

The value of listening

Healthwatch Islington
Annual Report 2023 - 2024



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Message from our Chair

Welcome to our 2023–24 annual report. It's been another year of growth for Healthwatch Islington. We've extended our work to include specific projects on cancer screening, childhood immunisations, and the physical health needs of residents with long-term health conditions.

We continued our work with Healthwatch across North Central London to raise the importance of a healthy lifestyle and talk to residents about hypertension (high blood pressure) which affects as many as one in five of us in Islington. Across the borough, over the last two years, we've helped over 1,300 people improve their understanding of the condition and we've directed over 130 people with undiagnosed hypertension to seek appropriate medical support.

We continued our community engagement through our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners, raising around £125,000 to diversify our reach by sub-contracting with community partners. Together, we investigated awareness of health checks (for over 40s with no recorded long-term condition) and health reviews (for people with one of a list of specific conditions). We talked to participants about their attitudes to movement and physical activity, and where relevant offered signposting to materials and local groups to help people increase their activity safely. We also worked with a subset of partners to raise awareness of cervical screening within the Turkish and Somali-speaking communities.

We worked with a wide range of local statutory and voluntary sector partners through Islington's All Age Mental Health Partnership Board. We also worked with our local mental health trust, North London Mental Health Partnership, to help residents increase their awareness of mental health, well-being, and the support available locally. We worked with the Trust and with our partners to offer residents mental health-themed workshops covering topics including sleeplessness, drug use and depression. Three Healthwatch Islington staff members are based within the Trust to support a person-centred approach to the delivery of mental health services.

Sadly, we had to close our digital inclusion project as we were not able to secure sufficient funding, despite our efforts to hone a highly efficient model over the last eight years, securing free equipment and a highly specialised and effective team. This feels like a great loss. We are immensely grateful to our amazing Digital Champion volunteers who helped hundreds of Islington residents become more confident and active online.



“It's been another year of growth. Thanks to our partners, funders, volunteers and staff team, and our Board. This year, we welcomed new trustees Stephen Adjaidoo and Nathan Allcott-Watson.”

Ralph Hughes, Chair of Healthwatch Islington



About us

Healthwatch Islington is your local health and social care champion.

We make sure NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Our vision

Improved health and social care outcomes for local residents



Our mission

- **To collect knowledge** that reflects the diversity of needs and experiences within the borough and encourage people to feedback their honest views on services.
- **To use the evidence** we gather to influence service delivery, provision and commissioning for the benefit of local people to improve their experience.
- To reach out to **empower our local community** to be informed about and involved in local services and exercise choice in taking up services.
- To support the independent assessment and audit of local services.



Our values

- We want to engage communities on issues that matter to them, in ways that are accessible and meaningful to them.
- We don't ask people to give us their opinions or feedback on services without offering them information or support in return.



Year in review

Reaching out:

812 people

shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1,241 people

came to us for clear advice and information about topics such as mental health and childhood immunisations.



Making a difference to care:

We published

4 reports

about the improvements people would like to see in health and social care services.

Our most popular report was the

challenging inequalities toolkit

which addressed inequalities in mental health service delivery



Health and social care that works for you:

We're lucky to have

28

outstanding volunteers who gave up 44 days to make care better for our community.

We're funded by our local authority.

In 2023 - 24 we received

£156,000

which is the same as the previous year.

We currently employ

11 staff

(in full-time and part-time roles) who help us carry out our work.



How we've made a difference this year

Spring



We brought partners and commissioners together to discuss our research findings and the opportunities to improve services.

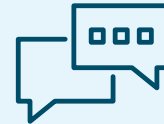


We provided information and advice to help people stay well over winter and cope with the cost of living crisis.

Summer



Our guidance 'Getting the best out of your practice website and phonenumber' was sent to all GPs in Islington by the ICB.



During Healthwatch Week we gathered feedback from local people on their biggest areas of unmet need.

Autumn



At our 10th birthday celebration we thanked the volunteers, organisations, and residents who have been key to our success.



We delivered a programme of information events with our partners to reach communities under-represented in mental health services.

Winter



We supported the involvement of local community organisations in the consultation around changes to maternity and neonatal services in North Central London.



A new team member began work to improve the experience of carers interacting with mental health services.

Your voice heard at a wider level

We collaborate with other Healthwatch to ensure the experiences of people in Barnet, Camden, Enfield, Haringey, and Islington influence decisions made about services at North Central London Integrated Care System (ICS) level.

This year we've worked with Healthwatch across North Central London to achieve:



Raising awareness of the dangers of hypertension. All five local Healthwatch worked with volunteers who reflected the communities where hypertension (high blood pressure) was more common, or less routinely identified. In Islington alone, over the last two years, we've helped over 1,300 people improve their understanding of the condition and we've directed over 130 people with undiagnosed hypertension to seek appropriate medical support.

Sharing the load so we can get more done. This year, we're speaking to residents across all five boroughs about interpreting services in primary care. Islington is leading the project as we've done a lot of work on interpreting in the past and many of our Diverse Community Health Voice partners already work across boroughs. Healthwatch Enfield led our work on ophthalmology services. Healthwatch Barnet and Enfield are leading our work on GP website accessibility.



Being clearer with decision-makers about the way they need to work with us. As a group we carefully considered how we would collaborate. We developed and agreed standard messaging, published on all our websites, to make this clearer to commissioners, who sometimes approach us for work that is outside our scope. This has made our role easier for decision-makers to understand.

Building strong relationships. All five wider staff teams came together for a successful away day in November 2023 to think through how best to work with the Integrated Care Board (ICB). Decision-makers from the ICB were invited to attend and give feedback on how we were having an impact. The role of representing the five NCL Healthwatch at ICB level rotated from Islington to Enfield. Enfield's chief executive praised how we'd established a strong working relationship so the ICB already understood his role and welcomed his insight.





Listening to your experiences

Services can't make improvements without hearing your views. That's why, over the last year, we have made listening to feedback from all areas of the community a priority. This allows us to understand the full picture, and feed this back to services and help them improve.

Making annual health checks more effective

This year, over 500 people managing long-term health conditions shared feedback with us about their experiences of annual health checks. Their insight has helped influence a planned new early intervention programme for conditions such as asthma and chronic pulmonary disease, that will better meet patients' needs.

Survey respondents told us that they were most concerned with making sure their conditions hadn't deteriorated and that their medication and/or treatment plan was still appropriate. However, people also felt that their annual health checks would be improved if there was a greater emphasis on prevention.



"I usually just have my blood taken and the doctor just calls to say if it was good or not. It would be nice to also have a conversation on some lifestyle changes I could make, and how to improve my condition."

Islington resident with diabetes



What did you tell us about annual health checks?

- You wanted more information about the management of your conditions as part of your annual check-up. You said your preferred way to receive this information was face-to-face. This would allow you to ask questions and check your understanding.
- Currently you are expected to go online to get this information. This is less effective, and can be both difficult and confusing, particularly if English is not your first language.

We shared our findings with decision makers at the Integrated Care Board in May 2024:

What difference did this make?

- The Islington Borough Clinical and Care Director told Healthwatch that this research corroborated things that they knew about, but for which they'd had no evidence from the community previously, for example 'the importance of having one to one conversations with the patient when discussing management of long-term health conditions'.
- A new programme being rolled out across North Central London to promote early detection of long-term health conditions will include the provision of follow-up appointments. These appointments will last for 30 minutes and will enable patients to have longer conversations to discuss their test results, to ask questions, and to learn everything they need to know about how best to manage their conditions.

Supporting the uptake of cervical screening

This year, we worked with local community organisations Imece, Islington Somali Community, and Jannaty to reach Turkish and Somali-speaking women aged between 25 and 49. Public health and GP data highlights that these are some of the groups most likely to refuse cervical screening. We wanted to understand more about the barriers faced, and what solutions might help overcome these.

Participating staff and volunteers were trained as cancer champions. We hosted a series of health information workshops. Women who attended these workshops who weren't attending cervical screening appointments were invited to participate in one-to-one conversations with the cancer champions to discuss their questions and concerns in their first language. The champions also gathered feedback from participants to understand the barriers to attendance.

- We hosted 14 health information workshops attended by 208 women in total.
- 39 women participated in one-to-one conversations with our cancer champions

One example of the impact of this project

A workshop participant, who was in her thirties, said she was hesitant to attend her screening appointment due to her close friend's negative experience. This hesitation was compounded by her own experience of a difficult birth.

She was invited to a cervical screening workshop hosted by Islington Somali Community. She came along and shared her concerns with the group. The cancer champion reassured her by describing what she could expect from her screening and what she could ask for during the appointment. The participant was also pleased to learn that Islington Somali Community now had a named nurse in the GP Federation who could support her if any issues arose. She is now planning to attend a screening appointment.

What needs to happen next?

- Some women booked screening appointments after the workshops, some after the one-to-one conversations, but many more said they needed more time, and needed to reflect on what they had heard.
- We learned that standard NHS messaging about the value of cervical screening is simply not reaching these communities. Most participants will need to hear these health messages many times. Many of the barriers are profound.



"I had a screening years ago, not fully understanding the reasons for it. So, I never went back. Now that it's been explained in Somali I understand it better. I wish this was offered back then."

Workshop participant

Three more ways we have made a difference

Throughout our work we focus on challenging health inequalities.

Promoting our toolkit for challenging inequalities

By working in partnership, and by encouraging collaboration between the voluntary and statutory sectors, we have achieved much more than would be possible by working in isolation.

Our October 2023 Progressing Equality event focused on our Challenging Inequalities Toolkit. Additional local partners signed up to make dozens of organisation-specific pledges to make their services more welcoming and accessible to a wider audience. We'll be continuing this work in 2024/25.



Supporting the involvement of local people in the commissioning and scrutiny of services

In February 2024, we coordinated a community response to the consultation on changes to maternity and neonatal services in North Central London

We produced a statement based on what we've learned from residents. We noted that the closure of services at the Whittington could have a disproportionate impact on Black African and Black Caribbean women, groups which are known to experience poorer maternity outcomes. We shared this with partners who also responded. Islington Somali Community co-signed our response and Manor Gardens Welfare Trust and Parent House submitted responses using ours as a basis.



Providing digital support

Our eight volunteer digital champions are a diverse and dynamic group with a wide range of ages and experiences - all with a passion for sharing their skills.

Our Digital Champions Team received a commendation in the category 'Volunteering Team of the Year' at an awards ceremony hosted by Voluntary Action Islington in November 2023. We helped residents gain skills and confidence in using their phones, tablets, and laptops to get online. We provided hundreds of sessions of support, both in person and remotely over Zoom.





Hearing from all communities

Over the past year, we have worked hard to make sure we hear from everyone within our local area. We consider it important to reach out to the communities we hear from less frequently to gather their feedback and make sure their voice is heard, and services meet their needs.

This year we have reached different communities by:

- Working through our Diverse Communities Health Voice partnership. Our partners represent communities that are less able to get their voices heard.
- Thematic community outreach programmes have been delivered by our mental health partnerships team, our childhood immunisations outreach worker, and our digital team.
- Holding stalls at a wide range of community events and public venues such as Chapel Market.

Physical activity and long-term health conditions

We spoke to residents from communities experiencing health inequalities about their attitudes towards physical activity and how this was affected by their health.

One of our partners, Disability Action in Islington, told us that people really enjoyed talking about a part of their life they don't often get to speak about. This group feels that they are often not consulted about their views on physical activities. As a disabled community they often get left out of the conversation. Most people don't see them as a group that wants to be physically active, so they really appreciated being asked the research questions.

What has happened as a result of people's feedback?

- Islington Council is working with Better Gyms on developing a new website landing page providing clearer information about the range of concessionary fees available to residents and how to access them.
- Regularly review and improve the information they provide to patients waiting for care.
- Proactively identify and communicate with vulnerable and at-risk groups of waiting patients.

Conversations about childhood immunisations

We've engaged with parents and carers at 'Stay and Plays' and at community events to raise awareness of the benefits of getting their children vaccinated.

To protect against outbreaks of measles, mumps, and rubella, the target is for 95% of children to have received the MMR vaccine. In Islington, coverage is only at 65-70%. This year we have delivered a programme of community engagement aimed at parents and carers in the borough's most deprived wards designed to raise awareness of the benefits of getting children up-to-date with their vaccines.

As well as raising awareness, our outreach worker has offered one-to-one-zconversations with parents who needed reassurance or who wished to talk through their questions and concerns. She also helped with appointment booking and made information available in a wide range of community languages. In addition she identified a number of opportunities to strengthen childhood immunisations services. In particular, developing the training given to non-medical staff at childrens centres.

- 118 parents reached in community settings leading to 18 one-to-one conversations.
- 93 professionals given robust information and resources addressing parental concerns.
- We've worked with Islington Council to develop and deliver a training programme 'talking to parents and carers about childhood immunisations' to staff in Early Years settings such as children's centres. These non-medical staff have trusted relationships with parents and opportunities to positively influence their decisions.



Advice and information

If you feel lost and don't know where to turn, Healthwatch is here for you. In times of worry or stress, we can provide confidential support and free information to help you understand your options and get the help you need. Whether it's finding an NHS dentist, making a complaint or choosing a good care home for a loved one – you can count on us.

This year we've helped people by:

- Providing up-to-date information people can trust
- Helping people access the services they need
- Helping people access NHS dentistry
- Supporting people to look after their health during the cost-of-living crisis

Giving advice and information to mental health professionals to support better patient care

Healthwatch staff based within the mental health core teams provide expertise on resources available within the voluntary sector.

Our Mental Health Partnerships team consists of three members of Healthwatch staff who are embedded in Islington's mental health core team. Because they collaborate and share the same workspace they can build effective relationships with mental health colleagues. The information they share within the team can have a really positive impact on care for individual patients.

A patient had been in a state of self-neglect for many months following difficult events and a traumatic bereavement. She was in a hostel where she was unable to clean or wash clothes. She was struggling. Her mental health social worker raised this at a core team meeting. The Healthwatch team member contacted a colleague at the Single Homeless Project for advice on local voluntary-sector services that might be able to help this particular patient. They suggested The Manna, a project that supported vulnerable women. We also contacted Streets Kitchen who have a women-only drop in. There were other options examined, such as peer mentor support through Minding the Gap.

We brought these options back to the core team, and the social worker discussed them with the patient. She was able to choose the options that best suited her, and connect with the immediate support she needed.

Helping out with home care

A blind and disabled resident living independently receives care at home provided by an agency.

One carer was particularly good, she looked after him well, prepared food and cups of tea according to his preferences, cleaned the flat and helped him with personal care. He received visits from other carers who didn't provide the same level of care: when these carers were in his flat he didn't know what they were doing; they didn't respond to his calls for assistance; they didn't make the tea or food in the way that he liked or on time; they didn't provide him with personal care even though they were meant to.

The carer that was particularly good left the agency. The resident raised his concerns with Adult Social Care/social services in Islington but there was no follow up. He decided to get in touch with our advice and information service to see if we could help:

What was the outcome?

- We contacted Adult Social Care at Islington Council, who said they had no record of any conversation with the resident. They followed up with the home care agency.
- Adult Social Care have reviewed the resident's care package, and have changed the agency providing the care (at the resident's request).



Volunteering

We're supported by a team of amazing volunteers who are at the heart of what we do. Thanks to their efforts in the community, we're able to understand what is working and what needs improving.

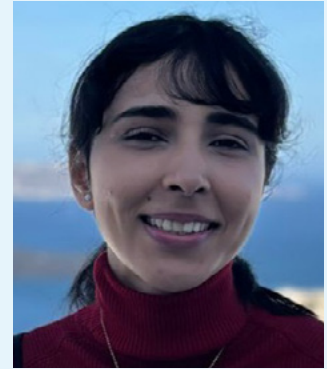
This year our volunteers:

- Collected experiences, gave information, and carried out blood pressure tests at many community events, and at Chapel Market during Healthwatch week.
- Helped us design and trial surveys for upcoming research into people's experiences of home care.
- Updated our Community Links data (a large contact list of community-based organisations in Islington providing various services).to support the work of our Mental Health Partnerships team..
- Made valuable contributions to the Evidence Islington project.
- Ran digital support sessions at Manor Gardens and other community venues.



“Driving change from the ground up – volunteering with Healthwatch transforms healthcare one voice at a time! Working as a volunteer for Healthwatch Islington has been tremendously fulfilling for me. It has helped me have a deeper awareness of healthcare challenges in our community and given me the opportunity to significantly improve local services.

Conducting interviews with service users and members of the public stands out as a noteworthy experience. The work is vital because it gives communities voice and guarantees that their opinions are taken into consideration when determining healthcare policies.”

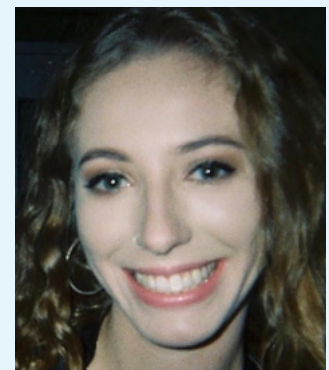


Aashima –
Healthwatch Islington



“I am starting a master’s in Public Health in September and joined Healthwatch as I wanted to gain some experience of, and exposure to, different health and social care services, and their function in the community. I was inspired by Healthwatch Islington’s commitment to putting local residents at the centre of their work, to ensure that everyone’s views on health and care are heard and acted upon. I think this is so important.

Healthwatch has been extremely accommodating in the type of volunteering they have enabled me to do, especially as I am trying to juggle volunteering alongside a full-time job until I start the master’s. I couldn’t recommend them enough!”



Grainne –
Healthwatch Islington

Do you feel inspired?



We are always on the lookout for new volunteers, so please get in touch today.

 www.healthwatchislington.co.uk

 07949 182687

 gulum@healthwatchislington.co.uk



Finance and representation

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

Our income and expenditure

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£156,000	Staff costs	£334,052
Additional income	£542,635	Project costs	£93,596
(Income restricted for coming year)	£ 107,383	Other operating costs	£47,501
Total income	£591,252	Total expenditure	475,149

Examples of additional income supporting our work this year include:

- £35,000 received from Cloudesley, Good Things Foundation, and Clarion Housing to support our digital inclusion programme.
- £135,000 received from Camden and Islington NHS Foundation Trust to fund the work of our Mental Health Partnerships team.
- £47,000 received from the Integrated Care Board to support our childhood immunisations work.
- £27,000 to support our involvement in Evidence Islington, a Health Determinants Research Collaboration.
- £100,000 from the Integrated Care Board to support Community Action Research.
- £14,000 to promote our challenging inequalities toolkit to statutory and voluntary sector partners.

ICS funding

Healthwatch across North Central London received funding from our Integrated Care System (ICS) to support new areas of collaborative work at this level. In Islington, this included:

Purpose of ICS funding	Amount
Representation at ICS level	£30,800
Hypertension project work	£14,000

Healthwatch representatives

Healthwatch Islington is represented on the Islington Health and Wellbeing Board by our Chief Executive, Emma Whitby. During 2023/24 Emma has effectively carried out this role by sharing information about local priorities and residents' concerns.

Healthwatch Islington is represented at meetings of the North Central London Integrated Care Partnership and North Central London Integrated Care Board by our Chief Executive, Emma Whitby.

Enter and view

We made no Enter and View visits this year. Other methodologies better suited our work.



Next Steps

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, especially people in the most deprived areas, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

Next year we will:

- work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System
- play our part to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our future priorities

Supporting our staff and volunteer team

Healthwatch Islington's staff and volunteer team have continued to deliver amazing work for Islington residents. Our staff survey highlighted that our current offices no longer meet our needs and so in 2024 we will be moving to the Claremont Centre in Angel. We'd like to say a massive thank you to the team at Manor Gardens Welfare Trust who've hosted us over the last four years. It's been great to collaborate with them on a number of projects and we hope to continue this into the future. We're lucky that Islington is a tiny borough geographically, so we will only be 'down the road'.

We've also introduced some new team building activities and an Employee Assistance Programme and all of the management team have updated their Management Training to ensure our staff and volunteers have a positive experience.

Working with North London Mental Health Partnership

We're also very excited to have developed further work with our mental health partners which will focus on identifying and supporting carers within mental health settings. We have recruited a Carers Best Practice Coordinator who'll be developing a strategy for Carers Engagement within our mental health Trust and a Community of Best Practice to help with the ongoing sharing of learning.

Challenging Inequalities

We will continue to focus on Cancer Screening and Childhood Immunisations, as uptake in North London is lower than the England average. With our Diverse Communities Health Voice partners we will be delivering a programme of community health education workshops covering a wide range of topics based on local need and interest, and of course gathering residents experiences of local services through this group.

As part of our Challenging Inequality work, we've been reviewing our recruitment processes for staff and trustees. We want to make sure our staff recruitment is reaching all genders, that our Board recruitment is reaching an older audience and that our partnerships increase the percentage of men and children we are reaching. We've been tidying up our data collection to help us evidence this, and in the coming year will be ensuring that our reporting processes are timely enough for us to respond to what the data shows and we can then adapt our programme of activity accordingly.

Evidence Islington

Healthwatch is set up to gather experiences of health and social care services. However, residents raise a range of health and well-being issues relating to housing, employment, education, transport, parks and the economy. We're really excited to be part of Evidence Islington [and then add text from our website on what this is]. We hope this will give residents a chance to influence a wider range of services and support impacting their health and well-being.

Get Involved

If you'd like to work with us, call us on **07849 161494** or email **info@healthwatchislington.co.uk**



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Islington, 6–9 Manor Gardens, 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 eight members who work on a voluntary basis to provide direction, oversight and scrutiny of our activities. Our Board ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2023/24, the Board met six times and made decisions on matters such as our recruitment strategy and our strategic plan.

We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities. For example, this year we invited people to identify 'Just One Thing' that the council or health and care services could do to make things easier for them and their family. 187 people shared their stories via this mechanism.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services. During 2023/24, we have been available by phone, and email, provided a web form on our website and through social media, as well as attending meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website..

Responses to recommendations

There were no providers who failed to respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to Healthwatch England Committee, so no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences that have been shared with us.

In our local authority area, for example, we invited commissioners to a meeting to discuss our research findings for the current year. Senior Management teams are now following up and will update us on how residents voices captured through our work are influencing in the year ahead.


We also take insight and experiences to decision-makers at the North Central London Integrated Care Board. We are currently represented by Healthwatch Enfield on three Integrated Care Board committees – the Quality and Safety Committee, the Primary Care Contracting Committee, and the Community Engagement Steering Group. This representative role is rotated between Healthwatch on an annual basis. At our monthly team meeting, Enfield updates the other Healthwatch and gathers their feedback for these committees. We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

healthwatch

Islington

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