

# London Digital First Programme: North Central London Patient Perspectives Case Study

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Case study undertaken by the Health Innovation Network (HIN)  
South London on behalf of NHS England's London Digital First  
Programme



digital first  
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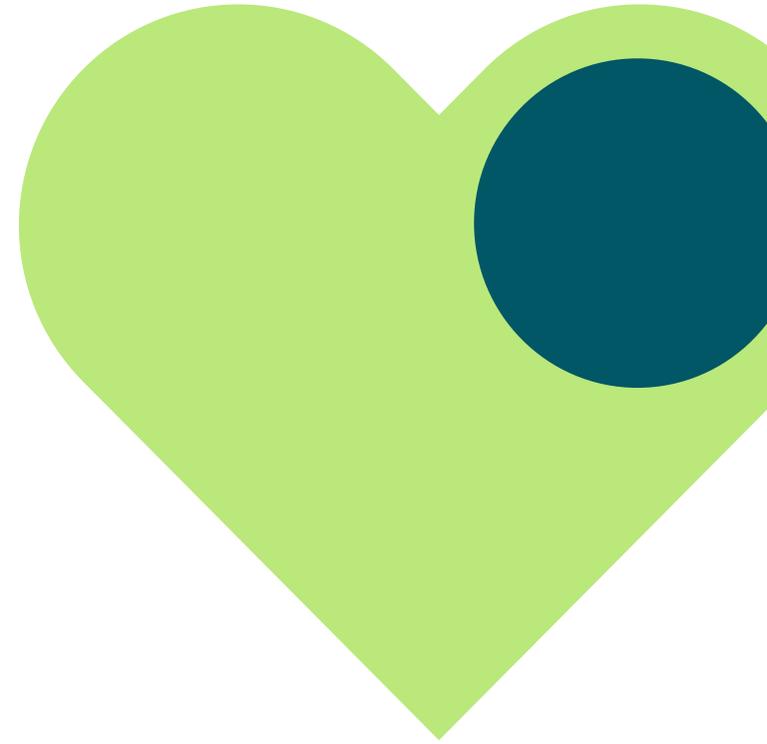


# Introduction

This case study was developed with patient feedback gathered from existing sources of feedback data, an online survey and an online focus group with patients from North Central London (NCL) Integrated Care System (ICS).

This report represents the experiences and perspectives of patients regarding three digital tools used to access general practice - Online Forms, the NHS App and GP surgery websites.

Please see the main report for further details, including London-wide findings, conclusions and recommendations.



# Executive Summary



## Online Forms (also known as Online Consultations)

Most survey respondents (92%) had used Online Forms for themselves or on behalf of someone else, which indicates there is a high awareness of this tool. This was higher than found in a previous survey conducted in two NCL practices (78.5%) (see Appendix 1: Existing patient feedback on Online Forms). The Online Form was mainly accessed via the GP surgery website (69%) for the purpose of requesting to book an appointment (75%), medical advice (43%) or to order prescriptions (43%).

Most survey respondents (83%) were either strongly or somewhat happy with the outcome of using Online Forms. This is higher than in the previous survey of two NCL practices where only 51% of respondents reported having their needs met. The focus group discussion highlighted the following benefits:

- time saved - both for patients by avoiding the need to travel and wait at the GP surgery, and for GP surgery staff by providing detailed information and photos in advance of an appointment
- convenience
- adequate time to provide information
- improving access (e.g. translation tools)

92%  
use Online Forms

78%  
find Online Forms  
easy to use

83%  
were happy with  
the outcome  
following use

89%  
use monthly or less



## NHS App

Most survey respondents (88%) had used the NHS App for themselves or on behalf of someone else. This aligns with the data from the NHS App Reporting Dashboard which reported an average of 107,076 views per month (between July 2022 and June 2023), however usage fluctuated throughout the year (see Appendix 2: Existing patient feedback on the NHS App).

The focus group discussion highlighted key benefits around the simple and intuitive design which enables access to records, booking of appointments and prescription management - the three most common uses identified in the survey. Although not all users had the same experience, with some unable to access their full records, directly book a GP appointment or order certain medications. Improving access to these particular features was identified as suggestions for improvements.

88%  
use the NHS App

91%  
found it easy  
to sign up

83%  
find it easy to  
find the information  
they need

87%  
use it monthly  
or less



## GP surgery website

Most survey respondents (91%) had used GP surgery websites for themselves or on behalf of someone else and 81% found them easy to use. This is higher than other data sources which showed only 59% of respondents reported the same ease of use (see Appendix 3: Existing patient feedback on GP surgery websites).

**91%**  
use their GP  
surgery website

**81%**  
find it easy to use

**92%**  
only use it  
monthly or less



## Communications

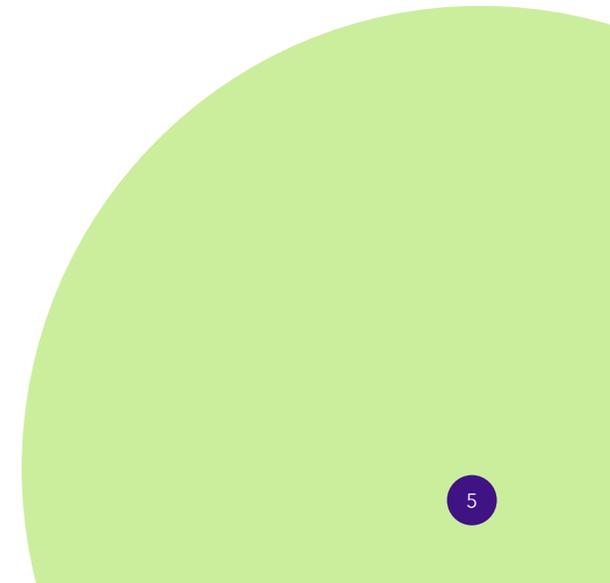
The most common reasons for receiving a text message from a GP surgery were appointment reminders (76%), invitations to book appointments (53%), and surveys (36%). Only a small number (3%) of respondents were not receiving text messages at all - although as the survey was distributed via SMS link and 78% of responses were received via this method, this is likely to be skewed compared to the wider population.

SMS / text message (66%), email (13%) and telephone (9%) were the top three preferred communications methods.

**66%**  
prefer SMS / text  
messages

**13%**  
prefer email

**9%**  
prefer telephone



# North Central London (NCL) ICS:

This case study is drawn from the analysis of three main data sources

## 1. Existing data

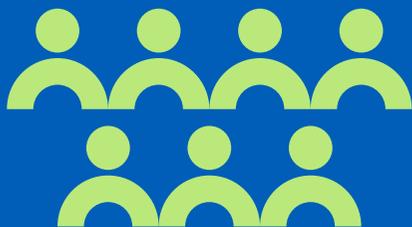
 Healthcare Communications survey: October 2022 and January 2023 for two GP practices

 North Central London ICS GP Patient Survey 2020-2023

 NHS App Reporting Dashboard July 2022-June 2023

## 3. Online focus group

A focus group was held to obtain conversational and detailed patient perspectives on key themes identified from the analysis of existing data and online survey.



**x7**

Seven participants



**x5**

All five North Central London boroughs represented

## 2. Online survey

An online survey using Qualtrics platform developed to obtain ICS-level feedback and indicate prominent areas for exploration with the focus groups.

**3,839**

3839 text messages sent by SMS

by two GP surgeries (Elizabeth Avenue Group Practice and West Hampstead Medical Practice) and one Primary Care Network (Enfield South West PCN).

**397**

responses received

**78%**

via SMS link



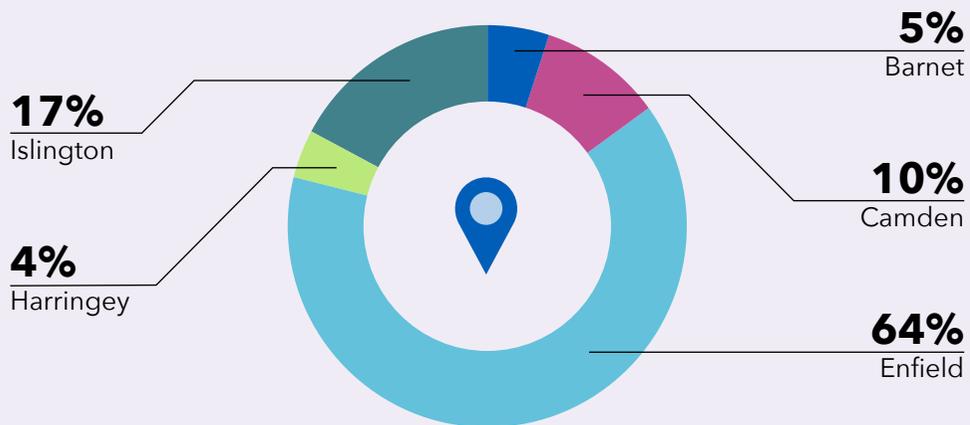
**22%**

via other routes

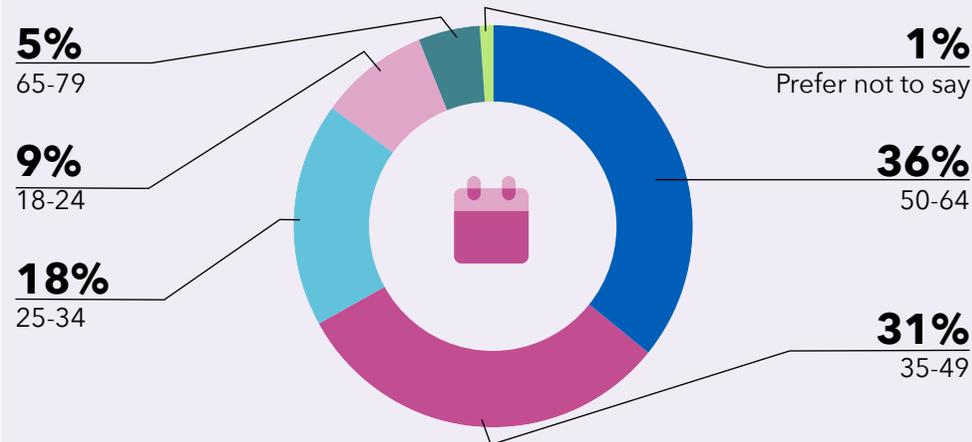
Key demographics of survey respondents are detailed overleaf.

# North Central London ICS: Survey respondent demographics

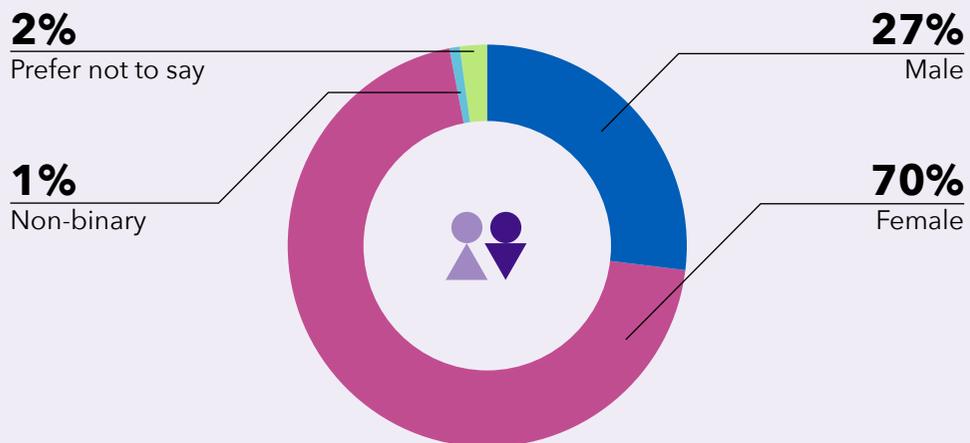
**Borough (n=397)**



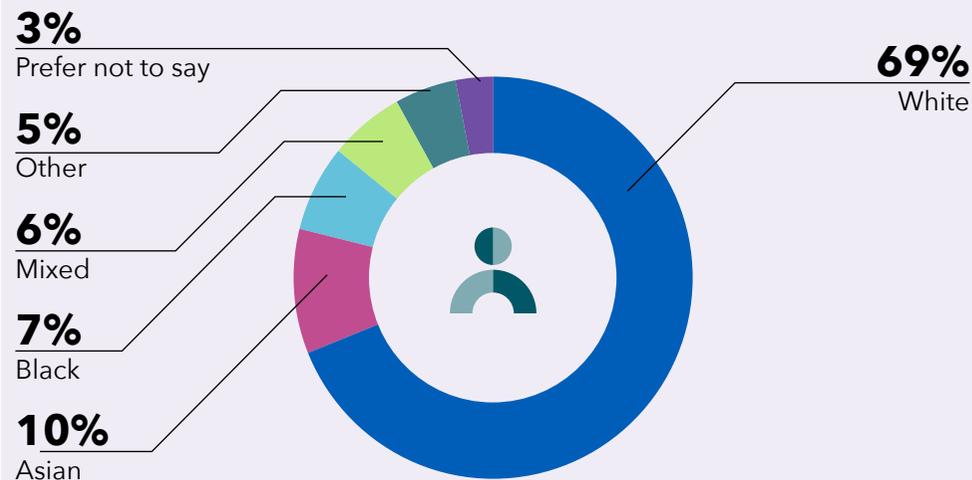
**Age group (n=390)**



**Gender (n=389)**



**Ethnicity (n=392)**



# North Central London ICS: Online survey results relating to Online Form use

## Most respondents had used Online Forms:

out of the 395 respondents, 92% had used an Online Form for themselves or on behalf of someone else.

## Most respondents do not use Online Forms frequently:

of 307 respondents, most use them monthly (26%) or rarely (62%).

## Most respondents heard about Online Forms via their GP surgery website\*:

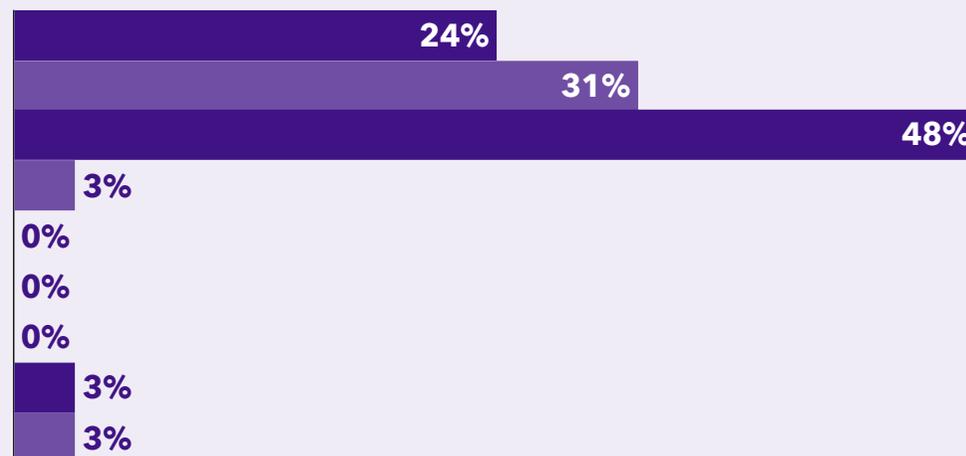
of the 363 respondents, 58% heard about them via their GP surgery website, 31% by the GP surgery/ staff, 17% via the NHS App and 17% via SMS/text message.

## Online Forms are mainly accessed via GP surgery websites or apps:

of the 363 respondents, 69% accessed Online Forms via GP surgery websites, whilst 16% used an app to access Online Forms. Only 4% required help from GP reception staff or family / friends.

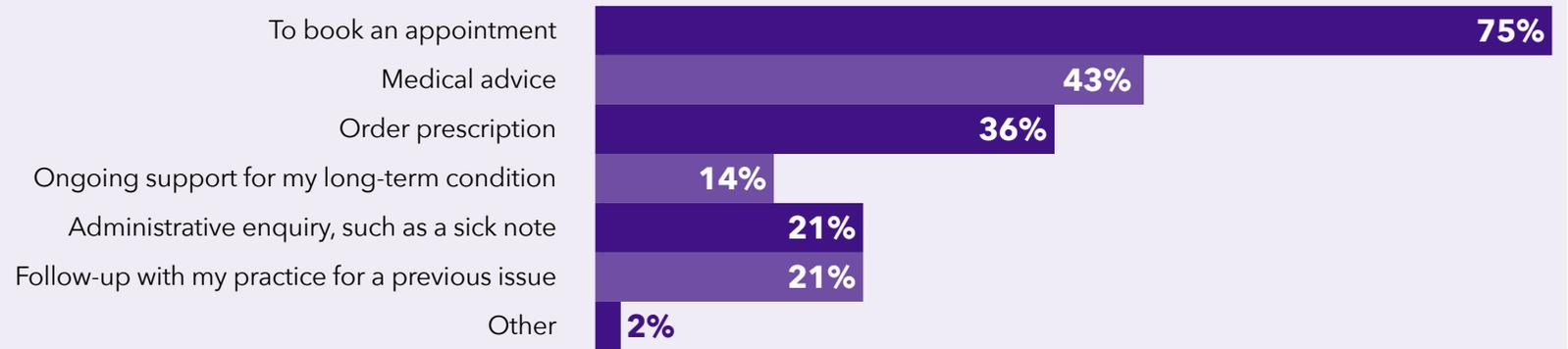
## Reasons for not accessing the service\* (n=29)

- I would rather make contact by phone or visiting the GP surgery
- I haven't needed to use an Online Form
- I didn't know this service was available
- I don't understand what I have to do/I don't know how to use a device
- I don't trust it
- I do not have a laptop/smartphone to access online services
- I do not have broadband/internet access
- I have a disability and it does not meet my accessibility needs
- Other (please specify)

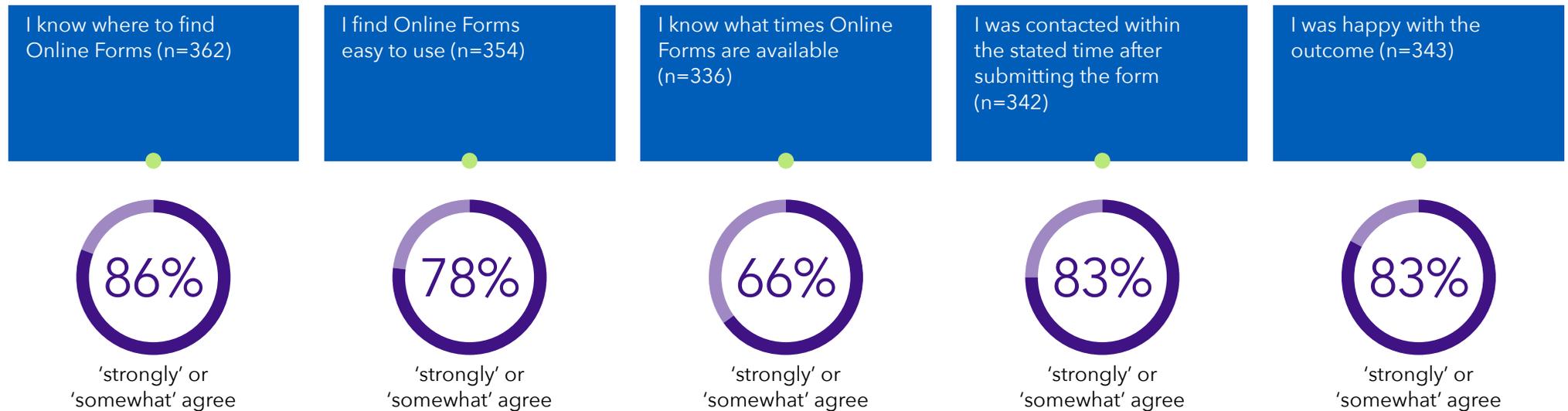


\*Respondents could choose more than one answer, so the total is more than 100%

## What have you used Online Forms for?\* (n=365)



### The following statements were asked:



\* Respondents could choose more than one answer, so the total is more than 100%

# North Central London ICS: Overall experiences of using Online Forms



This section uses data from all three sources: existing feedback, online survey and focus groups

## Positive experiences

### Time saving

- ✓ Don't need to travel
- ✓ Don't need to wait in phone queues
- ✓ More accessible and flexible

### More accurate

- ✓ Have time and means to express concerns in detail
- ✓ Allows ability to provide more accurate information to GP
- ✓ Can use translation tools for non-English speakers

### Efficiency for GPs

- ✓ Queries are triaged
- ✓ GP receives necessary information ahead of appointment

### Visual technology

- ✓ Photos can support diagnosis
- ✓ Video consultations mean avoiding travel and wait times

**“One thing I find really useful through the GP app is being able to order my own prescriptions really simply. I think that's really very time saving both for me and the GP practice. I can email the GP service and they can make the amendments [to prescriptions], so there's no need for me to book appointments - take up their time, take up my time.”**

## Negative experiences

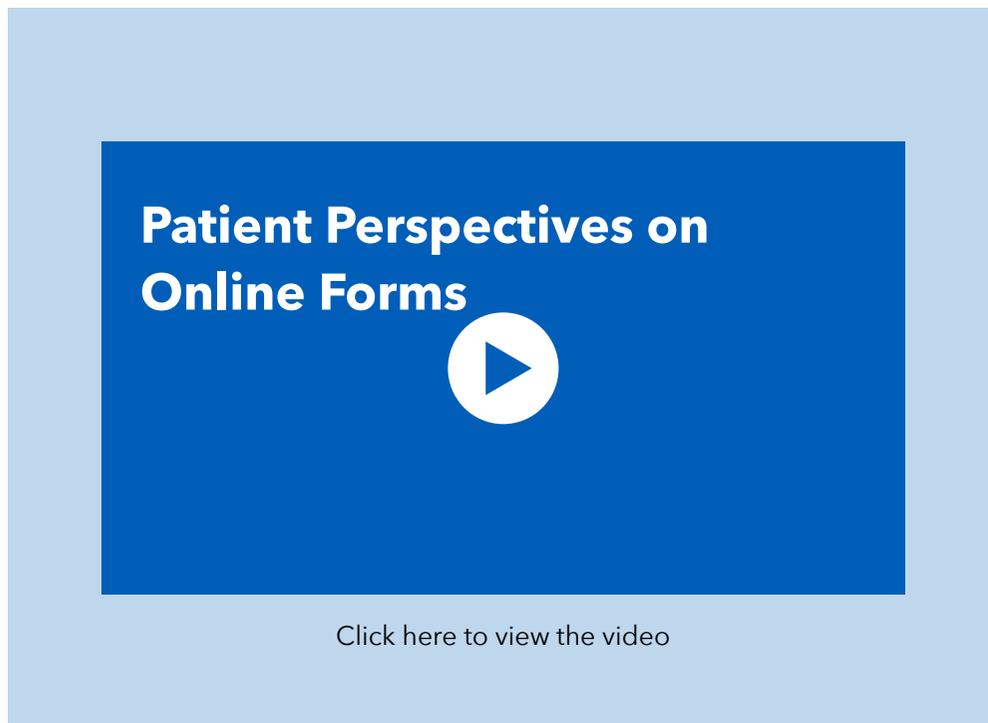
- Lengthy, irrelevant, or numerous questions
- It can be challenging to locate the form
- The available options are not always suitable or do not address specific health concerns adequately
- There can be inconsistent response times, with some not receiving responses at all
- Limited availability outside of normal working hours, and sometimes unclear when the service was available
- Unable to book appointments directly through Online Forms
- Some would prefer an option for in-person or phone interaction with GP surgery, rather than completing an Online Form
- “If you are made to go through too many options it's very frustrating.”**

## Suggestions for improvements

- Include a 'summarise your concerns' free text option to streamline and eliminate the need to navigate multiple fields
- Extend the hours that Online Forms are available for completion to improve accessibility and convenience
- Implement a receipt tracking function to keep people informed on the request progress and reduce the necessity to follow up with the GP surgery
- Offer provisional appointment slots, with the option to schedule appointments with specific health care professionals directly
- Clear guidelines indicating when to expect a response, as well as signposting for emergencies
- “Perhaps if it could be accessed for longer. This would help and it could state that it would not be looked at until the following day etc.”**

# North Central London ICS: Overall experiences of using Online Forms

A series of clips were collected from the focus groups held about patient perspectives of online forms. A video was created to highlight the perspectives from participants in each London region.



# North Central London ICS: Online survey results relating to the NHS App

## Most respondents had used the NHS App:

of the 376 respondents, 87% had used it for themselves or on behalf of someone else.

## Most respondents do not use the NHS App frequently:

of 276 respondents, most use it monthly (33%) or rarely (53%).

## Most respondents heard about the NHS App via their GP surgery website or Covid-19 communications\*:

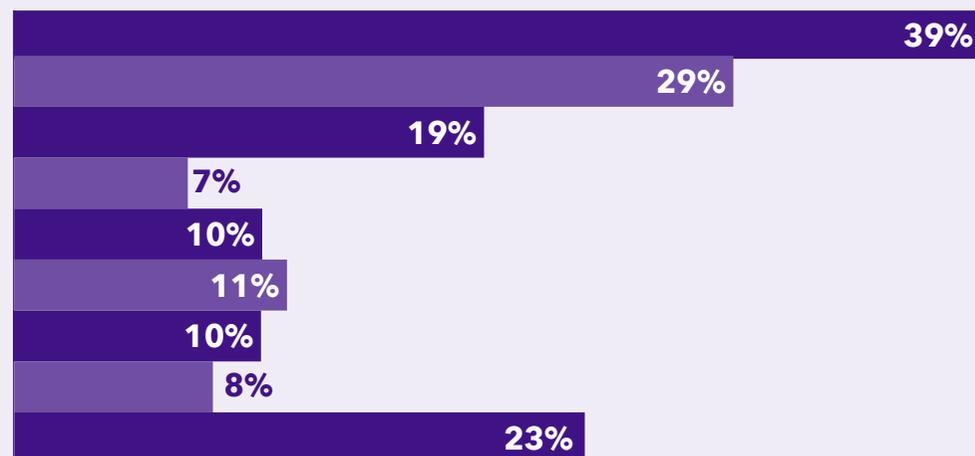
of the 346 respondents, 27% heard about them via communications related to Covid-19, 27% via their GP surgery website, 23% via the NHS website and 22% by the GP surgery/staff.

## The most common use of the NHS App is to view medical records\*:

over half (53%) of the 331 respondents reported using the NHS App for this purpose. Other common uses included to book a GP appointment (37%) and to order repeat prescriptions (34%).

## Please let us know why you are not using the NHS App\* (n=142)

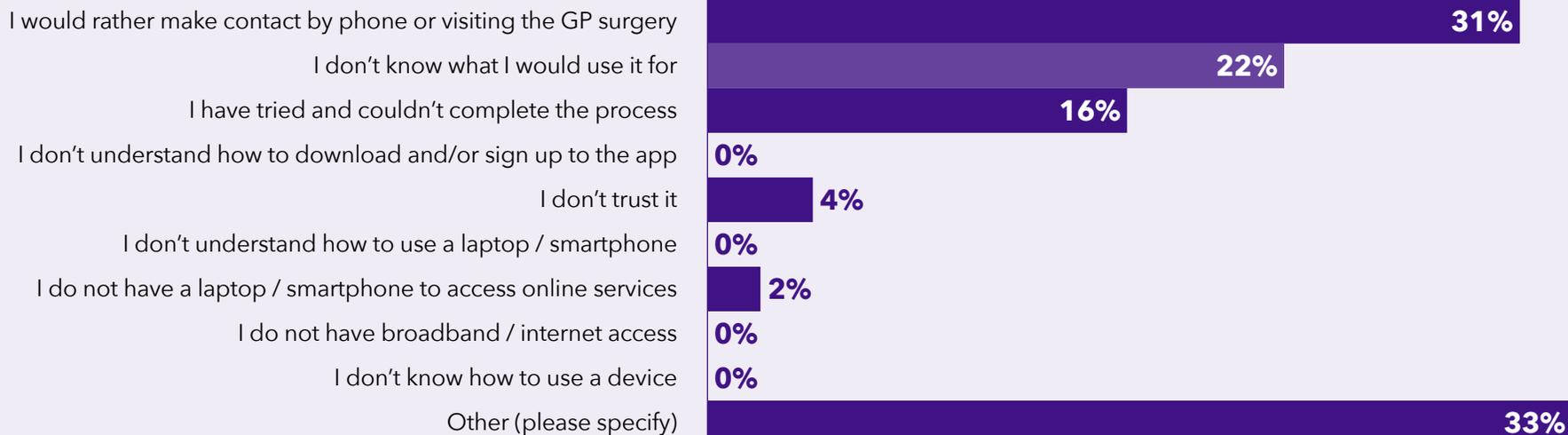
- I only needed it for my Covid-19 pass
- There are not usually online appointments available
- I do not need to order repeat medications
- I find it difficult to use
- My GP record is not available for me to view - I have not asked my GP
- My repeat medications are not available for me to order on the NHS App
- I don't find it useful
- My GP record is not available for me to view - I have asked my GP
- Other (please specify)



This question was asked to respondents who said they only rarely use the NHS App.

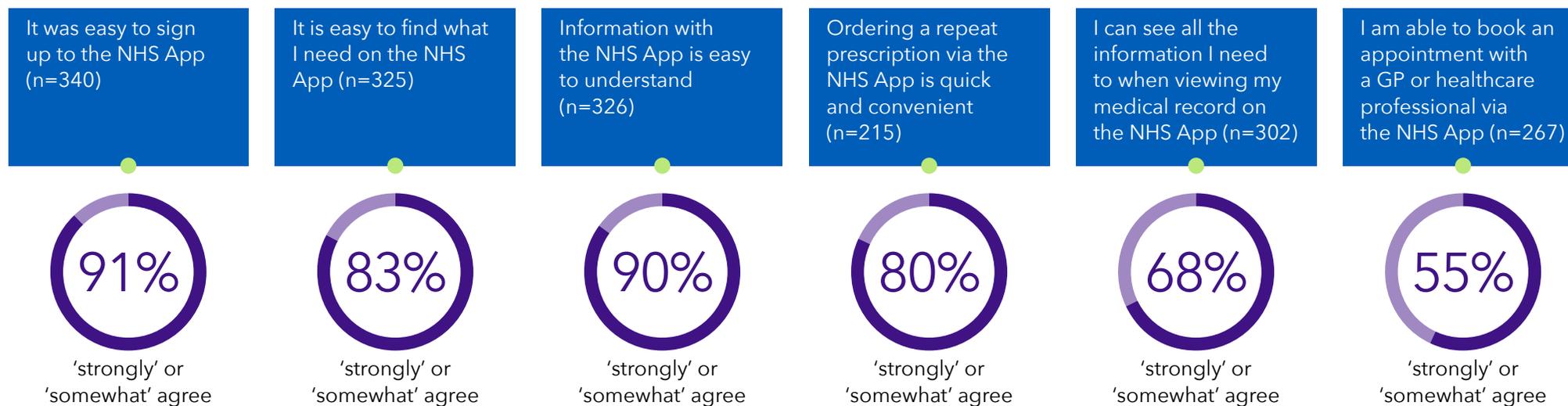
\* Respondents could choose more than one answer, so the total is more than 100%

## Please indicate why you haven't used the NHS App\* (n=45)



When asked why they have never used the NHS App, 33% of respondents chose the 'Other' option. Responses included "my GP surgery had not approved the use of the [NHS] App", "it wasn't available for download" and "I have too many apps and I don't want another".

## The following statements were asked:



\*Respondents could choose more than one answer, so the total is more than 100%

# North Central London ICS: Overall experiences of using the NHS App



This section uses data from all three sources: existing feedback, online survey and focus groups

## Positive experiences

### Ease of use

- ✓ Simple
- ✓ Straightforward
- ✓ Intuitive

### Access to records

- ✓ Share records with clinicians across various settings
- ✓ Can look up information
- ✓ Feel more engaged and able to make informed decisions

### Prescription management

- ✓ Order repeat prescriptions without need to contact GP
- ✓ Access prescription history

### Consolidation of information

- ✓ Streamline access
- ✓ Don't need to access multiple sources

**"I like having everything to do with my health in one place. I like that it is an NHS product. The information is presented clearly."**

## Negative experiences

-  Unable to book GP appointments directly
-  Limited information available, and not able to view full medical history
-  Some patients are unable to access test results from hospital or specialist appointments
-  Unable to order repeat prescriptions for medication on the acute list, requiring follow up with GP surgery
-  The NHS App does not always integrate with other applications and systems that patients use to manage their healthcare
-  **"Not all of the specialist information is on it. It gets quite tiresome having to check three different apps for each trust."**

## Suggestions for improvements

-  GP surgery to provide more online bookable appointments, providing patients with a more convenient process
-  Update online medical records, so patients have access to their full medical history
-  Ensure regular updates are made to allow patients to access test results from hospital or specialist appointments
-  Update the prescription services, to allow patients to order repeat prescriptions from the acute list
-  **"Make it easier to book appointments, lots of GP surgeries don't work with it".**

# North Central London ICS:

## Online survey results relating to GP surgery websites

### Most respondents have accessed their GP surgery website:

out of the 368 respondents, 91% had accessed their GP surgery website for themselves or on behalf of someone else.

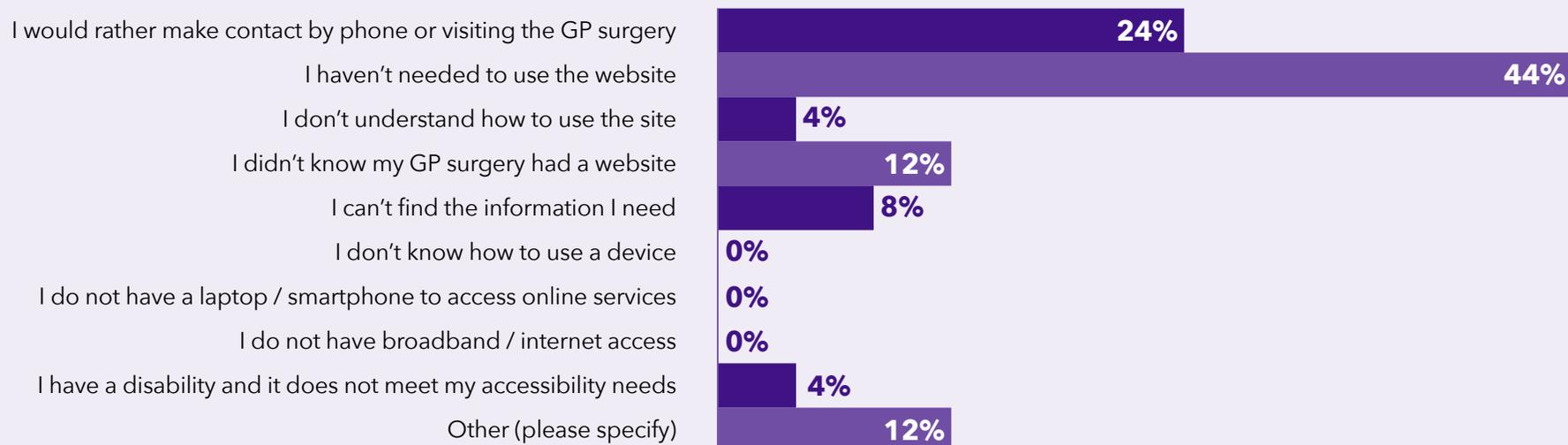
### Most respondents do not access their GP practice surgery website frequently:

of 294 respondents, most only access their GP surgery website monthly (21%) or rarely (71%).

### Finding information is relatively easy

81% of the 367 respondents found it very or somewhat easy to find what they need on their GP surgery website.

### Please indicate why you haven't used your GP surgery website\* (n=25)



\* Respondents could choose more than one answer, so the total is more than 100%

# North Central London ICS:

## Overall experiences of using GP surgery websites



This section uses data from all three sources: existing feedback, online survey and focus groups

### Positive experiences

#### Prescription management

- ✓ Order repeat prescriptions without need to contact the GP surgery
- ✓ Convenient and efficient

**"I have had a good experience when ordering a repeat prescription through my GP's website. It is simple to navigate, the wording is clear, and a request can be made quickly."**

### Negative experiences

- Unable to book GP appointments
- Unable to send messages through the website outside of normal working hours
- Difficult to navigate and use, especially for those individuals who may have less experience using online platforms.
- Some members of the population, particularly the elderly, may face challenges due to limited technology skills, lack of access to devices or the internet or unease with unfamiliar online services.

**"Most of the time I had to do a lot of trials and error because topics that I need to find are relatively hidden or hard to locate within the GP website and that is from a 23-year-old. How much more difficult it would be for people who are older than me trying to book an appointment that has little to no experience to these websites?"**

### Suggestions for improvements

- Simplify and improvements to the menu structure and signposting to make information easier to find.
- Introduce more accessible forms of support such as pictures, videos and diagrams
- Include a 'live chat function' to allow patients to engage with the GP surgery in real time to answer any queries they may have when navigating the website.
- Ensure the website is kept up to date, to accurately reflect services available, members of staff, opening hours and contact information for example.
- Adopt a common template across the London region to ensure consistency in user experience
- "The website can provide multimedia content such as pictures, videos and diagrams to enhance the user's understanding of the procedure and results."**

# North Central London ICS: Online survey results relating to communications

## Most text messages from GP surgeries are around appointments\*

  
**388**  
respondents



said they receive appointment reminders via text



said that they receive invitations to make appointments



said that they receive invitations to complete surveys



said that they receive information about test results

## Please let us know why you do not receive text messages from your GP surgery (n=9)

**22%**

Other (n=2)

**0%**

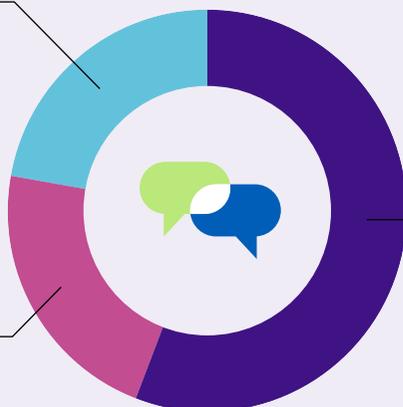
I have not provided my GP surgery with my mobile number

**56%**

I didn't know my GP surgery could send me text messages (n=5)

**22%**

I chose to opt out of receiving text messages (n=2)



Participants were asked 'How would you prefer to receive communications from your GP surgery?' (n=271)

## Answers, in order of most preferred were:

01



SMS / text message

04



WhatsApp

02



Email

05



Messaging via NHS App

03



Telephone

06



Letter / post

\*Respondents could choose more than one answer, so the total is more than 100%

# Appendix 1: Existing patient feedback on Online Forms

An analysis was carried out on the Healthcare Communications survey results from GP surgery A (n=731) and GP surgery B (n=591); and the North Central London ICS GP Patient Survey 2020-2023 results (n=83,302). The following themes were identified:

Theme	Detail
Patient experience of using Online Forms	<p><b>Awareness and usage:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>78.5% of respondents aware of the e-consult (Online Consultation product) system, and 76.5% had used eConsult or another online platform</li> <li>There was an increase in the percentage of patients who had had an online consultation or appointment over the past 12 months from 2021 to 2022 (24% in 2021, increasing to 28% in 2022). This data was not captured in the 2020 or 2023 survey</li> </ul> <p><b>Understanding use of system:</b> 89.8% of patients understood they could access medical care with eConsult</p>
Usefulness of service	<p><b>Usefulness:</b> 51% of respondents found eConsult a useful service</p> <p><b>Benefit to use:</b> 73% of patients at the GP surgery B agreed that using eConsult meant information could be submitted to the GP practice at times that were convenient to them</p>
Ease of use	<p><b>Ease of use:</b> 75.5% 'strongly agreed/agreed' they knew where to find eConsult</p>
Response time	<p><b>Contact time:</b> 67% of respondents were contacted within the stated time</p>
Patient satisfaction with care	<p><b>Needs met:</b> 51% of respondents said they had their needs met following completion of an eConsult, however it is important to recognise that 49% of patients did not feel their needs were met.</p> <p><b>Satisfaction:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>70.5% of respondents felt their appointment had been with an <b>appropriate clinician</b>.</li> <li>70% of respondents stating they felt <b>confident in managing their health issue</b> following their consultation with a non-GP Healthcare professional.</li> <li>74% of respondents rated their particular <b>experience with a non-GP healthcare professional</b> as 'Excellent' or 'Good'.</li> </ul>

## Challenges with the usefulness of service

**Benefit to use:** 58% of respondents perceived not having to travel to the GP surgery as a benefit of the use of eConsult

## Challenges with ease of use

**Frustrations with the eConsult system:** Across the two practices, the focus of frustration varied. At GP surgery B negative comments mainly focused on the system usability, whereas for patients at GP surgery A they were around their own ability to use the system. There was good representation across all age groups in the survey, particularly in respect of the use of eConsult, which refutes the common stereotype that older age groups can't or won't engage digitally.

**Usability:** Challenges described by respondent from GP surgery B could be grouped in to 4 main themes:

Theme	Patients felt...
01 Issues with eConsult system	the questions asked were 'repetitive', 'irrelevant', or there were 'too many questions'
02 The application of the eConsult system	it was too much to do when the patient was feeling unwell and it was not appropriate for use with all conditions
05 Communication with GP practice	a majority would prefer to phone the doctor to make an appointment and the need for 2-way communication between the GP surgery and the patient.
04 Improvements suggested by patients	Improvements would be to add free text options in the eConsult system and for the system to be available out of hours.

**Accessibility:** 42% of patients at GP surgery B 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' that eConsult was accessible to people with disabilities. 24% of patients thought it was accessible to people with disabilities. 77% of responders to this question stated they had a disability and/or long term condition.

## Challenges with patient satisfaction with care

**Clinical contact:** 65% of responders felt it was 'extremely' and 'somewhat' important to see their preferred clinician, however 43% felt this was achieved 'rarely' or 'never'. Of those who felt it was 'extremely' and 'somewhat' important to see their preferred clinician 66% were over 55 years and 10% were under 34 years, indicating this was more important to certain age groups of patients.

**Note:** this survey was only conducted across patients registered at two practices and, therefore feedback is focused towards the tools that these practices use.

## Appendix 2: Existing patient feedback on the NHS App

An analysis was carried out on data from the North Central London ICS GP Patient Survey 2020-2023 and the NHS App Reporting Dashboard (July 2022-June 2023). The following themes were identified:

Theme																	
<b>Annual use of accessing medical records online<sup>2</sup></b>	<p>Across NCL ICS there was a year-on-year increase in the percentage of patients who had accessed their medical records online in the past 12 months from 2020 to 2022 (7% in 2020, 8% in 2021, 18% in 2022), however this figure decreased slightly in 2023, with 7% of respondents stating they accessed their medical records online in past 12 months.</p> <p>Note: this is in relation to accessing medical records generally, not specifically via the NHS App.</p>																
<b>Monthly use of patient access to prospective medical records (NHS App)<sup>3</sup></b>	<p>The NHS App Reporting dashboard (July 22 - June 23) showed fluctuations throughout the year. Key data is shown below.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="633 775 1930 1161"> <thead> <tr> <th>View</th> <th>Average number of views per month</th> <th>Highest number of views</th> <th>Lowest number of views</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Record views</td> <td>107,076 views</td> <td>March 2023 (120,587views)</td> <td>December 2022 (92,115 views)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Summary coded record view</td> <td>105,251 views</td> <td>March 2023 (118,667 views)</td> <td>December 2022 (90,373 views)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Detail coded record view</td> <td>65,938 views</td> <td>Marrch 2023 (77,319 views)</td> <td>December 2022 53,170 views)</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Note: the detailed coded view holds all medical information, whereas the summary coded record view only contains information about a patient's medicines and allergies. Patients need to contact their GP surgery to request accessed to the detailed coded record</p>	View	Average number of views per month	Highest number of views	Lowest number of views	Record views	107,076 views	March 2023 (120,587views)	December 2022 (92,115 views)	Summary coded record view	105,251 views	March 2023 (118,667 views)	December 2022 (90,373 views)	Detail coded record view	65,938 views	Marrch 2023 (77,319 views)	December 2022 53,170 views)
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Record views	107,076 views	March 2023 (120,587views)	December 2022 (92,115 views)														
Summary coded record view	105,251 views	March 2023 (118,667 views)	December 2022 (90,373 views)														
Detail coded record view	65,938 views	Marrch 2023 (77,319 views)	December 2022 53,170 views)														

# Appendix 3:

## Existing patient feedback on GP surgery websites

An analysis was carried out on data from the North Central London ICS GP Patient Survey 2020-2023<sup>2</sup>. The following themes were identified:

The data showed an increase in the percentage of patients using online services, such as booking appointments online, ordering repeat prescriptions online, and having an Online Consultation or appointment, from 2020 to 2023.



Of the online services, booking appointments online appeared as the most used service (32% of patients in 2023) and filling in an online form the least used service (14% of patients in 2023).



The data showed a year-on-year decrease from 2020 to 2023 in how easy patients found the GP surgery website to use to look for information or access services.

When asked, 'how easy is it to use your GP surgery website to look for information or access services' 71% of patients in 2020 agreed it was easy, however this reduced to 70% on 2021, 60% in 2022 and 59% in 2023.

