



# Horsham District Women's Health Survey Access to Health Care for Women Summary Report

May 2025

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# National evidence and strategy

Although women and girls make up **51% of the UK population**, evidence suggests they do not receive the same level of care, investigation, or treatment for common and significant diseases as men. The consequence of this inequality is that women end up with poorer health in **more significant disease areas** than men.

In response, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), published the **Women's Health Strategy for England in August 2022**, which sets out NHS England's ambition for improving women's health over the next ten years.

## Women's Health Hubs – what are they?

Women's Health Hubs bring together healthcare professionals and existing services to provide integrated women's health care in the community, with a focus on meeting women's needs throughout their lives.

A Hub could offer a variety of services such as treatment for menstrual problems, a full range of contraceptive services and methods, cervical and other screening, menopause support and treatments, preconception care, breast problems, and emotional wellbeing services.

## The case for a women's health survey in Horsham District

**Women have talked of the increasing challenges they face in accessing health care in the Horsham area.**

In discussion with many local people, clinicians and the community, the problem appears to have worsened in recent years due to increased demand for appointments at GP practices and a deskilling of staff during the Covid pandemic, for example, for coil fittings.

### Some of the key views shared were about:

- Poor access to GP's and other clinicians with more expertise.
- Waiting times for hospital appointments.
- Long distances to travel for some specialist services.
- Another frequently mentioned area of expert clinical need are perimenopause and menopause services.
- Women in Horsham District have expressed concerns about accessing Sexual Health Services which are now based in Crawley.
- There has also been a significant increase in immigrant and refugee females of all ages in Horsham District who often struggle with language and cultural barriers. This can also be another challenge in accessing healthcare.
- Since the Covid pandemic, there has been an increasing need for mental health and wellbeing support for women.
- Local data suggests more women are suffering domestic abuse than ever before.

# Our approach

Given what we have heard from women and girls in Horsham District, Park and Orchard Primary Care Network, Horsham Local Community Network and Healthwatch West Sussex wanted to ensure that these views were captured in a survey. We also wanted to gain insights into the potential benefits of developing a specific Women's Health Hub for women in the Horsham District area to address concerns.

The survey was jointly devised and promoted widely via an A4 flyer through Healthwatch, Park and Orchard PCN communication and any community partners.

The survey opened at the end of September 2024 and closed at the end of February 2025. 1,247 responses were received. 1.7% (1,234) from females living in the Horsham District. This is a good sample size statistically, especially when combined with system and national data.

**Thank you.** We would like to thank all those who have taken the time to complete the survey and shared their thoughts to support this important piece of work.

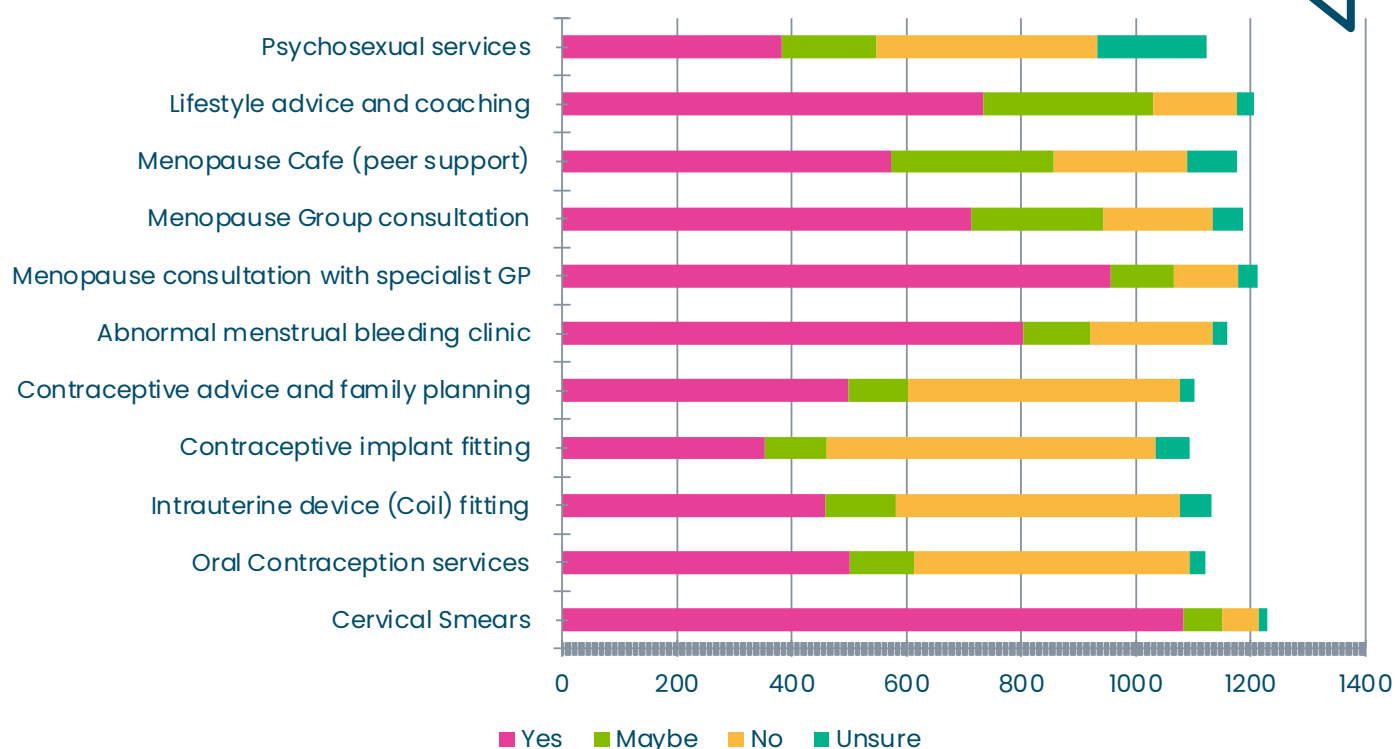
## Summary

### Survey Headlines

1,229 (99%) of responders confirmed the services they would like to attend if a Women's Health Hub were to be set up.

This is so crucial to delivering better services and support for women's health. It is overlooked and underfunded and has been for far too long.

### Services responders would like to attend



## Lack of joined up approach

The survey highlighted that women's sexual and reproductive health needs are provided by different services. Some are provided outside of the Horsham District. Since these services are not joined up or are out of the area, this can mean extra time is needed for travel, time off work or away from other activities.

## Challenging geographical access

Women attend their GP service in the Horsham area yet have to travel to Crawley or further afield to attend a Sexual Health Clinic, a Pessary Clinic or to see a gynaecologist.

## Lack of access to clinicians with special interest

Responders shared that they would like to access services led by clinicians with a special interest in women's health. Ideally this would include an input from gynaecologist and community organisations to support.

## Need for the wide range of services being joined up

Other areas of concern included access to local comprehensive sexual health and family planning services, including safe sex education, mental health services for anxiety, stress, and alcohol support.

Interest was shown in services that offer a psychosocial and holistic approach to include general well-being, lifestyle advice and coaching, as well as education for breast checks.

Responders also raised maternity services to include post birth and early years childcare. Mother and daughter gynecological sessions. Other suggestions included grief support for the loss of a child, dementia support, cancer support, and physio services for pelvic pain and pelvic floor weakness.

Currently have to go to Crawley for sexual health which is costly and time consuming.

Neither I nor my daughters have been able to access the care needed for endometriosis/polycystic ovary, as the services are too fragmented to enable diagnoses and follow through.

## Lack of signposting to services and accessibility

It is clear that although many services do exist in Horsham or in the wider District, some women do not or cannot access them. This highlights the opportunity for a Hub to play a significant role in signposting and connecting women to existing services.

## Education, improving knowledge and self-care/management

Throughout the survey there is a clear message regarding the need for education for all ages, including shared sessions that cross the generations and the sexes.

Responders suggested there is a need to create a **Community of Women** – own space, safe space, cafe, support clubs, talks, and workshops. This would help provide women with high-quality information and resources, leading to a more holistic and integrated approach to health care and better support for self-care.

School visits for teens. Where did all of the sexual health classes go? These are important for young women to understand their bodies and for young men to start showing respect.



## Volunteers

Participation of the wider community and patients in the development and provision of services within the Hub will be key to its success. The inclusion of appropriately trained volunteers to support those attending helps foster a sense of community ownership and contributes to realising the benefits of a circular economy.

## Domestic abuse

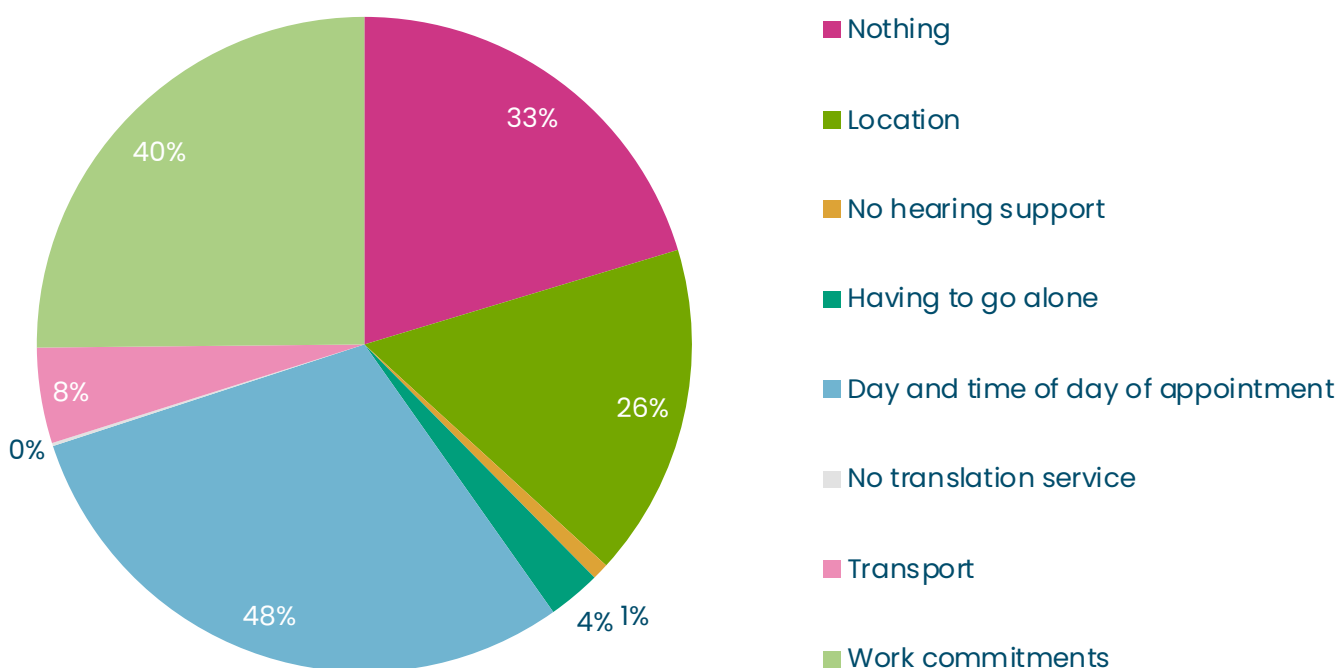
Since the pandemic, there has been an increase in domestic abuse being reported in general practice and community organisations. A safe space, such as a Women's Health Hub would be an ideal place for appropriate information and support.

I may not need an interpreter or domestic abuse service today but know I would appreciate the service if needed.

## Barriers to accessing a Women's Health Hub

Respondents shared a number of barriers that would stop them being able to access or attend appointments. The main concern was around the day and time of the appointment, work and family commitments, location, parking, accessibility, and transport.

### What would prevent you from attending?



Some respondents shared that their physical, emotional, and mental health issues such as social phobia might prevent them from attending an appointment. To improve access to support, video consultation or telephone could be used.

Concern about staff skills and sex of the clinician. The possibility of having to see a male doctor was also mentioned. Some people stated they lack trust in GPs due to previous experience.

This needs to be a priority as the only healthcare professional with any advice on menopause was the pharmacist.

# Next steps

## The next steps to developing an effective Women's Health Hub in Horsham.

- The results from the survey will help support improvements and priorities in the way care is provided for women and girls in the Horsham District and Community.
- Bringing together people and services to begin planning and developing a Women's Health Hub for the Horsham District. Using a co-production approach involving patients, women in the community, Patient Participation Groups, local Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations (VCSE), Primary Care and specialist services.
- Learning from other experiences of Women's Health Hubs in Sussex and the UK.
- Developing and bring together resources and training information.  
Supporting both clinicians and non-clinicians to extend their skillset in local practices, the Hub and community organisations.
- Include appropriately trained volunteers to support those attending, helping to promote a level of community ownership.
- Use an approach that embraces personalised care. Evidence shows that supporting women in the decisions they make about their healthcare is essential for achieving best health outcomes and effective use of NHS resources. Personalised care enables people to experience choice and control of their own health needs which increases self-confidence and resilience.
- To initially identify a few key services to focus on, building services according to population need with a focus on accessibility and addressing health inequalities.



## Talk to us

If you have questions about the content of this report, please either call 0300 012 0122 or email [cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](mailto:cheryl.berry@healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)

## How this insight will be used?

We recognise that all health and care services are under pressure at this time and have had to adapt their ways of working. We will share this report with the local NHS, Local Government, and other providers to help them understand where things are working well and services are adapting to meet peoples' needs, and to help them identify any gaps. We see this as a continuation of discussions taking place and will continue to use this fresh insight and the solutions presented to challenge for a better future.

### For help, advice, and information or to share your experience

We also help people find the information they need about health, care and community and voluntary health and care support services in West Sussex.

Here to help you on the next step of your health and social care journey



You can review how we performed and how we report on what we have done by visiting our website [www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchwestsussex.co.uk)



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