healthwatch Surrey

Loved, liked, or left alone?
What people in Surrey really think of the NHS App

The NHS App is designed to give people a simple and secure way to access a range of NHS services on their smartphone or tablet (or via web browser on the NHS website). But is it really making life simpler? What do people like about it (and what do they not?) and what changes could be made to improve useability and access?

What did we do?

75 Surrey residents gave us their views, via our survey or at a focus group held with the Merstham Community Champions.

Spotlight on a community
Almost half of the 75 people we spoke to were from the borough of Reigate and Banstead, with almost a third being from Merstham specifically, offering us useful insights in to the views of this community.

Key findings

Usage

**Although most people do have the NHS App, less people are actually using it. For those that aren't, issues with registration and log in processes (or fear of potential issues) and confusion about how to use it are key barriers.
A 'simplified' and 'easier to use' App would help.**

Almost 90% of those we spoke to have the NHS App on a device they own, but a slightly lower 79% actually use it.

> *"I know I have it but I don't know what it does."*

When asked why they don't use the App, the most common reasons given were:
- I find the registration and log in process hard
- I prefer to speak to someone
- I find it confusing.

For some, the difficulty of downloading or setting up the App simply doesn't outweigh the perceived benefits – people talked to us about "excessive" sign in processes being "frustrating".

> "I've tried to help people but often something stops them progressing to full sign up and then they feel deflated and give up."

> "I don't see the benefit in using it - by the time I've downloaded it, worked out how to use it and sorted out all the problems, I could have done what I needed to do the old fashioned way. I just don't see the benefit - it feels like more hassle than it's worth. I think it's for the systems benefit, not mine. I much prefer to speak to people face to face."
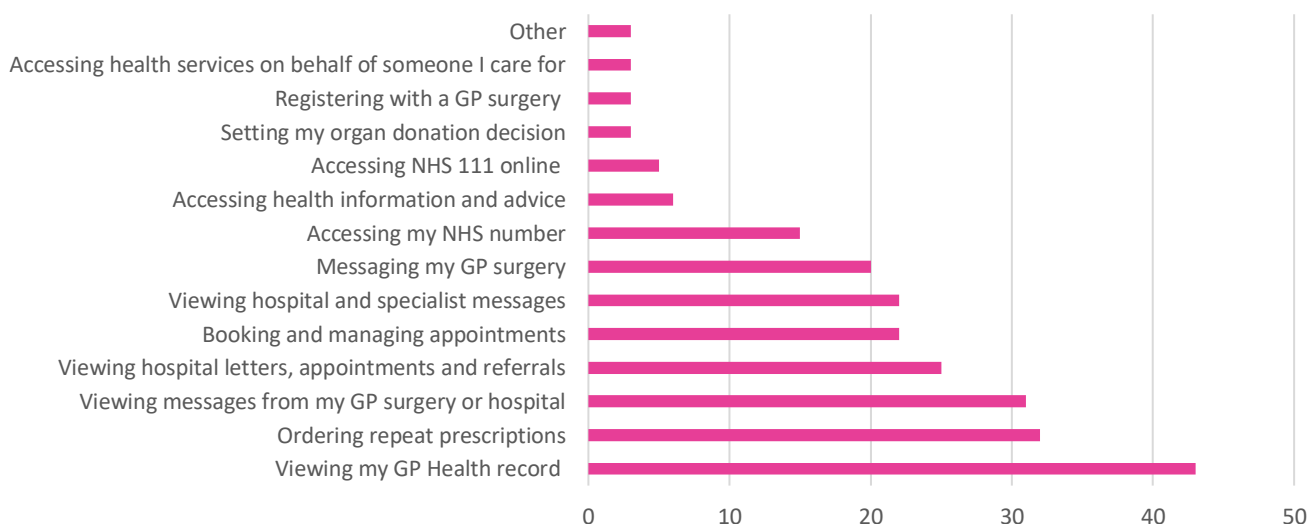
Benefits

> **There's a lack of awareness of the full breadth of what the App can do.**

Viewing GP health records, ordering repeat prescriptions and viewing messages from GPs or hospitals were the most common reasons people used the App. Only a small number were utilising some of its functionality; confusion about usage and security may go some way to explain this.

> "It doesn't store all your information, a lot of my stuff got deleted and they don't know where it went."

What do you currently use the NHS App for?
The majority of people use the App for viewing their health record and ordering repeat prescriptions, as shown in the chart below.

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Less than two thirds of those we spoke to feel confident in using the NHS App to get help about an NHS service or appointment. People told us that health information was more easily available elsewhere.

Accessibility

At our focus group people talked to us about potential accessibility issues with the App.

> "It needs to be easy to get in to – I only have one hand…. I can't remember numbers after my stroke so need to have it open on two devices."

You can read more about people's views on digital access to GP practices in our Digital Divide report

Feedback

We also talked to people about whether they'd feel comfortable leaving feedback about an NHS service via the App, and more generally about how they'd prefer to leave feedback. A key theme was the importance of anonymity.

> "Having a third party collating feedback not only gives peace of mind there will be no negative repercussions but also makes me think someone will notice if there is a pattern and keep driving follow up on the issue."

> "Feedback stops being anonymous [via the App], so [I have] a real fear if I do it through the App – that person will continue to be involved in your care – it puts you in a position of vulnerability. If you go to a third party you know it will be anonymised so you can be more honest."

> "Feedback needs to be simple and short – don't believe it would be through the App."

The NHS App is well known and reasonably well used, but much of its functionality isn't being utilised. For some it is seen as simply too complicated to be helpful and there are accessibility issues.
Could more be done to educate both current and potential new users?
Contact Healthwatch Surrey for more information on engaging with and informing local communities.

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