

HASCCC Review: Access to Health Services

Background

As part of the Health & Social Care Act 2012, Healthwatch Southwark (HWS) was established in April 2013, delivered through the contract won by Community Action Southwark (CAS). Supported by a National Healthwatch England, HWS is intended to bring the local consumer **voice** and **champion patient and public involvement** to influence, shape and ultimately improve health and social care services in Southwark.

HWS is currently guided by a sub-committee of CAS consisting nine organisational representatives affiliated with a range of community and user groups. For more information visit www.healthwatchsouthwark.co.uk

Why are we carrying out our Community Focus Groups?

For Healthwatch to be as representative of the local community's voice (and needs), we have started a programme of engagement with a wider and more diverse part of the population, in particularly the *seldom heard-those not typically involved in consultations or statutory engagement structures*. Thus, we will be holding an ongoing programme of Community Focus Groups.

Programme aim:¹

- Increase our knowledge, and insight into a range of issues across different groups
- Build ongoing relationships with individuals, groups and organisations and fulfilling our role as the *network of networks*.
- Inform our Strategic Priorities and Activities
- Influence specific services and longer term planning and delivery of local services.

Focus Group aim: To explore the key issues within these communities, specifically:

- Highlight particular health and care behaviours,
- Gain insight into the challenges they face, both specific and general faced by members of the community

What will we do with it?

- Develop ways to address them working in partnership with those bodies responsible for health and care services, including using our statutory powers

Healthwatch Priorities

¹Note: Findings are not intended to be represented of a whole community, there is diversity within all communities, nor quantifiable.

Based on a combination of engagement at our June launch, a stakeholder's day, and LINK Southwark's recommendations, the HWS board agreed on 4 strategic priorities which HWS could influence:

- Access to GP Services
- Access to Mental Health Services
- Sexual Health Services (specifically HIV)
- Social Care provision, for those outside of the Fair Access to Care (FACs) criteria

Focus Group findings

Two focus groups have been held with LAWRS (Latin American Women's Rights Service) and a Deaf Support Group run by SDA (Southwark Disablement Association) in August 13 and November 13. The focus group focused on:

1. **Key challenges or barriers in accessing health & social care services**
2. **Needs specific to the community**
3. **Ways to offer "good quality services"**
4. **Best way to get and obtain information HWS next steps**

A total of 38 surveys were completed from the two sessions with attendance from approximately 45 individuals. Interpreters were provided at both sessions and conducted in an informal setting with lunch provided.

Similar issues and challenges around access to health services rose at both focus groups. A summary is provided below, with further detail in the appendices.

- **Language issues**-verbal and written communication
- **Interpreters** - the ease to book interpreters, the availability and the awareness of the service at both primary and secondary level, and the potential safety implications
- Awareness of the **complaints process**, and the support required to enable using this route to complain and feed back to services.

- **Cultural and diversity training** of front line staff in dealing with communities with particular needs. A huge aspect involved the 'soft skills' of staff around patience, dignity, respect and empathy.
- **Workshops** - information about services, communication, confidence to empower communities. There is a lot of support for this and Healthwatch is exploring this.
- **Accessible information and support provision** - Both groups showed a distinct lack of awareness of services outside of A&E and GP practices.

Other feedback received through our online forums, engagement activities, info & signposting function included:

Relating to access to GP services...

- **New booking appointment system** at some *GP* practices - without prior or sufficient notification and/or engagement
- **Current appointment booking system**- not suited to people's lifestyle particularly Older and Working people, i.e. ringing on the day or advance booking available in 2 weeks
- **GPs not responsive to calls**, or perceived inappropriate usage of service
- **GP catchment areas / right to choose** misinterpretation

Hospital & Community Services...

- Information and communication relating to appointments after being referred from GP practice

Information

- Complaints - knowing where, how and being able to (supported)

Awareness / confusion relating to the status of NHS 111 in Southwark

- At a previous HASCCC meeting, HWS submitted patient feedback on 111 and we highlighted issues and questions it raised. Whilst we are still involved in the NHS 111 Patient Involvement Sub-Group for South East London, the group agrees that a lack of a 111 website or communication surrounding 111

Next steps

- **H&WB Engagement - 1000 lives and gathering feedback on HW's four priorities**
HWS is working with the Health and Wellbeing Board and its partners to collect the stories of local residents around their health. More info here
<http://www.healthwatchsouthwark.co.uk/get-involved/tell-us-your-story-to-improve-health-services-1000-lives>
- **Our HW priorities:** Access to GP services, Access to Mental Health, Sexual health services (HIV) and Social Care provision - those outside of the eligibility criteria (Fair Access to Care). This will involve taking forward our focus group findings and working with voluntary and community groups and our partners.
- **HWS Public Forum - March 2014.** Feedback from our last Public Forum: 'Building our Network' in December 2013 can be found on our website.