenges they had faced with basic communication, making appointments and attending appointments.

- Few people knew they could ask for their GP records to be 'flagged' with their communication needs
- Many were frustrated by having to remind people inside the surgery (and then in secondary care if they were referred) that they had a degree of hearing loss
- Few Deaf people had experience of British Sign Language (BSL) interpreters in a GP surgery. They said it took too long to book, and/or that Sign Live or similar apps were not generally used
- Many people who are hard of hearing, deaf or Deaf find making appointment by phone or receiving speech calls from GP surgeries difficult
- While several people asked family members, friends and/or social workers to help them book appointments and/or communicate with medical staff, some felt this did not allow them to keep aspects of their medical history private

- Some people told us that not being able to communicate in a way that suited them left them confused, frustrated, ill-informed or they felt the experience affected their self-esteem in a negative way.

Our recommendations

We recommended that BOB ICB should encourage Buckinghamshire GP surgeries to sign up to the Healthwatch Bucks Deaf and Hearing Loss GP Practice Charter. This sets out a commitment to reducing inequalities in access to GP surgery care that may affect people who are deaf, Deaf or hard of hearing.

The Charter should be displayed in GP practices and on their websites. By signing up to the Charter, practices would help demonstrate that they are committed to meeting the requirements of the Accessible Information Standard.

Download and read the report [here](#).

[Annual Report 2022-23](#)

We've published our annual report for 2022-23 – a document that pulls together information about the work we did on behalf of Buckinghamshire residents last year.

As the local health and social care champion, we've spent the past 10 years making sure that the voices of local people are heard by those who commission, deliver and make decisions about services.

We share feedback with the right people so it can make a difference, improving health and social care for the whole community.

Our year by numbers

In 2022-23, Healthwatch Bucks...

- Listened to **1,328** health and social care experiences that were shared with us by local people
- Provided help and support to people who asked for it through **159** signposting requests
- Published **7** reports on local health and social care services
- Attended **232** meetings with key stakeholders, to represent the interests of Buckinghamshire residents
- Benefited from the support of **21** generous volunteers who gave **1,910** hours to help us make health and social care better for people in our community.

Download and read the report [here](#).