

Language Guide

How to write about Healthwatch Northumberland

This guide will help ensure that we write in a way that is consistent, accessible to all of our audiences and that we are using the Healthwatch tone of voice.

Style and language

Dates

- Dates should be written as 'Friday 11 March 2021'. Don't say 11th, 22nd, or use commas.

Numbers and time

- Numbers should be written in full from one to ten. Larger number should be written in numerals - 11, 12, 13. The exception is time when numerals are always used.
- Use the 12-hour clock format.
- Times can be written as 9.00am or 9am, as long as used consistently throughout.

Ampersands

- These should be avoided except in recognised cases such as A&E. Otherwise, use 'and' in full.

Capital letters

- Use only at the start of sentences and for proper names and titles.
 - 'Northumberland County Council is having an event...'
 - 'The council has reported that..'
 - 'The Government has released information...'
 - 'Many government departments..'
- For services use lower case: social care, hospital, dentist, pharmacy, unless it's the title/ name of a specific service: Wansbeck General Hospital.
- If in doubt, use lower case.

Quotation marks

- Use single quotation marks to highlight a phrase or piece of text.
 - Example: When asked 'are you struggling to get dental treatment?' most people said 'yes'.
- Use double quotation marks for direct quotes.
 - Example: The manager said "We have listened to feedback from patients and intend to make some changes."

Us, we, them

- When referring to an organisation use 'is/its/has' not 'are/their/have'.
 - Example: Healthwatch England has published details of its annual conference.
- When we talk about ourselves, say 'we' 'us' 'our', rather than speaking in the third person.

Common terms

Instead of saying	Say
Lived experience	Experience.
Seldom heard	People who have not been asked/people whose experiences aren't being heard/people who aren't being listened to.
Primary care	Be specific about the service. Say GP surgery, doctor, pharmacy, dentists.
Secondary care	Be specific about the service. Say hospital or clinic.
BAME	Ethnically diverse communities.
People with autism	Autistic people. Many see their autism as a fundamental part of who they are. Describe people as being autistic, having a learning disability, or both - be clear that autism and learning disability are two different things.
Visually impaired	Blind or partially sighted.
Neurodiverse person	Neurodivergent person.
Mental health	People with a mental health condition or people with mental health issues.

Accessibility

Keep it simple

We're talking to everyday people, so we need to use everyday language. Be conversational, write as you speak, keep it light and don't be too formal. Avoid jargon when an alternative exists in everyday language and explain any terms people might not understand. We want people to understand us and not feel alienated, which is why we use plain English and keep sentences short and easy to read.

Acronyms

Avoid acronyms. Although it's quicker than saying or writing something in full, don't assume everyone understands an acronym. Acronyms and abbreviations aren't plain English and make it harder for people to translate. If possible write in full every time. If you want to use an acronym write the title in full in the first instance with the acronym in brackets. If the name/title only appears once in your text the acronym in brackets is not necessary. A few well known acronyms we can use are NHS, GP, A&E.

Use active language

Active language makes the sentence straightforward and concise. It can often sound stronger and more direct. For example say '2,000 people came to the event.' rather than 'The event was attended by 2,000 people.'