



# news



**healthwatch**  
Islington

## Action Stations

Healthwatch Islington is here to make sure that health and social care services are meeting the needs of local people. Earlier in the summer we held our annual fair, (pictured above and in the pages that follow) where Islington residents came together to share ideas about the projects we'll be tackling in the coming months.

Here are just some of the things Healthwatch will be looking to achieve in the year ahead:

- ▶ Improving access to interpreting services at GP practices for people whose first language is not English.
- ▶ Assessing customer service at GP practices; in particular the attitudes of reception staff towards children and young people, and towards those with sensory impairments.

- ▶ Helping those with mental health needs get support as early as possible, rather than having to rely on crisis intervention.
- ▶ Carrying out further interviews with people who receive care in their own homes, to find out what works well about these services and what can be improved.

Our volunteers contributed over 1,000 hours of their time to help us deliver last year's work plan. So we'll continue to push for improvements in those service areas too. For example, we'd still like to see a better service from local hospitals for Deaf patients, and better information about complaints at GP practices.

If you'd like to help us make some headway, we'd love to hear from you. Contact Paul Grant, our volunteering coordinator, on 020 7832 5821.



Passersby take shelter from the elements at the Healthwatch stall. Using pedal power, they could make a healthy fruit shake, whilst learning more about what we do. The colourful bike was a reminder that this was supposed to be the summer.

## Healthwatch goes to Chapel Market

August 26th saw us setting out our wares at Chapel Market, close by Angel tube station. A market stall was a great way to meet members of the public and let them know about Healthwatch. We put up a canvas shelter against the bad weather, but after a few hours we were wishing we'd packed the submarine.

Poor weather notwithstanding, we were able to speak with 113 people over the course of the day. Of these, 26 spoke at some length about their experiences of local health and care services. More than half of this group (14) had only good things to say. 6 of the people we interviewed had negative feelings, and 6 had mixed views:

'I've recently been in hospital for surgery and my service was "fantastico". I've never had consultations with so many surgeons and doctors. Excellent.'

'Couldn't recommend it highly enough (Killick Street Health Centre). Fantastic service and doctors, appointments are easy to do and on time. Often I can be diagnosed over the phone which saves time.'

'I would suggest my GP (Miller Practice), who I've been going to for 30 years, is maybe the best in London.'

'There's a discrepancy between the information given by GPs about referrals and the information held by hospitals. I was repeatedly told I had been referred to UCLH for an appointment by my GP, but waited and waited for an appointment letter which didn't come. There was a breakdown in communication which could have cost me my life as it took 2 years to get a diagnosis of ovarian cancer.'

10 people cited GP appointment systems as a source of frustration. The other common complaint concerned the poor listening skills of some doctors, rushed consultations, and misdiagnosis.

As the debut venture of its type, we were very pleased with how the stall at Chapel Market went. So much so, we plan to run similar stalls at some of Islington's other markets and shopping centres. Thanks to Healthwatch volunteers Ray and Max for all their invaluable help on the day.

My child has to miss school to interpret for me at the doctors.

Feedback from local resident at Healthwatch consultation event for non-English speakers



## Access to GP services for non-English speakers

Community Language Support Services hosted a Healthwatch event in Finsbury Park earlier in the year. This was attended by 18 women, primarily of Ethiopian and Eritrean origin. These women had either limited English, or did not speak English at all.

We asked them, via the translator, if they had ever been provided with an interpreter to access primary care (GP services). Only one woman raised her hand. All the others said that they were never provided with an interpreter for GP appointments, and nor were any of their friends.

‘In my surgery they don’t have interpreters. They ask you to come back next time [...] They change the appointment for two week’s time and ask you to bring an interpreter.’

‘My child has to miss school to interpret for me at the doctors.’

‘GPs don’t provide interpreters. Whenever I go, I have to take a friend or relative with me. This is not professional or appropriate.’

Stories shared with Healthwatch on other occasions suggested that the experience of this group of ladies was not unique. This from a Turkish speaker:

‘It takes too long to get an appointment. I used a translator which slowed down the process. I do not speak English at all. By the time I got an appointment I was well again.’

Islington Clinical Commissioning Group has provided funding to make interpreters available, and available in a timely manner. All GP practices also have access to telephone interpreting services. Are

they using them?

In our borough we’re well served with GPs who speak languages other than English. So if there is a widespread problem with the availability of interpreting services in primary care, it is likely it will affect speakers of certain languages, and members of certain ethnic groups, more than others.

This year we will be taking a close look at interpreting services. We will do this in a number of ways:

- ▶ A survey has been sent to all our GP practices to find out what interpreting support they currently offer.
- ▶ We will meet with community based organisations to gather more evidence from residents with limited English who are accessing GP services.
- ▶ We will ‘mystery shop’ a selection of GP practices in the borough to see what interpreting services they offer (mystery shopping involves volunteers phoning or visiting a GP practice to ask for an appointment and an interpreter).

If you speak another language and would like to get involved in the mystery shopping exercise, or if you have an experience of using GP interpreting services that you would like to share, contact Maria Gonzalez at Healthwatch Islington.

maria.gonzalez@healthwatchislington.co.uk  
020 7832 5828



## Feedback

Back in July we worked out that we'd had 599 one to one conversations with Islington residents since Healthwatch was launched. That's a lot of feedback from you about local health and social care services.

We've listened to you, but has anyone listened to us? Have we had an impact? Here's some of what's been achieved so far:

We've made 41 visits to GP practices. We've looked at how well the practices cater to the needs of children and young people, and how well they make information about making a complaint available. 16 out of 35 GP practices now display Healthwatch Islington's complaints guidance on their websites.

At the Whittington we've helped to improve discharge procedures for elderly patients, particularly with regard to follow-up care. We also secured the introduction of ear plugs and eye masks on wards to help patients sleep. Our work on behalf of Deaf patients has seen new training programmes brought in at the Royal Free, vibrating buzzers introduced at University College London, and a clear commitment from both hospitals to always let Deaf patients know whether a British Sign Language interpreter has been booked ahead of their appointment.

In the last three months we've knocked on 533 doors on some of the most disadvantaged housing estates in the borough to talk to residents about Healthwatch and to hear about their needs. This has quickly become our most important source of referrals for our signposting service; helping local people to access the support they need.

We've also made 8 visits to inspect conditions in care homes. We've been an extra pair of eyes and ears, and spoken to more than 60 residents and staff members.

### Our contact details

You can visit our website to give your own feedback on any health and social care services you use, and get information about other services that are available. If computers aren't for you, you can call us, or write a letter. You won't need a stamp.

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