healthwatch
County Durham

You Told Us

July - September 2026



You told us...

Between July and September 2026, feedback received from people across County Durham was analysed to identify key themes and emerging trends relating to health and social care services. The insights gathered inform our future engagement priorities and help identify issues that may require escalation to service providers for further consideration and action.

We engaged with...

2479

members of the public, patients and charity sector

We heard from...

242

people about their experiences of health and care

We reached...

6119

people through our social media and newsletter

We had the most feedback about...

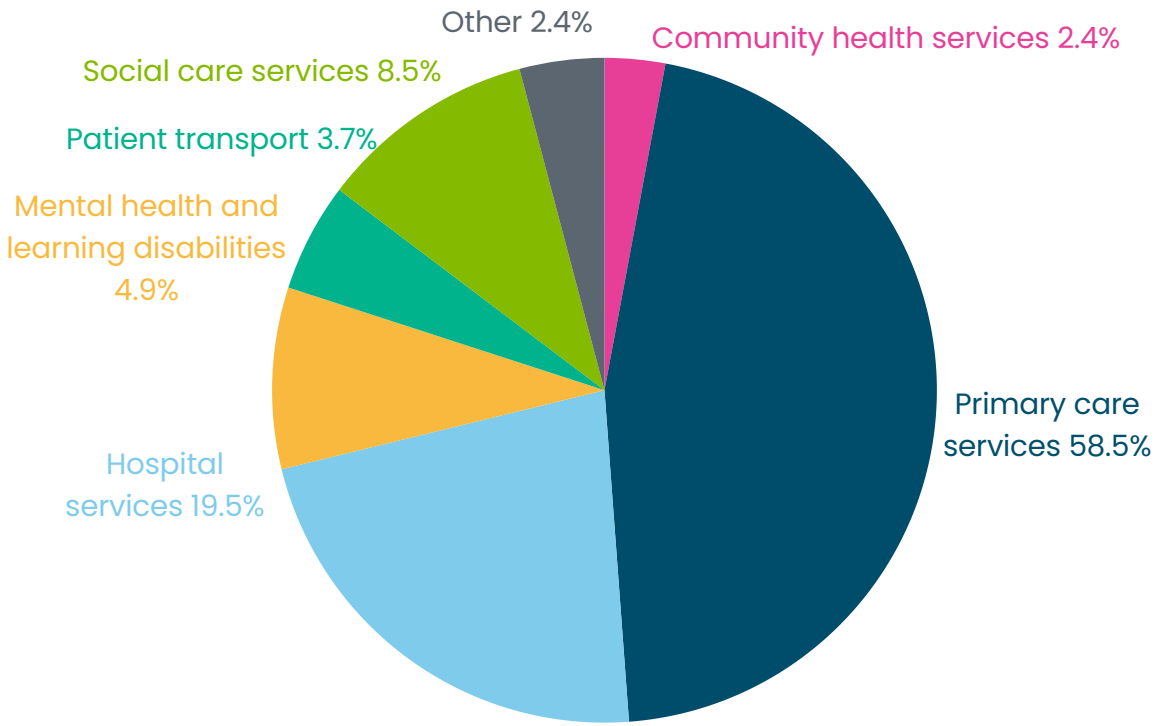
Services

- General Practice
- Dentistry
- Adult Social Care & Outpatients

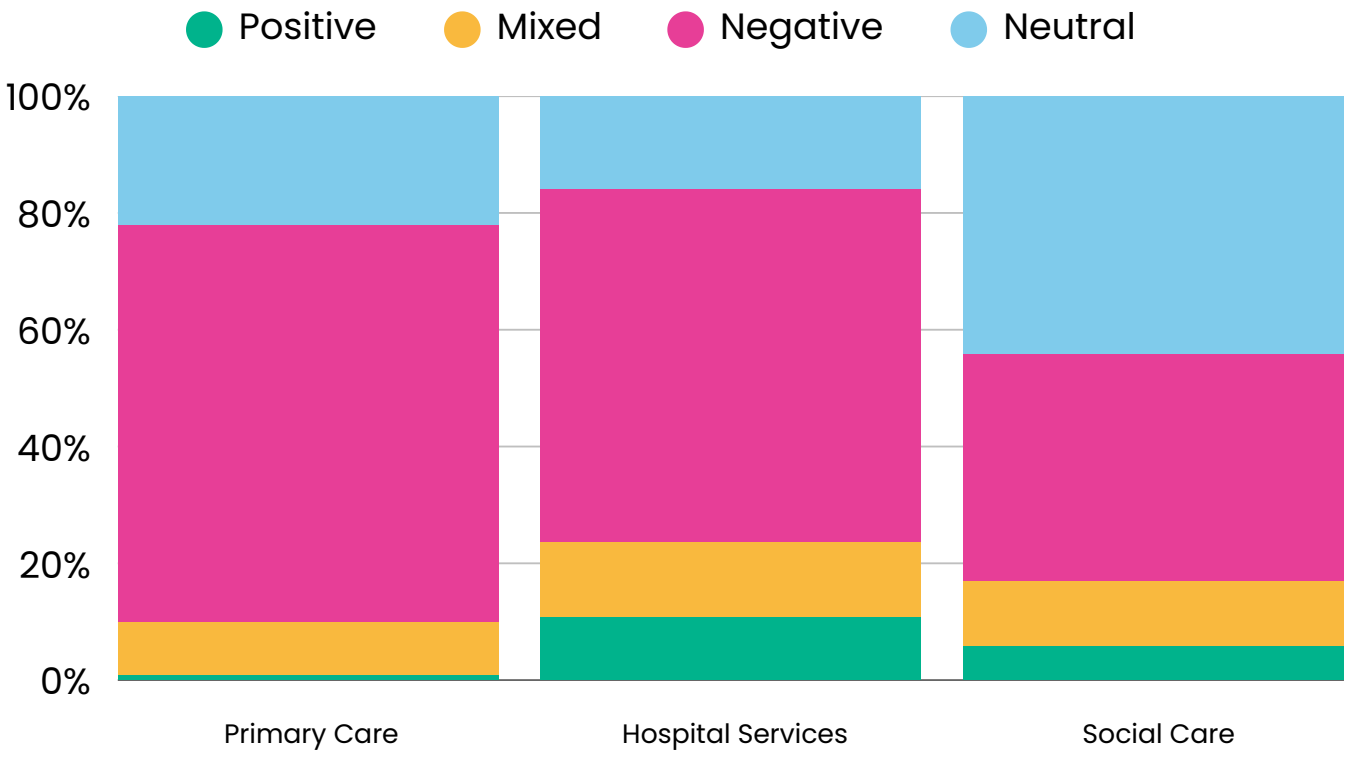
Themes

- Access
- Caring, kindness, respect and dignity
- Communication with patients

Most common services you used



Patients gave us the most feedback about primary care, hospital services plus social care, and this is how they feel (%)



You told us...

The district nurses in the Easington locality have been amazing. They always take the time to listen to any concerns, involve us in decisions, and give advice that is really helpful and reassuring. It's clear that they genuinely care about the people they look after.

What means the most is that they don't just support my mam, they support us as a family too. They show real compassion and understanding, which has made such a difference during a difficult time. I can't thank them enough for everything they do. We feel incredibly lucky to have such a caring team involved in my mam's care.





My son and I were both referred to the dermatology department by our GP, but we've experienced a number of difficulties accessing the service. My son was initially given an appointment for September, but this was cancelled without any explanation. When I contacted the hospital, I was told that a new triage system had been introduced and that the appointment would be rearranged.

I was later informed that a dermatologist was on maternity leave and that the department was not accepting new patient referrals because the post had not been backfilled. I asked our GP if they could challenge the decision, but the dermatology department advised that this would not make any difference to how quickly my son would be seen.

The wait has been incredibly frustrating because my son's skin condition is causing him significant pain and distress. It affects his face and is having a real impact on his wellbeing and confidence. While we continue to wait for an assessment and treatment, his condition is getting worse, which is very concerning for both of us.

You told us...

My 18-year-old child is currently waiting for ADHD and autism assessments and has been struggling with severe anxiety and low mood. They also live with a chronic illness and disability, which meant they had to leave education earlier than expected. Since then, they have become increasingly isolated, and I have watched their mental health gradually decline.

We first sought help through Talking Changes, but were told that my child's needs were too complex for their service and they were referred to secondary mental health services. We then found ourselves in the frustrating position of being told by secondary services that their needs were not severe enough to meet the threshold for support, and we were advised to go back to our GP. It felt as though we were being passed from one service to another without anyone taking responsibility for providing the help they clearly needed.

When we returned to the GP, they were reluctant to prescribe medication and instead referred my child to a mental health nurse. As a result, we are still waiting while their mental health continues to deteriorate. My child finds it extremely difficult to open up to strangers, yet they have had to repeat their story to multiple professionals over and over again, which has only added to their distress.

As a parent, it feels like services are waiting for my child to reach crisis point before any meaningful support is offered. I worry every day about what might happen if help does not arrive soon. Families should not have to wait until someone is actively harming themselves before they are considered unwell enough to receive the support they need.



Word on the street...

We asked our volunteers to gather information they are hearing about health and social care services whilst they are out and about. Here are some of the experiences people have shared:

Uncertainty about the use of AI in GP practices, including how to opt out, how securely information is stored, and who has access to patient data.

Frustration with missed calls from GP practices using withheld numbers, creating uncertainty about who is calling and often requiring patients to contact the surgery and wait to get through

Issues raised about local transport and getting to hospital appointments particularly in rural areas but also as a means to prevent isolation.

Medication shortages, nationally not just in the North East and the implications to patients.

Word on the street updates

We have a produced a report to answer many questions you may have around medication.

Read more on our website.

Our engagement activities this quarter were...

In July

- Bullion Hall drop in
- Foundation for Good community event
- Willington open Door Methodist Church
- Shildon alive drop in
- Deaf wellbeing network
- LGBT drop in

- Plus, our very own Carers support group at Hamsteels Community Centre in Esh Winning.



In August



- Chronic Pain group
- SPA Brandon
- LGBT Drop in
- Shildon Alive drop in
- Advice in County Durham Roadshow Peterlee??
- Mens group in The Shed
- Willington Open door methodist church
- Wear Together Group
- East Durham Veterans

In September

- Advice in County Durham Roadshow Stanley
- Durham Prostate Cancer Group
- Durham Sixth Form Freshers Fair
- Breathing space men's shed
- Shildon Alive
- Pain Support Group Drop in
- Men's Cree group
- The Venue, Stanley, Drop
- Deaf wellbeing Network meeting

- Plus, our Carers support group ran by Julia in Esh Winning.



We're Listening

Your voice matters and we want to hear it.

Whether it's a general experience or a specific enquiry, we're here to help.

If you'd like to leave feedback about a specific service (like your GP Practice, care home or hospital) the best place to do that is on our website:

www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

Our full contact details meanwhile are on the final page of this document including our social media accounts.

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Stay up-to-date with our activities



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News update - October 2026



In this edition, we're looking at the introduction of a two-week period of leave for anyone experiencing a miscarriage and we're also covering World Suicide Prevention Day which took place last month.

Also this month, we're supporting Northern Cancer Alliance's new initiative to support cancer screening and also details on Durham County Council who are wanting participants with lived experience to take part in refreshing their autism strategy.

As always, thank you for your continued support — your feedback helps us make a real impact.

News & Information

Our monthly newsletter keeps you in the loop with where we've been and where we're heading next, plus the latest news on events, campaigns, and projects across County Durham.

It's the best way to stay up-to-date with our work, see how your feedback is making a difference and get involved in upcoming activities.

Read or sign up here.

You can also drop us a follow across our social media accounts for regular news, information and our work updates.

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