

news

Registering at a GP is hard if you don't speak English

In November last year Healthwatch sent volunteers to visit every GP practice in Islington. They pretended to be new patients who did not speak English.

At most practices they said that they felt welcomed, and that they were treated with respect. However, only one of the 36 practices offered to use an interpreting service to help our volunteer to register.

And 19 practices told them to come back with a friend or family member who could speak English.

We'd like to see interpreting services offered to all patients who need them as a matter of course. We're working with Islington Clinical Commissioning Group to help make this happen. There's more on interpreting, and some of our other current activities, inside.

They see us struggling to communicate. Why don't they use the telephone interpreting?

Feedback from local community groups



'The GPs expect you to bring your own interpreter'

As well as sending volunteers to visit each GP practice (see front cover), Healthwatch has been speaking to community groups to hear their views on interpreting services offered in GP practices. We spoke to 16 groups in total. These were organisations whose members may need support to communicate in English.

Language Line provides this service to local GPs. Face to face interpreting needs to be booked in advance. Telephone interpreting is available more or less immediately, with no need to pre-book. Both services are provided at no cost to the individual GP practices.

However, the consensus amongst the groups we spoke with was that interpreting is not consistently available.

'Out of the 23 people we spoke to in October 2014, only 3 confirmed that they are provided with an interpreter. The remaining 20 said that they are not provided with an interpreter, that either they take a family member or that they try to manage with their very limited English.'

'We made a complaint to [the practice] where one of our clients is registered. She is very vulnerable due to her mental health and they did not use to provide an interpreter for her. We made a complaint and since then whenever she has an appointment, an NHS provided interpreter is available.'

But complaining doesn't always work.

'Some practices say no "with the recent cuts we don't have any more interpreters" and some do not explain their reasons.'

Where family members provide interpreting, safeguarding concerns may not be picked up.

'This is a huge issue for our community and for women in particular - especially in domestic violence cases where the husband (husband's family, even female members of the family) control the domestic violence survivor through interpreting.'

We also learned that lack of interpreting makes patient diagnosis less reliable,

'When the women feel unwell they come here and we write a note for the GP requesting an emergency appointment (we write loads of notes to GPs/receptionists). The woman goes to the GP with her note and then comes back after seeing the GP, so that our staff can explain the medication, etc. This is quite scary because the GP has not opportunity to ask any additional questions - he/she just diagnoses on the basis of the symptoms described in the note.'

Some organisations felt that some GP practices were relying on them to provide free interpreting for their members,

'It would be good to find out why GPs are not using the interpreting service if it is meant to be available - it is not fair - it puts a strain on organisations like ours, where we have to do more work to assist our clients to communicate with the GP practice.'

'I told the doctor that I could not wait very long as I had to be back in the office for another client, and still they made us wait over 50 minutes. As a result I had to leave and my client did not get to see the GP.'

You can read more about what local groups had to say in the [report on interpreting services](#) on our website. Contact us if you'd like it sent by post.



Mental health services for young adults

Healthwatch Islington has been working with a number of different agencies, including the local authority, large youth based services, mental health organisations and voluntary and community groups, to consider how we can make it easier for young adults (aged 18 to 32) to access appropriate mental health services.

One of our objectives is to make it easier for voluntary and community organisations (groups working on the ground with direct contact with this demographic) to refer young adults effectively to psychological services.

16 of the participating agencies came together at a meeting hosted by Healthwatch in November. The group will meet on a regular basis to share knowledge about local well-being and mental health services. They will also consider other joint initiatives supporting the mental health of young people.

If you belong to a local organisation working with young people who would benefit from psychological support, and you'd like to get involved, get in touch with Sarah at Healthwatch Islington.

One of the first pieces of work arising from the partnership is a Healthwatch consultation on the mental health needs of young adults in the borough.

We are speaking to 18 to 32 year olds to better understand their views about mental health. This could be their own mental health, or the mental health of friends and family. We have recruited, and are currently training, a team of young adults to carry out this consultation exercise. They are hoping to interview 50 of their peers over the coming months.

Once we have collated and analysed the responses, we will produce a report for the local authority (which commissions mental health services) with recommendations for service change or development, based on what we learn.

If you are a young adult who lives in Islington, and would like to be interviewed contact Sarah Lee. Everyone we interview will receive a £10 Amazon voucher for their time.

Sarah Lee 020 7832 5828
sarah.lee@healthwatchislington.co.uk



Healthwatch Islington's Olav Ernstzen and Emma Whitby flank Healthwatch England's Anna Bradley at the Houses of Parliament in October 2014. They were there to bring attention to our work. Would you like to get involved?

Elections - your Healthwatch needs you

Our steering group sets our strategic direction. Based on feedback from the community, the group decides what our priority areas of work should be in any particular year. The organisations and individuals in the group are elected for a three year term. This year 7 seats on the steering group are up for election.

- ▶ Volunteering as a steering group member gives you the chance to influence services for the benefit of Islington residents.
- ▶ The steering group meets every two months. The meetings are two hours long and held in the evenings.
- ▶ As a member, you will apply your personal knowledge and experience of health and social care services, but speak on behalf of the whole local community.

Interested?

We ask people who are interested in standing for election to complete a short form telling us why, and what experience they would bring. Applications must be received by **10am, Tuesday 24 February 2015**.

For further information, or to apply, contact Eva del Rio our volunteering coordinator on 020 7832 5821 or at eva.delrio@healthwatchislington.co.uk

'I think Healthwatch is a brilliant organisation. Being part of Healthwatch enables me to be involved in deciding the focus of its work plan, and to monitor settings such as GP surgeries, dental practices, and care homes. Healthwatch is the voice of the public, come and observe our steering group and see if this rewarding work is something you would like to be involved in.'

Rose McDonald, Healthwatch director and steering group member

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