

NHS 111 First

How well is Urgent Medical Care working in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin?



July 2021



healthwatch
Telford and Wrekin

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We are the independent consumer champion/patient voice, created to gather the views of people who live in Telford and Wrekin.

Nationally, Healthwatch England, supports 152 local Healthwatch that cover local Clinical Commissioning Groups and local authorities. We are a small team of three staff members and are supported by a Board of Directors and a team of volunteers.

Our mission is to provide our communities with the opportunities to present a stronger voice, thereby enabling them to influence and challenge how Health and Social Care Services are provided in Telford and Wrekin (T&W). Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin (HWT&W) routinely gathers the views of residents who use or have access to Health and Social Care Services. Their feedback is analysed to allow HWT&W to provide evidence-based comments to inform the key groups who plan, manage and regulate the service.

HWT&W engages with many statutory/voluntary organisations including the Local Authority, Care Quality Commission (CQC), Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), providers, individuals and groups, to ensure that services are designed and structured to meet the needs of local people. In addition, HWT&W have a statutory responsibility to carry out Enter and View visits to provider services offering health or social care activities.



Since July 2020, NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSEI) has been piloting an NHS First service to encourage patients to call NHS 111 for triage before attending Accident and Emergency (A&E) services. NHS 111 First is aligned to the five-year forward view for NHS Urgent and Emergency Care and is now being rolled out across the NHS in England and NHS 111 providers.

If anyone has an urgent, but non life-threatening health problem the public are encouraged to call NHS 111 to be directed to the correct service, whether that is an Emergency Department (Accident & Emergency), their GP, or self-care. Callers to NHS 111 can now receive time slots at local Emergency Departments (EDs) or other Urgent Care departments, as well as receiving time slots with GPs or out-of-hours GP Services. The new service aims to reduce waiting times at EDs and limit the number of people in waiting rooms, to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Initial findings in national research are showing that many people do not know that NHS 111 First could book them into the different services they may need.

HWT&W wanted to gather the views and experiences from people who have used NHS 111 First and how they were helped to access services.



What we did

We asked people to share their views and experiences of using the NHS 111 First service since December 2020. Due to the pandemic, we were still unable to engage with people face-to-face and designed a survey which was shared amongst key contacts, Local Authority, Telford Clinical Commissioning Group, Voluntary sector, Community sector, organisations and residents of T&W. We promoted advertising posters and used digital platforms; such as our website, social media and local press to reach as many respondents as possible.

We received 24 responses to our survey between March and April 2021.



People we heard from

Although we received responses from 24 people, it should be noted that not all respondents answered all questions. It was also interesting to discover that only a little more than half of the participants indicated that they did so on their own behalf.

Who are you completing this survey for?	Number of participants	% of participants
Myself	14	58%
Someone else	9	38%
Preferred not to say	1	4%



What we found

What was the first NHS service you/they contacted in relation to this urgent medical problem?		
NHS service	Number of people	% of people
Called 111	18	75%
Contacted their GP e.g. calling, using an online booking service, or visiting in person	4	17%
Went straight to A&E	1	4%
Went straight to Minor Injuries Unit at a Community Hospital	0	0%
Went straight to an Urgent Treatment Centre	0	0%
Other	1	4%

As you can see from the table above, altogether 18 out of 24 people called NHS 111. We also found out that 1 participant who contacted their GP first was advised to contact NHS 111 instead.

Comments received

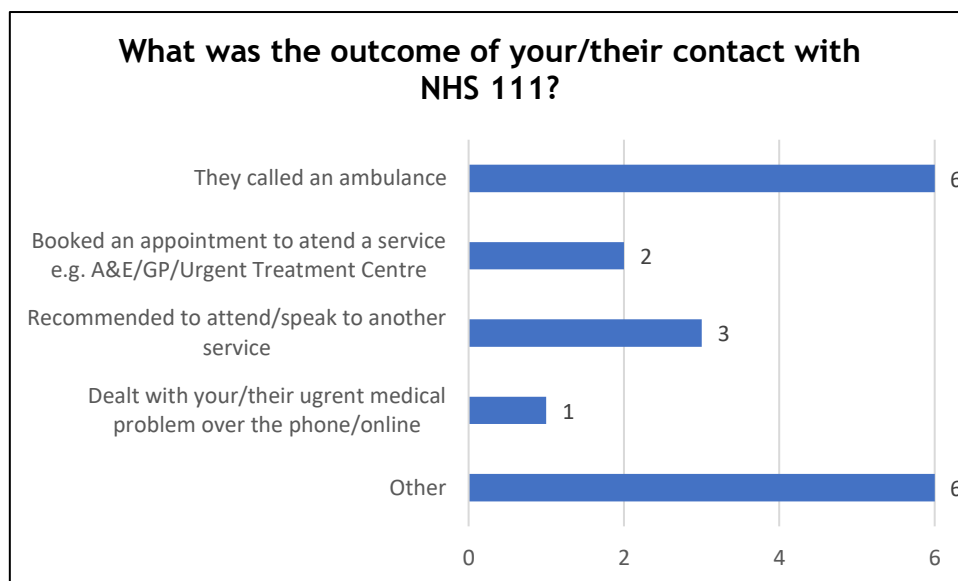
1 respondent said they find A&E easier. They told us; *“It is more convenient to come to A&E directly.”*

Another respondent (Other) contacted their GP Practice first, but they could not get on the telephone waiting list. They told us; *“I rang Teldoc first and I could not get on the telephone waiting list, so I rang 111.”*

Out of the 4 respondents who contacted their GP first, 2 of the respondents received treatment (either remotely by video or telephone call, or at the practice) and 1 respondent was advised to contact NHS 111.

Unfortunately, 1 respondent was unable to seek advice from their GP. They told us; *“After listening at great length to advice about COVID, which was not relevant to this call, the recorded message advised that the telephone queue was full and the call was disconnected (automatically, by the GP surgery). I was unable to speak to anyone at the GP practice.”*

Those who contacted NHS 111



Comments received

“I was number 400 in the queue, so I gave up and called 999.”

“Initially offered to book an appointment for a catheter change in a unit 30+miles away and in a higher risk COVID region.”

“Referred me to the website.”

Experience of those where an ambulance was called

Case Study:

1 out of the 6 respondents did not attend their booked appointment, they told us;

“The call taker referred the case to 999 despite it not being an emergency and despite protestations from the caller that an ambulance was not required.”

As a result they did not attend the ambulance that was booked for them and decided to call another service instead (GP out of hours service e.g. ShropDoc) who dealt with their issue, this is what they told us;

“111 default setting seemed to be to refer the patient to 999 despite it not being an emergency case. The questions asked were not particularly relevant and seemed engineered to get the patient to admit to having chest pain which resulted in an ambulance being sent. The issue was a chest infection, so it hurt to cough as this had been ongoing for several days.”

In 6 cases an ambulance was called and resulted in the individuals receiving treatment within the ambulance or they were treated further at a different service (such as A&E). The ambulance service received mixed ratings; 4 out of the 6 respondents rated their experience as *‘very good’* compared to 2 out of 6 respondents who rated their experience as *‘very poor.’*

Comments received

“I was not happy with the length of time it took to speak to an actual person, having to listen to numerous COVID messages and press 2 each time, which took several minutes. My husband had a head injury and I was very concerned. After explaining my husband’s long and complex medical history and answering questions I had to wait for a return call. It was over 40 minutes before the clinician rang back, and I had once again got to go through all the details from the beginning. All in all, this took well over an hour, the result being that an ambulance was sent and he went to A&E where he had a CT scan and was dealt with very efficiently. In similar circumstances I would not call 111 again.”

“Arrived promptly, had good knowledge and gave clear instructions as to next steps.”

*...and not want to go to hospital as I am shielding.
They were very professional and made me feel comfortable even though I had not had anyone in my home up to that point.”*

“Problem is lack of contact with patient once they went into ambulance.”

Wife called 111 as I thought I'd had indigestion and about 1 hr later was getting pain down my arm. 111 discussed how I was feeling, gave advise on taking aspirin if available & then arranged for an ambulance. I was taken in to A&E...Later confirmed had had a heart attack & treated in Telford & transferred to Stoke for tests.

Booked appointments to attend a service

The 2 respondents who had booked appointments with other services attended their appointments and received face to face treatment.

At which service did NHS 111 book an appointment for you?

- They booked a slot in A&E 4% (1)
- They booked a slot with a GP out of hours service (e.g. ShropDoc) 4% (1)

Both respondents rated their experience of contacting NHS 111 and receiving a booked time slot with a service to deal with your/their urgent medical problem as *'very good'* or *'good.'* They also told us that they were happy with how NHS 111 had advised them to speak to or attend a service to deal with their urgent medical problem and rated their experiences as *'very good'* 1 respondent told us they their experience was *'neither good nor poor.'* All respondents told us that their medical need was dealt with.

Comments received

"At the time they were not doing booked appointments and it took nearly an hour for them to return my call with a Doctor."

Recommended to attend/speak to another service

We found that only 2 out of 3 respondents attended their booked appointments, because 1 respondent said it was *'more convenient'* to attend a different service. All 3 respondents rated the services they attended (GP out of hours service e.g. ShropDoc or A&E at Princess Royal Hospital) as *'very good'* or *'good.'*

Dealt with you/their urgent medical problem over the phone/online

Case Study:

We had one respondent with a dental issue who sort help from NHS 111 who were able to assist them over the telephone:

“ShropDoc contacted me very promptly with a solution and advice. Antibiotics were prescribed and I was advised to call 111 again if my symptoms got worse as I may need to be seen at hospital, otherwise see my Doctor.”

NHS 111 were able to help this individual and they rated their experience of using NHS 111 as ‘*very good.*’ Following this they contacted their Doctor and found the service did not deal with their issue, they told us;

“I contacted my dental surgery, as my face was so badly swollen I was disfigured, there wasn’t a Dentist in until later that morning so I was told to contact my GP, on contacting Wellington Health Centre (at 9.30am and waited for 30 minutes plus for someone to answer) the Receptionist taking the call laughed at the fact ShropDoc had advised me to see my GP saying that a Doctor wouldn’t see me with a facial swelling, they knew this because they had had what I had got (how did they know what I had got?) and their advice was to go to A&E.

At about 11.30am I got back in touch with my Dental Practice, a Dentist without seeing me doubled the dose of the antibiotics prescribed by ShropDoc, my facial swelling went down after a week with the Dentist keeping in touch with me every few days over the phone to see how I was. A week later my right eye became uncomfortable so I promptly saw my optician who referred me to the emergency eye clinic at Royal Shrewsbury Hospital (RSH) I had a haemorrhage at the back of my right eye, this has been resolved with a second appointment at the emergency eye clinic at RSH. The Dental surgery and my very good optician did their jobs well, as did the emergency eye clinic at RSH.

I did get the name of the Receptionist at Wellington Health Centre who was so unhelpful. The GPs at Wellington Health Centre seem to have become virtual.”

This suggests that the respondent had a positive experience when seeking help from NHS 111, however they have expressed their concerns with Doctors and speaking to Receptionists, they also told us; *“111 were very good I was contacted by a Doctor very quickly. It’s the fact that not all GP practices aren’t playing there part in emergency care.”*

Other services

6 out of 18 (33%) of respondents told us that they contacted other services for help or NHS 111 had organised a call back from a specific service (such as ShropDoc).

Comments received

“Initially offered to book an appointment for a catheter change in a unit 30+miles away and in a higher risk covid region.”

They contacted ShropDoc who then called us back very promptly. ShropDoc then arranged for a Doctor to visit us at home 22.15pm.”

We asked these respondents to rate their overall experience and only 1 out of 6 rated their experience as **‘good’** (2x average, 1x poor and 2x very poor). We also found out that only 2 out of 6 respondents attended their booked appointments, compared to 3 who did not (1 who preferred not to answer the question). We were told 3 different reasons for why they did not attend their appointments:

- Previous negative experience of using the service.
- Travelling would be risky due to COVID-19 and was too far.
- There were no emergency appointments for dental treatment.

Out of the 3 respondents who did not attend their booked appointments, 2 of them contacted another service (Ambulance service and GP out of hours e.g. ShropDoc).

When they were asked to rate their experience of the service that treated them, all 6 respondents gave a rating with additional comments (3x very good, 2x good and 1x not sure).

Comments received

We received both positive and negative comments about people’s experiences:

“111 were no help, I eventually managed to get a telephone consultation from my GP.”

“111 Said they would book me in at Shrewsbury Hospital as an emergency but didn’t let them know.”

“Very efficient and thorough.”

“More staff needed.”

“In the end NHS 111 operative did put us through to ShropDoc which was completely appropriate and very helpful. However, initial option to drive over 30 miles with a very vulnerable older person to a higher covid risk area in the middle of the night was not appropriate or the safest option. It was only when this was clearly questioned that a more appropriate option offered. The call handler was polite throughout but didn’t appear to know the local area.”

Those who contacted on behalf of someone else

Out of the 9 respondents who contacted on behalf of someone else, 2 of them contacted their GP first, compared to the 7 respondents who contacted NHS 111. We also found that only 4 out of 9 respondents were present with the patient at the time of the call (4 respondents preferred not to answer the question and 1 stated they were not with the patient at that time).

Furthermore, we wanted to know whether permission to speak on someone else's behalf was recorded within the patients notes and although 4 respondents preferred not to answer this question, 3 out of 5 stated that their permission to speak on behalf of someone else was recorded in the notes. Compared to 1 respondent who said 'no' and another who stated that they 'did not know.'

We also found that 2 out of 8 respondents were unable to discuss the patients' needs with the Health Advisor. This is what they told us;

"I received a call from a lady late Friday afternoon who had tried 111 without any success in her mission to try to get emergency Dental treatment for her son. She tried every avenue to get this treatment without success and all avenues advised by the 111 operator who drew a blank. The Dentists listed as emergency clinics did not respond. One clinic suggested an appointment two weeks later then said they could not give an appointment. I tried calling 111 on their behalf and ended up being given the run around. Clearly the 111 operators were not in position to be able to give advice leaving someone in severe pain over the weekend. This needs to be addressed as soon as possible."

"To busy to answer my call, referred me to the website."

The Carers experience

Only 8 out 18 respondents stated they were Carers and only 2 completed this survey on behalf of someone else. To analyse the Carers, experience the following findings reflect the experience of the 2 Carers who completed this survey on behalf of someone else.

We wanted to know if there were any difficulties to Carers being able to discuss the issues/needs of the person they care for when contacting NHS 111. We were keen to find out about issues around;

- Being with the patient at the time of the call.
- The patient's permission for the Carer to speak on their behalf being already recorded on the patient's summary notes.
- Having to explain that they had the patient's permission.

Whilst both Carers explained that they did have permission to speak on behalf of someone they care for and were both present with them, only 1 said that this was recorded on the patient's summary notes. Both Carers were able to discuss the needs of the person they care for to the Health Advisor.

Additionally, both Carers received treatment for the person they care for by two different services (via ShropDoc and an Urgent Care Centre), and Both Carers rated their overall experience of the service that treated them as *‘good.’* One Carer explained further and said it was *“very efficient and thorough.”*

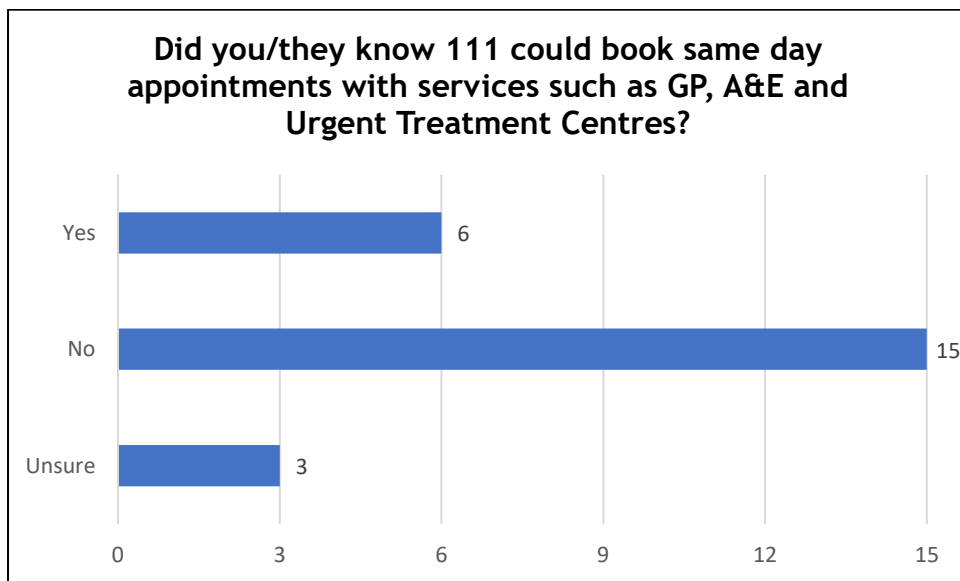
Comments received:

“Using 111 was straight forward.”

“They contacted ShropDoc who then called us back very promptly. ShropDoc then arranged for a Doctor to visit us at home 22.15pm.”

Knowledge of NHS 111

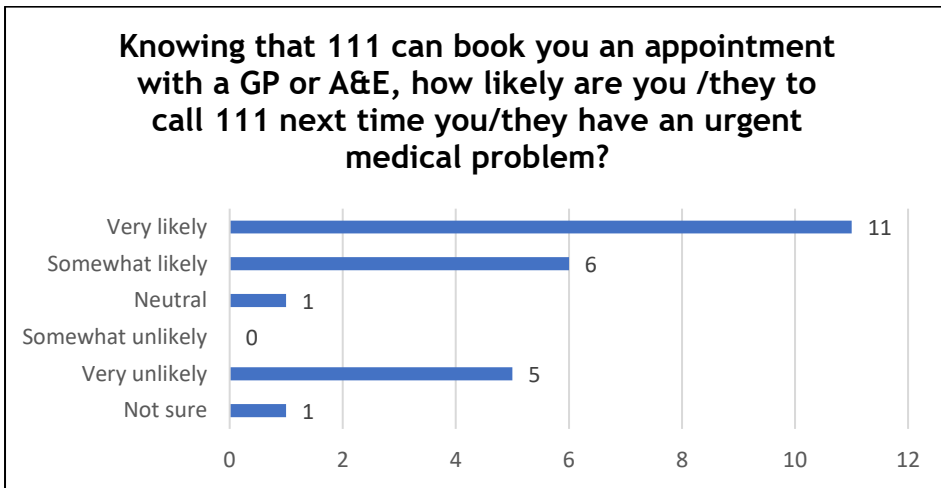
We wanted to know if people were aware of the options NHS 111 provides regarding booking appointments.



We found that out of the total (24) only 6 respondents (25%) knew that NHS 111 could book same day appointments with different services.

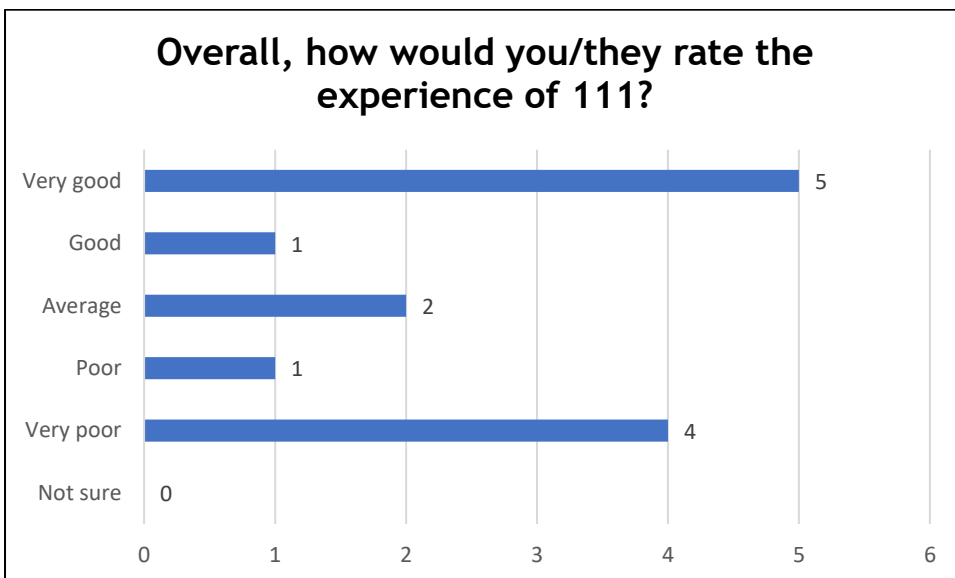
Some of the ways people told us they heard how NHS 111 could book same day appointments are as follows:

- Local newspaper articles.
- Adverts on television.
- NHS 111 operator explained it them whilst on the call with them.



The likelihood of the 24 respondents calling NHS 111 First next time they have an urgent medical problem.

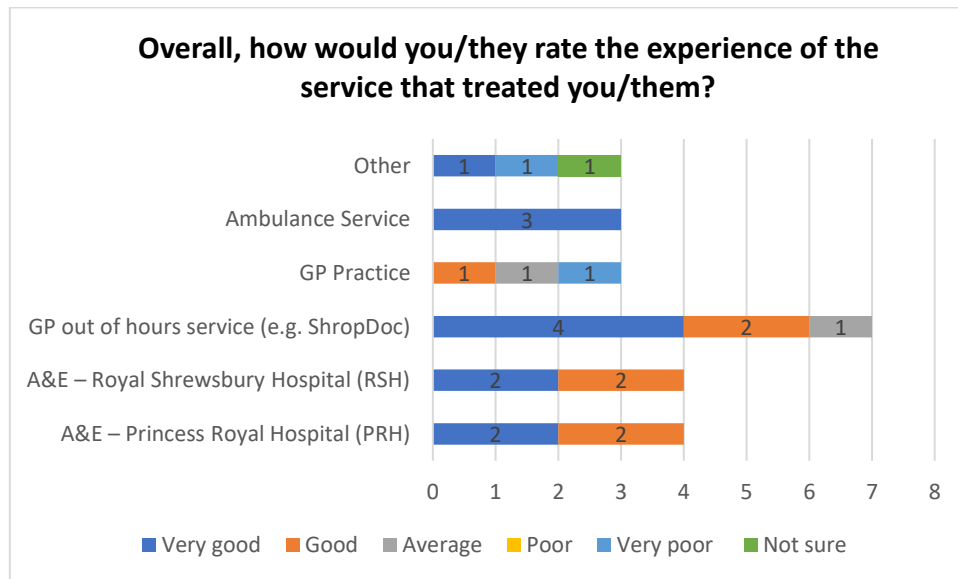
Overall, 11 (46%) rated it as very likely, 6 (25%) as somewhat likely, 1 (4%) was neutral, 5 (21%) very unlikely and 1 (4%) was not sure.



13 out of 18 (72%) respondents rated their overall experience of using NHS 111.

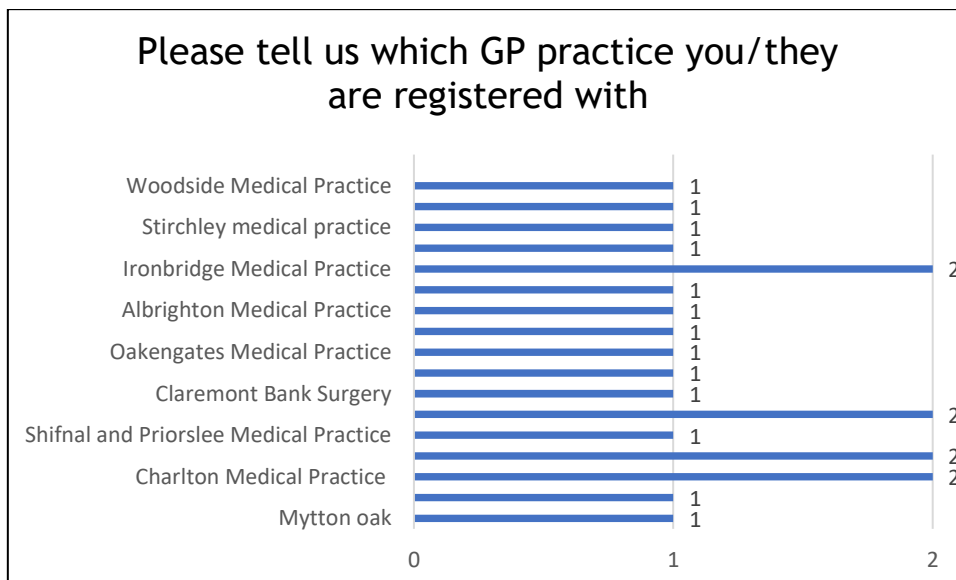
Overall, 5 (38%) rated their experience as very good, 1 (8%) as good, 2 (15%) as average, 1 (8%) as poor and 4 (31%) as very poor.

Overall experience of treatment

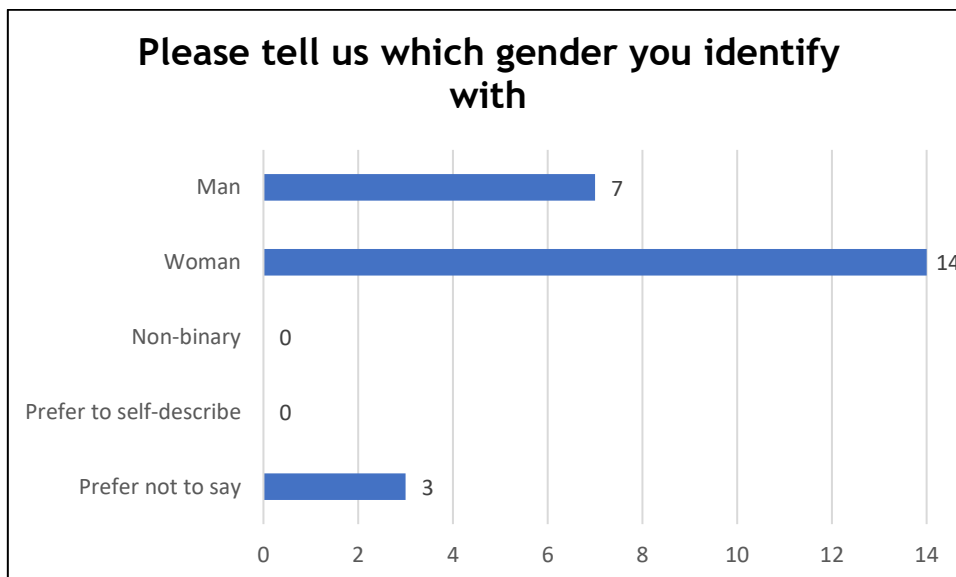


Overall, 12 (50%) rated their treatment as very good, 7 (29%) as good, 2 (8%) as average, 2 (8%) as very poor and 1 (4%) as not sure.

Demographics



3 people preferred not to answer this question.



14 (58%) said they identify as female.

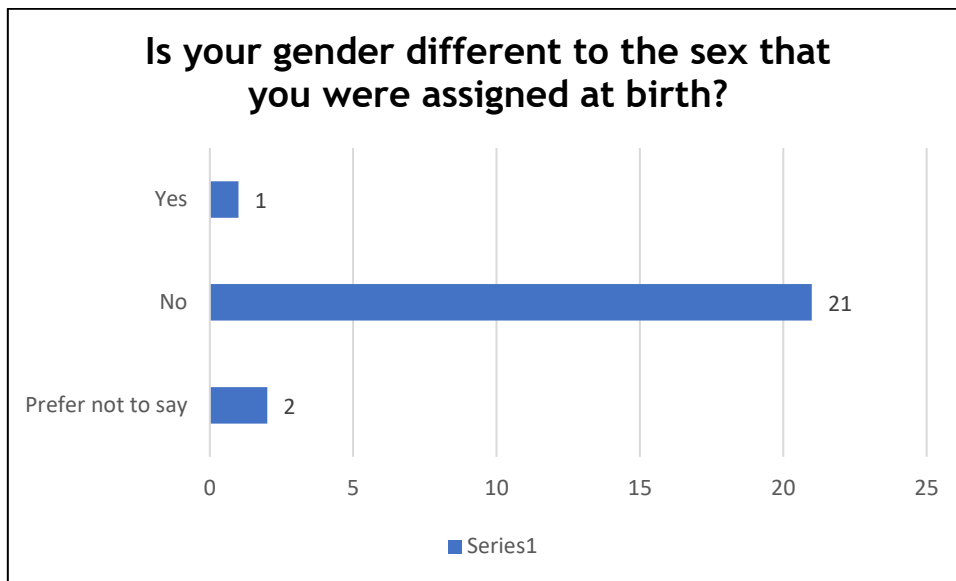
7 (29%) said they identify as male.

3 (13%) preferred not to say.

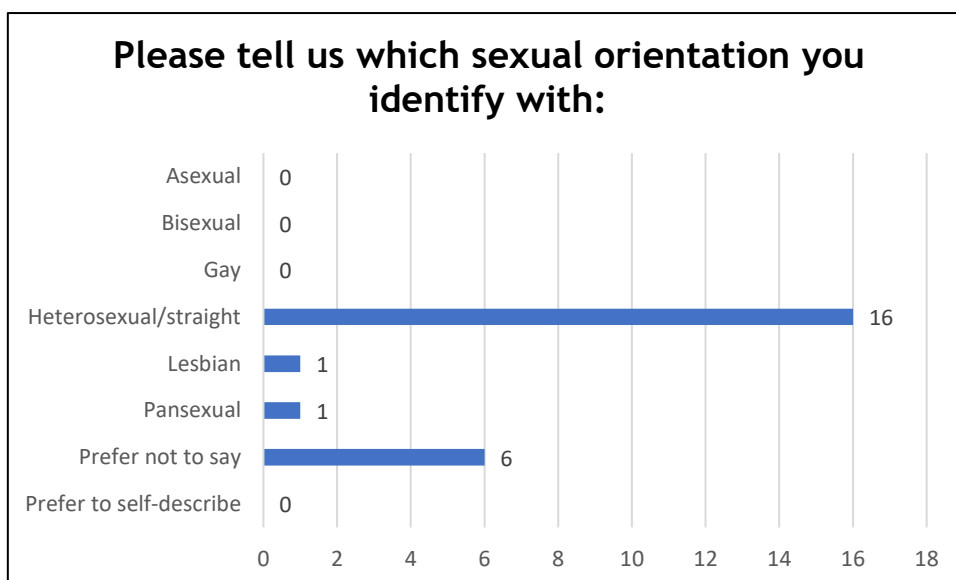
For prefer to self-describe, we received two comments;

“Informal Carer.”

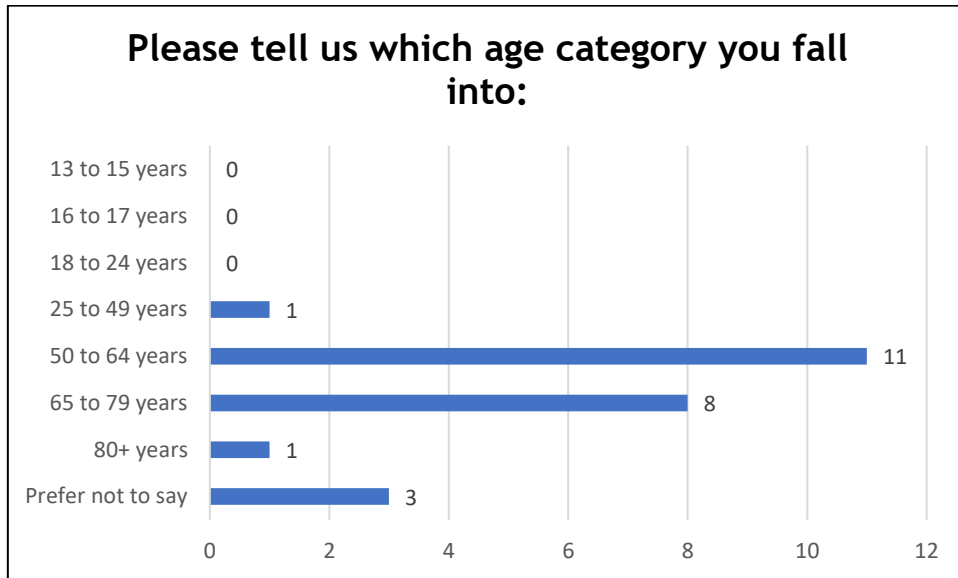
“Retired, fit and healthy, walk about 70 miles a week, like to know there is medical help out there when you need it.”



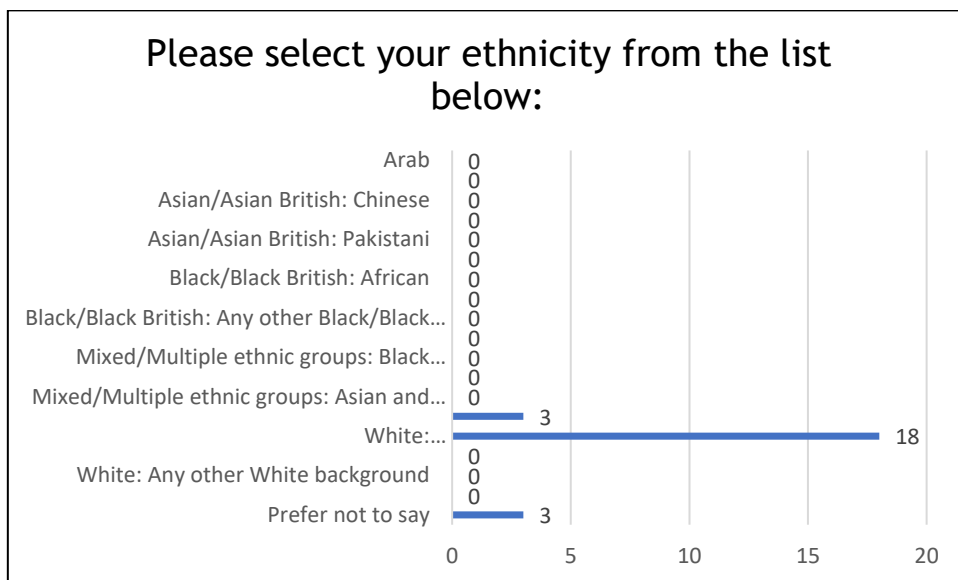
Gender different to that at birth; 21 (88%) replied no, 1 (4%) yes and 2 (8%) preferred not to say.



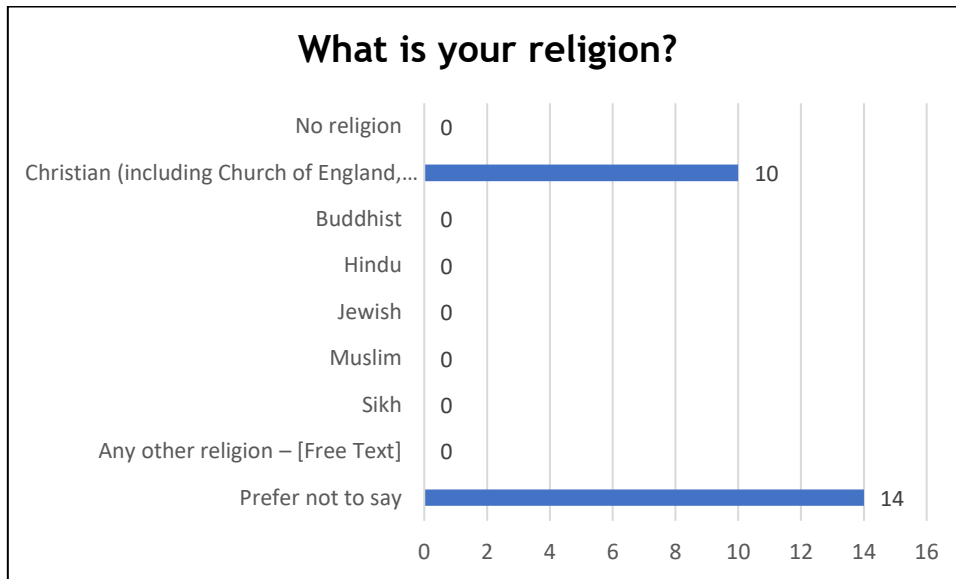
Sexual orientation identified with; 16 (66%) indicated heterosexual, 1 (4%) lesbian, 1 (4%) pansexual and 6 (25%) preferred not to say.



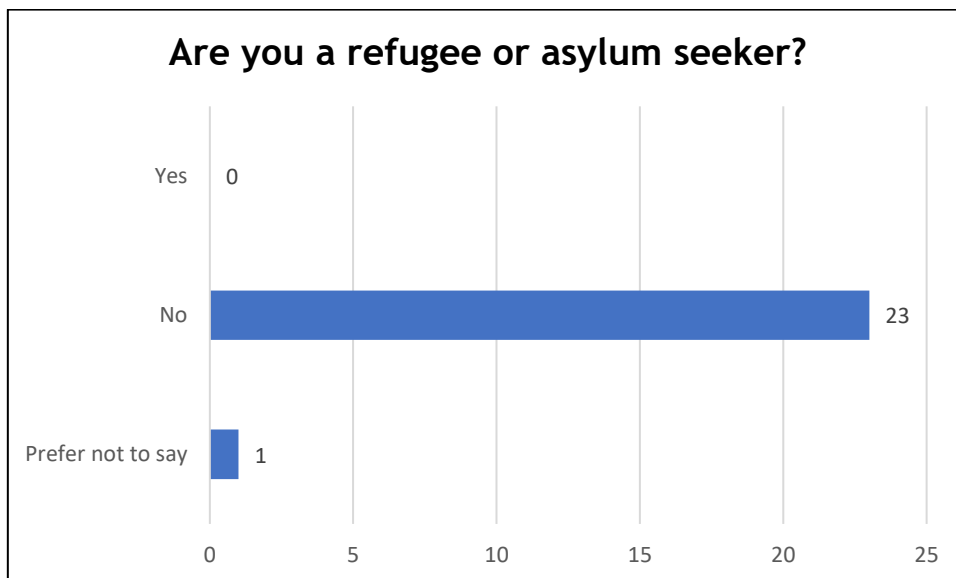
Age categories; 25 to 49 years 1 (4%), 50 to 64 years 11 (46%), 65 to 70 years 8 (33%), 80+ years 1 (4%), preferred not to say 3 (12%).



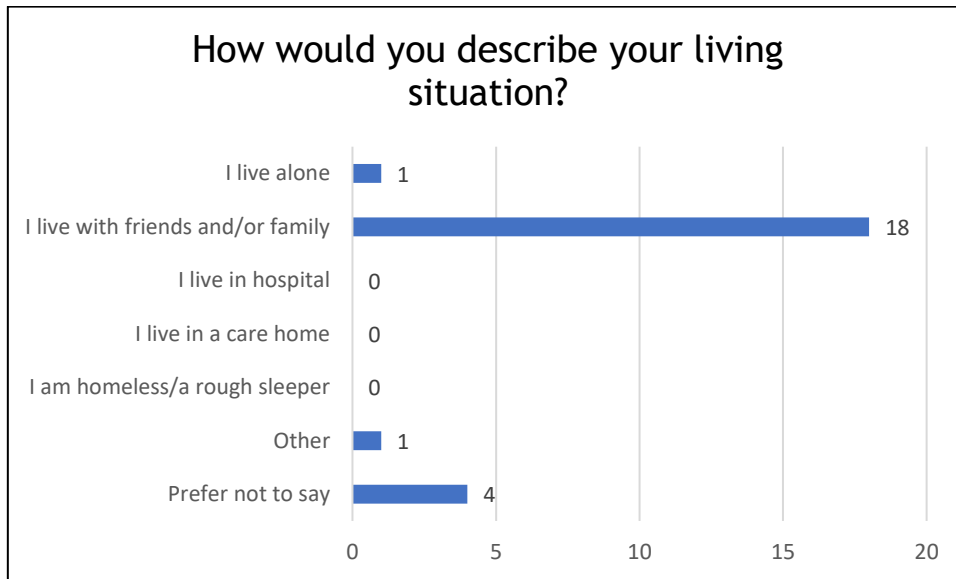
Ethnicity; Mixed/Multiple ethnic group: Asian 3 (13%), White 18 (75%), prefer not to say 3 (13%).



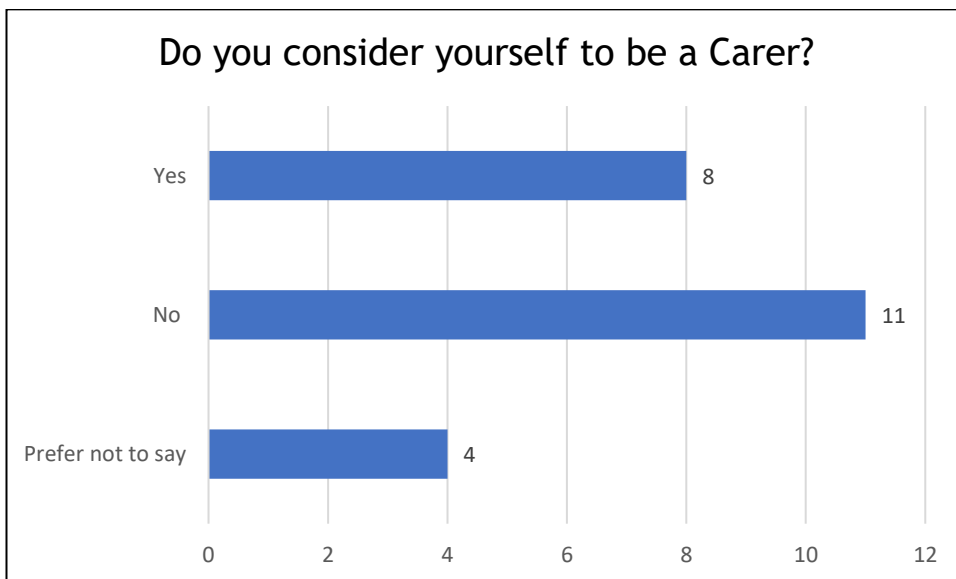
Religion; Christian 10 (42%), prefer not to say 14 (58%)



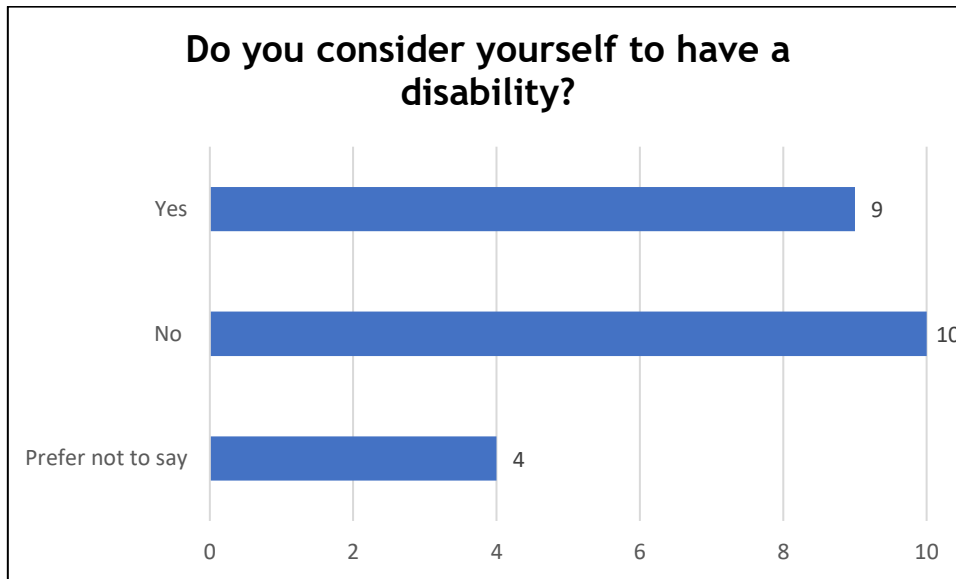
Refugee or asylum seeker; no (96%), yes (4%)



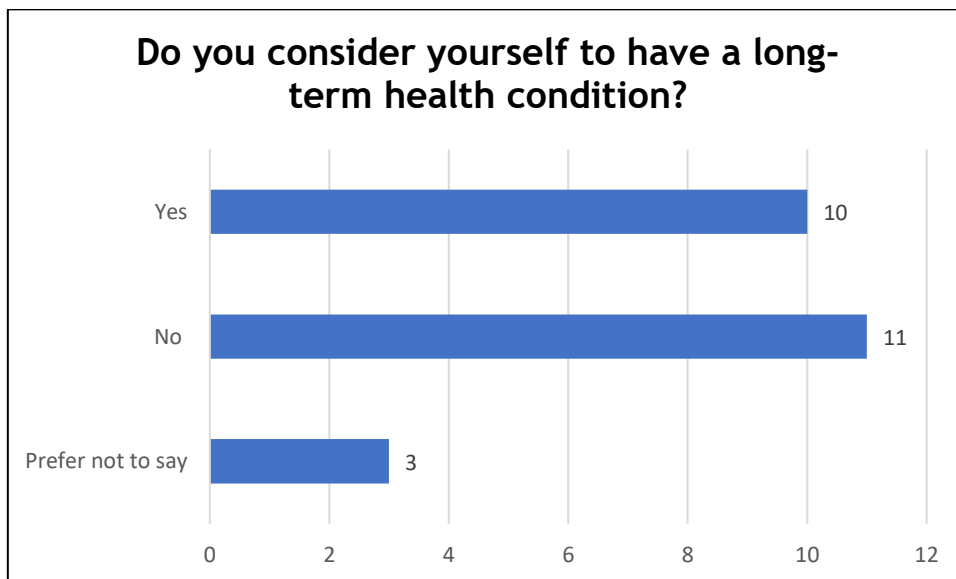
Living situation described; live alone 1 (4%), live with friends/family 18 (75%), other 1 (4%), prefer not to say 4 (16%).



Considers themselves as a Carer; yes 8 (33%), no 11 (46%), prefer not to say 4 (16%)



Considers themselves to have a disability, out of 23 responses; yes 9 (39%), no 10 (43%), prefer not to say 4 (17%)



Considers themselves to have a long-term health condition; yes 10 (42%), no 11 (46%), prefer not to say 3 (12%).



Conclusion

Regrettably the relatively small sample size for this survey, may have slightly skewed the overall results as presented. The survey was time limited and faced restricted exposure constraints due the Covid-19 situation.

Additionally, a temporary reduction in HWT&W staff numbers and a wider restructuring process restricted the resources that were available during the time period this project was conducted.

Revisiting this topic, following the upcoming anticipated easing of Covid restrictions would permit a broader, better resourced and more representative survey to be undertaken for the population of Telford and Wrekin.