

# Raising awareness of hypertension in Islington



## Healthwatch Islington

Healthwatch Islington is an independent organisation led by volunteers from the local community. It is part of a national network of Healthwatch organisations that involve people of all ages and all sections of the community.

Healthwatch Islington gathers local people's views on the health and social care services that they use. We make sure those views are taken into account when decisions are taken on how services will look in the future, and how they can be improved.

[www.healthwatchislington.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchislington.co.uk)

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# Introduction

In Islington, the prevalence of hypertension ranks highest among all long-term health conditions, with an estimated prevalence of 21% (42,600 people). The proportion of undiagnosed cases is almost equal to that of diagnosed cases.\*

In other words, it's estimated one in five people in Islington have high blood pressure but only half of them know they do. Salty and fatty foods, not getting enough exercise, and smoking and drinking alcohol all contribute to the risk of high blood pressure. Residents from poorer households and from African, Caribbean, and South Asian backgrounds are more likely to be affected. Left untreated, high blood pressure can lead to stroke and heart attack. The only way to find out whether you have high blood pressure is to get your blood pressure measured. Islington residents over 40 will be invited for a health check every five years, where their blood pressure will be measured. Blood pressure monitors are placed in most GP receptions and residents can walk in and check their blood pressure at their practice.

In 2022, Healthwatch in North Central London joined with the Integrated Care Board in the NHS England Core20Plus5 Community Connector programme. The five North Central London Healthwatch all participated. The programme aims to raise awareness of five health conditions, and in North Central London, the focus was on hypertension. The programme involves working with volunteers who reflect the communities where hypertension might be more common, or less routinely identified. Healthwatch Islington has experience of engaging and supporting volunteers from a range of backgrounds. We also work with a range of community partners, primarily minority-led communities of interest.

In July 2022, we hosted a week-long stall at Chapel Market in Angel. We gave blood pressure checks to over 600 people. We gave out information leaflets and advised on lifestyle changes that could lower risk. We also worked with our partner organisations to carry out targeted engagement with communities at higher risk. In July 2023 we again hosted a stall at Chapel Market and have continued to offer blood pressure checks at community events.

NHS England were interested in the Community Connector volunteering model. They did not require us to report on the demographics of the people we reached. We have provided NHS England with the data they needed via a separate report. The purpose of this report is to share information on the people we reached in Islington and the impact of the project locally.

\*Islington and Haringey Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, August 2017  
(the most up-to-date JSNA that covers prevalence of Hypertension)

# Key outcomes

## Summary of the impact of our hypertension work

- 1.** We helped over 1,300 people improve their understanding of hypertension, with the vast majority being Islington residents.
- 2.** We identified over 130 people with undiagnosed hypertension. We directed them to seek another blood pressure check in a pharmacy or at their GP practice. The health professional could then advise them on an appropriate treatment pathway if hypertension was confirmed.
- 3.** We used motivational interviewing techniques to help residents who wanted to improve their health to think about what they could do to maintain or regain healthy blood pressure. We signposted them to services in the community such as exercise classes and walking groups and provided information resources. We saw 576 visits to the [hypertension information page](#) on our website.
- 4.** 175 residents from communities that experience health inequalities attended healthy hearts workshops delivered by our partners (the content was based on the Healthwatch training and British Heart Foundation leaflets). All 175 said that they found the information helpful, and 155 felt able to act on it.
- 5.** 41 residents with an existing diagnosis of hypertension gave us feedback on the support they receive for the condition. Patients valued the advice they received for healthy living, in particular changing diet and doing more exercise. However, difficulties accessing appointments and communicating with their GP made this support less effective.

# Our aims

1. To raise awareness of the impact of high blood pressure
2. To highlight some of the contributing factors to high blood pressure using leaflets from the British Heart Foundation
3. To use motivational interviewing techniques to help residents think about what they can do to maintain or regain healthy blood pressure
4. To direct those with high blood pressure readings to seek a check in a pharmacy or GP practice. To provide information about pharmacists participating in a scheme offering blood pressure checks to over 40s with health needs
5. For those who were already diagnosed with high blood pressure, to invite them to take part in a survey about their annual review and the support they receive for the condition.

## Preparation

Healthwatch works with volunteers and local partners to help us reach more residents. Volunteers helped us at local stalls and community events so we could take information out to residents where they are. As some ethnic groups have a higher propensity to high blood pressure, we worked with four of our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners whose services are aimed at Black people.

We developed a basic training package. We received support from Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust Core Team Population Health nurses on how to take a blood pressure reading. This was then reviewed by a GP with amendments made regarding when to give healthy lifestyle advice. Colleagues from other North Central London Healthwatch further adapted the training materials so we were giving out consistent messaging across North Central London. We tailored this to our boroughs with signposting information on local pharmacies where free blood pressure checks were available and local health and well-being activities and advice that could support people to maintain/ regain healthy blood pressure.

Training was mainly delivered in person to give the opportunity to practice using the blood pressure monitors. The training was delivered to Healthwatch staff and volunteers and to staff and volunteers from participating partner organisations. It covered:

- ▶ Factors impacting on blood pressure,
- ▶ Language around lifestyle advice,
- ▶ How to take a blood pressure reading,
- ▶ What the reading means,
- ▶ Motivational interviewing techniques (Motivational interviewing is a communication style that uses strategies such as reflective listening, and shared decision-making with an emphasis on enabling the interviewee to fully own that decision to act).

# Who we reached

Assuming we did not give blood pressure checks to any residents more than once (though this may well have happened to a limited degree over the two-year course of the project), we helped over 1,300 people improve their understanding of hypertension, with the vast majority being Islington residents. As the funder, NHS England did not require us to report on the demographics of the people we reached, we did not initially collect this data, and counted contacts based on the number of cards given out (each participant was given a card with their Blood Pressure reading).

Based on the number of cards given out, we estimate that we gave blood pressure checks to over 600 people at our week-long stall at Chapel Market in July 2022 and Caledonian Road Street Festival the previous weekend and gave blood pressure checks there which are included in that estimate). We began collecting equality monitoring data on our second day at Chapel Market.

In the Autumn of 2022, we gave blood pressure readings and health information to a further 53 residents at engagement events at the Arc Centre Food Bank, the Holloway Neighbourhood Group, Finsbury Library, and at Carers Wellbeing Day.

In addition, events were hosted by four our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners: Choices, Community Language Support Services, Eritrean Community in the UK, and Islington Somali Community.

We prioritised reaching people who were more at risk, and therefore in older age groups, but participants were self-selecting. We only offered the checks to over 18s.

## Healthwatch blood pressure events 2022/23

Equality monitoring information from those that submitted data

Male	Female	Non-binary	No response	Total
143	196	1	2	342

18-24	25-49	50-64	65-79	80+	Total
6	86	122	98	24	337

Ethnicity	
Arab	9
Asian/Asian British	35
Black/ Black British	79
Latin American	5
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	9
White British	128
White Irish	12
White Other	49
No response	16
Total	341

### Blood pressure events delivered by our partners 2022/23

We used a partnership model with local voluntary sector partners led by and working primarily with:

- ▶ Black African and Black African Caribbean residents
- ▶ Somali residents
- ▶ Eritrean residents
- ▶ Residents from across the Horn of Africa

EQM from those that submitted data:

Male	Female	Total
88	86	174

18-24	25-49	50-64	65-79	80+	Total
17	69	57	29	2	174

Ethnicity	
Arab	17
Asian/Asian British	2
Black/ Black British: Caribbean	20
Black/ Black British: Eritrean	71
Black/ Black British: Somali	18
Black/ Black British: Any other	27
No response	2
Total	157

## Healthwatch blood pressure events 2023/24

We attended the Cally Festival and hosted our stall at Chapel Market again in July 2023. We also took blood pressure readings and provided information about hypertension at the following events:

- ▶ 12 July 2023 – Islington Community Festival with Faiths Forum
- ▶ 21 October 2023 – Eritrean Community in the UK Community Day
- ▶ 25 October 2023 – Age UK event at the LIFT Centre
- ▶ 4 November 2023 – South Islington Family Hub
- ▶ 16 November 2023 – Surviving Winter event at St Lukes Community Centre
- ▶ 8 December 2023 – Cost of Living event at Brickworks Community Centre

We received equality monitoring data from 505 residents in the second year of the project.

Male	Female	Non-binary	No response	Total
170	333	0	2	505

18-24	25-49	50-64	65-79	80+	No response	Total
4	136	159	167	37	2	505



Ethnicity	
Arab	5
Asian/Asian British	72
Black/ Black British	133
Latin American	13
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	8
Middle Eastern	6
White British	175
White Irish	12
White Other	73
No response	8
Total	505

# Signposting hypertensives

If your blood pressure is above 140/90 this indicates that you may have high blood pressure and you should speak to your GP. Further checks would normally be needed to confirm this. We advised those with high blood pressure readings who did not have an existing diagnosis of hypertension to go to a pharmacy or to their GP for another blood pressure check. Their health professional would then be able to advise them on an appropriate treatment pathway should hypertension be confirmed. Some residents told us that they found it difficult to be seen by their GP and would find it difficult to follow our advice for that reason. We were able to provide information about local pharmacies participating in a scheme offering blood pressure support to over 40s with health needs.

If your blood pressure is 180/110 or higher this indicates severe hypertension. We advised those with readings indicating severe hypertension to contact their GP as a matter of urgency.

## 2022/23 Signposting

We did not record the blood pressure of all the residents we tested during the first year of the project.

- ▶ At our stall at Chapel Market, we recorded 52 instances of signposting residents with readings consistent with undiagnosed hypertension to appropriate support.

High blood pressure-related signposting interventions	
5 July 2022	14
6 July 2022	17
7 July 2022	10
8 July 2022	11 (and one related to low blood pressure)
Total	52

- ▶ Our partners recorded 31 instances of signposting residents to additional medical support/advice. Ten of those interventions were to support residents who wished to take preventative action (exercise classes, dietary advice) and did not currently have high blood pressure.

## **2023/24 Signposting**

We recorded the blood pressure of all the residents from whom we collected data during the second year of the project. We reached 505 residents in the second year.

- ▶ 126 of 505 had been told by doctor they had high blood pressure (87 of those had high blood pressure readings when we took them). We reminded them of the importance of taking medication, checking their blood pressure regularly and talking to a healthcare professional about any abnormalities.
- ▶ A further 71 had undiagnosed high blood pressure and were signposted to health services. Though most of these people were from older age groups, one belonged to the 18 to 24 years age group and eight were between 25 and 49 years old.

# Advice and information

Not everyone needed signposting to health services. We engaged with over 1300 residents during the project, and everyone was given information about hypertension, the causes, impacts and ways to avoid. For those who wanted to take preventative measures 'Understanding Blood Pressure' the leaflet the British Heart Foundation supplied, proved to be an excellent resource.

We produced a Healthwatch branded card for recording each participant's blood pressure reading. On the back of the card was a QR code linking to the hypertension information we produced for our website. The webpage has been visited 576 times since we began our hypertension engagement activity. A printed version of the information was used as a training resource for partners and volunteers.

Our key messages for those who wanted to prevent or reduce high blood pressure were as follows:

- ▶ Eat less salt and more fruit and vegetables
- ▶ Cut down on the amount of alcohol you drink
- ▶ Stop smoking
- ▶ Be more active
- ▶ Dependent on your weight, try to lose weight

From our webpage we also linked to the One You Islington website with advice on getting active and physical activity opportunities being offered locally.

Partners delivering workshops and one-to-one support asked clients for feedback on whether the information about healthy hearts (based on the Healthwatch training and British Heart Foundation leaflets) was helpful, and how they might act on the information. Of the 175 supported in this way, all found the information helpful and 155 felt able to act on it, three felt partially able and 17 didn't feel able (as a result of socio-economic factors and/or caring responsibilities).

# Support for hypertension

Residents who had an existing diagnosis of hypertension and were already receiving treatment were invited to give feedback on that support.

We received 41 responses. The support that people found most helpful for managing their blood pressure was advice for healthy living, and in particular changing diet and doing more exercise. Those we spoke to at Chapel Market (as opposed to those who attended blood pressure events delivered by our partners) were more likely to mention medication.

“50mg in the morning and 5mg in the evening. The two medications are for blood pressure. My blood pressure was low with Covid and in hospital they took me off the medications and then I measured it at home, and it was over 200. Home measurement is very useful!”

- White British female, 80+ years

“[The support is] not bad, but I think the medicine I am taking is really helping with my blood pressure as it was very high before. They have been telling me to relax and eat well and have told me what to eat.”

- Black British female, 50 - 64 years

Negative feedback concerned access problems related to GP services in general. It was clear that this influenced patients' views of the support provided for high blood pressure. Services were seen as hard to contact and this made the advisory function of support less powerful. Where communication barriers existed, residents also found support less helpful, but barriers to accessing appointments were more significant. Over half of the respondents who shared feedback via our partner organisations felt that none of the support they received for high blood pressure was effective.

“It was alright, but they don't really explain so I understand.”

- Black African male 18-24 years

“I use the service with UCLH and they are good, specialists in blood pressure. I had a monitor for 72 hours because I had heart palpitations. I had a swelling on the leg, and I was put on special medication. They checked if it was a blood clot, which it wasn't. My GP was not so helpful, not proactive, not really supportive, and hard to contact.”

- White British female, age unknown

# Other feedback

Issues that participants raised in conversation with our staff, volunteers and partners:

- ▶ Very mixed awareness of the factors influencing/ action to prevent high blood pressure, some personal stories of losing people to hypertension related diseases.
- ▶ A lot of discussion about diabetes, especially when discussing heart health and diet.
- ▶ Desire to have other checks done all at the same time, lack of awareness about NHS health checks and whether these were available again post-pandemic.
- ▶ Lack of access to GPs, and concern when advised to see their GP about their blood pressure.
- ▶ Recognition that wider socio-economic circumstances are making it harder for people to live healthily (stress related to paying bills/ long working hours/ caring responsibilities, rising price of the basics including rent and food, not being able to keep homes at a comfortable temperature, homes in poor state of repair)

"I have suspected having high blood pressure, and now I know for sure. I will go to my GP."

- Black Somali male, 80+ years

"I am quite surprised by how high it is, whenever I have done it before I've scored a little lower. I think it's mainly stress that's causing this so I will do more activities to reduce my stress including walking and spending time alone."

- Black Eritrean female, 50 – 64 years

"My blood pressure is within the normal range. I play football three days a week and walk every day, and I was advised to keep up my exercise, reduce my salt intake, and eat healthy foods. Now I clearly understand that it is not only about exercising, but also about reducing salt and replacing processed foods with healthier options and overall being more conscious about my intake and health."

- Arab male, 25 – 49 years

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