

People's experiences of using GP websites to access information

October 2022



Contents	Page
About us	3
Background	3
What we did	5
Who we spoke to	6
Key messages	7
What people told us	8
• Public survey	8
• Focus groups	15
Recommendations	17
Next steps	18
Stakeholder response	18
Thank you	18
Appendices: 1 – 10	19

Note: Throughout this report there are embedded links to external websites. Full details of each one is listed under Appendix 10, page 28.

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About us

Healthwatch Somerset is the county's health and social care champion.

We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. We are entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice to help you to get the care and support you need.

As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care. This report is an example of how your views are shared.

Healthwatch Somerset is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We cover the geographical area of Somerset County Council, which includes the districts of Mendip, Sedgemoor, South Somerset, and Somerset West and Taunton.



Background

In 2016 Somerset County Council and NHS Somerset, formerly known as Somerset NHS Clinical Commissioning Group, published the [*Somerset Digital Roadmap*](#) which includes the shared Somerset digital vision:

People of Somerset will have high quality care that is affordable and sustainable supported by:

- Digital systems which support individuals to maintain their health and wellbeing and take control of managing their conditions
- Individuals who have ownership of their record with is shared digitally at the point of care
- Digital systems that extend into, and connect, resilient communities enabling 'one system' to be efficient and effective
- Planning of care which uses joined up information
- Digital systems that provide paper free efficiencies, removing paper and fax flow of information.

Since the emergence of COVID-19 in 2020, services and information from GP surgeries have been focussed on increasing digital access including booking appointments online and virtual consultations.

During 2020–2021, we heard through meetings we attended, from public feedback, and organisations, that people are experiencing difficulties accessing GP services. This is causing increased pressure on other essential providers such as the ambulance service and hospital Emergency Departments (ED's). During September and October 2021, in partnership with the NHS Somerset, we conducted a survey at Somerset Foundation Trust, Musgrove Hospital and Yeovil District Hospital ED's. Results showed that 32% of 283 people did not seek treatment or advice from other services before going to the ED.

To help reduce pressures on NHS services, NHS Somerset have undertaken a public campaign #ChooseWisely to inform people of the alternative services available to assist with medical issues.

NHS Somerset infographic to promote the correct use of NHS services for medical issues

Stay Well Somerset THIS WINTER

Injured or unwell? Use the right service **NHS**

The NHS is facing unprecedented challenges this winter. We need you to play your part and use services wisely. Thank you for your continued support.

Self-care	Pharmacy	NHS 111	GP	Minor Injury Unit	A&E
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grazed knees • Sore throat • Coughs & colds <p>Visit nhs.uk for self-care advice</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Headaches • Upset stomach • Aches & pains • Bites & stings <p>Visit your local pharmacy</p>	<p>Visit 111.nhs.uk or call 111 for advice and support</p> <p>24 hours a day 7 days a week</p>	<p>Call your GP for symptoms that won't go away</p>	<p>Urgent but not life-threatening</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sprains • fractures • burns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unconscious • Breathing difficulties • Stroke • Heart attack • Heavy bleeding • Severe burns

#ChooseWell

Why we are evaluating GP surgery websites

The NHS England national [GP patient survey 2021](#) shows that 58% of respondents in Somerset did not use general practice online services for any of the following:

- Booking appointments
- Ordering repeat prescriptions
- Accessing my medical records
- Consultations or appointments

50% of Somerset respondents said they hadn't tried to use their GP practice's website to look for information to access services.

Digital access to services and support is rapidly becoming the primary method of contact to health and social services, however this a disadvantage for people who are not able, or do not want, to use these methods.



Many people and communities remain digitally excluded or unable to access fast and reliable broadband coverage.

Somerset County Council [Business Plan 2019-20](#)



We wanted to better understand the impact of changes to access, such as digitalisation, on patients using GP services.

Health and wellbeing information

Information can be confusing when different sources say different things, so it is essential that available information is up-to-date and maintains continuity with other medical guidance.

There is a huge variety of information available online about health and social care services in Somerset, we wanted to investigate how, and if, people use their GP practice website to access this information. We are also interested in how useful the websites are, if the information within them is up-to-date, and how people access this kind of help if they are not digitally connected.

The feedback and data we collected has been used to create this report which will help inform the development of GP websites and their effectiveness for services users.

Important note about GP surgeries



General practices are the small to medium sized businesses whose services are contracted by NHS commissioners to provide generalist medical services in a geographical or population area.

[The King's Fund](#)



As GP practices are managed as small businesses it is important to note that although they receive guidance from commissioners about their website structure and content, they are independent and do not have to follow this guidance.

What we did

- We met with the following members of the NHS Somerset: Associate Director of Digital Strategy, the Programme Manager, and the Data Facilitator.
- We produced a public survey to record people's experiences of using their GP surgery website to access information about general health and wellbeing.
- The public survey could be completed between 9–23 May 2022 online, over the phone, or in person at one of our 13 venues during our two-week roadshow across Somerset.
- We organised three focus groups with two different minority groups, care leavers and members of the Macular Society South West.
- There are 64 GP surgeries in Somerset and each one has a website. Our volunteers reviewed every website using a checklist based on the guidelines *What a GP website should always contain* produced by NHS Somerset and distributed to all NHS GP surgeries in Somerset. A summary of these results can be seen in Appendix 1, page 19.

Our volunteers

We have 34 active volunteers, 22 of these supported this engagement. Their contributions included:

- Nine Volunteers joined us on our roadshow to talk to people about our work and help them complete our survey. Together they contributed a total of 31 hours.
- 13 Volunteers reviewed all the GP websites and completed a website checklist. Together they contributed a total of 48 hours.
- All of our volunteers assisted with the promotion of our roadshow and public survey through their networks.



A really interesting experience in Chard Hospital, being able to chat with some of the people coming through the door.

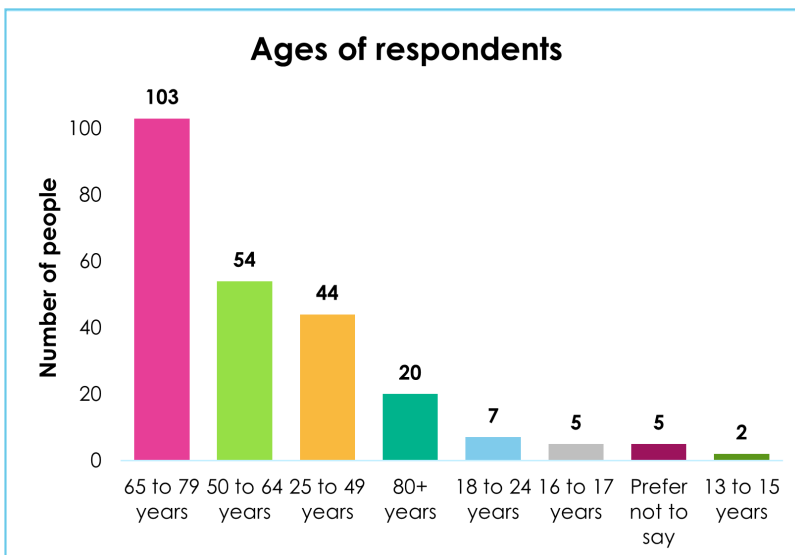


What a difference in standard and content between websites. Some are so easy to read and use while others you are clicking and clicking to find things.



Who we spoke to

There were 242 responses to our public survey.



235 people told us their age. Five people preferred not to say. Two people did not answer this question.

Gender

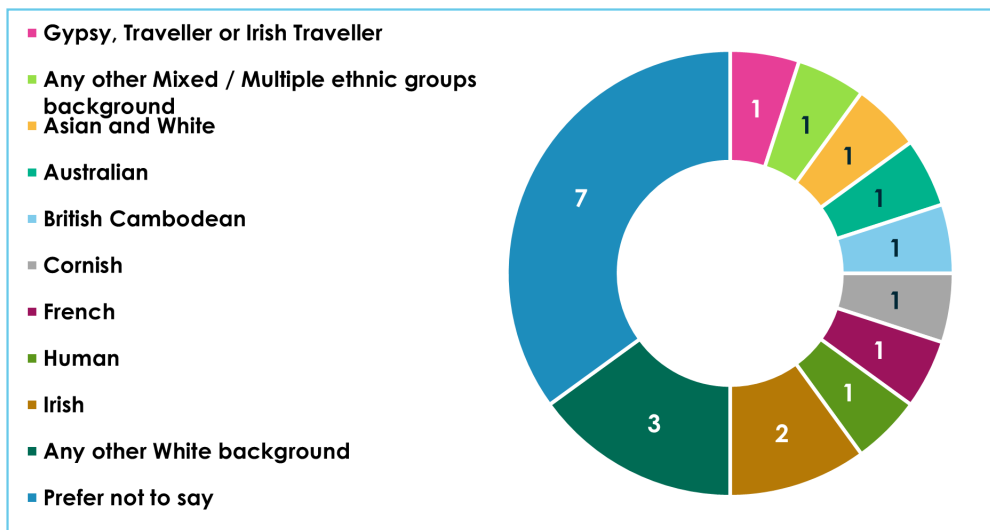
154 respondents were female, 78 were male, and two identified as non-binary.

Five people preferred not to say the gender they identified with and three did not answer the question.

Ethnicity

215 people identified themselves as White - British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh. Three people did not answer this question and one person commented that they found the question offensive in 'other'.

Other ethnic groups



Other

38 people identified themselves as carers.

92 of the respondents said they had a disability.

A breakdown of respondents by postcode can be seen in Appendix 2, page 22.

Key messages

- 77 out of 242 people told us their preferred method to access information about health and wellbeing was GP appointment; 51 of these people said they had access to digital services.
- The main reason given for using a GP surgery website in the past 12 months was to try to book an appointment.
- 177 people out of 242 made additional comments; 97 of these comments were negative.
- The variety of third-party services and differences in what they provide causes confusion and, in some cases, disadvantages.
- 28 of the 177 comments made mentioned it was difficult to make an appointment at their GP surgery.
- The most common answer for not having access to digital services was that people do not know how to, or do not have the confidence, to use them.

Third party services are provided by external companies. They help GP surgeries manage their workflow by offering facilities such as ordering prescriptions or patient triage. The services have to comply with regulations and follow guidelines provided by the **Government and the **NHS**.**

What people told us

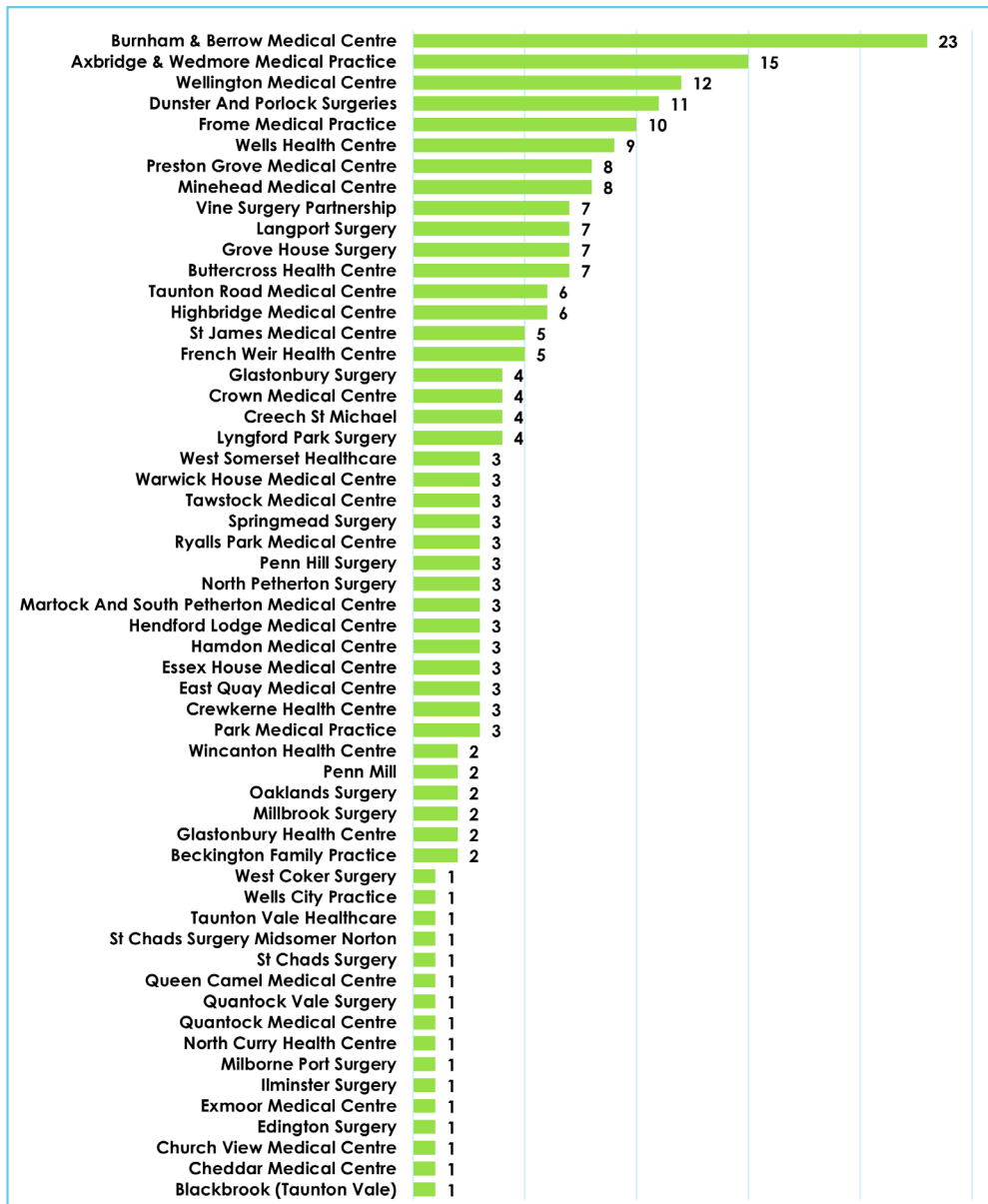
Public survey

The purpose of this engagement was to investigate how, or if, people use their GP surgery websites to access information for general health and wellbeing.

It is clear that a meaningful number of people wanted to tell us about other access issues with their GP surgery. These comments cannot be overlooked just because they sit outside of the original aims and have therefore, in part, been included in this report.

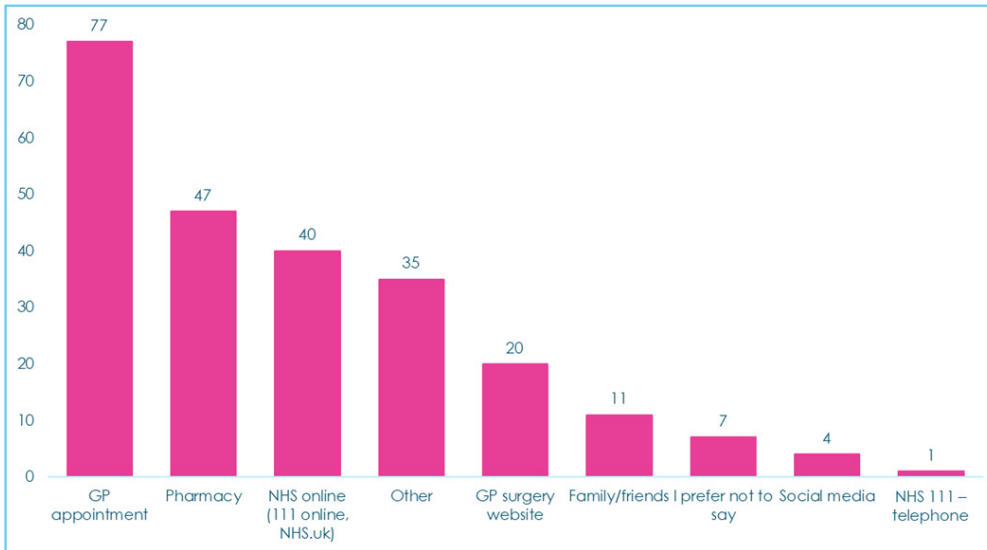
GP surgeries

There are 64 GP surgeries in Somerset, 56 of these were named by participants as their registered GP surgery in our public survey. Ten people did not include their registered GP surgery



Finding and receiving information

Preferred method of finding information



'Other' responses can be seen in Appendix 3, page 23.

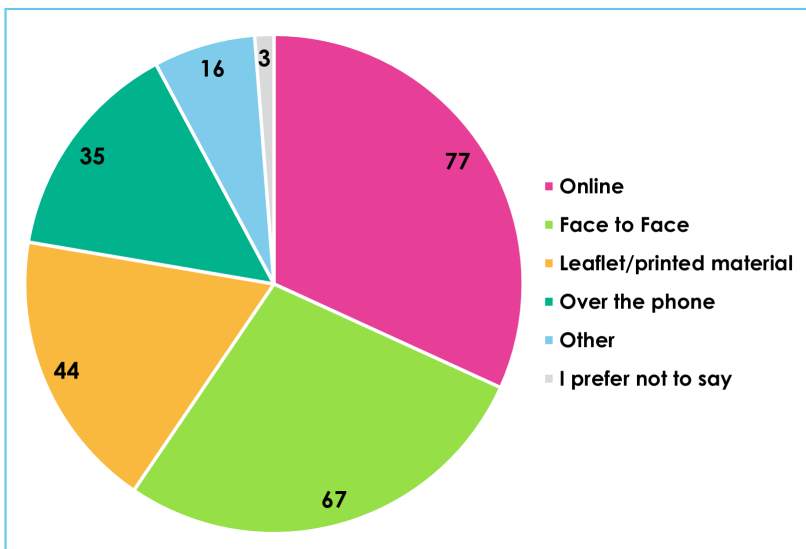
35 respondents who prefer not to use any digital method for accessing information do not have access to digital services.



I now go to pharmacist as my first choice primary healthcare. They are helpful, friendly, knowledgeable, and easily accessible - everything that GPs & the wider NHS aren't.



Preferred method of receiving information



'Other' responses can be seen in Appendix 4, page 23.



Prefer to look at leaflets. Technology changes too quickly to keep up.



The convenience of receiving accurate medical advice without having to take up valuable time (mine and the GPs) waiting for a face-to-face appointment.

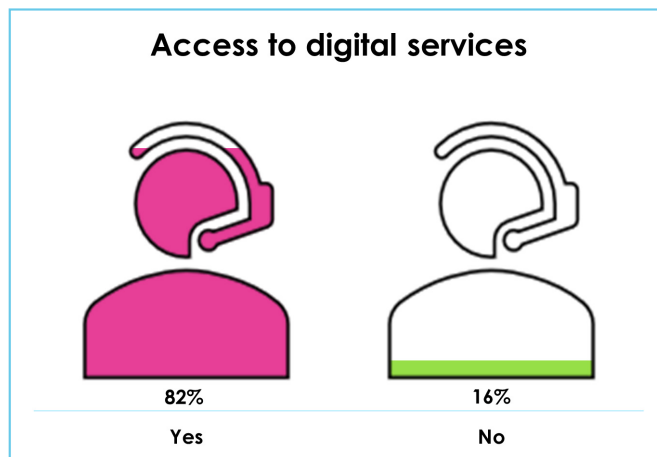


Digital access

198 respondents said they had access to digital services.

38 people told us they did not have access to digital services; we asked them to tell us why and six (2%) preferred not to say.

22 people told us that the reason for not being able to access these services was because they did not know how or have the confidence to use them. Some people gave more than one reason.



Ten people who gave other reasons for not being able to access digital services indicated the following:

- Four people said they don't want to.
- Three could not use it due to physical or mental difficulties.
- Two said they were concerned about digital security.
- One person was not interested in using digital services.

The full breakdown of reasons can be seen in Appendix 5, page 24.

Barriers to digital services



Further comments through the survey showed that although people may have access to digital services, there were reasons that prevented or discouraged them from doing so.

Eight people found digital services unsuitable due to physical or mental barriers, such as dyslexia. This does not include seven comments about age related difficulties.



My wife is dyslexic so is unable to use the website but when she phones up she is told to use the website.

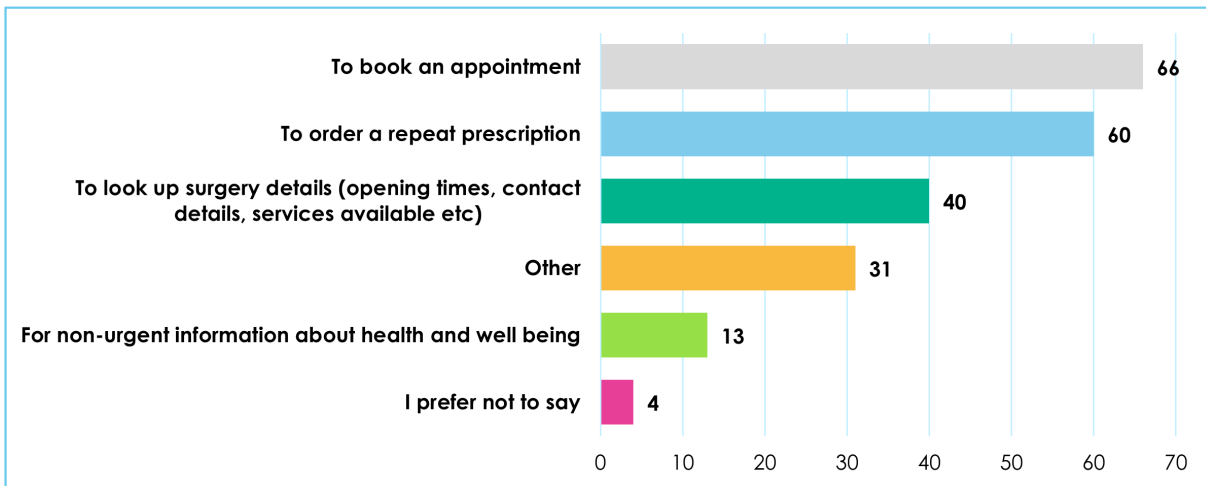


Reasons for using GP surgery websites

127 respondents told us they had accessed their GP surgery website in the past 12 months. 50 people stated that they did not access the website for health and wellbeing information.

We asked people to give all the reasons why they had used their GP surgery website. The most popular reason, given by 66 people, was to book an appointment, although this was not always possible. 13 respondents used their GP website to look for non-urgent information about their health and wellbeing.

Reasons people accessed their GP surgery website



A breakdown of how many reasons people gave and the 'other' responses can be seen in Appendices 6 and 7, page 24.

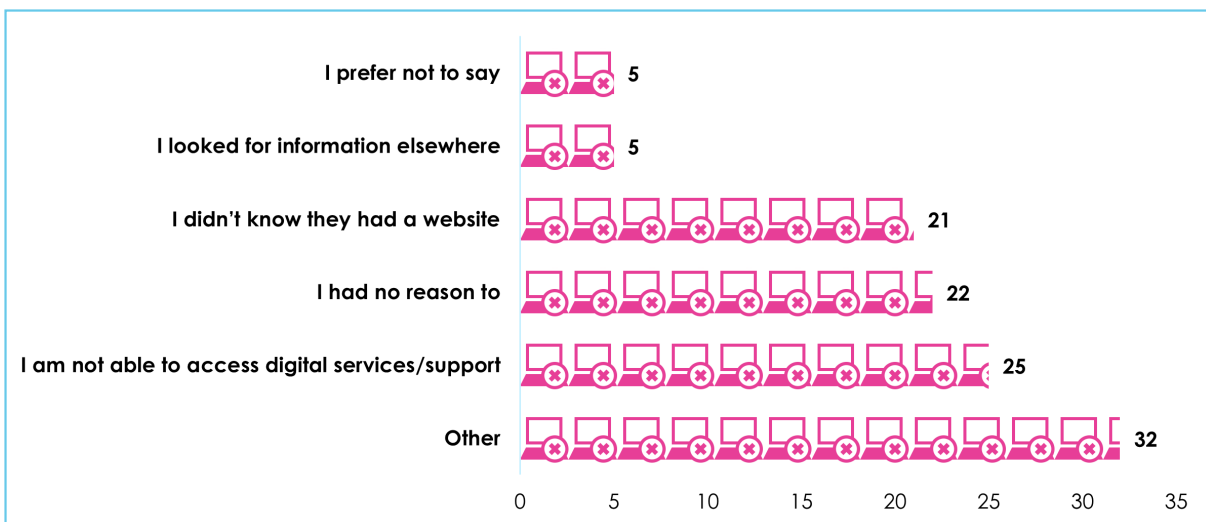
20 of 128 people said the information available resolved their issue.

Ten out of 177 comments made included that it was easy to contact their GP surgery using the website, and six said it was good because they could look up surgery details such as opening times.

To find out who the GPs are and if you can get face-to-face appointments.

Reasons people did not use their GP website

We also asked people why they hadn't accessed their GP surgery website in the past 12 months, there were 110 responses.



I have tried to use it before and have not found it helpful. In fairness it may have improved, but because of past experience I haven't tried recently.

I don't think I should have to.

'Other' reasons can be seen in Appendix 8, page 25.

Technology

14 people told us they used the website to access a third-party service application such as AskMyGP or Patient Access.

23 respondents said that what they liked about their GP surgery website was the ability to order repeat prescriptions.



It is complicated. There are two systems: Engage Consult and Patient Access which appear to be private.

Three respondents said that they used their GP surgery website for online consultations and that it was easy to do this.

Two people said they didn't find the third-party service fit for purpose.

Ease of use

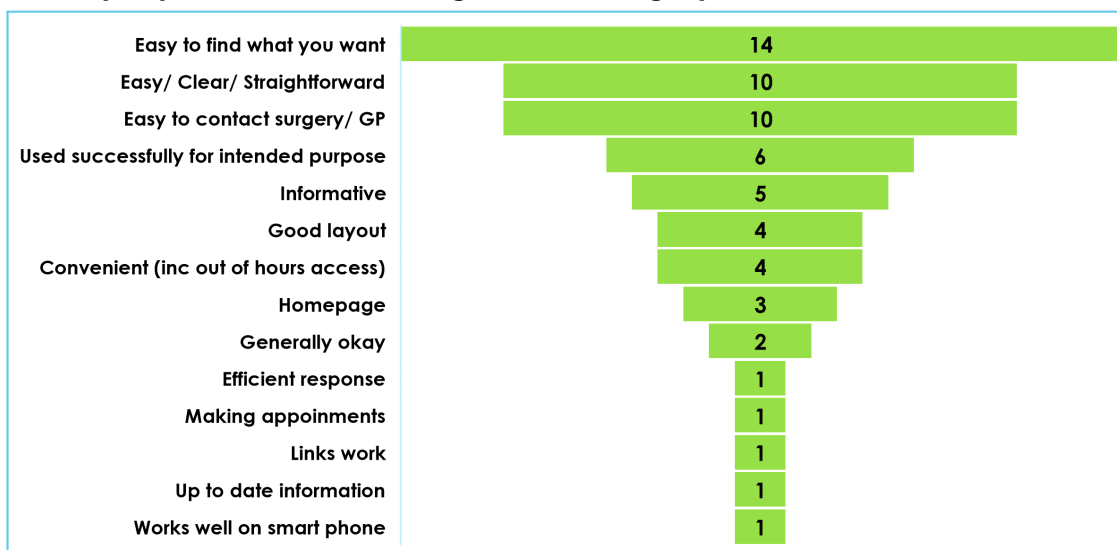
62 of 128 people said they found their website easy to use, 57 did not, and nine people preferred not to say.

177 respondents out of the 242 people we spoke to, gave comments about using their GP surgery websites.

Well laid out, easy to navigate around.

It's easy to contact admin.

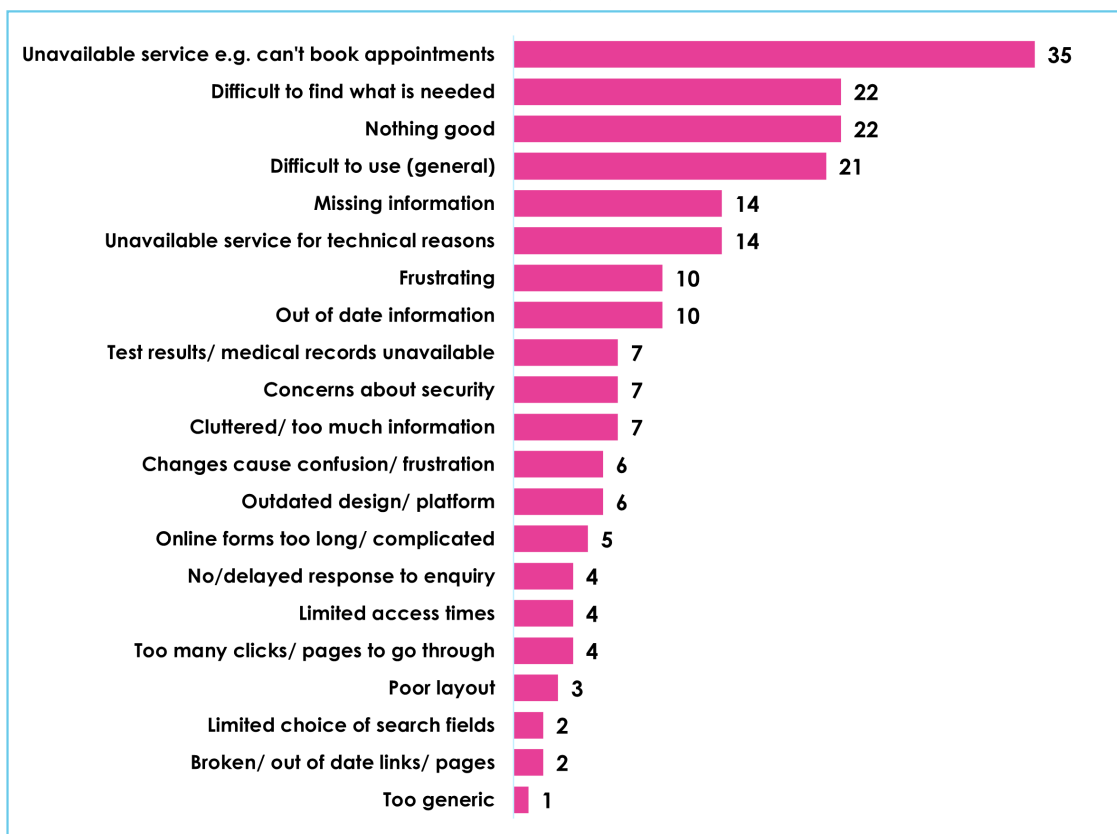
What people liked about using their GP surgery website



I found the information I was looking for on how to book an appointment (by phone or in person).

I was able to input the information I wanted an answer to, and the surgery responded the same day.

What people did not like about using their GP surgery website



Q The website is quite cluttered, very hard to find eConsult which I did wrong (accessed a different area and left my details) - then felt told off by the receptionist who called because I hadn't used eConsult - yet I couldn't find it!

Q Too complicated to set up. Can't access results of order prescriptions. Just too hard and don't want to phone.

Q After going through all of the questions on the e consult to then be told to phone the surgery! What a waste of time!

23 people out of 177 who commented stated their GP surgery website did not offer any function to make an appointment online.

Personal preferences

Accessing healthcare through digital services is a choice and people's preferences need to be respected regardless of their ability to access digital methods.

Q I am not going to conform with the idea that everyone should go digital and use digital access for their healthcare.

Q I use AskMyGP for straightforward medical issues. I get a prompt response and matters are usually dealt with quickly. I don't search for basic medical information.

We received a small number of comments that indicated a preference for using digital services due to their ability to access some services out-of-hours or that it was quicker than the long wait to get through to the surgery on the telephone.

Various responses we received during this survey showed that some people prefer to talk to healthcare professionals either in person or over the phone. There were also signs that a number of people felt excluded or criticised for not using digital services at the GP surgery.

21 of 177 comments included that they would prefer to speak to someone either over the phone or face-to-face.

81 people indicated they prefer to access information about their health and wellbeing through their GP by appointment, 55 of these said they had access to digital services.

I only use the internet for emails.

It doesn't seem to serve my needs.

I don't have to talk to anyone, and I can make an appointment when convenient to me - i.e., after work at midnight.

I am filling this in for my husband. He is 80 and not computer literate. All the info that is sent him about his diabetes is sent online and apparently not available in leaflet format. He therefore doesn't/cannot receive further help. This is without a doubt discriminatory!

I would prefer to talk to somebody, but it seems impossible these days!"

Information is not available without internet, I prefer to interact face-to-face.

I am frustrated and angry and am not prepared to spend hours - HOURS it takes me - trying to access websites.

So much better to see a human being. Feel they may be doing the best they can but too time-consuming.

Other comments about access

Throughout the survey a variety of people told us about the problems they were experiencing accessing services from their GP that they could not resolve online.

16 people out of 177 made comments that either they experienced difficulty getting through to their GP surgery on the phone, or they are not able to get through at all.

Impossible to get through on the phone.

There is a long wait to get through on the phone, emails are no good.

28 people out of 177 told us they found it hard, or were unable, to make appointments with a doctor at their GP surgery.

Frequently no appointments available. I don't actually know how to see a doctor.

Trying to get an appointment to even speak to your GP or other specialist on the telephone, is next to impossible and actually getting a face-to-face appointment is almost completely out of the question.

A copy of the public survey questions can be seen in Appendix 9, page 26.

Focus group summary

We wanted to investigate if there were any distinctive experiences from certain minority groups such as young people or those with specific needs. We reached out to several organisations including those connected with men of working age, the [LGBTQ+ community](#), and the sensory impaired.

As a result, we were invited to talk to a group of young care leavers and two groups of the Macular Society South West.

Care leavers

We spoke to 12 care leavers and four care leaver workers.

When looking for information about their general health and wellbeing all 16 participants said they would use Google search, however 11 of these would use [NHS online](#) (or NHS 111) for trusted medical information. Three participants said they would use their GP surgery website for help with their general health and wellbeing, but a few said they would never use it as they prefer to use NHS online.

It was clear that the care leavers are comfortable using digital technology and several indicated that they would use Google search to help them prepare for a visit to a GP or health professional.

One care leaver indicated that they would only use an appointment with their GP to access information about any health needs due to previous negative experiences using other help such as a pharmacist.

One participant indicated they would seek advice from a pharmacist for general health and wellbeing information.

As with our survey participants, the care leavers were keen to share other experiences about accessing health and wellbeing advice from their GP surgery. Several care leavers indicated that because of their age they felt GPs and/or healthcare professionals did not listen to them, and there was a general worry amongst the group that their concerns would be dismissed by their GP.

The group suggested that it would be helpful if GP surgeries had a designated professional for care leavers who understood their specific needs and would help with their continuity care through their transition to adult services.



Macular Society South West – group 1

There were six participants in this group.

Nobody in this group uses their GP surgery website for accessing information about health and wellbeing.

One person uses their GP surgery website to use the third-party service Patient Access. They told us that they found the service easy to use and used it to access their medical records, they were also directed to the GP surgery website for further information and to access the Somerset Talking Therapies service.

Two people who were registered at the same GP surgery said they were unable to read the text on the website as it was light blue on a white background. This made it unsuitable for their visual impairment.



Accessible formats, sometimes called alternative formats, are alternative means of presenting information for people who are unable to access it in its original written format.

[Sight Scotland](#)



One person does not use the internet at all due the severity of her visual impairment.

Several participants also mentioned that some online access to services and information was done on their behalf by a partner or family member, often because of their visual impairment.

Pharmacists were also mentioned as a source of information for health and wellbeing as this can be done independently. People can also ask important questions that may be provided on the medication information.

Macular Society South West – group 2

There were 12 participants in this group.

Nobody in this group uses their GP surgery website for accessing information about health and wellbeing.

All of the participants in the group said they would prefer to access information about their health and wellbeing through an appointment with their GP. Six members said they would consult a pharmacist about some minor health and wellbeing matters.



All members of the group said that they would not use their GP surgery website to access health and wellbeing information if they needed it or could.

Nine people prefer to receive health and wellbeing information face-to-face. A number of these participants said this was because they could then ask questions if necessary. Five members said they would prefer to receive information in an accessible written format.



Clear and Large Print are important for making your information accessible for people with visual impairments, but everyone benefits from information being clear and legible.

[Sensory Trust](#)



Six members of the group have access to digital services, none of them have accessed their GP surgery website for health and wellbeing information in the past 12 months. The reasons they gave are:

- Three didn't know the GP surgery had a website.
- Two looked for information elsewhere.
- One person had no reason to look for health and wellbeing information.

Six people told us that they did not have access to digital services.

One person said that they did not have a stable internet connection or enough bandwidth to support the services.

Eight members of the group indicated they did not know how or have the confidence to use digital services.



Recommendations

Based on the experiences we gathered we are making the following recommendations to help improve the offer of accessing health and wellbeing information through GP surgery websites.

- **Use simple and uncluttered content and design:** This may require clear, more specific guidelines from NHS Somerset Digital and collaboration with the website designers.
- **Avoid frequent changes to the look of the website:** so that people become familiar and confident how to use the website.
- **Explain how to use the website for people who are unsure:** GP surgeries should consider a more proactive approach. For example, they could provide a brief one page 'How to use our website' guide for all patients. This needs to be available or offered in a variety of formats so that people don't have to go online to access the information. This also needs to explain the benefits of using the website and what the functions of the different third-party services are.
- **More help for people who lack digital knowledge:** It would be beneficial for GP surgeries to help those patients who want to use digital services but lack the knowledge or confidence to do so. This could be through the GP practice Digital Outreach Team (DOT), or by displaying posters of support schemes currently available in Somerset such as [Spark iT](#) provided by Spark Somerset.
- **Respect needs and preferences:** Some respondents who could not or would not use digital services indicated they felt criticised and/or excluded because of this.
- **Seek patient input to help develop the website:** this could be achieved through the Patient Participation Groups, NHS Somerset Digital Champions, or by creating their own digital participation group.

Next steps

We will be inviting the NHS Somerset to work with us to respond to the issues identified through people's experiences and plan improvements to simplify websites making them more accessible where possible.

Our findings will be presented to various organisations who have significant interest in GP surgery websites, and the report will be published on our website. The data and report from this engagement will also be shared with Healthwatch England.

Stakeholder response

We know that many people access NHS services online. We can see this in the report, which tells us that 82% of people who took part are able to access digital services. Part of the work of NHS Somerset is to help to improve these digital services. Our Digital Outreach Team (DOT) work with all 64 General Practices in Somerset to help them to provide a range of excellent services. This includes supporting Patient Participation Groups (PPGs); improving GP websites to make it easier for patients and carers to find information; helping General Practices to promote online consultations, which are a great way to speak to a GP or other health professional; and use of the NHS App which helps people to stay in control of their wellbeing.

We also know that some people cannot use digital services. That is why we are currently working with partners including SPARK Somerset, our local libraries and our GPs to offer loans of devices and internet connection to those who don't have them, as well as training sessions via digital champions in the community, and care coordinators at General Practices. This includes how to use websites, how to use the Somerset apps library, how to use the NHS App, and much more. If you're interested in finding out more, please ask your GP care coordinator who can link with the NHS Somerset DOT team or contact SPARK Somerset.

We will use the feedback in this report to help inform this digital improvement work – thank you for sharing it with us.

Thank you

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to provide their views and experiences throughout this project.

A special thank you to the Macular Society South West, the Care Leavers, the Care Leavers Support Workers, and Val Marshall (Somerset Leaving Care Participation Lead – Countywide) for their contributions to our focus group work.

Additional thanks must be given to our dedicated volunteers, NHS Somerset and the numerous voluntary and community sector organisations who helped to support the engagement activity.

Without their support we would not have been able to achieve such comprehensive coverage of Somerset County or to reach such a wide-ranging audience.



Somerset

Appendices

1. Results of the GP website investigation

Background

This piece of work is included in our project on accessing information about health and wellbeing from GP websites. We know that NHS Somerset are currently offering support to GP practices through their Digital Outreach Teams to develop their websites. Conversations with staff within the NHS Somerset have indicated that if members of the public are able to get the information that they need from websites, it frees up time for face-to-face appointments for people who are unable to access this information. This piece of work will enable the NHS Somerset to focus their resources where they are most needed, and the 'raw' data has been shared with them.

11 of our volunteers and two members of staff looked at each website in turn and answered the following questions. Our volunteers are people who are not familiar with websites, so they gave us a good indication of whether or not a particular item was easy to find. When collating the results, we did spot checks on the feedback we had received and, in some cases, did manage to find the information that the volunteer had been unable to find.

Item	Notes	Results
1. All websites should be offering and promoting an online consultation tool.	An online consultation enables you to contact a GP or other health professional over the internet. It saves you waiting for an appointment or going to the GP surgery.	63/64 websites offered online services. Several of the surgeries had the online consultation tool appear as a pop-up box when the website was logged into, however if you did not immediately click the link it was then hard to find.
2. All websites should be offering and promoting an online facility to provide and update personal or contact information.		55/64 websites offered the ability to update personal details via the website and it was easily available, in some cases this was available via Patient Access or the NHS App.
3. No fax numbers.	No GP website should contain a fax number.	Only 1 practice out of 64 still had a fax number on the website.
4. Signposting for symptoms and managing our own health.	Patients should be helped to understand how to look after their own health and check their symptoms.	57/64 websites offered signposting for symptoms and managing our own health. The signposting varied from website to website in some cases there was a list of common complaints/ailments and in others it was very limited with a suggestion to contact the GP. The majority of websites linked through to the NHS Health A-Z.
5. Keeping the GP website up-to-date.		48/64 websites showed an up-to-date copyright mark in the footer of the website.
6. Key information which should be kept up-to-date and included.	a) Practice premises addresses b) Telephone numbers c) Practice email address d) Any other ways that patients access services, such as the link to the practice's online services and video consultations.	Of all the information on websites we looked for the contact information was the most consistent. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 64/64 had the premises address. • 64/64 had a telephone number available. • 51/64 had an email available; in some cases this was through an 'email us' form rather than giving the email. • 59/64 offered alternative ways of contacting the practice; Facebook was a common option.

Item	Notes	Results
7. All websites should promote the NHS App (and, where applicable, Patient Access).	Both Patient Access and the NHS App offer services to patients including with appointments and prescriptions.	54/64 websites have either NHS App, Patient Access or both. Volunteers only mentioned on four occasions that they had found a button or link easily. Apps, particularly Patient Access, were only promoted under another link, i.e. ordering prescriptions.
8. Accessibility statement.		61/64 have accessibility statements and the statements included sections on things like how to make the text larger for example. However, a lot of the accessibility statements were behind a link in the footer of the website page in typeface that was 1-2mm in height. One website was singled out by the volunteer who looked at their website for praise as they have an icon on the front page of the website.
9. Patient Participation Group (PPG).	Information about the PPG – what it is and how to join.	61/64 mentioned PPGs; examples of good practice included listing the minutes of meetings and good information accessed via the home page. PPGs were sometimes being offered as closed Facebook groups.
10. How to offer feedback to the practice.		59/64 practices seemed to be accepting feedback in different ways such as through the 'Family and Friends Test', via a contact us form, and through PALS were some examples quoted. Our volunteers often stated that the facility was difficult to find.
11. How to join the practice.		62/64 websites explained how to join the practice and, in several cases, included a geographical boundaries map to show which area's they covered.
12. Information on the Somerset Apps Library - Orcha.	The Somerset Apps Library shows health and care related apps which have been reviewed for data privacy, professional clinical assurance and how usable and accessible they are.	Only 12/64 websites mentioned or linked to Orcha.
13. Information on Somerset Choices and the Somerset Local Offer.	Information on social care.	16/64 websites mentioned external support, e.g. Somerset Choices, Somerset Direct or services like Talking Café's or Health Connectors.
14. Services that the practice offer.	For example, links to self-refer into maternity services.	56/64 websites highlighted the services that were provided within the practice.
15. Practice opening times, and what to do when the practice is closed.		64/64 websites listed the practice opening times and all except a few explained what to do outside of these hours. The explanations referenced NHS 111 and the 999 service in case of an emergency.

Item	Notes	Results
16. Explanations and guides on the NHS App and how to register.		51/64 referenced the NHS App on their site; a few of the volunteers mentioned that it was difficult to find. A couple of sites only mentioned the NHS App with reference to the COVID pass.
17. Information about local schemes.	For example, NHS Diabetes Prevention Programme, MyWay Diabetes.	49/64 gave information about local schemes and some websites gave more details than others.
18. How to contact NHS 111.	Also whether there is an explanation of what NHS 111 is.	54/64 only. 9 volunteers mentioned an explanation on NHS 111 accompanying the link. NHS 111 was often mentioned as the place to contact out-of-hours..
19. Community pharmacy consultation service.		23/64 had an explanation of the community pharmacy consultation service.
20. Promotion of ordering prescriptions online, an explanation of how to do this, and the benefits to both patients and practice.		59/64 websites were promoting online ordering for prescriptions, often the explanation was about how to achieve it rather than the benefits of ordering online. The NHS App and Patient Access were both referenced here.
21. Unpaid carers and support available to them.		43/64 referenced support for unpaid carers. This often included how to register as an unpaid carer, details of who the carers champion is and how to contact the carers service.

In summary

Our volunteers struggled to find some of the items on the different websites, e.g. how to update personal contact details was often buried in the websites and not at all obvious. Sometimes, it was a form to complete, and other times part of one of the online consultation apps.

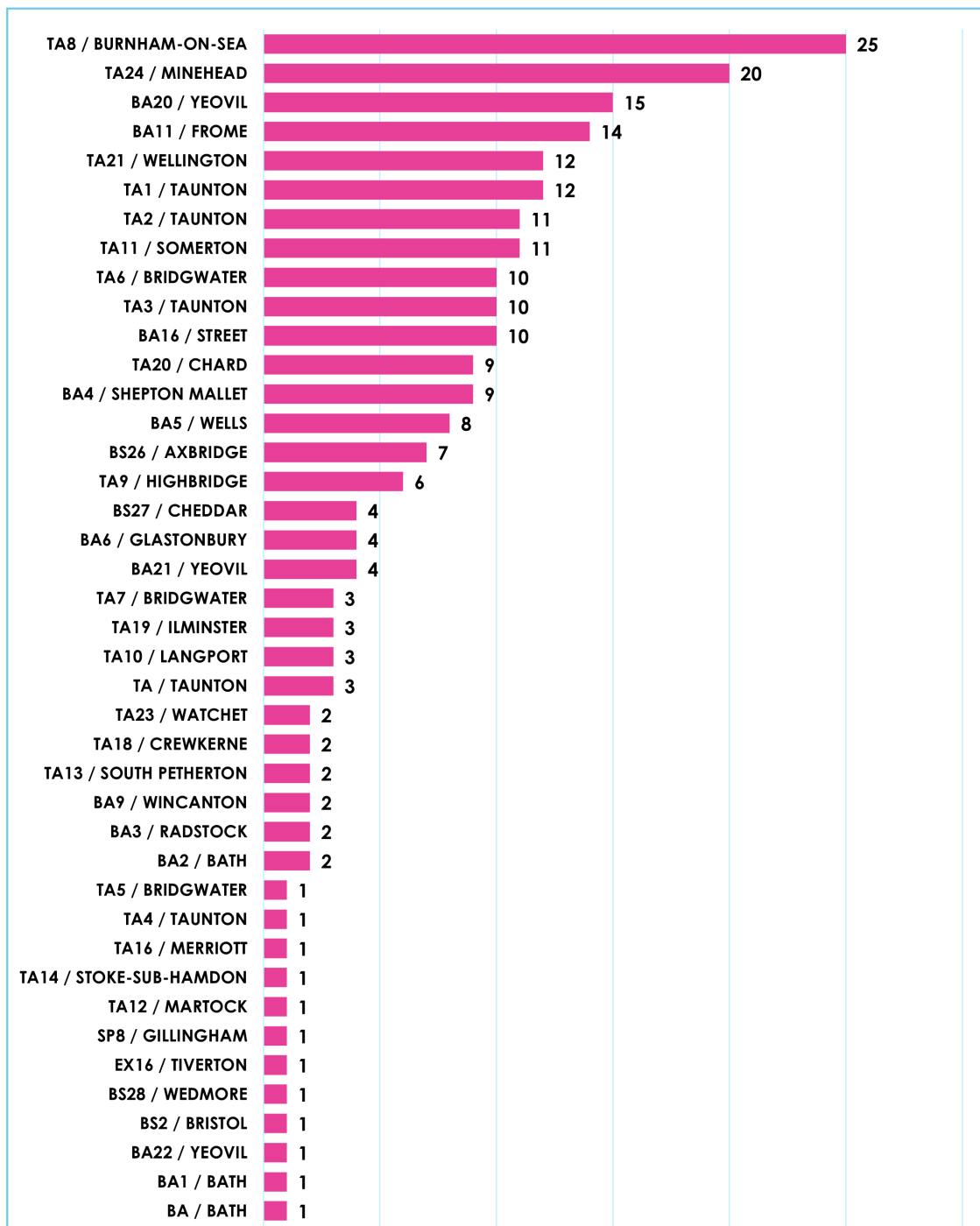
Apps such as the NHS App and Patient Access both have the potential to help patients to undertake simple actions such as changing personal details and ordering repeat prescriptions. However, they are rarely promoted in a prominent position, our volunteers only specifically mentioned being able to find the buttons easily four times.

How to offer feedback to the practice was often difficult for our volunteers to find with a variety of different methods. No websites mentioned Healthwatch Somerset as a way of collecting feedback for the practice as an independent option.

Information about the availability of external support for accessing digital services/technology was often missing.

The websites easiest to navigate are those that are simply laid out with clear pathways for patients to follow. It is also important that websites are optimized to work on a range of digital devices including smart phones and tablets.

2. Survey respondents by postcode



3. Other responses: method of accessing information

I would rarely require information about non urgent health and wellbeing.	AskMyGP App.
I would not bother a GP with those sort of trivial things. What about including self-care?	GP website - My Doctor App.
Our surgery use My GP for triage purposes. I say the problem, how I would like it resolved and a clinician phones me. It generally works well.	Self-care and management.
This is everyday knowledge. May check online on reputable websites, never GP website as it doesn't have that info and is difficult to find if it does.	I haven't needed anything for a few years. Minor things I would use pharmacy, for major things I'd speak to GP.
Sometimes I Google things.	No indication of what I have ticked here. Internet search also.
I would firstly use the internet to find an easy remedy or find out whether I should seek professional, medical help.	Depends what the issue is.
Phone doctors.	By my GP on the telephone.
Researching on Google.	Daughter is GP.
Internet including NHS website plus other reputable British health sites.	Research self NHS.
Self-diagnosis and medication.	NHS 111, NHS Online, family/friends.
I also look at the NHS web pages for useful information.	GP appointment, GP website, pharmacy, NHS 111, social media, Patient Access.
NHS 111 telephone and Google.	GP website, NHS online (111 online, NHS.uk).
I don't.	

Ten of the 35 people who gave 'other' responses did not give consent for their comments to be published in this report.

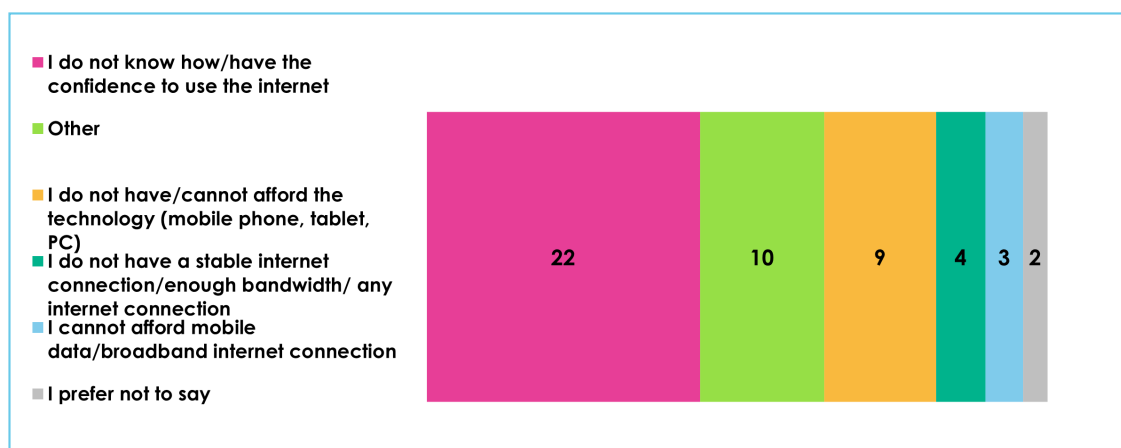
4. Other responses: method of receiving information

Again, I would rarely want or require information about general health and wellbeing.
With a nurse practitioner for minor matters.
Happy to be contacted by email.
My sister is a doctor. I ask specific questions.
Email.
Text.
AskMyGP App.
Message.
Depends what the issue is.
Don't really get any.
Face-to-face and online.

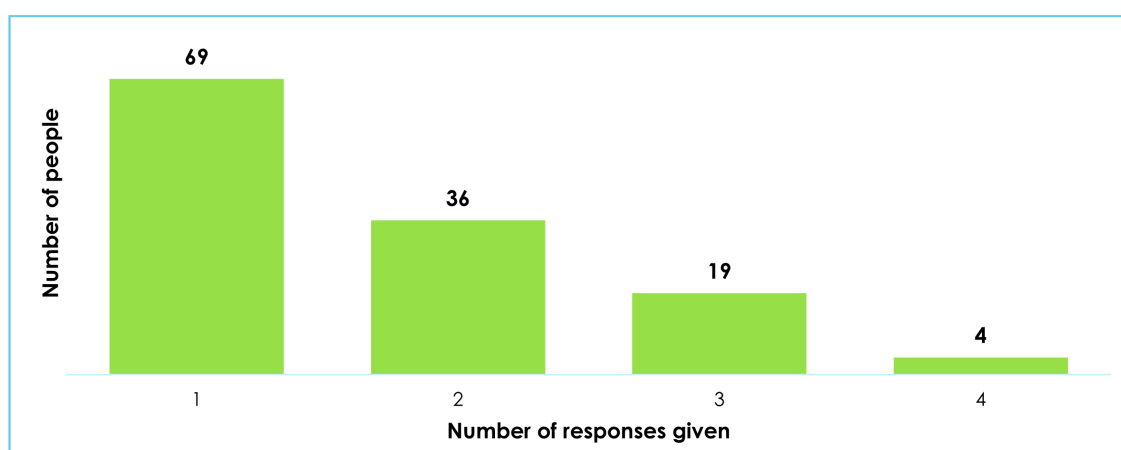
Five of the 16 people who gave 'other' responses did not give consent for their comments to be published in this report.

5. Reasons for not having access to digital services

We asked people to indicate all the reasons they could not access these services; 38 people gave a total of 50 reasons.



6. Accessing GP surgery websites



7. Other reasons for accessing GP surgery websites

To post blood pressure readings.	To book an appointment and to order a repeat prescription.
Knee pain that was not responding to OTC medication and wasn't improving with NHS recommended physio exercises.	Trying to find an online form to request a sick note because I can't do this over the phone (apparently) so I tried to find it on their web site to save me walking to the surgery. (30 min walk and can't drive due to epilepsy).
I booked a routine blood test.	Breast cancer familial history. Request for further investigation.
To see which GPs were working at the surgery.	To look at medication and test results.
Online consultation.	And vaccinations.
To find out who the GPs are and if you can get face-to-face appointments.	Also to get advice.
To try and book appointments and look at my own results but these are not available now!!!	Single access for appointment.
Health questionnaire.	To view my records.

To try and book an appointment to be seen for ongoing symptoms that they wouldn't help with over the phone.	To report blood pressure readings.
For return to work.	First time it ticked an answer!
What new doctors are now in my medical practice.	Test results and repeat prescriptions.
Cannot book appointments online here.	Test results.
To actually get a phone call from a GP who might consider that he needs to actually see me.	I use Patient Access for repeat prescription. I preferred using AskMyGP but the surgery turned the system off.
Our site does not allow the making of appointments. We can ONLY order repeat prescriptions. We have been able to access the AskMyGP service once, and since then we have been unable to as the practice does not support this function.	
<p>I have used the website to communicate with the GP surgery, via eConsult to do the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To inform them of my own health issues and I have been advised, via online message or phone, about an appointment with the GP - always by phone first these days and then, when required a follow up face-to-face appointment. to inform/update the GPs about both of my daughters mental health issues (ages 17 and 20), and to seek and chase support/response, including to chase my eldest daughter's ADHD assessment. GP has responded with phone calls to myself and my daughter, to consult and to make face-to-face appointments, and there have also been online messages providing updates and appointments. 	

Three of the 31 people who gave 'other' responses did not give consent for their comments to be published in this report.

8. Other reasons people did not use GP websites

I have tried to use it before and have not found it helpful. In fairness it may have improved, but because of past experience I haven't tried recently.	Found it one of the most difficult websites I have ever come across.
Don't trust website/digital security.	After numerous attempts and much time spent I had to admit defeat every time and give up.
Have not looked at their website in a long time. I use Patient Access to view test results, order prescriptions etc.	Prefer to contact the surgery by phone.
I prefer to phone or go to surgery.	Tried to use it don't like it.
Letters too small on phone to use to access internet easily.	Don't have the confidence to use the internet.
I have dyslexia and find it inaccessible and hard to read.	I don't think I should have to.
I only use the internet for emails.	GP surgery doesn't have a website.
I'd rather use the phone.	Do not trust.
Downloaded the app but it requires a photo of me - this is a step too far. Why a photo? They have all my details because I am a registered patient.	Prefer to phone.
When used before it was not very helpful.	Prefer to phone.

My password got confused with my sick husband's, then I got help from the IT person at the surgery. I then became so worked up about it that I hid from the problem. I am aware that plenty like me are now avoiding contact with potential dangerous results because we can access no help from the surgery and we certainly mustn't try to see a GP.

I no longer trust GPs or their evil receptionists. It is almost impossible to get past the receptionists. Patient confidentiality is a joke. Part-time female GPs are destroying primary healthcare. It is primarily a service by women, for women.

9. Other reasons people did not use GP websites

Everybody was asked the following four questions:

Q1. Which GP surgery in Somerset you are registered with?

Q2. What is your preferred method of accessing information about your non urgent general health and wellbeing? Please select one answer only.

[Your general health/wellbeing would include treating minor illness/injury such as a sore throat or grazed knee. It would also include things such as quitting smoking, losing weight, or carers support.]

- GP appointment
- GP surgery website
- Pharmacy
- NHS 111 – telephone
- NHS online (111 online, NHS.uk)
- Social media
- Family/friends
- I prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Q3. How do you prefer to receive information about your non urgent health and wellbeing? (Please choose one of the following options).

- Leaflet/printed material
- Over the phone
- Face-to-Face
- Online
- I prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Q4. Do you have access to digital services/devices?

- Yes
- No

If the answer to Q4 was 'No', other questions were skipped, and the respondent directed straight to the following questions highlighted in pink:

What prevents you from accessing digital services/devices? Please select all that apply.

- I do not know how/have the confidence to use the internet
- I do not have/cannot afford the technology (mobile phone, tablet, PC)
- I do not have a stable internet connection/enough bandwidth/ any internet connection
- I cannot afford mobile data/broadband internet connection
- I prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about accessing information for health and wellbeing using your GP surgery website?

If the answer to Q4 was 'Yes', respondents were asked:

Q5. Have you accessed your GP surgery's website over the past 12 months?

Where respondents answered 'No' to Q5 they were directed straight to the following questions highlighted in blue:

Please tell us why you have not used your GP surgery website in the past 12 months. Please select one answer only.

- I had no reason to
- I didn't know they had a website
- They don't have a website
- I looked for information elsewhere
- I am not able to access digital services/support
- I prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about accessing information for health and wellbeing using your GP surgery website?

Where respondents answered 'Yes' to Q5 they were directed straight to the following questions highlighted in green:

Who did you access the GP website for?

- Myself
- For someone else
- As an unpaid carer
- As a parent/guardian
- I prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

Please select one of the following statements:

- I have a disability
- I have an ongoing/long term illness/health condition that is not a disability
- I do not have a disability or an ongoing/long term health condition
- I prefer not to say

Please tell us why you accessed your GP surgery website. (Please select all that apply.)

- To look up surgery details (opening times, contact details, services available etc)
- To book an appointment
- To order a repeat prescription
- For non-urgent information about health and well being
- I prefer not to say
- Other (please specify)

If you accessed your GP website for non-urgent information about health and wellbeing, please tell us what you were looking for. (For example, 'An ongoing health condition' or 'quitting smoking'.)

Did you find the general health and wellbeing information that you were looking for? Please select one answer only.

- Yes – The information available resolved my issue
- In part – I needed more information/the information available was not helpful
- There was no information regarding my issue
- I did not access the website for information about general health and wellbeing
- I prefer not to say

Did you find the website easy to use?

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to say

Please tell us what you like the most about your GP's website.

Please tell us what you dislike the most about your GP's website.

In addition to what you have told us, is there anything else you would like to say about your GP's website?

10. Reference: embedded links

Page 3	Somerset Digital Roadmap	https://www.somersetccg.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/1.-FINAL-OCTOBER-SUBMISSION-Somerset-Digital-Roadmap-v2.0.pdf
Page 4	GP patient survey 2021 Business Plan 2019-20	https://gp-patient.co.uk/surveysandreports2021 http://www.somerset.digital/businessplan/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Business-Plan-PDF-1.pdf
Page 5	The King's Fund	https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/gp-funding-and-contracts-explained
Page 7	Government NHS	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/code-of-conduct-for-data-driven-health-and-care-technology/initial-code-of-conduct-for-data-driven-health-and-care-technology#regulation https://www.england.nhs.uk/gp-online-services/
Page 15	LGBTQ+ community NHS online	https://www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/information-and-resources/faqs-and-glossary/list-lgbtq-terms https://www.nhs.uk/
Page 16	Sight Scotland Sensory Trust	https://sightscotland.org.uk/articles/information-and-advice/accessible-formats https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/resources/guidance/designing-with-clear-and-large-print
Page 17	Spark iT	https://www.sparksomerset.org.uk/spark-it



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