

Delays to non-urgent care survey report

**Survey data collected
November 2021 to June 2022**

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@HealthwatchTame

Introduction

Healthwatch Tameside is the independent consumer champion for health and social care in Tameside.

We listen to local people, and gather information about their experiences of using health and social care services.

We use this information to talk to the people who arrange (commission) the services and the people who provide the services. We can influence changes which will make these services better for everyone. If we hear about good practice, we encourage this to be shared. If you tell us about something that could be improved, we will talk to the people in charge about this too.

Any information we are given will remain anonymous. We are careful to share ideas in a way which will not identify any individuals.

What is this survey about?

This survey gives people an opportunity to tell us about their experience of delays to care since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. People also told us about how the delays affected their health and wellbeing.

What will happen next?

We will share the anonymised findings from this survey with local health and care partners. The report will also be published on our website.

The information will be used by commissioners and providers of services, alongside other feedback, to plan future services for the local population.

Survey responses

We received 79 responses to the survey. Surveys could be completed online, via a QR code, on paper or over the phone.

Online	-	19
QR code	-	1
On paper	-	52
By phone	-	7

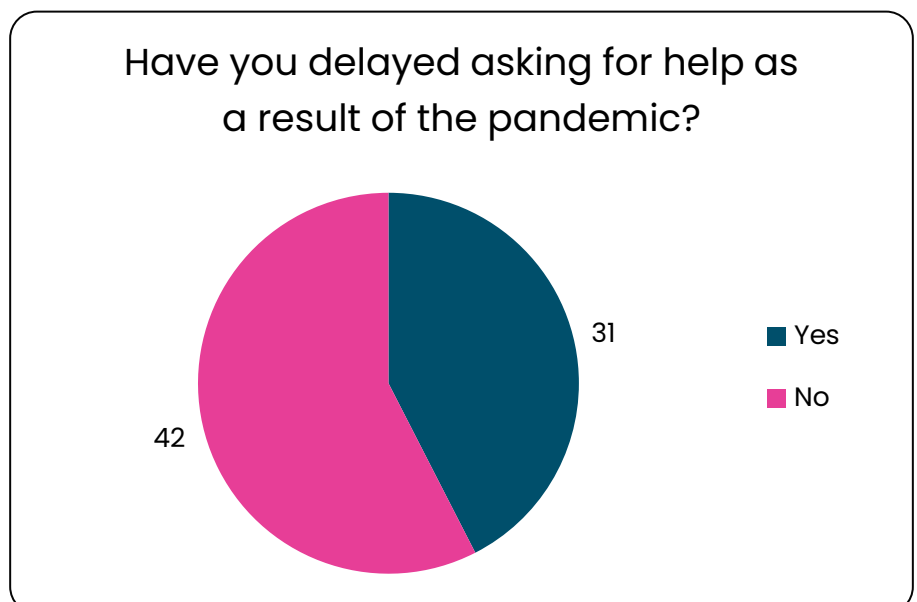
Questions

Many of the questions had tick-box responses. There were also opportunities to provide additional explanations or information. We will look at the questions in the order on the survey.

We have not included the names of health and care providers in the quotes or comments in this report. Most people did not provide that amount of detail in their responses. Where we have information about, for example, a particular hospital, that feedback has already been included in our anonymous monthly reports to commissioners and providers of services.

Question 1) - Have you delayed asking for help as a result of the pandemic? This is where you have chosen to wait a while before seeing your GP. You might still be waiting. (If someone else has delayed your care, please see question 3.)

73 people answered this question.



Question 2) – What sort of help have you delayed asking for and why did you decide to wait? Have you done anything else about your health while you have been waiting? E.g. paid privately, etc.

The types of issues people said they had delayed asking for help with included:

- Menopause
- Pain in various parts of the body – arms, back, ribs, shoulders, wrist
- Pain relief
- Physiotherapy
- Possible infections or other problems – circulation, cyst, ear, hernia, recurrence of previous issue, skin, throat, thyroid
- Regular reviews – blood test/follow-up appointment, COPD, diabetes, mental health medication

Delayed asking for support with my health conditions, and how they work together.

Some of the actions people took instead of asking for help included:

- Asked friends for advice
- Bought pain relief medication
- Changed diet and increased exercise
- Decided which of several issues was the most important to get help for
- Paid for acupuncture
- Researched alternative herbal options
- Tried different over-the-counter medicines
- Used online pharmacy

I have several health issues and have had to choose which ones to pursue.

Reasons for people waiting to ask for help included:

- Had other conditions which seemed more urgent
- Had heard services were delayed due to Covid (physio)
- Services are already stretched
- Too difficult (or impossible) to make a GP appointment

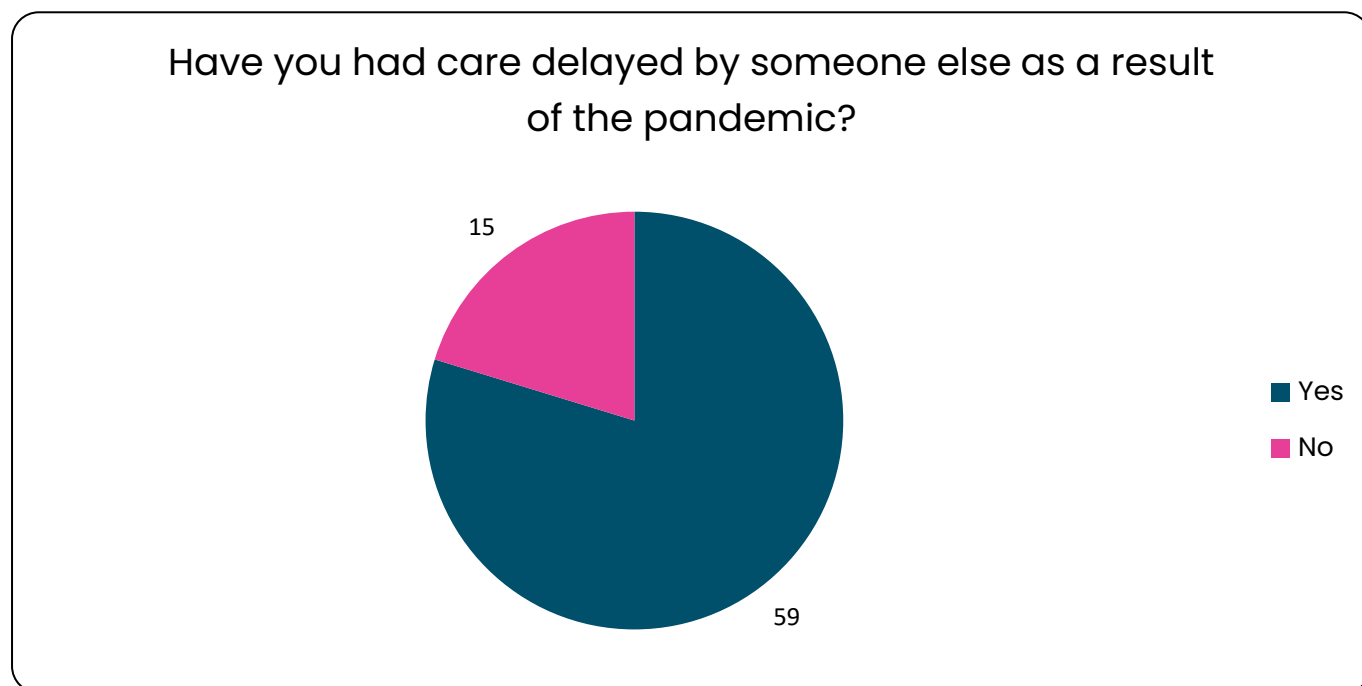
Other comments included:

- Hospital asked GP to prescribe pain medication, but this did not happen.
- When help was asked for, a referral to hospital was needed.

Ear infection. Hoped it would clear up. Had to consult Doctor and was referred to hospital.

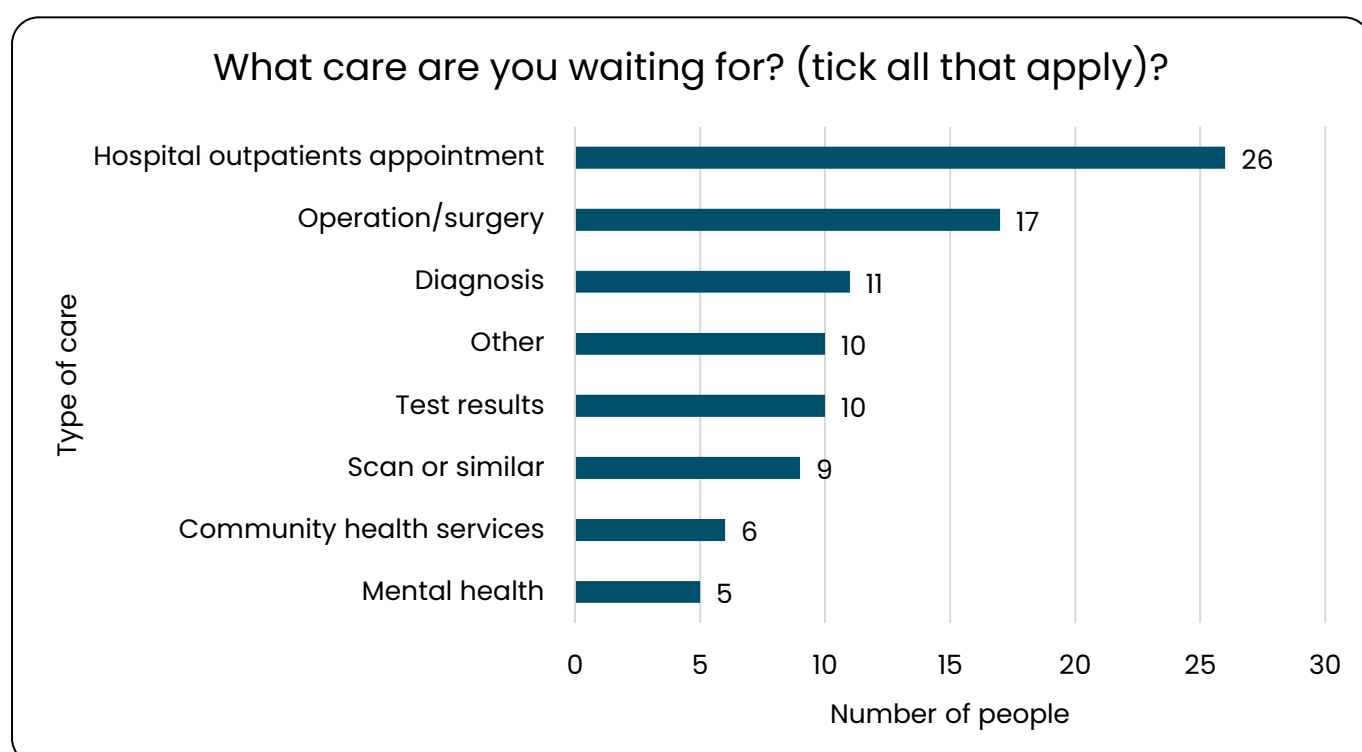
Question 3) - Have you had care delayed by someone else as a result of the pandemic? (This is where a hospital or clinic, etc. has cancelled, re-arranged or delayed sending your appointment.)

74 people answered this question.



Question 4) - What care are you waiting for? (Tick all that apply)

58 people told us about care that had been delayed. Some people said they were waiting for more than one type of care.



'Other' includes:

- Dental care (more than one person)
- Diabetes review
- Face-to-face appointment
- Medication reviews
- Optician appointment
- Radiotherapy
- Spirometry tests
- Weight-loss programme

Question 5) – Please tell us more about the type of care you are waiting for (e.g. heart, cancer, hip/knee replacement, eyes, mental health, physiotherapy, etc.)

The types of care which were described in the responses to this question included:

- Dental care
- Diabetes review
- Hospital outpatients:
 - Dermatology
 - ENT
 - Gastroenterology
 - Gynaecology
 - Oncology
 - Ophthalmology
 - Orthopaedics
 - Pain relief injections
 - Respiratory
 - Scans
 - Urology
- Medication review
- Mental health
- Optician
- Physiotherapy
- Podiatry
- Social care

My operation was cancelled due to no beds. I'm currently waiting to be seen by Orthopaedic Consultant due to Osteoarthritis in my hip and lower back.

I have been told I am taking too much prescription medication and need a review, as I have suffered a lot of falls recently.

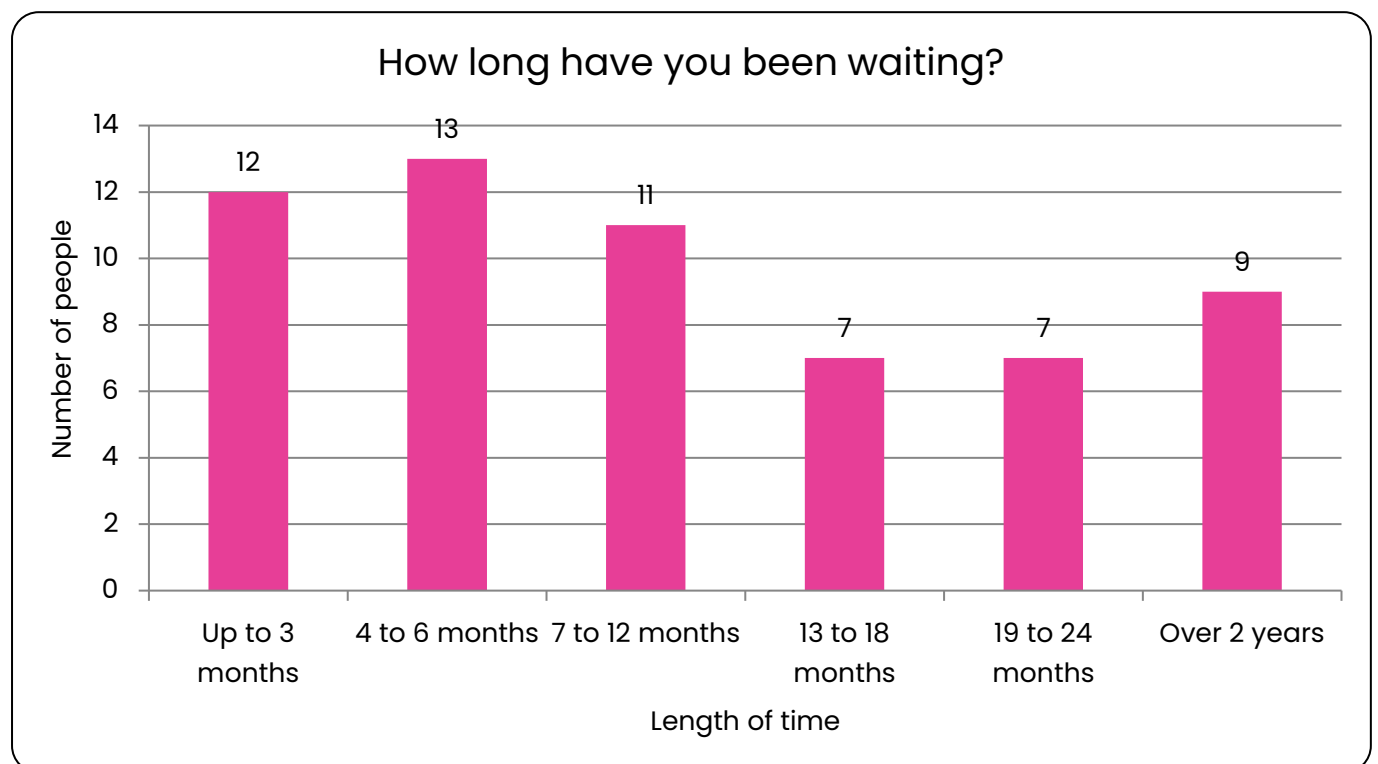
- Surgery
 - Colorectal
 - Cosmetic (classed as emergency)
 - Eyes, including cataracts
 - Foot
 - Hand
 - Hip
 - Spinal
 - Tonsils
- Test results
- Weight-loss programme (pre-surgery)

3 months delay for surgery on my foot, the result was that I lost some of my toes.

Question 6) - How long have you been waiting?

56 people answered this question.

One person provided waiting times for more than one appointment.



The information about which type of care was being waited for in each time period has been taken from the responses to question 7).

The types of care people are waiting for within each time period include:

- Up to 3 months:
 - GP practice – call from diabetes nurse, general appointment, medication review
 - Outpatients – audiology (ear infection), orthopaedics, scan test results
 - Surgery – eye, foot (diabetic)
- 4 to 6 months:
 - Dental treatment
 - Outpatients – biopsy results, eyes (hospital tests, to plan cataract surgery), heart scan, oncology appointment (classed as non-urgent), orthopaedics (treatment following scans), urology (results of scan)
 - Physiotherapy
 - Podiatry
- 7 to 12 months:
 - Dental check-up
 - Medication review
 - Outpatients – dermatology, eyes, gynaecology, heart tests, orthopaedics
- 13 to 18 months:
 - Opticians
 - Orthopaedics (hip surgery)
 - Outpatients – gynaecology
- 19 to 24 months:
 - Mental health
 - Orthopaedic surgery – foot and hip
 - Outpatients – gynaecology
 - Surgery – tonsils
- Over 2 years:
 - Dental and orthodontic
 - Outpatients – eyes
 - Physiotherapy
 - Surgery – emergency cosmetic, hip, pain relief

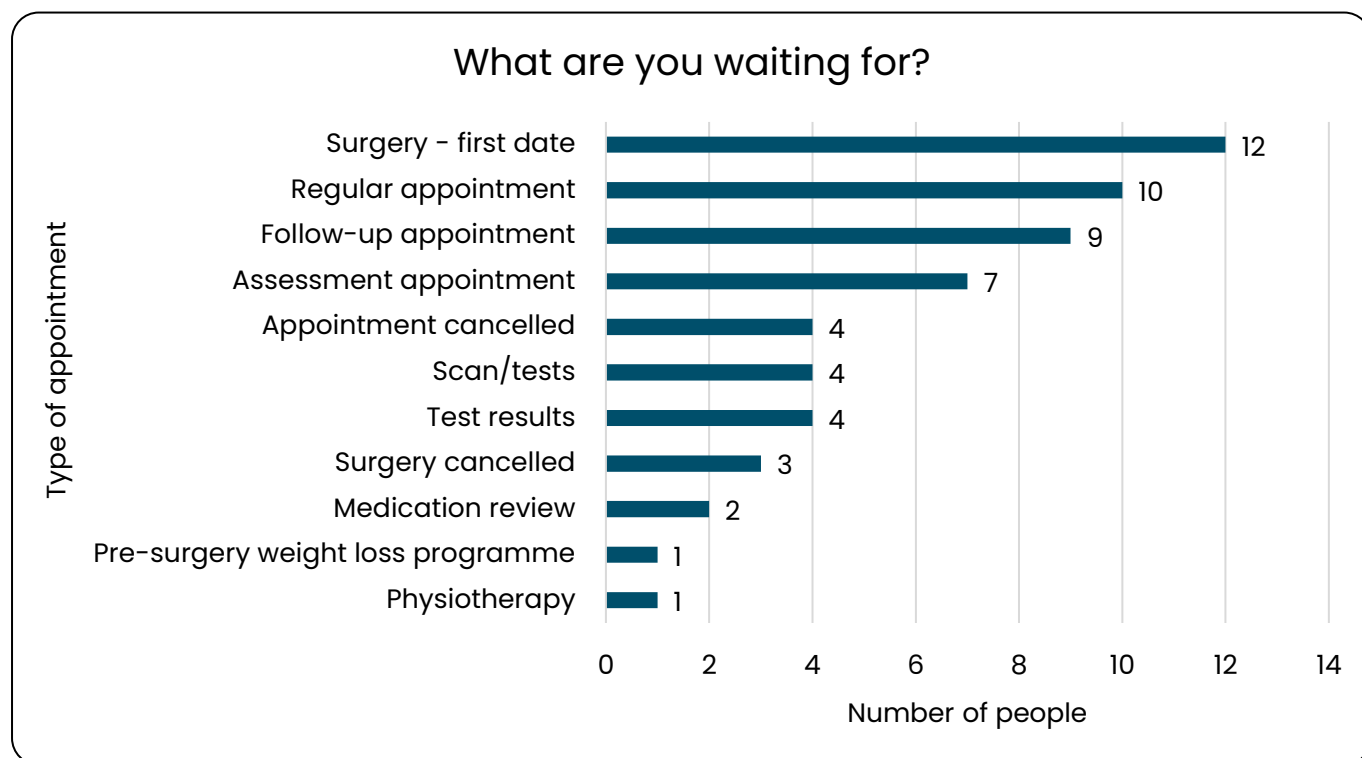
Whilst waiting for the NHS I have had further tests done privately. Still waiting for NHS follow-up.

Difficult and frustrating as unable to have tests to find out cause of problem.

Eye investigation for Glaucoma. Should be seen every 6 months. 2 years is a long time to wait.

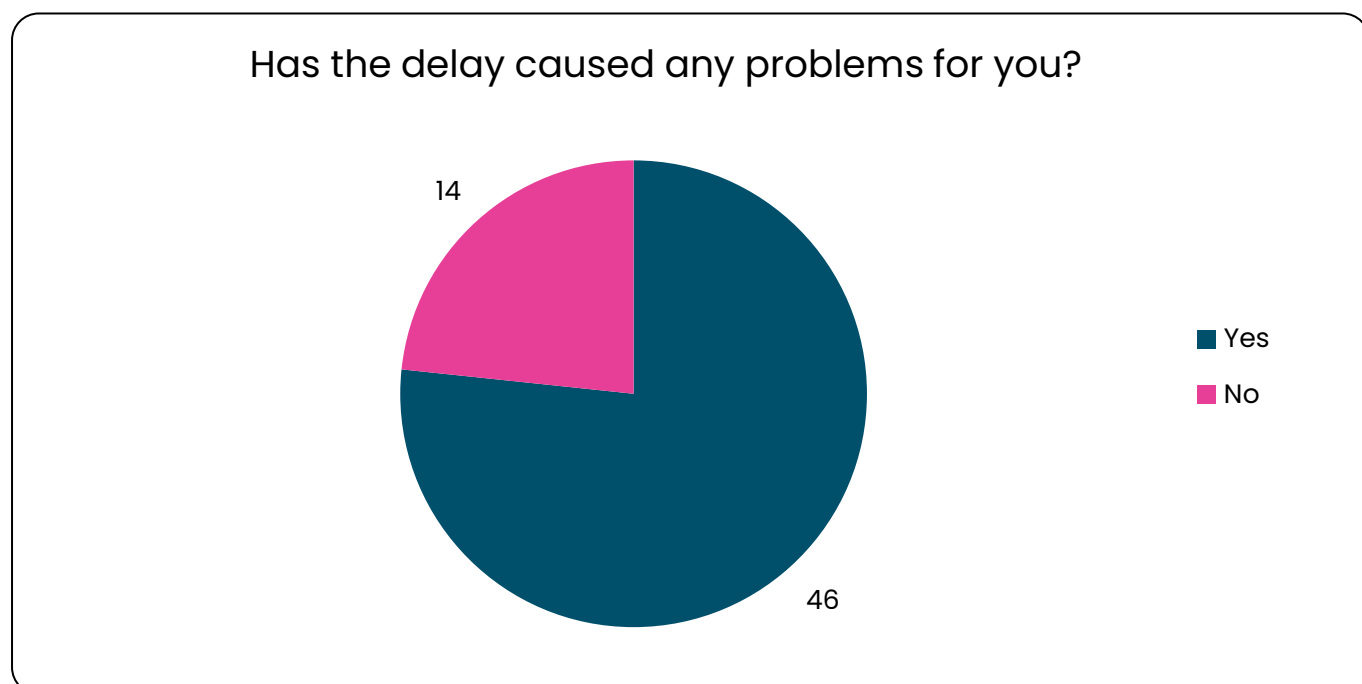
Question 7) – Please tell us more about your waiting time.

We are not including any responses about how the delays have affected people here. The feedback will be combined with the responses from question 9).



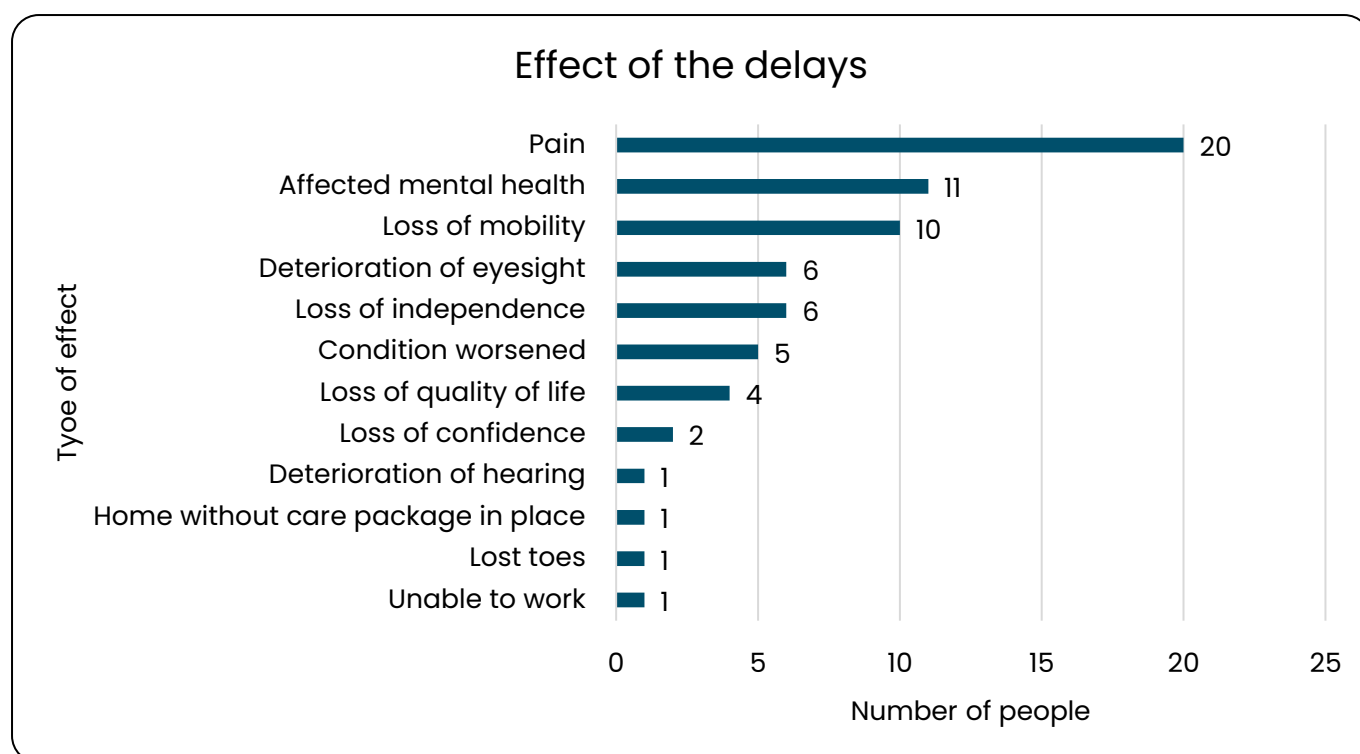
Question 8) – Has the delay caused any problems for you? (e.g. pain, loss of mobility, loss of independence, unable to work, mental health, etc.)

60 people answered this question.



Question 9) - Please tell us more.

We have summarised what people told us into this graph.



Within 'mental health', we have included 4 people who said they were feeling anxious due to not knowing what was wrong with them.

Now I spend most of my time lying on my bed or sitting in my chair. Fed up with cat napping. When can I be a person again?

It has left me suffering tremendous pain and continually taking medication. Eating is difficult, unable to eat hard/chewy food.

I was given the CT scan as an urgent 2 week case. I do not know if the diagnosis is still urgent or not. A simple telephone call or letter would have helped my anxiety.

On discharge had to wait for care package to be put in place. Waited so long I went home without it.

I can't read at the moment and I love to read.

I now have to walk with a walker on wheels and at night every joint in my lower body stiffens up and I can't get out of bed in time to get to the bathroom.

Stopped all of my exercise i.e. walking, swimming, biking, walking football. Cannot do any task in house or garden.

Question 10) – What support has been provided to manage your health and wellbeing while you are waiting? What else would have helped you?

‘None’ and ‘Nothing’ were the two words which appeared more than any other. 29 people answered the question this way. 3 people said no support was needed.

Where support was provided, this included:

- GP appointment or home visit
- GP provided medication
- Told to take it easy
- Using Patient Access app

Some support was helpful, other support less so. Family provided support for some people.

The second part of the question asked what would have helped.

The suggestions included:

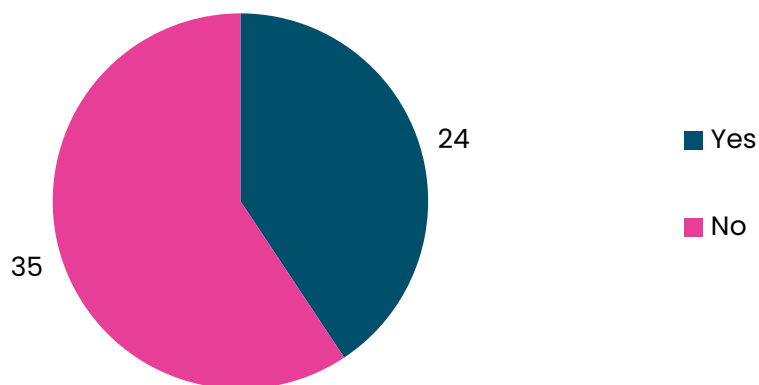
- Communication generally
- Face-to-face appointment
- More notice of cancellation of appointments
- More support from GP practice or hospital
- Offer a conversation with a nurse or doctor
- Provide test results, to reduce anxiety
- Quicker follow-ups
- Referral to another hospital

Communication from both hospital and GP. Recognise that it might seem a small thing but it has impacted on my daily life.

Question 11) - Have you now got an appointment, or received treatment?

59 people answered this question.

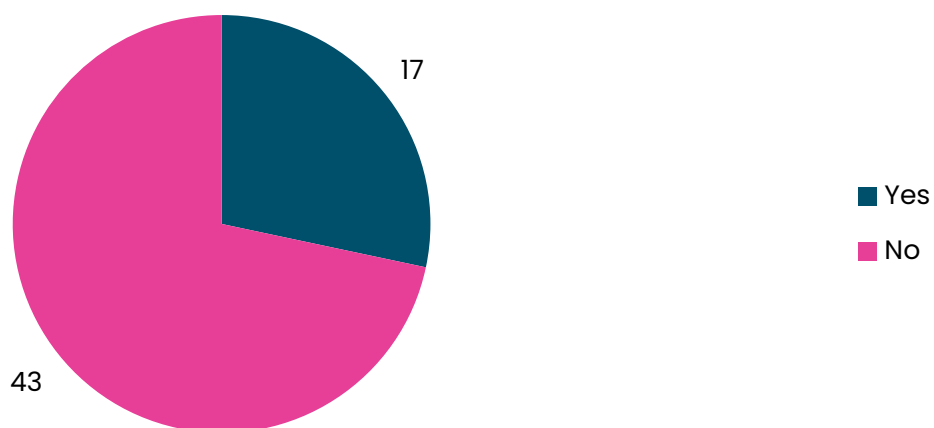
Have you now got an appointment, or received treatment?



Question 12) - Have you been given enough information about your delay in care?

60 people answered this question.

Have you been given enough information about your delay in care?



Question 13) – Please tell us more. For example, did the information you were given make sense? How could the information or the way it was communicated to you have been improved? What were you NOT told that would have been helpful to know? Did you ask family/friends or search online for information? And so on.

Of the people who provided a response to this question, only 6 people were happy with the information they received.

Several people said they had not been told anything, and they had no idea what was happening, or how long the delays would be.

Other people said they had received some information, but they either did not understand it, or it did not answer their questions.

Some people asked family members to help them.

Here are the suggestions from the responses about how improvements could be made:

- Answer the phone, and return phone calls, so people do not feel ignored.
- Give more detail about what people can expect (a treatment plan).
- If a person is signposted elsewhere, make sure they understand why.
- Offer face-to-face appointments to people who cannot access phone calls or the internet, to provide information.
- Provide information without patients having to ring and ask for an update.
- Provide truthful information about waiting times, not just 'You are on the waiting list'.
- Tell people the results of their tests, and what the diagnosis is, to reduce anxiety.
- When information is provided in a letter, let the person know if this needs to be changed, and why.

The department have kept in touch, ringing me every 6 weeks or so and have said I can phone them if the chest pains get more severe.

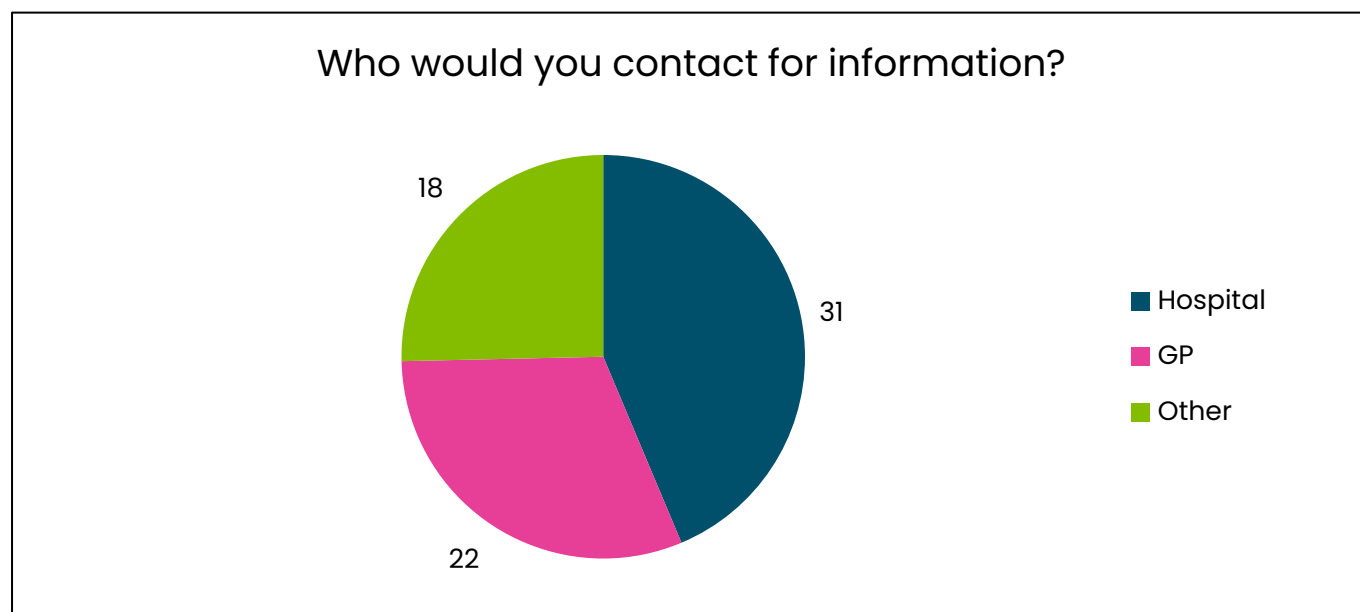
I just simply have to accept that because I can't use the phone, I have to wait longer than someone who can.

The letter said I would have an appointment in a few weeks and I've been left for 10 months – don't say a few weeks if it's going to be longer.

Being offered a face-to-face appointment would have helped massively.

Question 14) – Who would you contact first for information about delays in your care, if you need to know more? For example – GP, hospital or other place/person.

60 people answered this question. Some people included more than one provider, depending on the care they were waiting for.



Within 'Hospital', people said they would contact:

- Department or clinic – 6 people
- PALS – 1 person
- Secretary of consultant – 2 people
- Unspecified – 22 people

The responses within 'Other' included:

- All concerned
- Dentist
- Don't know
- Go to A & E
- Healthwatch
- MacMillan nurses
- MP
- Optician
- Ring 111 or Go-to-Doc
- Social worker.

There were 8 comments from people who either said there was no-one who could help, or various ways of saying contacting anyone would be a waste of time.

Some people were signposted elsewhere, but not told who to ask for.

Wherever we have enquired it's like talking to a brick wall, whoever you are speaking to it's almost always the same – 'oh the person you need to speak to is off today, we'll get them to phone you back'. Inevitably they never do.

Other comments

Throughout the survey responses there were additional comments which we have included here.

- Appointments:
 - People described the problems they face trying to make GP appointments.
 - Received a letter from the NHS asking the patient to make an outpatient's appointment. When they contacted the hospital there were no appointments available.

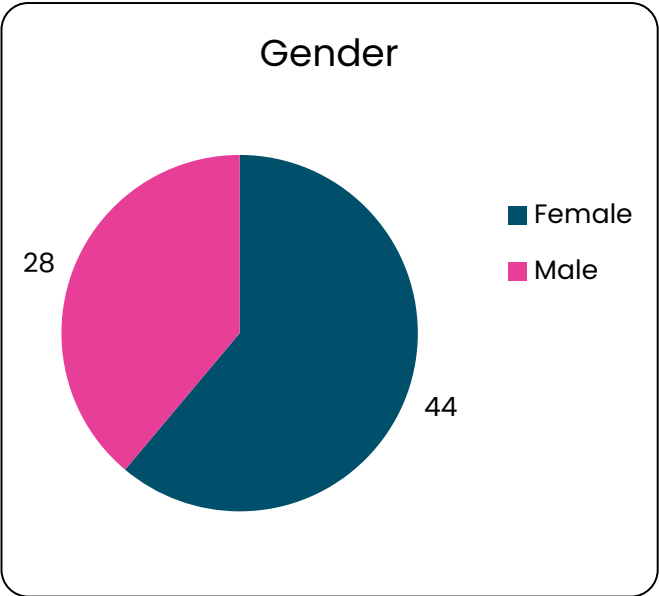
Haven't been able to get a face-to-face appointment despite explaining I'm autistic and have auditory processing issues which mean phone call appointments are useless and stressful.

- Feedback about:
 - Difficulties with phone appointments when you are hard of hearing.
 - Doing physiotherapy over phone, not good at all, face to face is better.
 - Incorrect health information in a letter.
 - Not providing enough information to a doctor in a phone consultation, resulting in a delay to cancer care. Felt this delay would have been avoided by an initial face-to-face appointment.
 - Very good care (mainly hospital) during pandemic for condition that suddenly developed.
- Impact of lockdown on people with dementia and their carers – day centres closed, no respite or support for carers, deterioration of dementia.
- Information about growing up during the war, and the harsh realities compared to living today.
- Lost faith in the NHS.
- People were in good health, so not needing to wait for care.
- Thanks to the NHS and various providers for their help.

Sometimes accessing healthcare feels so difficult that I just want to give up.

Demographics

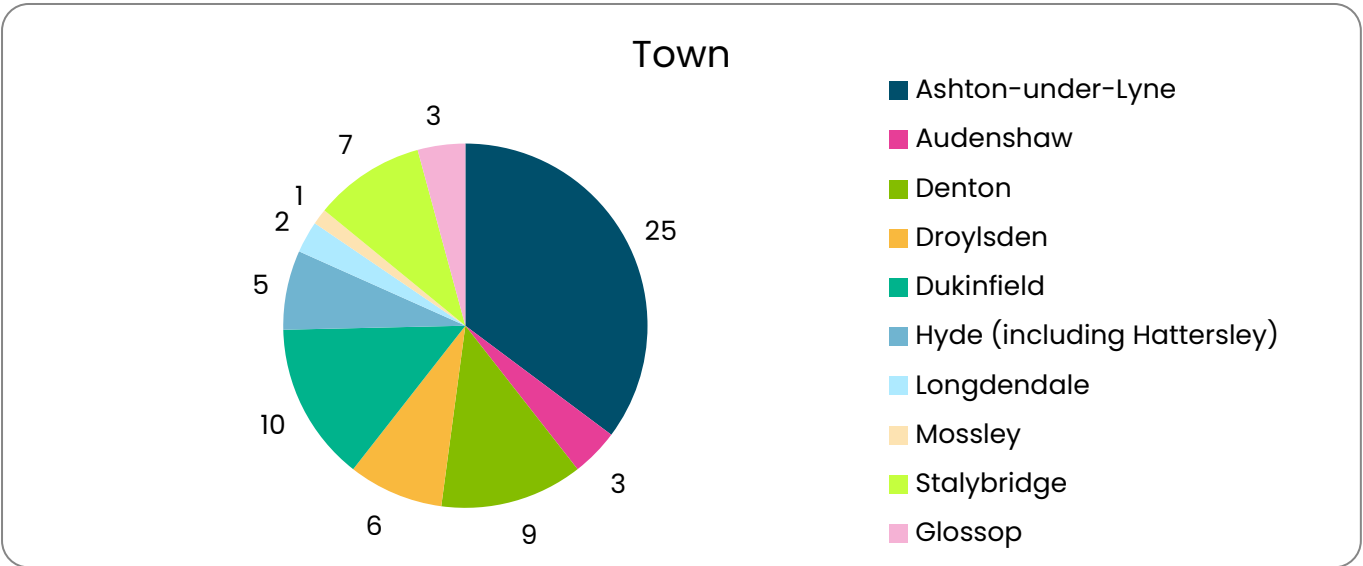
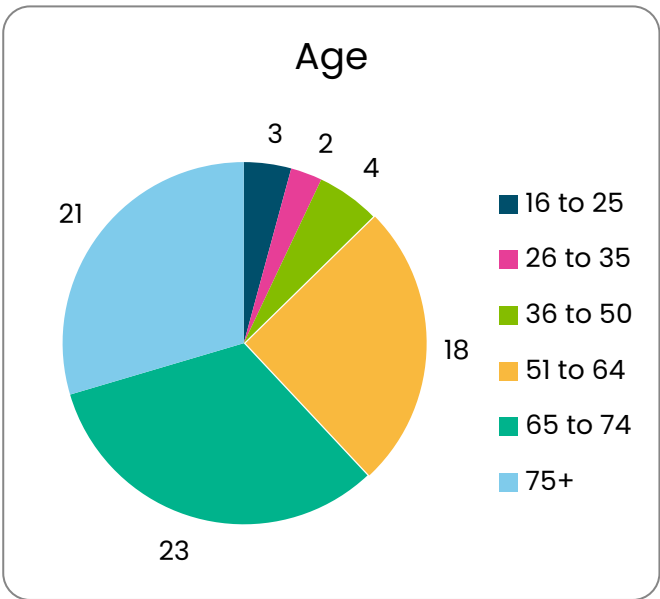
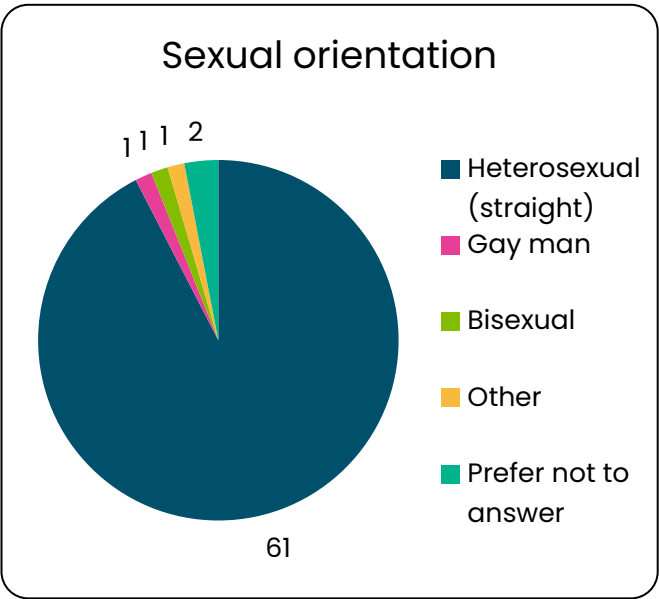
Not everyone has completed these final questions.



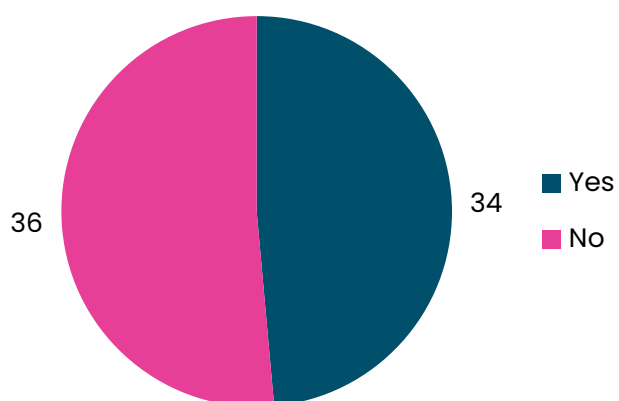
Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

69 people answered this question:

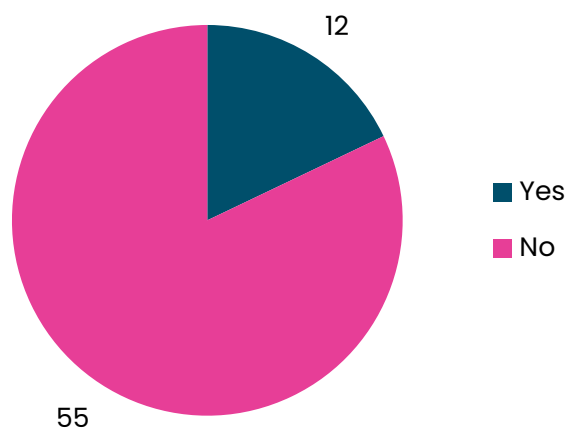
Yes	-	67
No	-	2



Are you a disabled person?



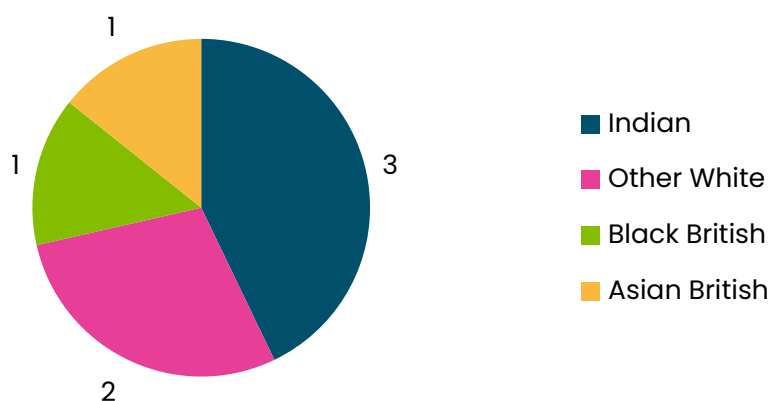
Are you a carer?



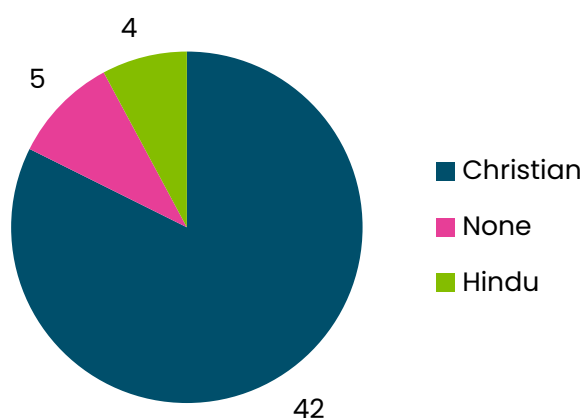
Of the 71 people who answered the question about ethnicity, **64** people selected **White British** as their response.

The remaining responses are shown in the next graph.

Other than White British



Religion



Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who has supported Healthwatch Tameside in our work. This includes the people who complete our surveys, and the individuals and organisations who promote them.

We also thank our volunteers for the support they provide.