

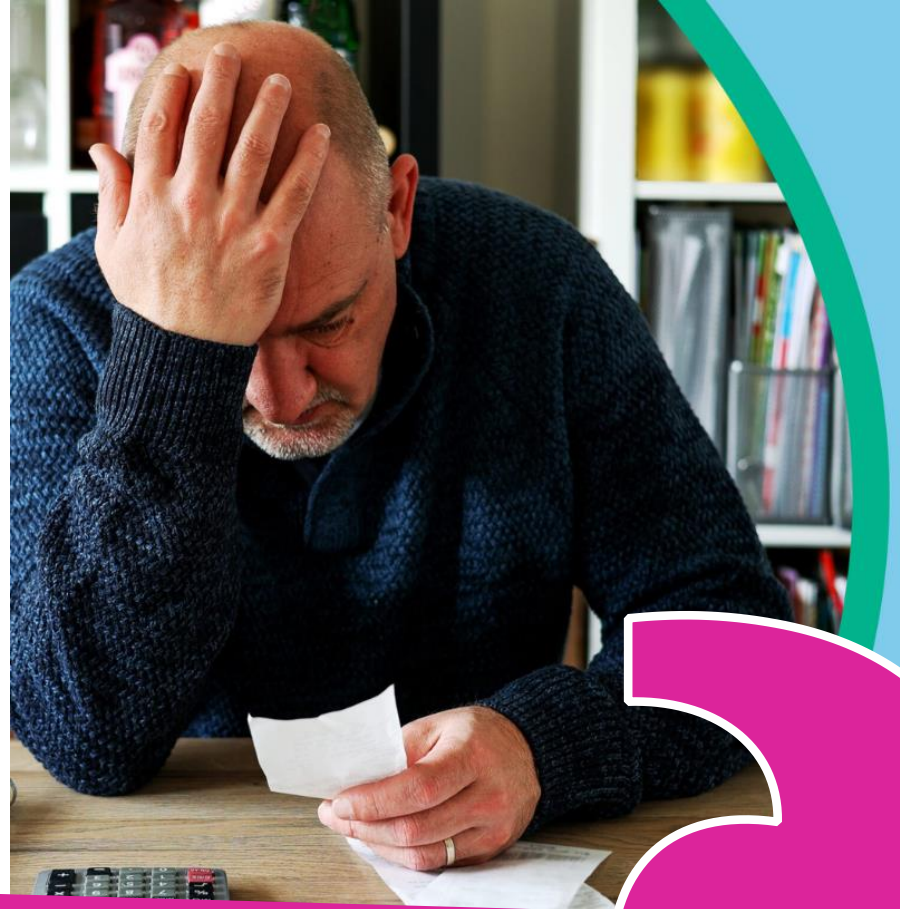
healthwatch

in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

The Cost of Living and the Impact on People's Health and Wellbeing

July 2023

A Summary of the National and Local
Findings



What Healthwatch England did

Healthwatch England heard through the local Healthwatch network that the cost of living was having an impact on people's health and on their use of health and care services.



To understand the scale and nature of this impact Healthwatch England decided to run a poll in four waves between October 2022 and March 2023.

The aim of the poll over time was to find out:

- What impacts people anticipate the cost of living will have on them
- What impacts people are already experiencing as a result of the rising cost of living
- And how the rising cost of living will affect how people interact with health and care services and how they take care of their health and wellbeing.

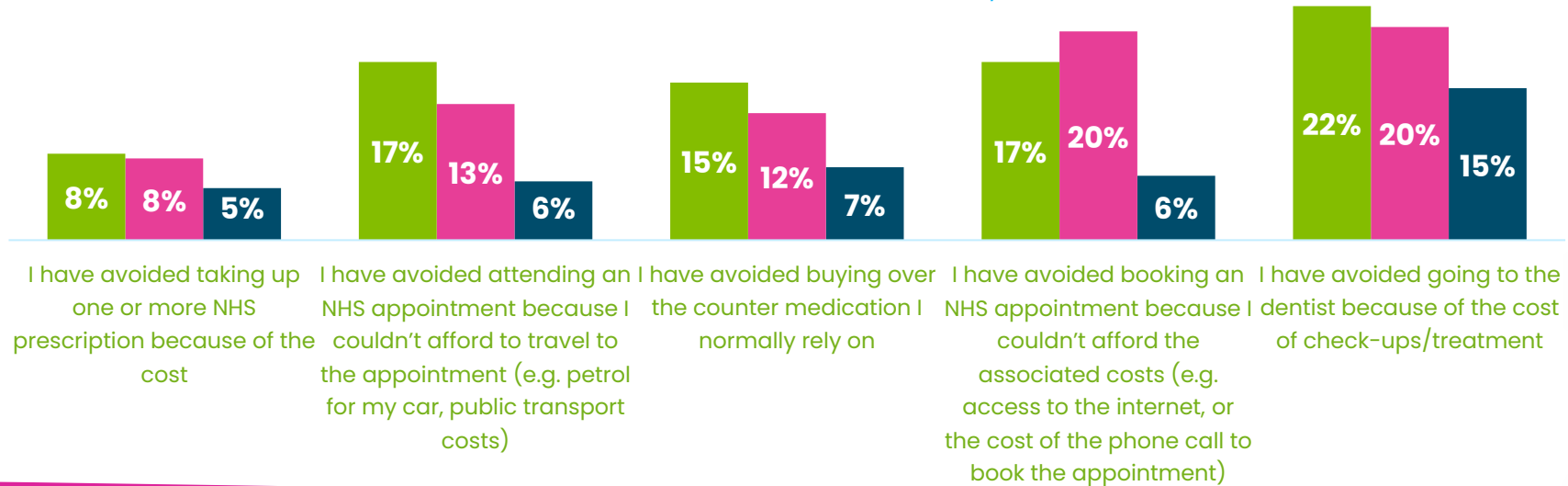
What Healthwatch England found

That people who are disabled, on means-tested benefits or aged 18-24, are more likely to avoid vital health services due to the fear of extra costs.



Figures for people on disability and means-tested benefits, wave 4*

■ All ■ Means-tested benefits ■ Disability benefits



*based on a poll of 2000 adults in England

What Healthwatch England found

That people are increasingly avoiding vital health and care services due to the fear of extra costs, such as:

- going to a dentist because of the cost of checks ups or treatment
- booking an NHS appointment because they couldn't afford the associated costs, such as accessing the Internet, the cost of a phone call
- buying over the counter medication that they normally rely on
- taking up one or more NHS prescriptions because of the cost.



"I can't get a GP appointment. The highest I have ever got in the telephone queue is number 11, so I gave up in the end as it was costing me a lot of money on my telephone bill and I am a pensioner. All I want is a referral to an audiologist as I am losing my hearing."

– Sandra, Wolverhampton

Healthwatch England's Recommendations

Healthwatch England recommend that:

Primary care teams make people who need medication aware of pre-payment options

Dentistry teams offer check-ups based on individual need, to free up more NHS slots

More people are made aware of the Healthcare Travel Cost Scheme (HTCS)



"I've had to have lots of hospital visits lately because of being diagnosed with leukemia. I eventually decided to ask for help with petrol costs as I am on benefits. It's 20 miles to hospital and 20 back. I was given £4.60!! For 40 miles! In about 2 months I had about 10 appointments and had to pay a lot more than this in petrol money." - Gill, Norfolk.

What we did in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay

Following Healthwatch England's publication of their interim findings, in relation to the cost of living and the detrimental impact it is having on people's decisions about their own health and wellbeing we wanted to know if the cost of living was having an impact on people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay and if so, in what way.



We asked people what changes they were thinking of making, what changes they had already made, and what impact the changes were having on their lives.

60 people responded to the survey and the survey ran throughout March to May 2023.

What we found

- Almost half of respondents (46%) said they have avoided going to the dentist because of the cost of check-ups or treatment and almost a quarter (22%) said they are anticipating this.
- Almost a third of respondents (32%) have cut down or stopped support from services that they pay privately for, such as physiotherapy, earwax removal or counselling.
- Half of respondents (50%) said that changes they have made because of the cost of living have negatively impacted on their ability to manage an existing long-term condition.
- Almost three quarters of respondents (73%) said the changes they have had to make due to the cost of living have negatively impacted on their levels of stress and anxiety.



What people in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay told us



"Lack of NHS Dentistry has forced me to use a private provider. Their charges have just increased by almost 25%. I'm not sure how much longer I can afford this."

"My worry is more for my mentally ill son who has been impacted by these things. Loss of Warm Home Discount due to changes in criteria (not informed) and loss of his PIP benefit when everything else costs more, causing increased anxiety for both him and myself."

As a stroke survivor on benefits my next step forward would be to join a gym to allow me to properly evaluate my post stroke physical health, **CAN'T AFFORD IT!**"

At 68 years old I have no life at all. All my money goes on Care Home fees."

"Live in fear of major expense making me go into debt."

"I work and face a lot of extra costs as a direct result of my disability. I must find money for all these costs because working means I don't qualify for any help despite being disabled, except for PIP which in no way comes close to covering a fraction of the extra costs by disability brings."

To find out more

The latest Healthwatch England findings are available on their website [here](#).

The Healthwatch in Devon, Plymouth and Torbay cost of living feedback report is available [here](#).



healthwatch
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healthwatchdevon.co.uk
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voice
counts**

