

## Living, coping, thriving:

### exploring preventative health behaviours of people aged 50–66 in Surrey

Prevention – specifically ‘Supporting people to lead healthy lives by preventing physical ill health and promoting physical wellbeing’ – is Priority 1 of the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Prioritising prevention, moving from reactive to proactive care, is also one of the cornerstones of the NHS 10 Year Plan.

This project explored the behaviours and attitudes to health and wellbeing of people aged 50–66 (those approaching the age range which, statistically, needs the NHS and social care the most). Geographically, we focussed on Spelthorne – the neighbourhood with the poorest health outcomes in Surrey – and compared to the rest of Surrey.

## What did we do?



Over **150** people contributed to this research; **35** people spoke to us at **8** community engagement events and **118** people completed our survey.

During our face to face engagements we asked about how people look after themselves, what they'd like to do more of now and in the future, and any barriers they faced. Our survey also included more detailed behaviour and attitude questions related to Surrey's Health and Wellbeing Strategy priorities, such as physical health, mental health, isolation, screening and vaccination.

## Key findings

### Basic survival beyond health and wellbeing

Some people told us that their first priority was 'survival'. Finding work, paying rent, accessing food and transport issues are uppermost in their minds, before thinking about their health and wellbeing.

Almost half (**44%**) of the people we heard from said that they are too busy working to do more to look after their wellbeing; **35%** said they are too busy caring for others, and **25%** said they can't afford it (people could choose multiple options).

## Physical health

Very few people (11%) claim to have excellent physical health, and many have concerns about their future health. Almost two thirds (62%) are unhappy with their weight and would like to weigh less. However:

- **Less than half (42%)** do the recommended amount of vigorous exercise per week, though the majority of people (**81%**) would like to do more exercise.
- Only around a **quarter** have their recommended '5 a day'.

We saw a strong link between physical activity and good mental health but cost and time were barriers to both physical activity and healthy eating.

## Mental health

Although people reported excellent mental health more commonly than excellent physical health, only a small proportion of people rated their mental health as excellent and scores were significantly lower amongst those with long term health conditions. People told us that social connection is very important for mental health; people who have done unpaid voluntary work in their neighbourhood have better mental health scores than those who don't:



"Human contact is the biggest positive, knowing that people care is more important than any amenities."

**Surrey resident**



The people we spoke to in Spelthorne do **significantly less** volunteering than in other areas. More than **a third** of people in Spelthorne have been affected **by anti social behaviour (double than in other areas)**.

## Screening and vaccinations

The people we spoke to had reasonably high levels of awareness and uptake of most of the health screening programmes, however, not receiving direct invitations to screening was the main reason for not taking part. There was also some wariness/distrust and misinformation.

**This research identified that there are opportunities to help people to understand more about the importance of prevention; there are also opportunities to design services to help them to do this. Our report makes a series of recommendations on this and offers more detailed information on the research.**

**Read our report: [Living, coping, thriving – March 2026](#)**