



Hearing your experience:
What you told us about health and social care services
in our Annual Survey 2025

Aims

For the past seven years we have asked people living in Northumberland to tell us what they think of the NHS and social care services they have used over the last 12 months, in our Annual Survey.

We compare the results year on year.

The aims of this year's Annual Survey are to:

- Gain an overview of experiences and views of health and social care services in the last year
- Get clear direction from people in Northumberland as to which services we should prioritise in our work for the next year, and why

Who we are

Healthwatch Northumberland is the independent health and social care champion for people in the county. If you use GP services, hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services in your area, we want to hear about your experiences.

As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Healthwatch Northumberland is part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We're here to listen to the issues that really matter to people in Northumberland and to understand your experiences of using local health and social care services. We're entirely independent and impartial, and anything you share with us is confidential.



"Access to medical expertise is good here in Northumberland but getting to and from hospitals for scans/treatment etc. is not good for many in rural areas. I know the hospital transport system is there BUT it is very unreliable."

Northumberland resident

Summary

Our Annual Survey was open during February and March 2025. It was available online, as a printed document and in easy read. It was promoted on our website, social media platforms, newsletters, through our network of contacts and at our 12 in-person events during that time.

We received 377 responses to the survey from all parts of the county. This is more than last year, where we received 229 responses.

Generally, people felt that NHS healthcare in the previous 12 months had been good and had largely stayed at the same level of service, getting neither better or worse. People didn't think as highly of adult social care services, but said they had largely stayed the same over the year.

We heard from more than twice the number of females (60%) to males (23%). Adults of all ages shared their views, but the majority of people were aged 65 or above.

As reflects the demographics of the county, 2% of the respondents were non-white.

NHS services

Overall, respondents felt that in the past 12 months, the NHS had provided a good level of service (see Figure 1 below).

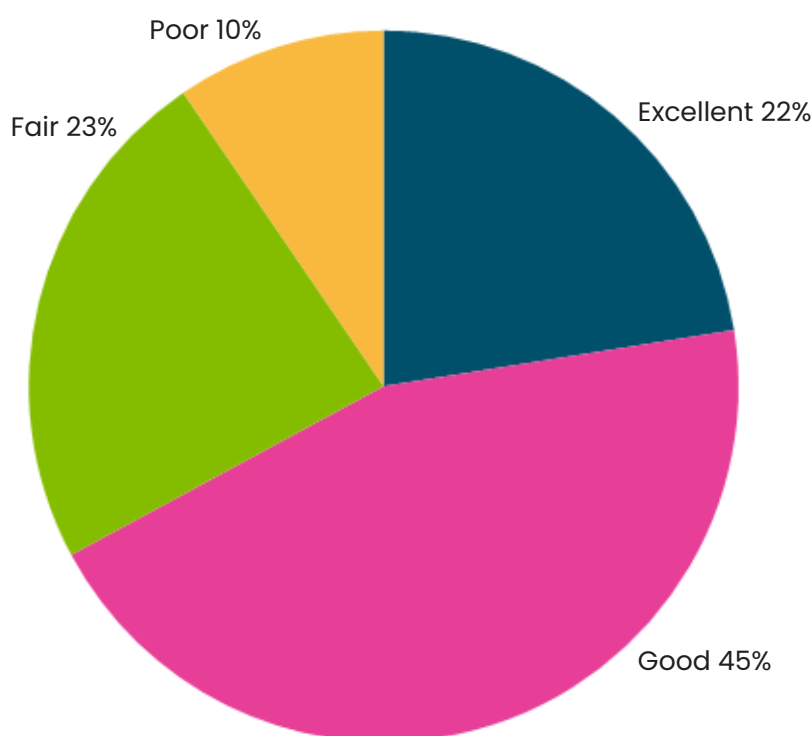


Figure 1. Overall most people were positive about their experiences of NHS healthcare in the past 12 months (n=356)

This was up from last year's survey result of approximately 62% of respondents who rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' and back in line with the average result from previous years of 67% who rated 'good' or higher to this question.

We then asked whether people had felt the services had changed. In the past twelve months the sentiment towards NHS services was largely that services had stayed the same (i.e. neither got worse nor better), with 30% saying they had got worse to some degree and 25% saying they had improved, as shown below in Figure 2.

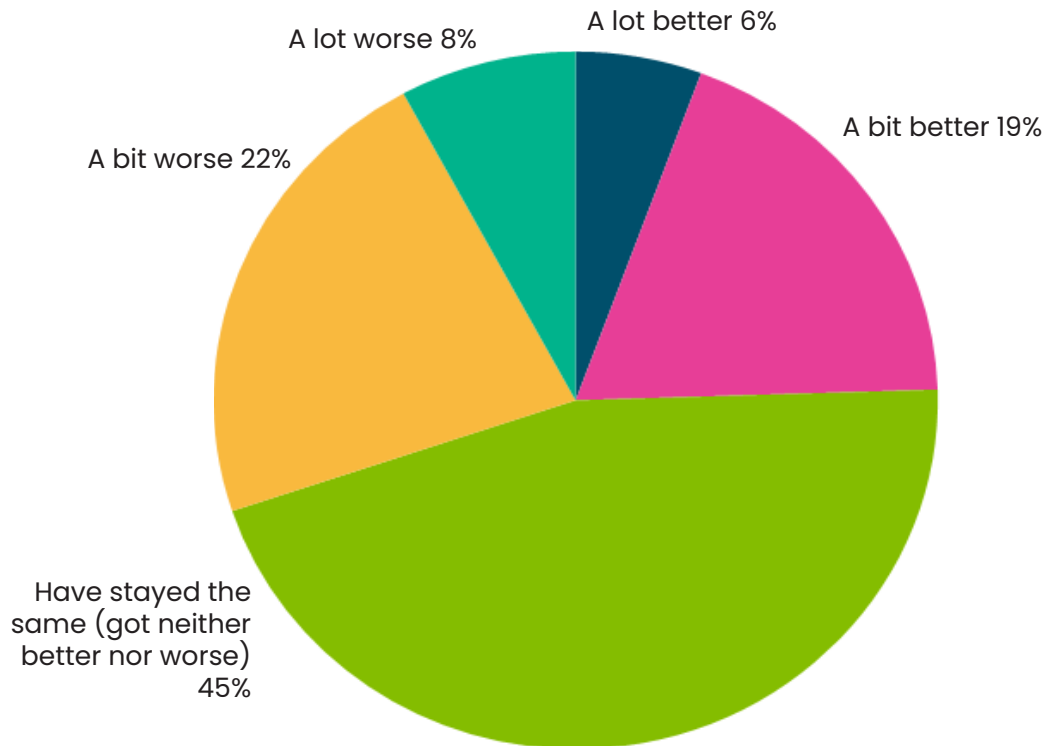


Figure. 2. In the past 12 months, 70% of people felt NHS services had remained the same or got better (n=355)

This is an improvement on the previous year when 41% of the respondents said the services had remained the same and 38% had said that services had got worse to some extent. It would appear that amongst our respondents the overall trend in sentiment is that services are either staying the same or improving.



I haven't seen a GP in some time with the Nurse Practitioner offering a service instead. This feels to be an appropriate situation. I was sent to Cramlington hospital by the NP as an emergency where I had tests and close monitoring. I was eventually discharged. I was treated professionally by all concerned and was happy with the outcome."

Tynedale resident

Adult social care services

The questions on adult social care services provided by Northumberland County Council, had far fewer responses. Less than a third of people answered Question 3 – ‘Overall, how would you rate your experiences of adult social care services in the last 12 months?’. Of the 111 people who responded, the majority of those who had experience of adult social care felt that services had been ‘fair’ or ‘poor’ (20%), whereas 14% of respondents said that services had been ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ (see Figure 3, below).

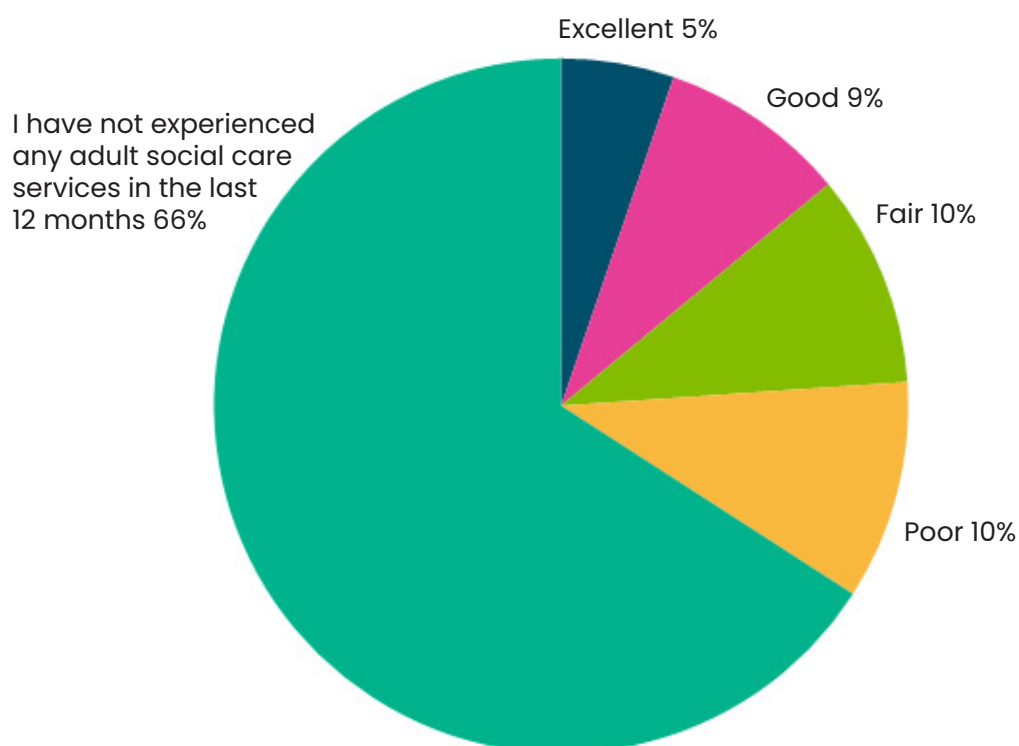


Figure 3. Overall, respondents who had used adult social care services in the last 12 months were more negative about them than positive (n=117)

However, this is an improvement on last year’s survey when 11% of respondents told us they had a ‘poor’ service, 11% said they’d had a ‘fair’ service, 5% had an ‘excellent’ service and 6% had a ‘good’ service.

In answer to Question 4 – ‘In the past 12 months, do you feel adult social care services have got [better or worse?]’, most people who gave a rating felt services had remained the same (got neither better nor worse) (16%). However, the second largest response was that services had got a lot worse (7%), and 4% of respondents said that services had got a bit worse. See Figure 4 overleaf.

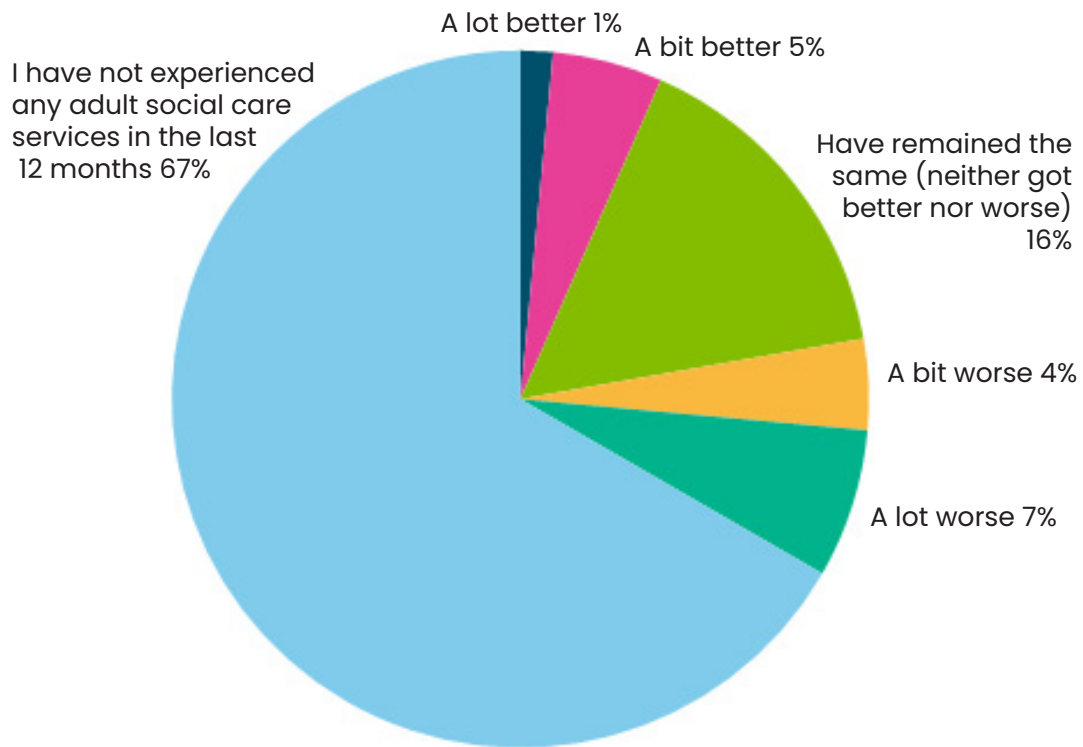


Figure 4. In the previous 12 months, respondents felt that adult social care services had remained the same or got worse (n=111)

Despite the overall feeling around adult social care services leaning towards the negative, this is still an improvement on what we heard last year. In 2024, 12% of people said that adult social care services had got a lot worse, 8% said they had got a bit worse and 13% responded that services had remained the same.

This shows that for people who responded to our Annual Survey, although services are still not up to expectations, there is improvement happening.



"Social care – lack of integrated care and specific agencies working together. Experience of getting a parent from hospital to rehabilitation then back home was exasperating: only one agency did what they were supposed to – occupational therapy!"

Castle Morpeth resident

Our work priorities for the next year

As part of the survey, we asked people to choose one service from a list of 22 health and social care services (plus 'other' option), that we should focus on in the coming 12 months. 320 people answered this question.

The top three services chosen were:

1. GP services (28%)
2. Dentists (13%)
3. Adult social care services (12%)

These three choices totalled over half of the responses (53%). The rest of the choices had a much lower percentage of the responses each. The table below shows the reasons why people made their choice.



“Lack of NHS dentists in my town. I have to go across the border to Scotland to see a dentist.”

North Northumberland resident

GP services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Difficulty making an appointment ■ Not everyone has access or ability to use a smartphone or computer ■ Difficulty getting through on the phone ■ GPs are the gateway to the NHS ■ Appointments are too short
Dentists
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Can't get seen by an NHS dentist ■ Lack of preventative care leads to more expensive treatment later
Adult social care services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ This service is the key to improving NHS services ■ Difficult to find out what is on offer ■ Underfunded and resourced

Table 1: Summary of why respondents chose these services. N.B. this summary table was generated by Microsoft Copilot from the answers received.

Demographic and geographical variations to our priorities

Looking at the priorities chosen by people in different parts of the county, or Local Area Councils (LACs), the results for the top three choices are broadly similar compared with those chosen overall. This is except in Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley LAC where people wanted us to prioritise emergency ambulance services rather than dentists.

Ashington and Blyth

1. GP services (19% of Ashington and Blyth LAC respondents)
2. Adult social care and dentists (15% each)

Castle Morpeth

1. GP services (33% of Castle Morpeth respondents)
2. Adult social care (10%)
3. Dentists (8%)

Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley

1. GP services (32% of Cramlington, Bedlington and Seaton Valley respondents)
2. 999 and emergency ambulances (blue light) and adult social care (11% each)

North Northumberland

1. GP services (30% of North Northumberland respondents)
2. Dentists (16%)
3. Adult social care (12%)

Tynedale

1. GP services (23% of Tynedale respondents)
2. Dentists (16%)
3. Adult social care and hospital outpatients (8% each)



“While caring for my mother-in-law we had good support from adult social care. However, what lets the system down is good quality places for people to go for respite. Private care in most cases is a joke.”

Ashington and Blyth resident

Looking at the choice of service priorities by sex, there was not much difference between the top three choices for the male respondents, whereas GP services was a very clear priority for female respondents.

Male

1. GP services (chosen by 23% of male respondents)
2. Adult social care (20%)
3. Dentists (16%)

Female

1. GP services (chosen by 27% of female respondents)
2. Dentists (11%)
3. Adult social care (9%)

When it comes to age, there was some variation in people's choices of which services to prioritise.

All the age categories chose GP services as the first, or joint first, choice. Those of working age then prioritised dentists and mental health services after GP services, with decreasing emphasis on mental health services as the respondents got older. For those over retirement age adult social care replaced mental health services within the top three priorities and became increasingly a priority for older respondents.



Priorities by levels of deprivation

The Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) ranks places in England with the same levels of population in order of deprivation, from the most to the least deprived. These rankings are divided into ten bands - 'deciles' - where the first decile is the most deprived area, and the tenth decile is the least deprived area. Using a postcode tool, we can see the level of deprivation in the area where a person lives.

When looking at the choice of service priorities by IMD decile, GPs come out first choice for all deciles except the sixth decile area.

First decile (most deprived areas)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (chosen by 30% of respondents from this decile) 2. Mental health services (17%) 3. Dentists (13%)
Second decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (24%) 2. Adult social care (16%) 3. Mental health services and dentists (12% each)
Third decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (36%) 2. Adult social care (14%) 3. No clear third choice
Fourth decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (33%) 2. Dentists, adult social care and mental health services (11% each)
Fifth decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (25%) 2. Adult social care (18%) 3. Dentists and mental health services (11% each)
Sixth decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adult social care (17%) 2. Dentists (13%) 3. GP services, mental health services and audiology (9% each)
Seventh decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (29%) 2. Dentists (24%) 3. Emergency departments at hospitals e.g. A&E (10%)
Eighth decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (25%) 2. Emergency departments at hospitals e.g. A&E (16%) 3. Adult social care and physiotherapy (9% each)
Ninth decile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (38%) 2. Hospital outpatients (14%) 3. Adult social care (10%)
Tenth decile (least deprived areas)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. GP services (26%) 2. Dentists (22%) 3. Adult social care (11%)

Conclusions

Our Annual Survey ran between mid-February and mid-March 2025 and 377 people responded.

The feedback shows people feel more positive than negative about NHS services and their delivery. Although the sentiments are that the services have remained the same or got worse over the past 12 months, the underlying trend is that services are improving.

The feeling about adult social care services is more negative than positive with people telling us they feel services had remained the same or got worse in the previous 12 months, although the underlying trend was that services were improving slightly.

There is a clear indication from all the demographics that people would like us to focus on GP services, NHS dentists and adult social care over the coming year. It is also of note that people who live in the more deprived deciles of IMD mentioned mental health services in over 10% of their responses about which areas we should focus on in the next 12 months.

What next?

We will use this information to guide our work in 2025/26. You can see what we decide to focus on, on our website and you can read what happens as a result in our Annual Report each year.

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