

Transforming care with local voices

Annual Report
2025–2026



Contents

A message from our Chief Officer.....	2
About us.....	3
Our year in numbers.....	4
A year of making a difference.....	5
Making a difference in the community.....	6
Listening to your experiences.....	7
Hearing from all communities.....	11
Information and signposting.....	16
Showcasing volunteer impact.....	18
Collaboration.....	20
Finance.....	24
Future priorities.....	25
Statutory statements.....	26



“We would like to personally thank Healthwatch Dudley for the depth of insight presented in [their research into access to GP services] and for the patient-centred approach taken. Your work continues to play an essential role in shaping services and supporting patients across our borough.

The contribution you make, both through this report and the previous year’s work, has been invaluable, and we would like to express our sincere thanks and ongoing support for everything you do.”

–Primary care colleagues

Note: Names and identifying details of the public have been changed throughout this report.

Improving services through targeted community engagement and cross-sector collaboration

Over the last year we have worked closely with people experiencing financial difficulties, the LGBTQ+ community, people who are digitally excluded, people with sensory loss and people with learning disabilities to understand what is important to them and share their feedback with leaders who have the power to bring about change.

We employ targeted community engagement and ongoing collaboration with voluntary and community sector organisations to hear from diverse communities. We have built trusted relationships throughout Dudley borough, particularly with some of the most seldom heard in our society.

We spent 10 months building trust and listening to people who were accessing foodbanks to discover the barriers to health and care that people experiencing financial hardship face. The project painted a sobering picture of inequitable access throughout our community and helped highlight how essential it is to build trust with the community, so they feel safe to share their experiences. This work has played a vital role in informing local poverty mitigation strategies and future workstreams.

Helping people navigate sometimes complex health and care systems has remained a core focus of our work and allowed us to spot trends, themes and gaps in provision. Working closely with system partners enables us to amplify these views and experiences and contribute to meaningful change.

Thanks to a team of dedicated volunteers, we have been able to reach out to even more people to shine a light on health inequalities, find out what's working well and share what could be improved.

Whilst the future of Healthwatch is uncertain, we strongly believe that any future provision must continue to work with the community for our community and maintain independence to ensure feedback is turned into real change.

My sincere thanks go to the staff, steering group, volunteers, partners and wider colleagues and most of all, the people of the Dudley borough who engage and share their experiences in the interest of bringing about positive change for others.



"From individual changes, like helping Ben get reliable oxygen deliveries, to large scale service change, like the GP practice Charter, we have been at the forefront of improving health and social care for local people."*



About us

Healthwatch Dudley is your local health and social care champion.

We ensure that NHS leaders and decision-makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



Our vision

To bring closer the day when everyone gets the care they need.



Our mission

To make sure that people's experiences help make health and care better.

Our values



Equity

We are compassionate and inclusive. We build strong connections and empower the communities we serve.



Collaboration

We build internal and external relationships. We communicate clearly and work with partners to amplify our influence.



Impact

We're ambitious about creating change for people and communities. We're accountable to those we serve and hold others to account.



Independence

Our agenda is driven by the public. We're a purposeful, critical friend to decision-makers.



Truth

We work with integrity and honesty, and we speak truth to power.

Our year in numbers

In 2025/2026 we supported more than 5000 people to have their say and get information about their care.

We employed 4 staff and, our work was supported by 12 volunteers.

Reaching out:



2642 people shared their experiences of health and social care services with us, helping to raise awareness of issues and improve care.

1499 people came to us for clear advice and information on topics such as where to find an NHS dentist, how to access Urgent Care and how to book a GP appointment.

1439 people accessed advice and information on our website.

Championing your voice:



We published **18** reports about the improvements people would like to see in areas like GP services, Care Homes and Social Care services.

Our most popular report was **More than the Essentials: Poverty and its Wider Impact**, highlighting the barriers people face when experiencing financial hardship.

Health and social care that works for you



In 2025–2026 we employed **4** staff.

We're funded by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council In 2025–26 we received **£190,200**, which is **12.9% less** than last year.

A year of making a difference

Over the year we've been out and about in the community listening to your stories, engaging with partners and working to improve care in Dudley borough. Here are a few highlights.

Spring

Trans and non-binary people's experiences of GP care

We contributed to a national report by Healthwatch England exploring the experiences of trans and non-binary people accessing GP services.

Accessing NHS Dental Care

We published our report on access to NHS dental care. We promoted the report on various boards to ensure services heard the experiences of our community.

Summer

Exploring follow-up after surgery

We were commissioned to see what people think of a new initiative which gives patients more control over their follow-up care after hospital treatment.

Experiences of Veterans

We attended a local veterans' breakfast and attended a veterans day celebration to discover the health and care experiences of people who have served in the armed forces.

Autumn

Shared Lives Carers

Shared Lives Carers and the people they cared for shared their experiences of care. We learnt of the barriers to support for both vulnerable adults and the people who care for them.

Stopping the stigma

We co-hosted a workshop encouraging cancer screening among ethnic minority women, addressing stigma and barriers to screenings.

Winter

More than the essentials

We unveiled the findings of our 10-month engagement with people who used foodbanks. This research painted a sobering picture of the impact of financial crisis on access to care.

GP Access follow-up

We explored the impact of recent changes to primary care services to see if they improved access to GP services.

Making a difference in the community

We bring people's experiences to healthcare professionals and decision-makers, using their feedback to shape services and improve care over time.



Championing community voice in community health initiative

We sit on a group with representatives from the NHS, local council, education, housing and voluntary sectors.

The goal is to address health inequalities in an area with high levels of deprivation in Dudley borough.

We ensure the voices of the local community are heard and considered. By working with the community, Public Health has set up a network of Community Champions, a family fun day was held and courses are being planned to improve wellbeing.

Improving care over time

Change takes time. We have worked with the local D/deaf community since 2013 to champion their voices.

We work with the Dudley Deaf Focus Group to bring together members of the local D/deaf community and leaders in health and social care to ensure the experiences of people with hearing loss are considered.

We have raised issues with booking interpreter services in primary and hospital care. We have also heard how residential care services often are not set up to accommodate people with hearing loss.



We have included the need for hearing loss awareness in the Dudley GP Patient Charter and contributed to the development of "I am D/deaf" cards which highlight a person's communication needs.



"Thank you for your continued commitment to hearing directly from our communities."

Listening to your experiences



“Thank you for actively listening!”

This year, we've listened to feedback from all areas of our community. People's experiences of care help us know what's working and what isn't, so we can give feedback on services and help them improve.



Local people still experiencing inequality in access to GP services

Last year, we asked local people if recent changes to primary care had made it easier to access GP services.

Pharmacy First, Modern General Practice and the Dudley GP Patient Charter all aim to improve access to primary care. We asked local people if they were aware of these initiatives, and more importantly, if they had improved people's access to GP services.

Our multi-method approach:

Survey



- Online
- In-person
- Feedback boxes

Enter & Views



- 1 Pharmacy
- 7 GP practices

Desk research



- GP practice websites
- Social media

Our work showed that there are still barriers to accessing GP services, particularly for those who have additional communication needs or who are digitally excluded.

Key things we heard:

17%

of people are unaware of different healthcare professionals at their GP practice.



74%

of people have heard of Pharmacy First, but many reported a "back and forth" between the pharmacy and their GP.

14%

of people have seen and read the Dudley GP Patient Charter.



"If you have internet access then you are able to get the information, it seems it all hinges on that."



Nearly one third of households in Dudley borough are at the highest risk of food insecurity

We spent 10 months working with people who access local foodbanks to discover the barriers they face to accessing health and social care.

They painted a clear picture, financial insecurity forces people to make impossible choices between paying for transport, digital access, food and bills. Complex support systems and online only applications are more challenging to navigate when people have financial barriers.

Key things we found:

68%

of survey respondents do not have access to a computer.

18%

of advice and signposting was tailor-made – reflecting the complex needs of people facing food insecurity.



69

"It costs £5 to go to the hospital and back, that's a week's worth of food."

Our work showed the value of having information and signposting support available in foodbanks. This helps people facing financial hardship navigate complex systems and access the services they need.

In numbers

281 people listened to or supported

116

bus passes provided to help people access essential services.

96

professionals attended an event to hear people's experiences.

Empowering patients to manage their follow-up care

We explored local experiences of Patient Initiated Follow Up (PIFU) to ensure this new model of care is accessible and equitable for everyone in Dudley borough

Commissioned by The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust, we conducted targeted engagement to understand the potential benefits and challenges of the PIFU model, which allows patients to arrange their own follow-up appointments only when needed.

We spoke with 62 people from seldom-heard groups, including adults with disabilities, unpaid carers, and members of the LGBTQ+ community, using group discussions and surveys to capture their concerns regarding digital barriers, communication needs, and clinical safety.

Key things we found:

63% of people prefer in-person appointments.

50% of survey respondents prefer getting information via text or email.



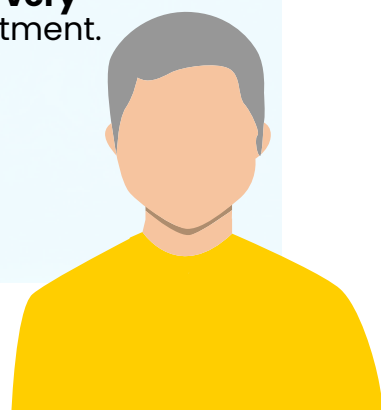
"Asking for an appointment makes me feel more in control and listened to, as though I am part of the process."

I used PIFU after my son's surgery

Liam used PIFU to follow-up on treatment for his son's hand. Liam experienced significant administrative hurdles including a phone line ringing out and being passed back and forth between reception and the clinical department.

Eventually, he reached the right clinician who was **"fantastic and very informative"** and provided him with information on his son's treatment.

Liam's story highlights the benefit of patients being able to contact clinical teams directly with concerns. However, it shows how organised systems are essential for PIFU to work for patients.



Hearing from all communities

“

Healthwatch Dudley provided members the opportunity to share positive and negative experiences relating to their healthcare, whilst in the company of a compassionate and caring professional.”



Frontline workers share their thoughts on the safeguarding process

We conducted a small research survey to explore professionals' experiences of the safeguarding process in Dudley borough.

We heard how the online referral form can be confusing and take a long time to complete - often asking for the same information multiple times.

Workers also told us there was uncertainty as to what the threshold is and raised concerns about the lack of support for vulnerable people who do not meet the threshold.



“Why aren’t people meeting the threshold? What actually needs to happen for someone to meet the threshold?”

What difference will this make?

The Dudley Adult Safeguarding Board was grateful for the work and accepted all the recommendations we made.

These will now be picked up and progressed by the different improvement groups and separate workstreams to get a response to each and every recommendation.

This demonstrates a real commitment to addressing concerns of frontline workers and the people they support.



Helping Lucy advocate for her son's care

A parent contacted us with concerns about the care their adult son was receiving in supported living.

The situation had caused them both distress and they were unsure how to have his voice heard and his care needs reviewed.

We signposted the family to an independent advocacy service, ensuring they could be supported to express their views and wishes.

This demonstrated the vital role of advocacy in ensuring vulnerable people are supported to have their say and get the care they need.



Exploring the Shared Lives scheme

The Camphill Village Trust Shared Lives Scheme provides personalised care for adults with learning disabilities, autism and mental health needs.

Carers told us that caring is rewarding but caring 24/7 with limited respite can lead to "burnout".

Our report showcased the highs and lows of being a Shared Lives Carer and encourages services to address the challenges raised.



"The best thing about being a shared lives carer is seeing the people you care for develop."



Exploring experiences of HIV care

We joined a local HIV support group to listen to people's experiences of health and social care. Their stories show cases of compassionate care, as well as highlighting areas for improvement.

Key findings

- Specialist HIV clinics received high praise for providing respectful and dignified care.
- Lack of knowledge in wider healthcare teams can lead to issues such as not understanding the impact of HIV on wider health.
- Primary care triage is seen as invasive and distressing when pressured to disclose HIV status to administrative staff.



"If I tell the doctors about something, they say it's my HIV, but my viral load is very low. Some doctors don't understand that."

Stopping the stigma: cancer screening for minority ethnic women

We partnered with Womenn, Macmillan and the NHS to host a workshop addressing cultural stigma and barriers surrounding cancer screening.

Discussions highlighted barriers and addressed the questions and concerns of the women attending.

Key findings

- Cultural stigma can prevent some women from attending cancer screenings.
- Accessible information in different languages and formats is crucial to improve awareness and participation in screenings.
- Misdiagnosis can lead to mistrust in healthcare services.



"We need to share breast cancer information with our sons, husbands and dads as they can get it too."



Listening to the experiences of people living with sight loss

People who live with sight loss often face additional barriers to accessing health and social care services. Beacon, a service that provides support for people living with sight loss, invited us to speak with people who use the service regarding their experiences of health and social care services.

We spoke with 21 people in two focus groups to get a snapshot of the experiences of local people living with sight loss.

We heard how flexibility of services is needed to meet the needs of people with visual impairment and although the Accessible Information Standard is in place, it is often not met.



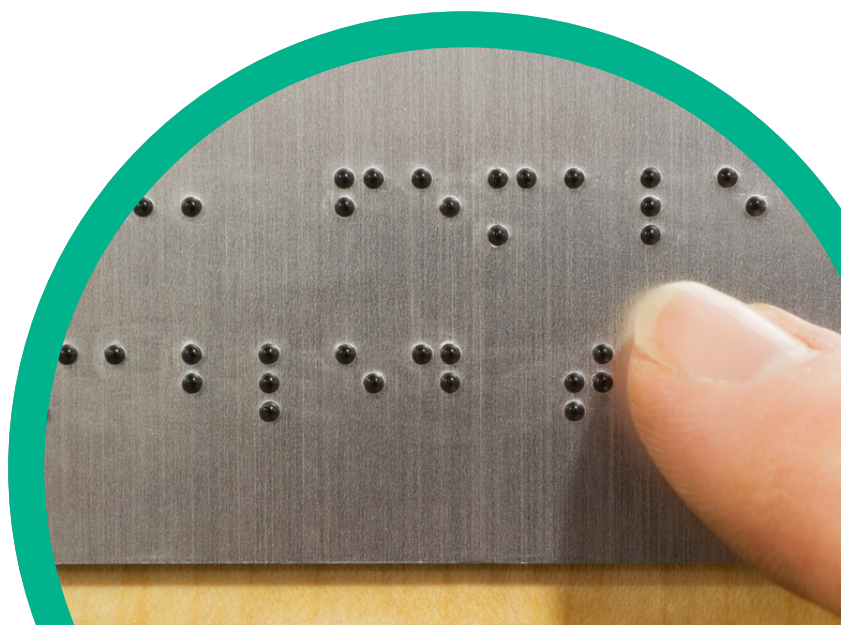
"I'm visually impaired, and I say to the GP 'don't send me anything on the portal because I can't access it.' I need it in large print. I still get things sent to me on the portal."

Key findings

- Lack of awareness and understanding from staff can cause traumatic experiences or even failed procedures.
- Getting a face-to-face appointment with a GP is more difficult since the pandemic.
- Beacon provides a range of support and a welcoming space for people living with sight loss.



"There are things that can be changed to make it a better experience for everybody, just be understanding of people's needs."



Signposting and information

“

Your advice and info was so valuable to me as an unpaid carer. I now have the correct support in place from the GP.”

This year, we've helped people by:

- 2,938 people accessed advice and information from us.
- Informing patients of their rights to help them access primary care.
- Listening to the complex needs of people who access foodbanks and directed them to services that can help.
- Co-creating an information resource for refugees and migrants.



Helping Rachel overcome Digital Barriers to Care

Rachel contacted us after struggling for several months to secure a GP appointment for ongoing back problems.

Frustrated, she escalated her concerns by writing directly to the Practice Manager and she was offered a physiotherapy appointment. However, she continued to encounter difficulties attempting to book the next appointment and was not routinely told to complete an online form, despite not having access to online services.

We advised her to request that surgery staff complete the online form on her behalf. Following further support with follow-ups, she was successfully seen again by a physiotherapist and referred for an X-ray.

This case highlights the importance of providing a range of ways for patients to access primary care. We highlighted the importance of this in the GP Practice Charter and refer both patients and services to this when access needs are not met.



"I couldn't have done this without [Healthwatch Dudley]. I would have just given up."

Providing one place for information

Gemma spoke to us at a local foodbank. She had been struggling to access practical, social and financial support.

We provided a listening ear and were able to help her come up with a plan and contact the different services needed to provide the care and support she needed.

A week later she informed us that she had seen the Queens Cross Network, was having stair and grab rails fitted and the fire service was going to check her alarms.

With the right information, she was able to solve multiple issues in just a few days.



"In just three days it's 100% better!"



Showcasing volunteer impact

“

Our fantastic volunteers have given 249 hours to support our work. Thanks to their dedication, we are able to reach more people, dig deeper into service provision and help our community.”

- Carly, Volunteer Co-ordinator



At the heart of what we do

Our 12 amazing volunteers have worked hard to drive our work this year. Three people also completed our micro-volunteering challenge – turning small actions into big impact.

Our volunteers undertook a wide range of activities over the year, with all volunteers showcasing their individual talents.



Reviewed GP practice websites and Facebook pages to support our research into GP access.



Assisted with activities and engagement at Russells Hall Hospital throughout the year.



Created a 'What's On' booklet to let parents and carers know about free and local activities for young people.



Assessed Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust's new website content and accessibility check to ensure digital communications work for the community.



Conducted a mystery shopping activity to the National Data Bank to discover what it is like for people to access mobile data when experiencing financial crisis.



"Thanks so much for the opportunities Healthwatch has provided. I'm really happy to help and hope I've made a difference"



Collaboration

“

We have had regular and invaluable support from Healthwatch Dudley over the years, evidenced in the improvement in NHS and Social Care access and services.”

This year, our collaborative approach included:

- Working with Black Country Foodbank to listen to the experiences of people experiencing financial hardship.
- Working with Adult Social Care to explore the safeguarding adults process.
- Collaborating with support organisations to listen to the experience of people who use their services, including the LGBTQ+ community.



Stakeholders praise us for improving access and providing insight

Stakeholders highlighted how we are a trusted service that encourages real change and identifies areas for improvement.

We asked stakeholders from the Local Authority, Black Country Integrated Care Board (ICB) and local charities and support organisations to share their experiences of working with us and provide insights into our impact.



"I think the team are genuinely well respected and are authentic and able to challenge in a constructive manner."

Key findings

94%

agreed that we understand local issues and base our work on residents' feedback.

80%

felt we influence decisions made and add valuable insight for decision-makers.

94%

agreed that we effectively collect insight from diverse or seldom heard communities.



"I have worked closely with Healthwatch Dudley since I started over a decade ago, and really appreciate the helpfulness, expertise and insightfulness that comes from being in the position of a 'critical friend.'"

We will use this feedback to build on what we do well, share more stories about the difference we make and continue to make sure local voices contribute to local change.

Bringing services together to tackle poverty

Our joint project "More than the essentials" paints a clear picture: people are being pushed into hardship by complex, systemic challenges. For many, foodbank use has shifted from a temporary emergency intervention to an ongoing necessity.

We listened when local people told us how complex systems and disjointed working between services made it difficult to access support. So we brought together services from the NHS, police, social care and the voluntary sector to encourage them to work together to address poverty.

“*It can be easy to make assumptions relating to people living in poverty. This research will make me think more about the biological impacts of poverty.”*

We invited Helen Rowe, author of *Eliminating Poverty in Britain*, to present information on how poverty affects the human body and how it can impact people's behaviour.

This provided further context to the impact of poverty and challenged assumptions and prejudices that people may hold about those who are facing financial hardship.

Commitments to change

- Attendees made commitments to how they will address poverty within their work.
- A cross-sector group is now actively working together to tackle digital poverty.
- Voluntary sector organisations, Dudley Council and Healthwatch Dudley produced a resource to help refugees and asylum seekers get essential support.

“*I commit to considering the circumstances of those living in poverty that I work with.”*



Finances, future priorities & statutory statements



"Reaching this community ensures their experiences shape services, improving inclusivity and reducing inequalities."



Finances

Our income and expenditure:

Income		Expenditure	
Annual grant from Government	£190,200	Expenditure on pay	£176,651
Additional income	£15,900	Non-pay expenditure	£5,345.78
		Office and management fee	£28,530
Total income	£206,100	Total Expenditure	£210,526.78

We received additional income for the following projects:

- *Follow-up exploring access to GP services in Dudley borough – Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.*
- *Exploring residents' views of Patient Initiated Follow-up – Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust.*
- *More than the Essentials – Black Country Foodbank.*



Future priorities

Over the next year, we will keep reaching out to every part of society, so that those in power hear their views and experiences.

We will also work together with partners and our local Integrated Care System to help develop an NHS culture where, at every level, staff strive to listen and learn from patients to make care better.

Our top three priorities for the next year are:

1. Co-designing a Care Home Charter that visually displays what residents and their loved ones can expect from their care.
2. Exploring the Adult Social Care front door – what happens to people who do not meet the criteria for Adult Social Care Support?
3. Supporting young people to have their say on the health and wellbeing issues that matter to them.



“My experience of Healthwatch Dudley has been so positive. I don’t feel alone at my lowest ebb when trying to navigate GP services.”



Statutory statements

Healthwatch Dudley uses the Healthwatch Trademark when undertaking our statutory activities as covered by the licence agreement.

The way we work

Involvement of volunteers and lay people in our governance and decision-making

Our Healthwatch Steering Group consists of three members who work voluntarily to provide direction, oversight, and scrutiny of our activities.

Our Steering Group ensures that decisions about priority areas of work reflect the concerns and interests of our diverse local community.

Throughout 2025–26, the Steering Group met four times and made decisions on matters such as staffing and priorities for research. We ensure wider public involvement in deciding our work priorities by analysing the feedback we hear on health and social care services.

Methods and systems used across the year to obtain people's experiences

We use a wide range of approaches to ensure that as many people as possible can provide us with insight into their experience of using services.

During 2025/26, we have been available by phone and email, provided a webform on our website and through social media, and attended meetings of community groups and forums.

We ensure that this annual report is made available to as many members of the public and partner organisations as possible. We will publish it on our website and on the Black Country Insight Library.

It will also be shared on our social media channels and physical copies will be available from Dudley CVS, 7 Albion Street, DY5 3EE.

Statutory statements

Responses to recommendations

We had no providers who did not respond to requests for information or recommendations. There were no issues or recommendations escalated by us to the Healthwatch England Committee, so there were no resulting reviews or investigations.

Taking people's experiences to decision-makers

We ensure that people who can make decisions about services hear about the insights and experiences shared with us.

- Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board – represented by Jason Griffiths and Andy Gray.
- Dudley Integrated Care Partnerships – represented by Jason Griffiths and Andy Gray.
- Quality Partnership – represented by Jason Griffiths and Katie Chiverton.
- Local Healthwatch Network – represented by Jason Griffiths and Carly Houghton.
- Dudley Health and Social Care Scrutiny Committee – represented by Jason Griffiths and Katie Chiverton.

Our representatives share findings from our engagement and research with decision-makers. Where relevant, we seek collaboration on research or work to address inequalities raised by our community. We continue to be an independent voice for health and social care.

We also share our data with Healthwatch England to help address health and care issues at a national level.

Enter & View

Location	Reason for visit	What you did as a result
GP practice Castle Meadows	Practice identified as a Modern General Practice, visited to explore impact of Modern General Practice on access to care.	Wrote a report with recommendations – results were included in wider report on access to GP services.
Jhoots Pharmacy Milking Bank	Pharmacy identified as delivering Pharmacy First and has close links to Modern General Practice GP surgery (Castle Meadows). Visited to explore impact of Pharmacy First on access to primary care services.	Wrote a report with recommendations – results also included in wider report on access to GP services. Since visiting, Jhoots Milking Bank has closed.
Six GP practices	Previously conducted an Enter & View in 2023. Visited to explore the prevalence of patient information in waiting rooms.	Findings from the Enter & Views were shared in a report and included in our wider research into GP access. report on access to GP services.
Pathways Supported Living	We wanted to explore the experiences of people who live at Pathways Supported Living.	Privacy concerns were raised by residents regarding access to their flats during maintenance visits. This has been promptly addressed by Pathways.

2025–2026 Outcomes

Project/activity	Outcomes achieved
Following-up access to GP services	Highlighted changes to primary care and addressed areas for improvement, Made recommendations to stakeholders and held them accountable to previous recommendations.
Patient Initiated Follow-up	Produced a report that identified the preferences for communication, focusing on the needs of seldom-heard communities.
Professional experiences of the safeguarding process	Provided recommendations to the Adult Safeguarding Board who have accepted every recommendation and are actioning changes.
Exploring the health and social care experiences of people living with HIV	Produced a report highlighting the experiences of local people and made recommendations which were shared with local services.
Exploring the experiences of people who use the Shared Lives Scheme	Produced a report highlighting people's experiences of the Shared Lives Scheme and made recommendation which were shared with local services.
Exploring veterans' experiences of health and social care	Produced a report highlighting veterans' experiences of care and made recommendations which were shared with local services.
Encouraging cancer screening among ethnic minority women	Hosted a successful event to increase awareness and address stigma surrounding cancer screening. Produced a report highlighting the impact of community focused interventions.
Exploring the health and social care experiences of people who access foodbanks.	Produced a report highlighting experiences, making recommendations and proposing opportunities for change. Hosted a conference to encourage change. Working groups and resources already developed to action recommendations.
Listening to the experiences of people living with sight loss.	Produced a report highlighting the barriers to care faced by people living with sight loss. Made recommendations to improve accessibility and shared these with local services.

Have your say

If you have had an experience with health or social care, good or bad, we want to hear from you.

By sharing your story you can help to bring about positive change to local services.

Share your story with our team:

 **03000 111 001** local rate number

 **07983728913** WhatsApp message

 www.healthwatchdudley.co.uk/have-your-say

 hello@healthwatchdudley.co.uk

You can read all the reports mentioned in greater detail on our website

 www.healthwatchdudley.co.uk

If you require any reports in an alternative format, please contact us.



If you would like this report in another language or format please contact us.

Healthwatch Dudley

7 Albion Street
Brierley Hill
DY5 3EE

03000 111 001 local rate number

🌐 www.healthwatchdudley.co.uk

✉ hello@healthwatchdudley.co.uk

f @hwdudley

X @HWDudley

📷 @healthwatchdudley

***"You are so supportive, full of information,
a light in the dark, there when we need help."***