

# GP website check-up

Summary



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# Introduction

## Background

**GP (General Practitioner) websites are often the first point of access to NHS care for many people. The annual GP Patient Survey found that nationally, 61% of respondents had visited their GP website in 2023<sup>1</sup>.**

The proportion of respondents who said they had tried to use their GP practice's website to look for information or to access services has increased year on year since the question was added to the annual survey in 2018. Considering the current access issues many are facing when trying to get an appointment at their GP practice, increasing numbers of people are turning to their GP practice website to find information or to access services. It is therefore vital that GP websites are user-friendly, provide up to date information and are accessible for patients.

**Considering this, Healthwatch North Yorkshire have carried out a 'health check' on all GP websites in North Yorkshire to explore how easy to use, up to date and accessible the websites are.**

This project follows on from a similar exercise we undertook in 2021<sup>2</sup>, however this time there is an added focus on accessibility (following the accessible information project we completed in June 2022<sup>3</sup>).

## What we did

**A team of eight Healthwatch North Yorkshire volunteers undertook a review (health check) of the 84 websites that fall under the 17 Primary Care Networks (PCNs) in North Yorkshire<sup>4</sup>.**

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<sup>1</sup> [GP Patient Survey \(gp-patient.co.uk\)](https://gp-patient.co.uk)

<sup>2</sup> [Healthwatch North Yorkshire GP Report March 2021.pdf](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Accessible Information Report - June 2022\\_0.pdf \(healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [NHS England » Primary care networks](#)

PCNs are formed by GP practices coming together to coordinate provision of care and services at scale above that which individual practices can deliver. All except a handful of GP practices in England have joined a PCN (please note, the only GP practice that is not part of a PCN in North Yorkshire is Reeth Medical Centre, however this practice website was still included in our review).

**Our volunteers acted as a patient or member of the public and navigated their way around the websites and answered yes or no to a set of questions with an option to add additional comments.**

They were asked to answer the questions as if they themselves wanted to find the information on each website. It was recognised that one volunteer might answer differently to another: this represents the variation that members of the public might demonstrate when visiting their own GP website. Similarly, if a volunteer was unable to find information on a practice website, this represents a member of the public not being able to find the information they need.

**Reviews took place between 26<sup>th</sup> July through to 1<sup>st</sup> September 2023.**

We recognise that some practices may have updated their websites during or shortly after we gathered the information, therefore the information we discovered is a snapshot of that held on sites during the given period.

## **Different ways you can view the findings**

**This report provides an overall summary of the findings for all GP practice websites across North Yorkshire.**

In addition to this overall summary, we have also produced short briefings for each of the 17 PCNs that cover North Yorkshire. [Click here](#) to access the briefings. Within each PCN briefing you can also access the specific findings for each individual practice website.

**In this summary report, the findings are divided into four key themes:**

- 1. General usability**
- 2. Appointments and prescriptions**

### 3. Accessibility

### 4. Patient involvement and extra support/advice

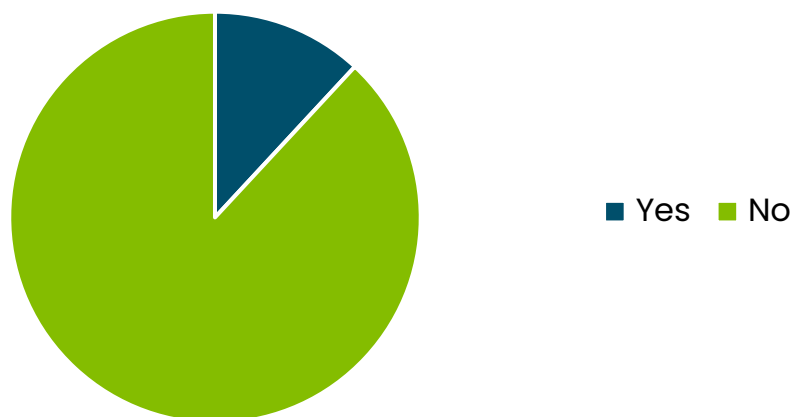
Our volunteers completed this exercise using a laptop or desktop computer, however as many people will access their GP website via a mobile phone or tablet there is also a short section at the end of this report that explores our volunteers' experiences of accessing a sample of 10 websites via their mobile phone or tablet.

## General usability

In terms of general usability, **pop ups or overlays were reported on 12% of the websites.** A website pop-up or overlay is a window/box that appears on the screen as soon as you open the website, they 'pop up' into view without you doing anything and you can only navigate to the rest of the website if you click off the window/box. It can be difficult for people to navigate past overlays so they can create usability issues. Research by NHS England found that **27% of participants who visited a site with an overlay as the first thing they saw struggled to get past it<sup>5</sup>.**

Please note, any cookies and/or privacy policy pop-ups were not counted as a pop-up or overlay for this project as most websites now have these small pop-ups due to recent changes in GDPR regulation.

### Are there any pop ups or overlays present on the website (other than for cookies or privacy)?



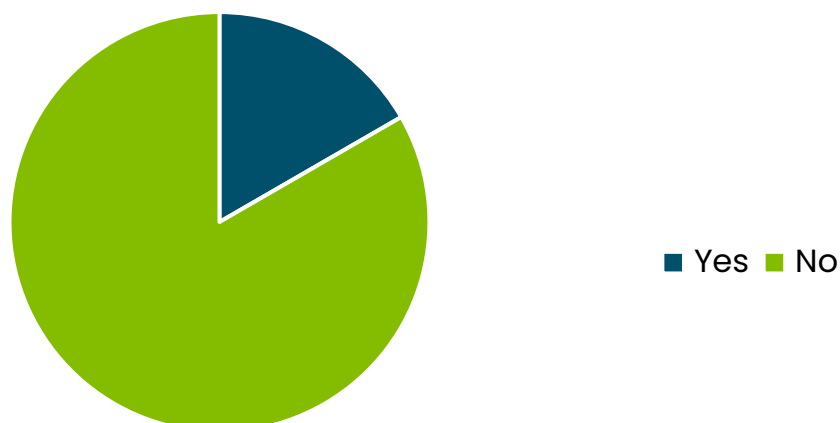
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<sup>5</sup> [NHS England » Creating a highly usable and accessible GP website for patients](#)

A large proportion of the websites were reported as being clear and attractively presented. **Around 17% of the practice websites were viewed as being too busy or cluttered.** Some of these websites were reported as having small fonts, and clashing background colours leading to eyestrain when trying to read the text on the page.

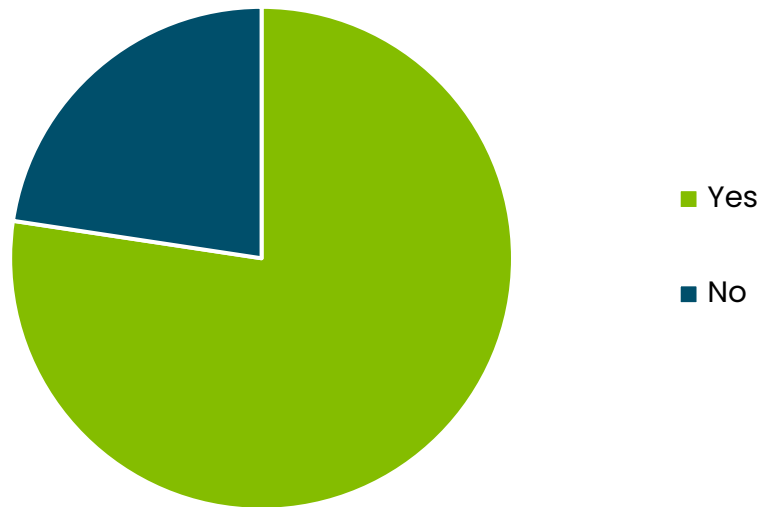
Some practices were reported as having side menus with lots of different options that were difficult to navigate. It was suggested these type of menu options would be more user friendly if they were ordered either alphabetically, in order of importance or in an order that reflects the patient journey (e.g. contact surgery, register, make an appointment etc.).

### Is the website too cluttered and busy?



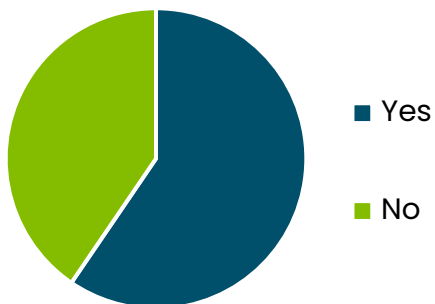
**The search field was visible on the main page of a large proportion of the practice websites (77%).** Those websites that lacked a search bar were reported as being significantly more difficult to use. However, it must be noted that **for a few websites with a search field, the search tool was reported to not work** (nothing appeared when different key words were entered into the search bar). Similarly, several sites were reported as having an A-Z of common health issues tool, however in some cases this tool was reported to not work.

## Does the website have a search field and is it visible?

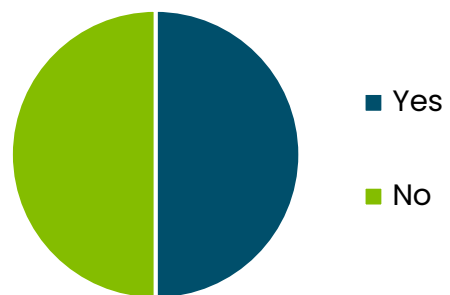


**Surgery information** (such as opening times, contact information etc.) was reported to be **on the homepage of 60% of websites**. There was an exact **50/50 split in terms of whether the websites had up to date content/advice** (e.g. for seasonal changes like flu or hay fever advice).

**Is surgery information included on the homepage (e.g. opening times, contact information)?**



**Is the content up to date? i.e. seasonal changes like flu or hay fever advice?**



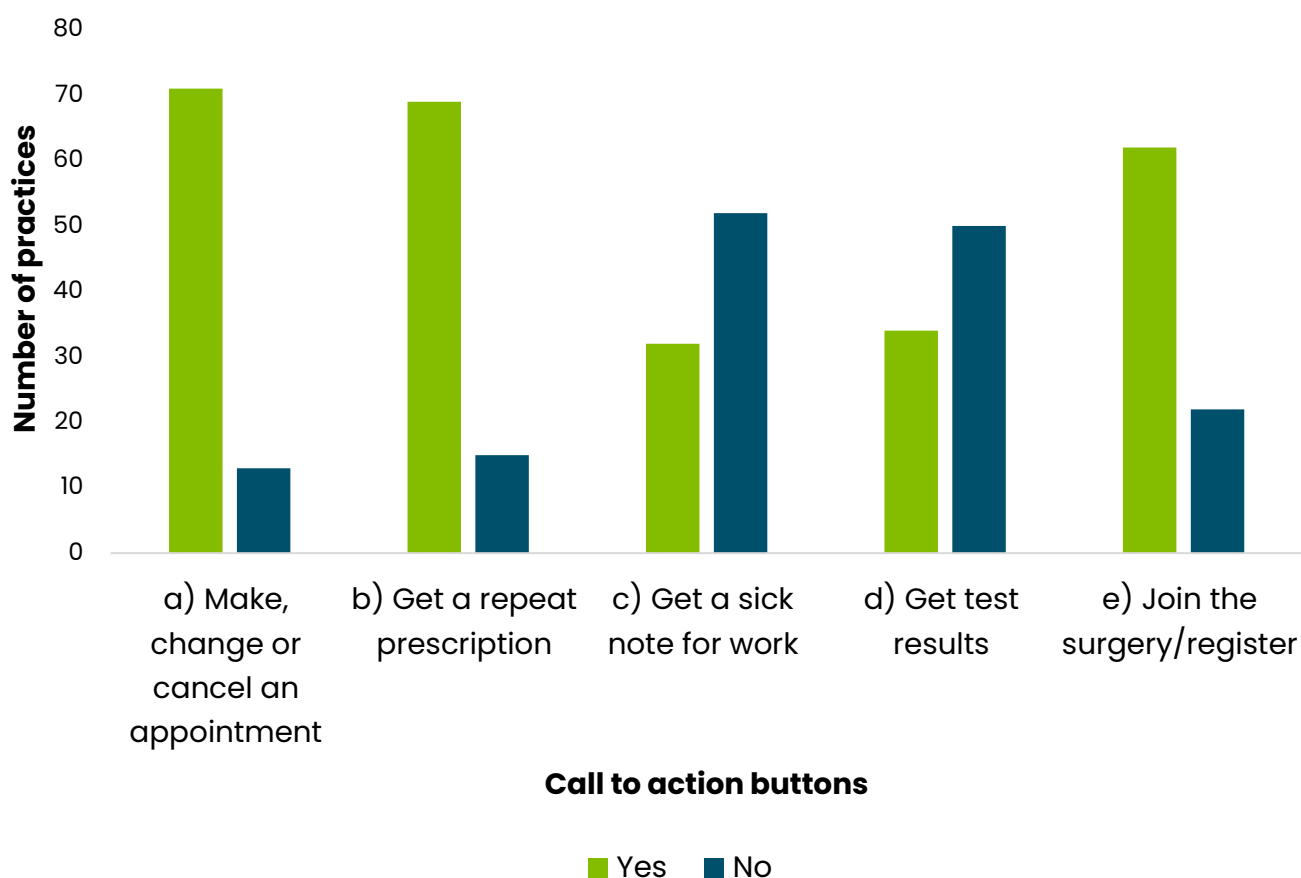
A few questions were asked in relation to 'call to action' (CTA) buttons. A CTA button is a prompt on a website that tells people to take some specified action. It is typically written as a command or action phrase. CTA buttons are a useful element on a webpage, acting as a signpost that lets people know what to do next. Without a clear CTA, people may not know

what steps to take and are more likely to leave the site without accomplishing their task.

As the graph on the next page shows, **many websites had a CTA button for appointments (85%), prescriptions (82%) and for registering with the practice (74%).** However, **a large proportion of websites did not have a CTA button relating to sick notes or test results.**

It is also important to note that while some websites were reported as having CTA buttons, these were not always at the top of the homepage, instead in some cases you had to scroll down towards the bottom of the main homepage to find them.

### Were the following 'call to action' buttons easily visible?

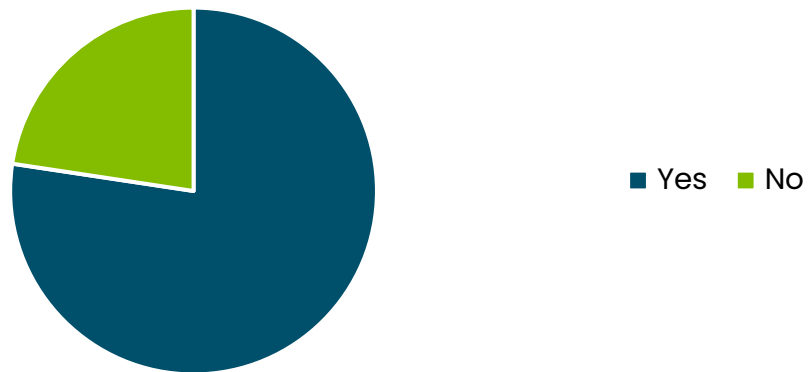




## Appointments and prescriptions

In relation to appointments, **it was reported as being easy to find out how to make an appointment on 77% of the practice websites.** Getting an appointment is the top patient task for a GP surgery website, so it is key this information is clear and easily accessible.

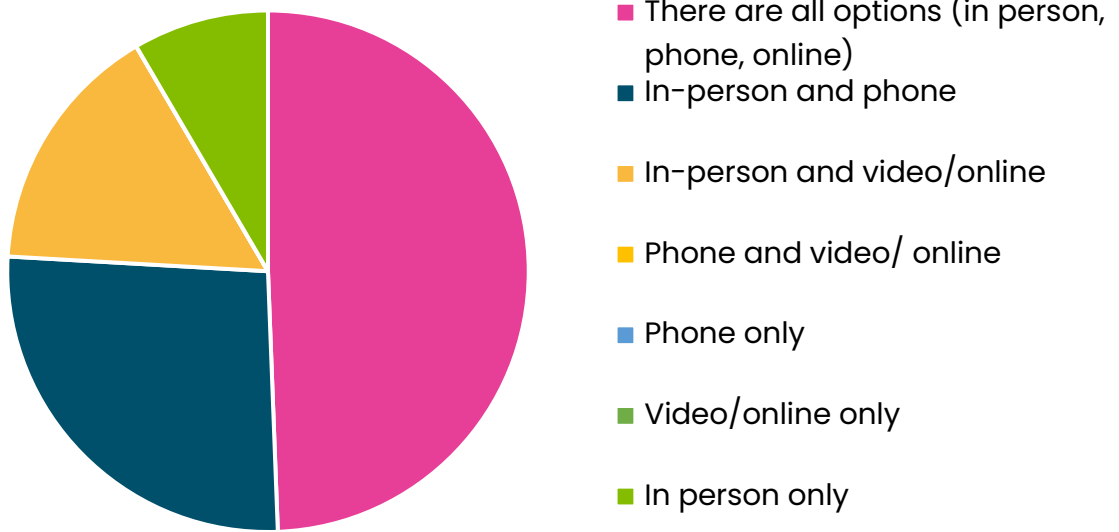
### Was it easy to find out how to make an appointment?



We also asked volunteers what type of appointment options were found on the websites (in person, phone, online/video). It is important that websites are clear on what type of appointments they offer. As shown by the following graph, **49% provided information about all options, 27% provided information about in person and phone, 16% about in person and online and 8% only provided information about in person appointments.**

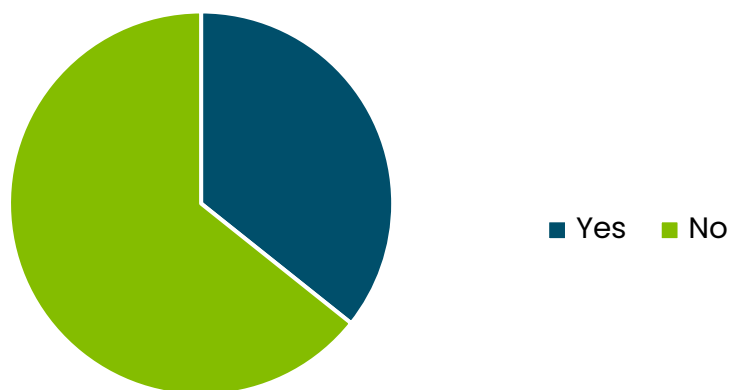
Please note, these figures represent what our volunteers could find on the websites in terms of appointment offerings, this may not reflect what appointment options are actually provided by the practices (for example, a practice may, in reality, provide in person, phone and online appointment options, but from searching on the website if only in person appointments were mentioned this would have been classed as 'In person only').

## Appointment options provided on the website



In relation to whether instructions were clear about how to cancel or change an appointment, **it was reported as not being clear for 62% of practice websites**. In some cases there was a page/section on the website about cancelling an appointment, however the page just said to 'tell the surgery' about cancelling but doesn't describe how to do this (email, phone, online, via a form etc).

## Are there clear instructions about how to cancel or change an appointment?

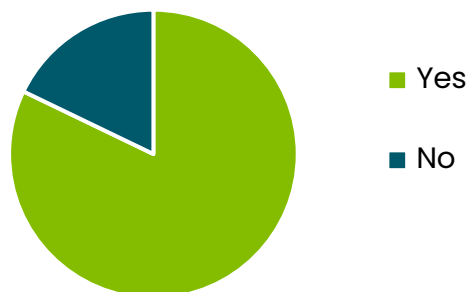


It was clear for **82% of the practices that there are different ways to contact** and see a doctor or healthcare professional. In terms of information about what patients should do **out of hours, it was reported as being clear for 82% of practice websites**.

**Is it clear that there are different ways to contact and see a doctor or healthcare professional?**

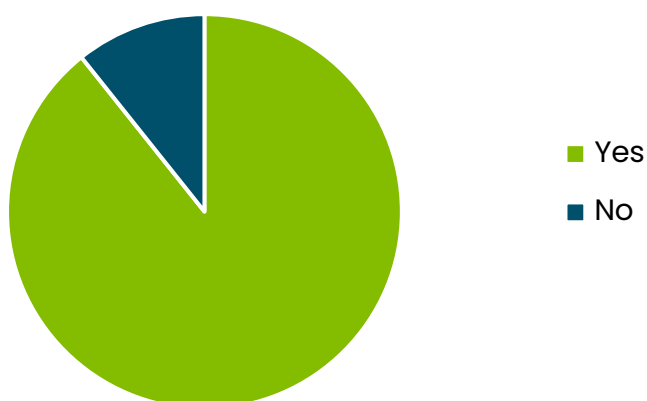


**Is there clear information about what patients should do out of hours?**



Regarding prescriptions, **89% of websites were reported as providing clear instructions on how to order repeat prescriptions.** Research suggests getting a repeat prescription is the second most important task for patients accessing a GP surgery website (after appointments)<sup>6</sup>.

**Are there clear instructions about how to order repeat prescriptions?**

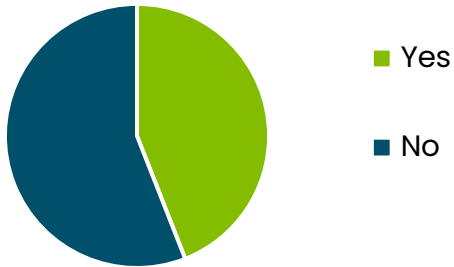


It was reported as being **easy to find information or links to the NHS app on only 44% of the websites.**

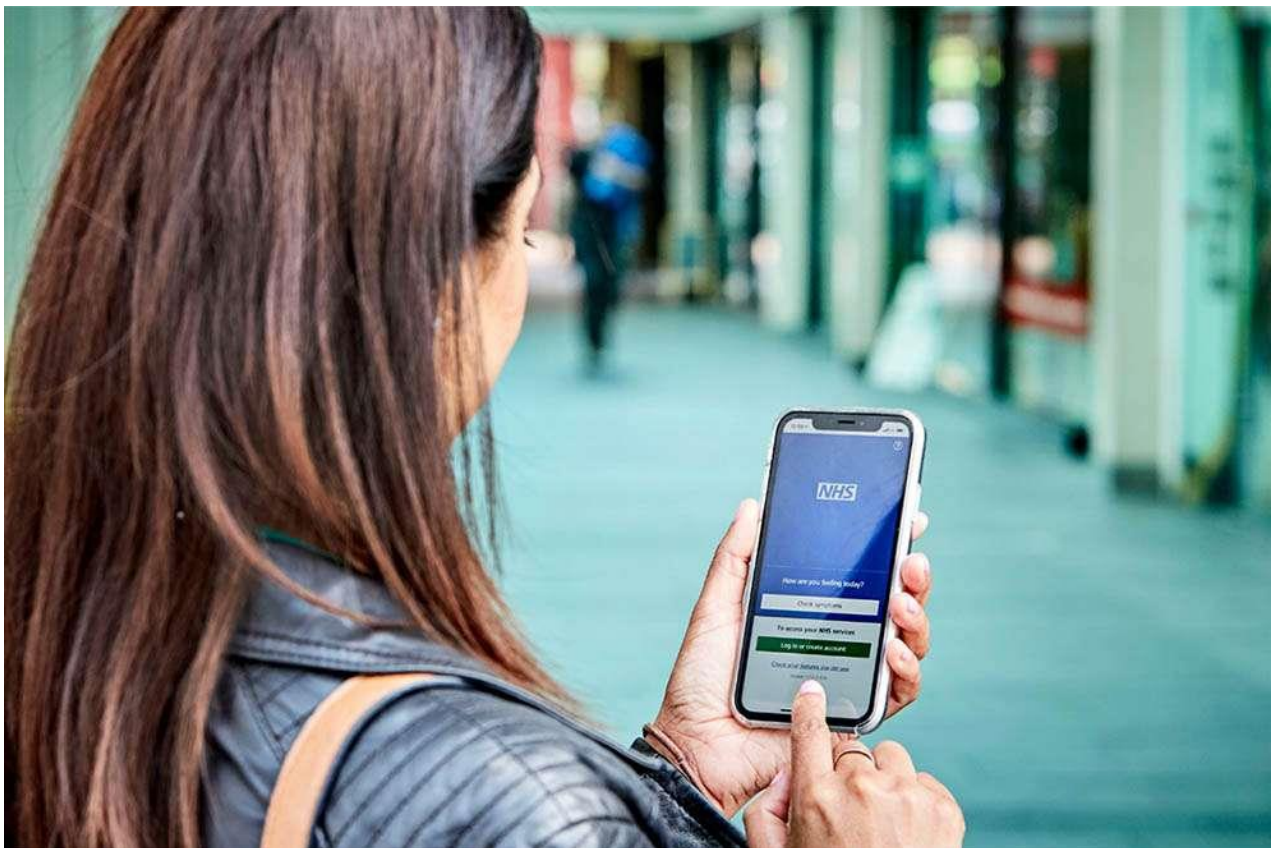
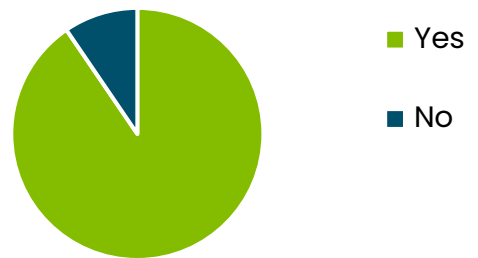
<sup>6</sup> [NHS England » Creating a highly usable and accessible GP website for patients](#)

For **90%** of practices, any **online consultation forms** were reported as being **clear and easy to access**.

### Is it easy to find information and links to use the NHS app?



### Are any online consultation forms clear and easy to access?



## Accessibility

**Accessibility of the websites was another aspect that we explored. All NHS services are legally required to be accessible and meet level AA of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) version 2.1.**

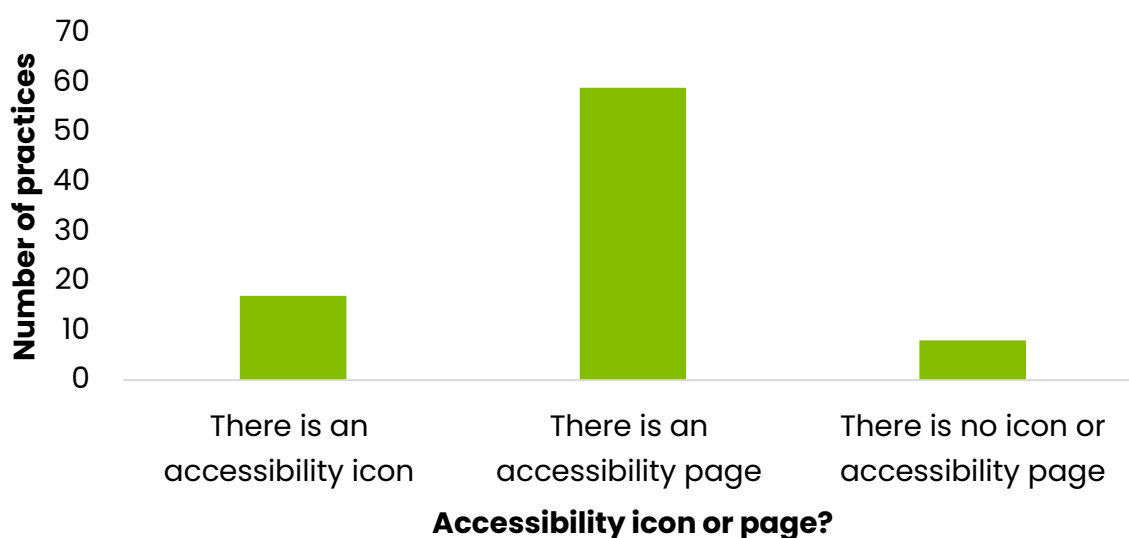
**We explored whether the websites had an accessibility icon or an accessibility page.**

An accessibility icon includes images, significant texts, keyboard shortcuts, text-to-speech, etc., so that disabled or people with impairments can easily access the information on any website. An accessibility page contains a commitment to accessibility for people with disabilities and contact information in case people encounter problems. Ideally, websites should have both an accessibility icon and an accessibility page.

According to Government regulations, all public sector websites must meet accessibility standards and publish an accessibility statement<sup>7</sup>.

Concerningly, **only 20% of the websites had an accessibility icon, 70% had an accessibility page** and **10% had no accessibility icon or accessibility page.**

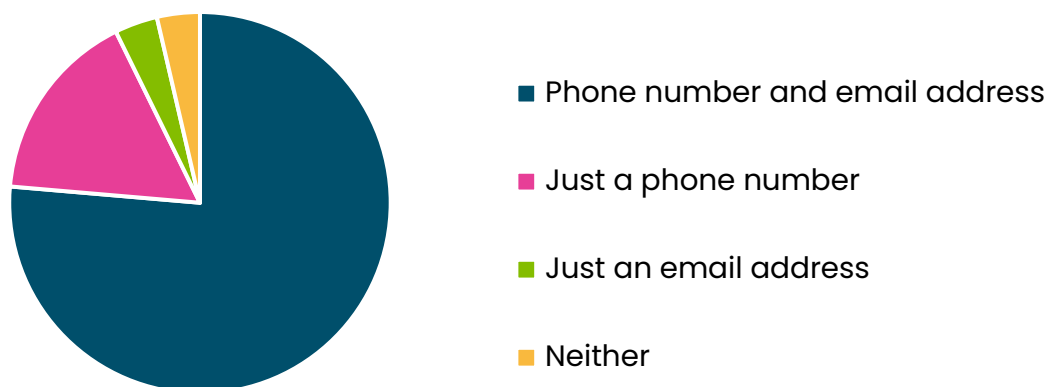
### Is there an accessibility icon or accessibility page on the website?



<sup>7</sup> [Accessibility requirements for public sector bodies | Local Government Association](#)

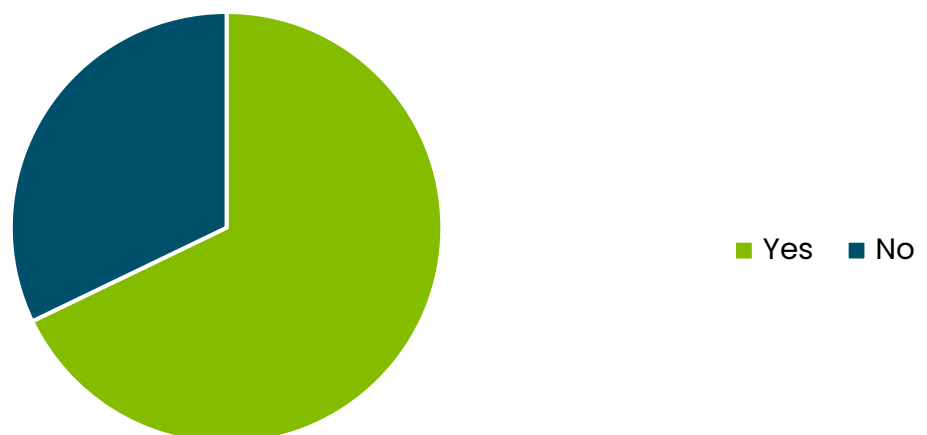
braille etc). Additionally, there should be both a phone number and email address available for people to contact. **71% of the websites provided the option to contact the practice for information in a different format.** Of the 55 practice websites that provided the option to contact the practice for information in a different format, **the majority (76%) offered both a phone number and an email address, 16% offered just a phone number, 4% just an email address** and 4% offered neither.

### Is there a phone number, an email address or both to contact the practice for information in a different format?



**There was the possibility to change the language on 68% of practice websites.** However, for some websites, although there was the option to translate the page, it was reported that you could not see which language it was translating into and in some cases the translation tool was reported to not work. Other comments included volunteers getting stuck on one language, with the user being unable to change it back to English.

### Is there the option to change the website into another language?



It is also important to note that there were some comments about the language on websites not always being user friendly. For example, the word 'triage' is mentioned on a lot of the websites, but it was acknowledged that not all patients will know what this means. Similarly, it was reported that the text on some of the webpages could be reduced and more succinct, with shorter sentences to improve clarity.



## Patient involvement and extra support/advice

Since April 2015, it has been a contractual requirement of NHS England for all GP practices to have a Patient Participation Group (PPG) and to make reasonable efforts for this to be representative of the practice population.

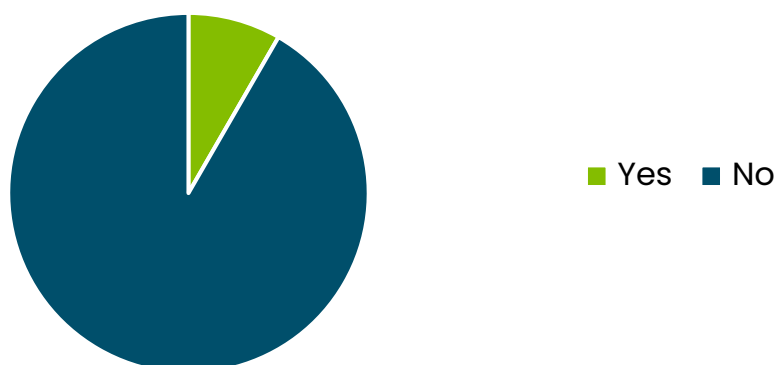
In terms of whether there was current PPG information on websites, **51% were reported as having this information**. However, in some cases, even though there was information about **how to join the PPG there was either no information about what they do or the information** (e.g. minutes or reports from previous meetings) was reported as being very out of date. In some case, the PPG information was recorded as being nearly ten years out of date (with the most recent reports being dated from 2014/2015).

Many people want to know how best to take care of their own health and to access organisations that can help them, so it is positive that **86% of the practices were reported as having information and links to self-care and support organisations** for health and well-being.

Lots of GP practices now offer social prescribing, this enables GPs, nurses and other primary care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services to support their health and well-being<sup>8</sup>. **Only 27% of websites were reported as having information about social prescribing**.

Only **8% of websites** were **reported as having information or links to Healthwatch**.

### Is there information about or links to the local Healthwatch?

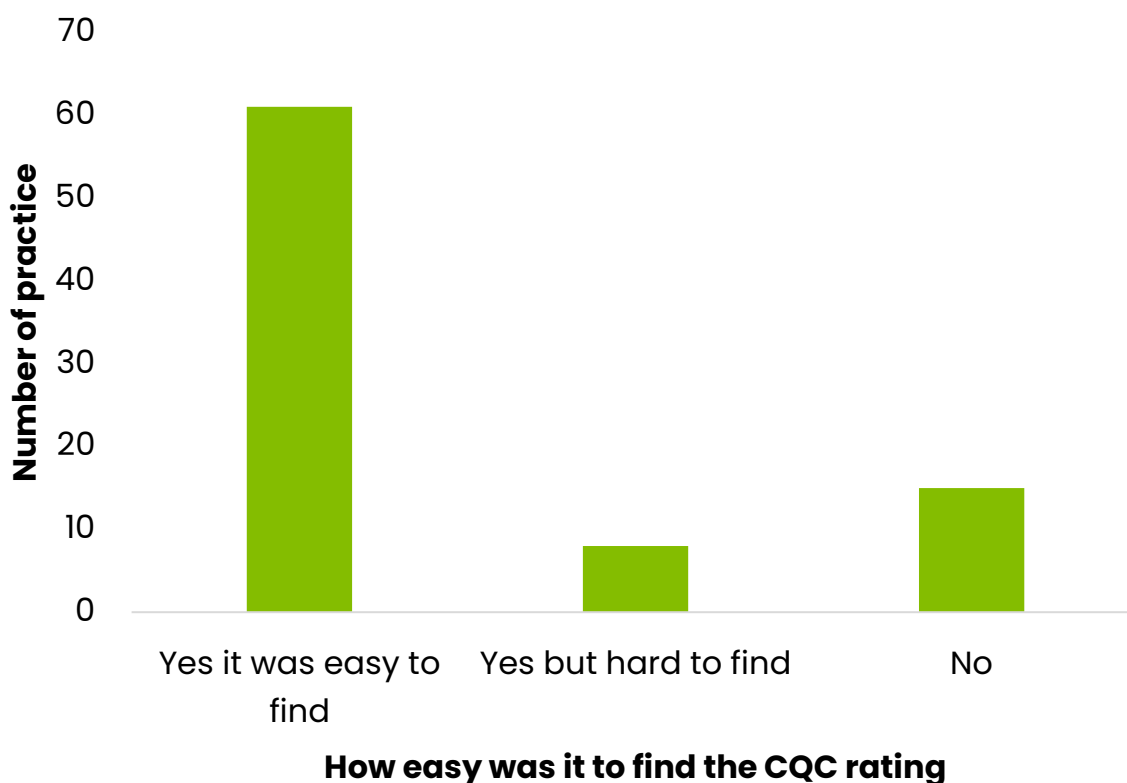




**It was reported as being easy to find out how to make a complaint for 55% of the practice websites.** In some cases, complaints information was reported as being embedded within the practices complaints policy which was hard to find. In other cases, it was reported that users are directed to a page where they can fill in a complaints form but the form was not there.

It is a legal requirement to have the most recent CQC rating of the practice on the website<sup>9</sup>. **The practice CQC rating was on the website and easy to find for 71% of the practices, on the website but hard to find for 10% of practices and not visible on 19% of websites.** For some of the practices under the Modality PCN it was reported that there is a space for the CQC rating on the website, but it says the service is no longer registered.

### Is the most recent CQC rating of the GP Practice visible on the website?



<sup>9</sup> [Ratings: what you have to display and where - Care Quality Commission \(cqc.org.uk\)](https://www.cqc.org.uk)

## Accessing websites via a mobile phone/tablet

As more and more people will now access their GP website via their phone or a tablet (rather than via a laptop or desktop computer) we randomly selected 10 practice websites which our volunteers explored on both a laptop/desktop computer and on a mobile phone or tablet. For the majority of these 10 websites the usability was reported as being the same.

One website (Reeth Medical Centre) was reported as having an option for web and mobile view at the bottom right of the page, with the mobile view being a more zoomed in version of the website.



## Conclusion and next steps

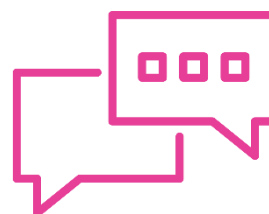
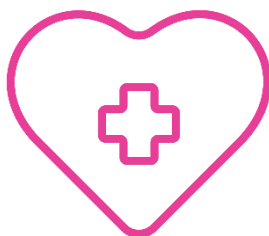
**Our volunteers found many great examples of GP websites that are clear, easy to navigate and user friendly. However, for some GP practice websites, there are areas that need significant improvement, most notably in terms of accessibility.**

Healthwatch North Yorkshire will disseminate our findings to all the GP practices and PCNs involved in this study. As all GP practices are currently working on improvement plans, which includes improving usability and accessibility of their website<sup>10</sup>, these findings will support practices to implement changes to improve their websites. We expect GP practices to consider the findings and respond to us detailing what changes have been made as a result.

## Thank you to our volunteers

**Projects like this are reliant on the work of our volunteers. We at Healthwatch North Yorkshire are exceptionally grateful for the amazing work our volunteers do.**

Our volunteers raise awareness of the work we do in the community to make sure that local services are meeting people's needs. They gather people's views and experiences which we use in our reports, and conduct research for projects like this one. They are central to achieving our core purpose of putting patients' and the public's voice at the heart of health and social care.



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<sup>10</sup> [NHS England » Primary care access improvement plans – briefing note for system-level plans](#)



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# healthwatch

North Yorkshire

Healthwatch North Yorkshire  
55 Grove Road  
Harrogate  
HG1 5EP

[www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk)

**t:** 01423 788 128

**e:** [hello@hwny.co.uk](mailto:hello@hwny.co.uk)

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