On equal terms

Healthwatch Islington Annual Report 2020-21

Contents

Message from our Chair

During the pandemic we've adapted how we work and supported our partners to do the same. We are committed to engaging our residents using new ways, and old ways, to safely hear your views and help you access services.

Responding to the pandemic:

We know many residents continue to experience very difficult times during the current crisis and that inequalities have exacerbated the impacts. We have focused on providing residents with good quality information about Coronavirus, access to services, and vaccinations. We've hosted a range of events attended by over 450 residents and voluntary sector partners. We're looking at the data on who attended so we know who we missed and who we need to work harder to reach out to. We've offered phone-based signposting advice and information support to over 240 residents. In addition, we worked with our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners to provide reliable information about the pandemic to 680 residents from communities whose first language is not English.

Digital inclusion:

We've adapted our digital inclusion support, offering one-to-one and group sessions remotely to over 130 people. We continue to work with our partners to ensure this work has reach. We also ran several workshops for voluntary sector colleagues to help them to move services online and support residents to access them. Our safeguarding framework for remote digital support has received recognition from Digital Unite and Good Things Foundation, and our Digital Champion volunteer David Mallory won Islington Volunteer of the Year.

> **Whilst we recognise that digital is not for everyone, we are keen to work with borough partners to ensure that help is made available to those who are interested but need support to get online.**

We've been researching the barriers to getting online. Many residents lack skills and confidence and we are supporting them to access well-being tools, understand internet safety, and to attend our virtual health information workshops. We also recognise that digital is not for everyone, and have worked with Healthwatch colleagues in Brighton, Healthwatch England and the Consultation Institute to develop engagement tools for working with residents who are not online.

We've also evaluated Maya Centre's remote therapy services, gathering and analysing feedback from staff and service users on their experiences of virtual counselling during the pandemic. We focused on their person-centred approach to evolving their offer. If your organisation would like to commission our evaluation service, contact our Chief Executive.

Equal Access for all:

We continue to champion the need for constant review of the equity of access to mental health provision. We were pleased to see Camden and Islington Public Health's Needs Assessment making clear requirements/ and taking actions to meet the needs of our diverse community. We are also bringing together partners from across a range of sectors; education, social care and health, to share good practice in making services welcoming to all and to improve the robustness of service design so that residents' diverse needs are better reflected in the design and planning process.

Building partnerships:

We welcomed a new partner, Disability Action in Islington, to our Diverse Communities Health Voice partnership. We've raised £75,000 for partners this year alone, helping us reach widely into our community through people trusted by local residents. This brings the total amount we have raised for local organisations to over £290,000, no mean feat for an organisation of our size.

We thank all of the residents and workers who've kept us all going through this challenging time, our funders, and particular thanks to Healthwatch Islington's volunteer team and our dedicated staff.

Jana Witt, Chair of Healthwatch Islington

Share your views with us
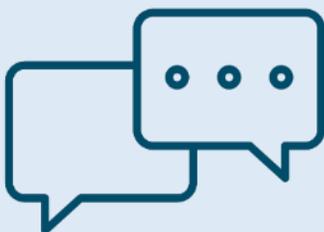
If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

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About us

Here to make health and care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services in Islington. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure your views shape the support you need, by sharing these views with those who have the power to make change happen.

Helping you to find the information you need

We help people find the information they need about services in their area. This has been vital during the pandemic with the ever-changing environment and restrictions limiting people's access to health and social care services.

Our goals

1 Supporting you to have your say

We want more people to get the information they need to take control of their health and care, make informed decisions and shape the services that support them.

2 Providing a high quality service

We want everyone who shares an experience or seeks advice from us to get a high quality service and to understand the difference their views make.

3 Ensuring your views help improve health & care

We want more services to use your views to shape the health and care support you need today and in the future.

"Thanks so much for organising today's Flu event. It was really helpful and the speaker gave the information in such a pleasant way. You take care of these events so efficiently. We are privileged in Islington to have such a proactive, educational and supportive Healthwatch group."

Feedback from Wendy, a resident who attended one of the Flu Vaccination events we hosted in September 2020

Highlights from our year

Find out about our resources and how we have engaged and supported people in 2020-21.

Reaching out

We heard from
781 people
this year about their experiences of health and social care.

We provided advice and information to
922 people
this year. We worked with partner organisations to reach more residents.

Responding to the pandemic
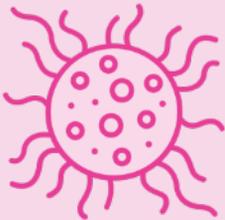
We engaged with and supported
2,189 people
with issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic this year.

15,000 visits
to Covid-related information articles on our website.

Making a difference to care

We published
5 reports
about the improvements people would like to see to health and social care services.

10 partner organisations
sharing experiences of care from residents that are less able to get their voices heard.

Health and care that works for you

12 volunteers
helped us to carry out our work. 9 volunteers were Digital Champions and 3 were researchers.

We employ 5 staff
3 of whom are full time.

We received
£156,100 in funding
from our local authority in 2020-21.

Then and now: from digital exclusion to inclusion

Then: changing attitudes towards digital

700 local people have taken part in our Log On digital support programme since April 2017. Residents who felt the internet was 'not for them' are now going online to manage their health, speak to their grandchildren, or see the news in their mother tongue.

We worked in partnership with community organisations supporting residents who were older, had existing health conditions, and/or were from communities whose first language was not English. One organisation supporting older Greek speaking residents who were particularly digitally excluded describes the impact. "It felt like we were scratching at the tip of an iceberg... there was definitely a shift in the attitude of the participants. It was no longer a blank 'No' to digital technology... they are definitely more open to it."

This year we surveyed 59 digitally excluded residents from these groups. In the past many would have shown little interest in going online, but now most told us they were keen to be supported to learn new digital skills. 49 said they would like to use WhatsApp, Facetime or Zoom to keep in touch with friends and family and 45 said they would be happy to learn how to book a GP appointment online.

The programme has also helped many of the organisations involved to build their own digital capacity and engage clients more effectively. For example, some of our partners now use WhatsApp to reach residents instead of using leaflets. By giving our partner organisations a head start with digital, we helped to make them more resilient when the pandemic struck, and better able to adapt to offering activities online.

Now: going digital during the pandemic

Healthwatch won funding from National Lottery Awards For All to provide digital training and support to local voluntary organisations. We helped them to move online to better support their volunteers and the communities they serve whilst social distancing measures are in place.

One such organisation is Jannaty Women's Social Society, based in Finsbury Park. We taught staff and volunteers at Jannaty how to make use of online platforms to support residents. We trained them in the use of screen sharing and break-out rooms, for example, as well as showing them how to share video, audio and document files with online attendees. As a result they've been able to continue to offer wellbeing activities to their service users. Jannaty have a sewing group who have been meeting to make face coverings to distribute to local residents. Although the group is no longer able to meet in person, meeting virtually has meant they can continue to socialise as they work on the masks at home. They come together to stay connected, and to share progress and discuss techniques that are working well.

> **It was a very good experience for us to do the Eid party on Zoom. It was very nice and we learnt a lot. For example, letting people into the Zoom meeting actually takes a long time. So we used that learning when we started the sewing classes."**

Using digital platforms to share reliable information about Covid-19

There's a lot of good information available about coronavirus, with advice and guidance provided by the NHS and government websites. However, if English isn't your first language it has been much harder to get access to reliable information. This lack has encouraged the spread of misinformation.

- Healthwatch successfully bid for funding from the London Community Response Fund to work together with organisations supporting migrant communities in Islington, to help tackle this problem.

- Our partnership supported 680 residents with a range of issues related to the pandemic, and helped 1,698 local people get access to reliable information about coronavirus in their first language.

- Information was shared via Zoom, WhatsApp, videos, texts, and email, as well as by more old-fashioned means, namely phone calls and (socially distanced) face-to-face conversations.

Then and now: challenging inequality

Then: access to mental health support

We work in a diverse borough and know that some communities are less able to get their voices heard. Protected characteristics such as age and disability (including mental health problems) can also impact on residents' ability to access services. We're committed to reducing inequality.

In 2017, adults with ADHD told us they were having to wait as long as three years for an assessment, and were unable to access any of the support they needed in the meantime. We recommended adults in this position be given access to support groups whilst on the waiting list. Commissioners adopted this change.

Then in 2020, we told commissioners that the needs of established migrant communities in Islington were not being fully considered by our existing mental health commissioning structures. As a result Healthwatch and Islington Bangladesh Association were invited to chair the newly created Inequalities Sub-Group of the Mental Health Partnership Board to help ensure that these inequalities were addressed.

This year we were delighted when the Mental Health Partnership Board identified the change we had recommended for ADHD services in 2017 as a service improvement that should be introduced much more widely. This means patients on waiting lists for assessments from other mental health services will be able to access support that would not have been available to them previously.

Now: accessing your GP during the pandemic

The arrival of the pandemic has changed the way we access GPs, placing even more pressure on phone lines and larger reliance on technology at home. We knew that people who weren't used to going online or didn't have access to a computer, including many older residents, could be unfairly disadvantaged. We asked residents and community organisations supporting vulnerable groups to tell us how the experience of accessing a GP had changed. Over 200 people shared their views by phone and online.

We found that disabled people, people with long term health conditions, and people whose first language wasn't English were struggling to get the care they needed. Language issues were a big barrier and these were made worse because you cannot point or use gestures to communicate over the phone. We learned that e-consult, the online tool people were asked to use to describe their symptoms and request an appointment, was particularly off-putting for those who lacked confidence using digital platforms.

- We worked with our partner organisations to support residents who were digitally excluded. We made a total of 209 referrals into our digital support services.

- To support patients who were struggling with the e-consult tool we hosted a training workshop 'How to use e-consult to communicate with your GP practice' . A clinician explained how the tool worked and our volunteer digital champions walked the 10 participants through the process on their own devices. Further one to one sessions have enabled residents to embed their learning.

- Partners organisations supporting residents in sheltered accommodation, and supporting speakers of languages including Greek, Arabic, Somali, and Tigrinya also attended the training, so they could better support their tenants and communities to use e-consult. We also produced guidance materials.

> **I think the event was really accessible. I was able to follow the step by step approach to complete e-consult, filling the form in with my own tablet and with my own queries at the same time. I am not so frightened of it now!"**
>
> **Penny, digital learner**

Sharing patient feedback with key decision makers

- As a result of people sharing their experiences, we gained a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of remote and online appointments. We have also gained greater insight into the ways in which a 'digital first' approach to accessing GP services can make existing health inequalities worse.

- We published our findings in the report 'From digital exclusion to inclusion'. The findings will be shared more widely at a launch event this summer. Feedback from patients will help commissioners understand how GP services can be offered most effectively going forward, to ensure that no one gets left behind.

Find out more about our work to reduce inequality > > >
Learn about our Diverse Communities Health Voice partnership

www.healthwatchislington.co.uk/our-partners

Responding to COVID-19

Healthwatch plays an important role in helping people to get the information they need, especially through the pandemic. The insight we collect is shared with both Healthwatch England and local partners to ensure services are operating as best as possible during the pandemic.

This year we helped 2,189 people by:

• Providing up to date advice on the COVID-19 response locally

• Linking people to reliable up-to-date information in their first language

• Running a programme of online events on key issues of public concern

• Supporting the COVID-19 vaccine roll-out

• Delivering a programme of activities to encourage take-up of flu vaccinations

• Providing an information and signposting service to help people to access the services they need

Equality monitoring data was provided by 918 of the 2,189 people we supported. 765 were female and 153 were male. Of those who gave their age, 397 were under 50 compared with 494 aged over 50. Many different ethnicities were supported. At least 680 people who provided data belonged to communities represented by our Diverse Communities partners. 1,012 of their adult friends and family members were engaged indirectly. 89 people who shared ethnicity data described themselves as White British.

Top four issues bringing people to our advice pages:

34% for Cleaning the Home Safely

33% for Vaccines

5% for Dentistry
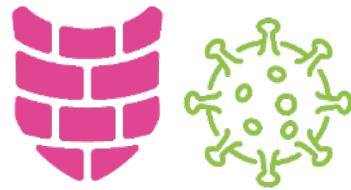
4% for Shielding

COVID-19 vaccine information

We produced a fact sheet on the coronavirus vaccine to support the vaccine roll-out in February 2021. As well as being shared with the public, this resource was used by statutory and voluntary sector partners across the borough. Islington Council specifically identified Healthwatch as a trusted information source in the film they produced to encourage residents to have the jab.

• We had over 15,000 visits to Covid-related information articles on our website this year.

• We had over 5,000 visits to our COVID-19 vaccination information resources in February and March alone.

Contact us to get the information you need

If you have a query about a health and social care service, or need help with where you can go to access further support, get in touch. Don't struggle alone. Healthwatch is here for you.

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Volunteers

12 volunteers helped us with our work this year. Some of our regular volunteers weren't able to participate, but will return when it is again appropriate to carry out face to face activity. This year our volunteers:

• Helped people have their say from home.

• Helped residents to develop their digital skills, offering support over the telephone and online.

• Supported people to access GP services by taking them through the e-consult platform, step by step.

• Carried out research into mental health provision, and the accessibility of information about online services

"I've worked with several volunteer organisations over the years and Healthwatch Islington's support is outstanding, especially the training prior to activities."

Feedback from volunteer

Digital Champion - David

David helps residents who are nervous about IT to recognise that they do indeed have the skills they need to get online. He won the borough's 'Volunteer of the Year' award in December 2020. Philippa, who runs our digital inclusion programme, spoke glowingly of David's contribution:

"His technical knowledge around IT is immense yet he is able to explain and support people at a pace and with language they understand. He could not be a more deserving winner of this award."

Digital Champion - Keith

'Using the internet is a key life skill and can give participants access to so many other things that can make their quality of life better. There's much more to it than just accessing healthcare services, that's a small part of people's lives. They can also improve their well-being by having greater contact with friends, hobbies and all sorts of information."

Keith has also helped the staff team improve how we administer our digital programme, introducing us to new online tools and processes.

Researcher - Geraldine

During the pandemic we have been asked to access health services remotely. Geraldine conducted research into the accessibility of information about online services. She analysed the websites of 32 NHS General Practices in Islington.

"My research made me more aware of the barriers that are experienced by many patients who are not frequent or confident website users. There should be more user testing of these websites, involving people of different ages, languages, and IT skills."

Volunteer with us

Are you feeling inspired? We are always on the lookout for new volunteers. If you are interested in volunteering, please get in touch.

**www.healthwatchislington.co.uk/volunteer**

07538 764457

jennifer.kent@healthwatchislington.co.uk

Finances

To help us carry out our work we receive funding from our local authority under the Health and Social Care Act 2012.

Income

- Funding received from local authority
- Additional funding

£137,182

Total income £293,282

£156,100
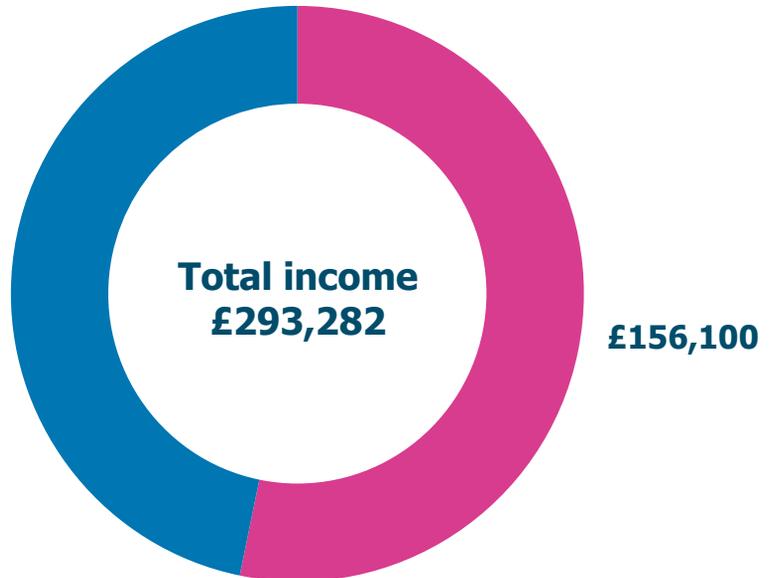
Expenditure

- Staff costs

- Operational costs

£78,232

- Support and administration

£24,378

Total expenditure £276,348

£173,738
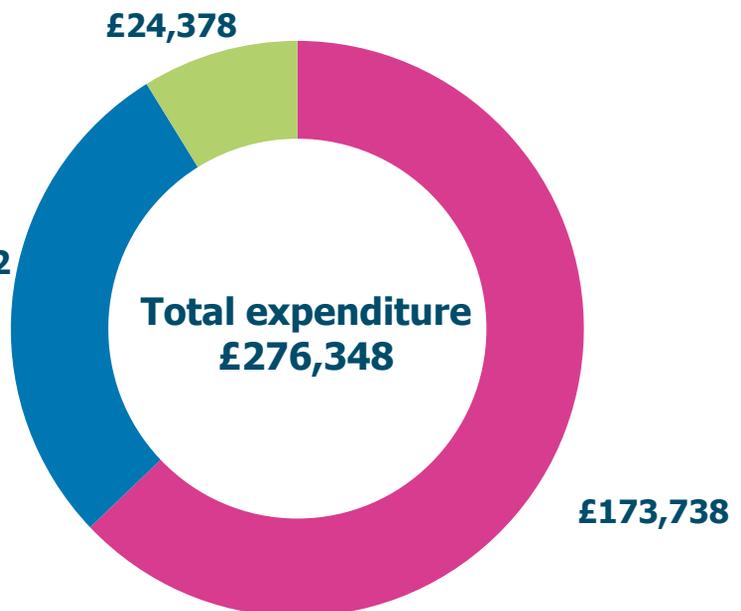
Next steps & thank you

Top three priorities for 2021-22

- Access to non-Covid related healthcare

- Covid vaccinations and Long Covid

- Challenging inequalities

Next steps

Our partners, volunteers and staff have been working exceptionally hard throughout the year to maintain services during the pandemic. We switched to online and phone-based delivery in March 2020 and whilst we miss seeing everyone face-to-face, we've learned a lot and will be adopting some more virtual methods in to our business-as-usual. We recruited two new trustees in April 2020 who we are yet to meet in person but who have already made a great contribution to our work.

> **COVID-19 has led to many changes to health and care services. As services return to something like 'normal' it will be our role to help services to understand the impact that these changes are having in the wider community.**

Some of the major changes we've seen to health and care services include non-urgent treatment being postponed, a reduction in face-to-face appointments, and care homes limiting public access. As a member of the Fairer Together Borough Partnership, we will champion residents' views and have committed to work with statutory and community colleagues to make Islington a fairer place for all.

In particular we will be talking to residents about access to non-Covid related healthcare, as well as providing information about Covid vaccinations and Long Covid. We will continue to deliver our digital inclusion work thanks to additional funding from Cloudesley, Clarion, Awards for all, and our Clinical Commissioning Group. If you know a resident who needs support to get online but can't afford it, then put them in touch.

Many thanks to partners, colleagues, volunteers and funders for all your ongoing support.

Emma Whitby, Healthwatch Islington Chief Executive

Statutory statements

About us

Healthwatch Islington, 6-9 Manor Gardens, London N7 6LA

Healthwatch Islington uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making.

Our Healthwatch board consists of seven members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny to our activities. Our board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community. Through 2020/21 the board met six times and made decisions on matters such as our fundraising strategy, and the allocation of our budget.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. For example, we use insight from information and signposting enquiries, from our community research, and from comments that are submitted via our website. We also consult with our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners to ensure that our priorities are informed by the experiences of residents that these organisations represent, so that inequalities are addressed.

Methods and systems used across the year's work to obtain people's views and experience.

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible have the opportunity to provide us with insight about their experience of health and care services. During 2020/21 we have been available by phone, by email, provided a web-form on our website, designed and delivered phone and web-based surveys, attended virtual meetings of community groups and forums, provided our own virtual activities and engaged with the public through social media.

We are committed to taking additional steps to ensure we obtain the views of people from diverse backgrounds who are often not heard by health and care decision makers. We have done this by continuing to work with our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners. This year we welcomed Disability Action in Islington to the partnership, enabling us to better represent the views of disabled residents.

2020-21 priorities

Project / activity area	What we achieved
Better access to information about health and care services – supporting residents to use their devices and navigate the internet	Together with our partner organisations, we made a total of 209 referrals into our digital support services.
Non-emergency patient transport services – making eligibility criteria more transparent	Eligibility criteria were suspended due to the pandemic. Individuals who were having difficulty accessing transport received signposting support from our advice and information service.
Mental health support – helping services meet the needs of migrant communities	As a result of our work, commissioners have asked all GPs to actively support residents who don't have English as a first language through the referral process for mental health support, rather than expecting them to self-refer.
Information workshops, particularly on topics relevant to the pandemic	549 people attended our virtual events, with a wide range of specialists sharing their expertise. Feedback was very positive. Topics chosen reflected concerns shared with us by residents.
Improving access to primary care	We published 3 reports sharing feedback from the community on the impact of the pandemic and on access to health services. This work is ongoing and we continue to collect and share feedback.
The impact on services from COVID-19	

Responses to recommendations and requests

There were no providers who failed to respond to requests for information or recommendations. This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not make use of our Enter and View powers. Consequently, no recommendations or other actions resulted from this area of activity. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by our Healthwatch to the Healthwatch England Committee and so no resulting special reviews or investigations.

Health and Wellbeing Board

We are represented on the Islington Health and Wellbeing Board by Emma Whitby, our Chief Executive. We shared our work plan for the coming year at the March 2021 meeting.

healthwatch
Islington

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