



**healthwatch**  
York

# Young People's Experiences of Health and Social Care

**Core Connectors Report 2025**

# Researched, compiled and created by our Core Connectors team:

## Team leaders:

Grace Robinson  
Jamie-Lee James

## Core Connector team

Aaron Rich  
Alecsia Torok  
Anna Wells  
Casey McInerney  
Cory Rich  
Gordon Kwok  
Katie Pawlec  
Kiri Shaw  
Lily Zhao  
Martha Steventon  
Ralph Woods  
Ryan Barry



*"Being a core connector has  
given me so much more  
confidence to go out and ask  
other young people about the  
issues that matter to us."*

# Contents

Background	4
About us	5
What we did	6
Our future plans	7
How the cost of living has affected young people and their access to health and social care	8
Things that have negatively impacted young people's mental and physical health	13
What would make York a healthier city	19
Which service did you access and how was that experience?	21
What was your experience of moving from children's to adult services?	25
Are you aware or do you attend any support groups for your health and wellbeing? If so, where do you attend?	27
What has been your experience of dental care?	28
Is there anything else you would like to tell us about healthcare in York?	30
Recommendations	33
Statistics	35

**Content warning: contains reference to mental ill-health, anxiety, distress, and struggles with daily living.**

## Acknowledgements

We recruited 14 young people and we thank them all for their dedication and passion in taking the research out to a variety of locations across the city, talking directly to other young people, their detailed analysis of all the data and creation of this engaging and comprehensive report. They did this despite all the many pressures of work and study and we are grateful for their time and expertise.

This report is a departure from our 'usual' publications, as it was researched, conceived and created by the Core Connectors themselves. We now look forward to continuing to work alongside them to co-create better ways forward for the health and wellbeing of all young people in our city.

We would also like to thank York College for allowing us to have Jamie-Lee and Grace as Core Connector Team Leaders as their T-level work experience. We really couldn't have done this without them.

# Background

**Core Connectors are young people who help Healthwatch York improve local health services by sharing their experiences and ideas. They are part of the Core20PLUS5 Connector Programme, which aims to reduce health inequalities in their area.**



## **Who can be a Core Connector?**

- Young people aged 16–25
- People with local knowledge and recent lived experience of health inequality
- People who are passionate about improving local services



*“Spending time outside and with my friends has a positive impact on my mental health. I think trying to learn how to practise self-love/self-care is helping both mentally and physically. I have been making more of an effort to look after my body by doing exercise to move around and learning more about what my body needs to be healthy.”*



# Healthwatch York is your local health and social care champion

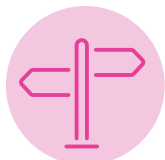
## About us

We make sure NHS leaders and decision makers hear your voice and use your feedback to improve care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice.



### Our vision

A world where we can all get the health and care we need.



### Our mission

To make sure people's experiences help make health and care better.

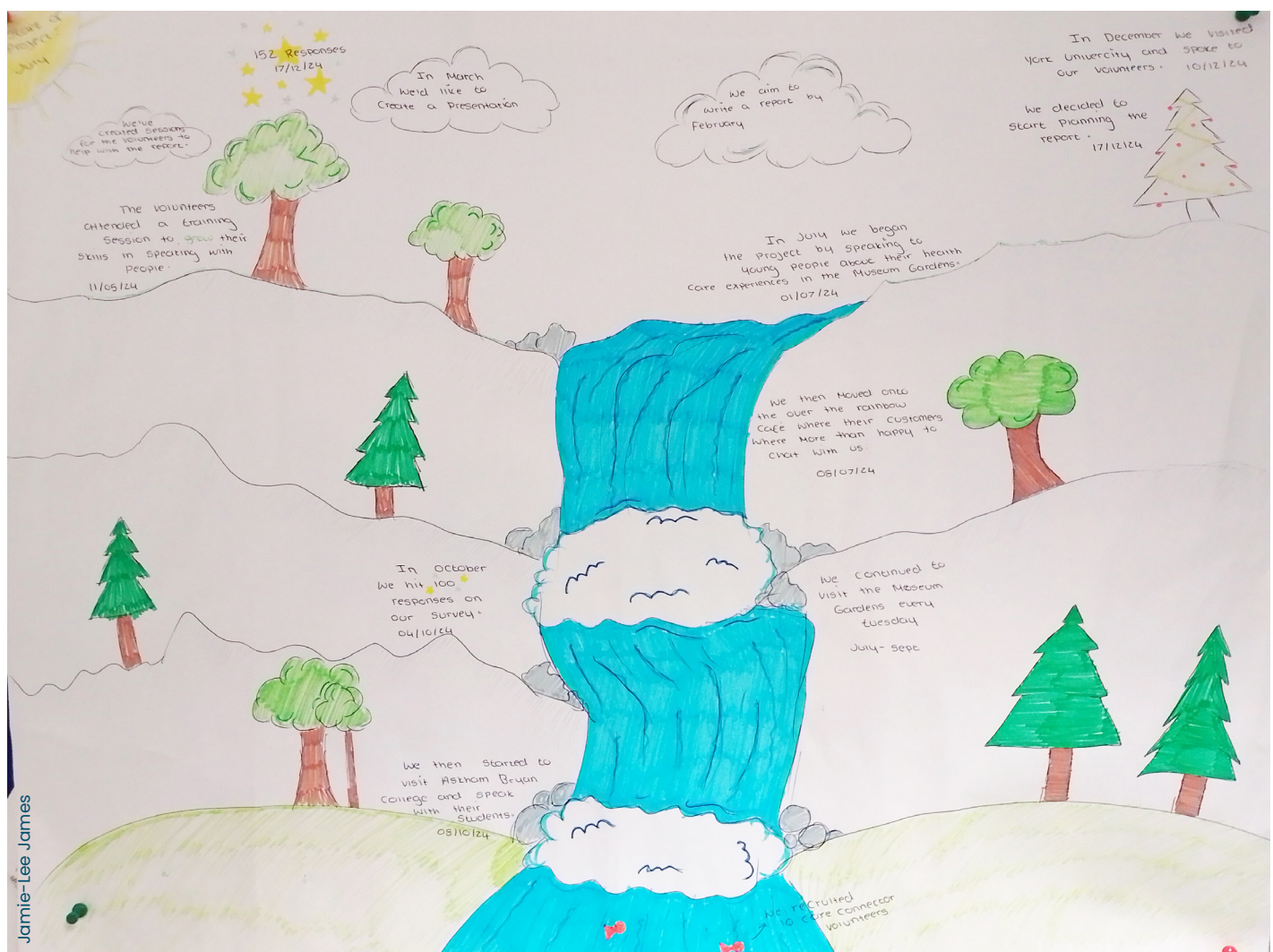


### Our values are:

- Listening to people and making sure their voices are heard.
- Including everyone in the conversation – especially those who don't always have their voice heard.
- Analysing different people's experiences to learn how to improve care.
- Acting on feedback and driving change.
- Partnering with care providers, Government, and the voluntary sector – serving as the public's independent advocate.

# What we did

Recruited 10 Core Connectors and designed and completed questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews with 152 young people at various locations across York. These included the Museum Gardens, Askham Bryan College, York College, A NAUWU (Nothing About Us Without Us) event and Over The Rainbow Cafe (an LGBTQ+ safe space/cafe and sober space).





# Our future plans

We aim to continue our research throughout 2025 by looking in more detail at some of the issues from the initial report and proposing better ways forward. To continue to research issues of concern to young people in York and take action to improve healthcare for young people in the city.



Unsplash

# How the cost of living has affected young people and their access to health and social care

Key themes that have emerged when we asked this question to young people included food inflation, restricted access to now-private healthcare, changes to diets due to food affordability, issues with paying bills at home and restricted access to essential travel due to rising prices.

Food inflation was a main concern with young people that filled out our questionnaire. For example, some young people told us that they had to make changes to their diets due to an inability to afford “good” or “nutritional food”. Another young person claimed it was “hard to afford the basics without overworking”. Being able to know where to go to find affordable food was also an issue for young people, this may be due to young people often being very inexperienced about where to buy food and not knowing how various supermarkets compare in terms of affordability. One young person found that even “justifying a food shop is hard”. This shows that young people are seriously debating going out and buying food, likely due to the large inflated prices at supermarkets due to the ongoing cost of living crisis. Another young person resorted to getting food from a food charity to “make up what was once the weekly shop”.



Some young people that participated in our study were unhappy about having restricted access to private healthcare such as eyecare and private dentists. Other young people on prescribed medication were frustrated with having to pay money for life-saving medications such as asthma medication which one person paid “over nine pounds for.” One young person told us that they had spent fifty pounds on medication in one month. It is clear there must be another way to make access to life saving medication available to young people at a much lower cost, especially given the amount of young people suffering from long term health conditions. Long term health conditions led to one person having to access private healthcare due to the NHS not covering long term treatments such as physiotherapy. Another young person’s access to eyecare was heavily restricted due to being over the age where age-related discounts could be applied, making this young person unable to afford a new pair of glasses. Other young people simply could not afford private healthcare.

*“A lot of the time can’t afford to eat- primary carer of mum and siblings and so there has been a lot of increased stress from trying to buy groceries. Also, payments for apartment have massively gone up- really expensive.”*

*“Rising bills on gas, electricity, and water, rising insurance costs for car is especially ridiculous, rising food prices - have been and are getting some food from food charity to make up what was once the weekly shop.”*

Young people also spoke to us about difficulties around their finances. Some students were upset about rising rents in York. Some students told us they had to “really budget” in order to get by. For young people living at home, some had to chip in to help with their family finances, some young people were forced to move back in with their parents due to their finances. Another young person had to move out of York altogether due to higher prices after having lived in the city for four years.

Some young people that we spoke to had help from their family to ease the burden on the cost of living but when these young people struggled further, they felt unable to get any more help due to “feeling guilty about asking for more [support]”.

Transport was also an issue faced by young people taking part in our research. One person who suffered with various illnesses found that their illnesses combined with the cost of living crisis made transport to hospital difficult. One young person who got their food shopping delivered to them due to illness had to go to get the food themselves, walking with a sprained ankle to the shop due to them not being able to afford delivery costs.

*“...can't afford delivery despite struggling with energy and access to shops – sprained ankle but had to walk on it as it was the only way to get food.”*

For young people that owned vehicles, issues with car insurance affordability was also commonly discussed with us. One young person had to walk to work rather than get there any other way due to their mother not being able to afford to pay bills from time to time. Another person remarked “transport is so much more expensive”. One young person said that the price of their car insurance was “ridiculous”.

Money and finance related difficulties were also found to have had a negative effect on young people’s mental wellbeing, with students saying that they were struggling with the cost of living crisis, paying rent and feeling “guilty” for treating themselves by going against their budgets.

*“my bills, rent especially and transport is so much more expensive.”*

*“...know that could ask for parents for help but already receive a lot of support from them and feel guilty about asking for more.”*



*"The higher costs of healthy food results in having to purchase less nutritional items. This has resulted in me being ill a lot more."*

*"Absolutely yes - has put a massive strain on groceries. The prices of things are so ridiculous that cannot afford to buy as much/ as good a quality of food. Feel a lot of shame around their diet because they can't afford to buy healthy food- want to eat fruit and vegetables but have to prioritise high energy foods like carbs because there isn't the money to buy enough."*

# Things that have negatively impacted young people's mental and physical health

Waiting time was a prominent issue faced by research participants. Young people complained that access to GP appointments was very difficult and that when they had these appointments, sometimes doctors had to have issues such as gender dysphoria explained to them or not being inclusive toward young people with autism. Phone appointments were found to be challenging too, as young people found it difficult to fully explain their issues adequately to healthcare professionals. One trans person was told by their GP to not get an autism diagnosis in case it delayed their access to receiving gender-affirming care. Communication about a young person's status on a waiting list was a common issue faced by young people that we spoke to. One person had waited six months for a medical appointment only to have it cancelled. Many young people complained at the lack of mental health related services available alongside the long waiting lists for these services.

*"My experiences in the healthcare in York has been really good however mental health have difficult issues on where to start with it, I personally don't know how to access proper forms of support or any help for that matter."*

Education related issues that young people spoke to us about mainly included exam-related stress and pressure, a lack of help within educational settings, managing a work life balance and rental costs for student accommodation. One student told us that they felt a lot of pressure relating to exams yet had no adequate support to deal with managing this pressure at school. One university student previously was able to get support but told us that they no longer were able to. Another student at a university told us that they had to wait seven months for counselling and so did not use the services much as a result. Students also struggled with the work life balance, one student said “having to work and study is stressful as I have to make time for both of them”. Another student said they felt “overwhelmed with how much I have to do in so little time”. A lot of students felt worried about the future, one student felt that they had to “plan [their] own life” and that they were being treated like an adult when they are still a child.

*“hard to get face to face appointments  
– takes far too long to find a doctor who  
understands mental health.”*

*“Really long waiting times for  
appointments – had to wait  
6 months for an appointment  
only to have it cancelled.”*

*“I think social media and body  
image has a negative impact on  
my mental health.”*



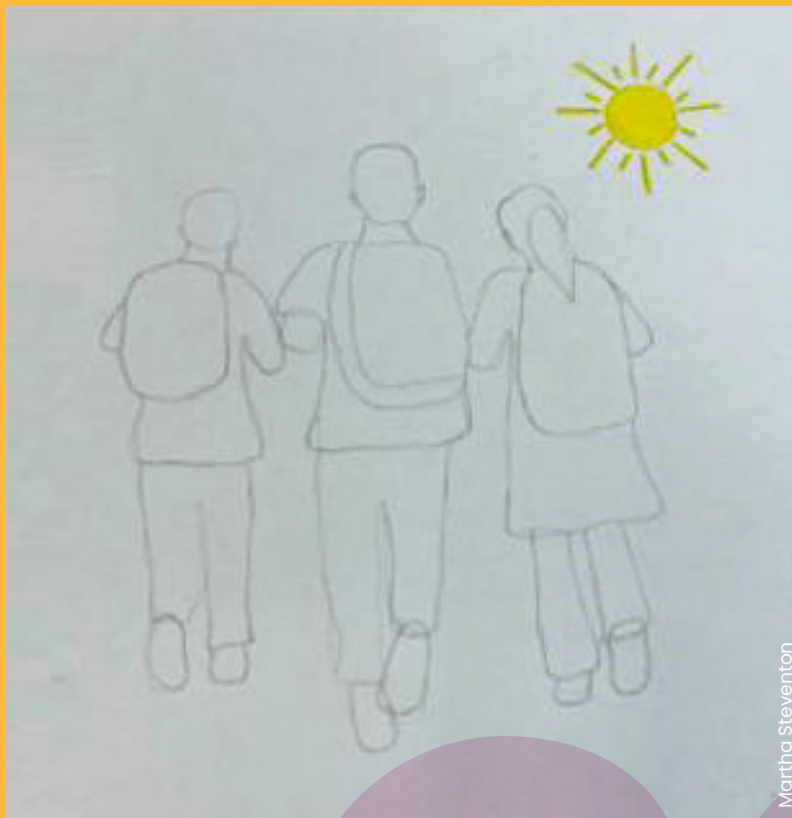
Money and finance related difficulties were also found to have had a negative effect on young people's mental wellbeing, with students saying that they were struggling with the cost of living crisis, paying rent and feeling "guilty" for treating themselves by going against their budgets.

Other issues that negatively impacted young people's mental and physical wellbeing were family issues, anxiety from adjusting to social situations post-lockdown, being in unhealthy relationships, the isolation felt by young people and the negative impact of social media encouraging young people to stay inside rather than go out.



We asked this question to have a focus on the positive aspects of young people's mental and physical health, as well as to learn what keeps them happy. We found that the things that have the most positive impact on young people's mental and physical health are healthcare, education, their selfcare/hobbies and their social relationships.

Young people mentioned that healthcare has a positive impact on their mental and physical health due to good experience with specific organisations, those were Mind and Spectrum First Education. Easy access was also mentioned, this had a positive impact as it meant young people were not waiting too long and left struggling, so it was effective and efficient.



*“Exercise and time outside  
seeing friends.”*

*“Walking in nature and seeing  
friends and family.”*

We found out that having a support team at their educational establishment that they could easily access had a positive impact on their mental health and said it was “very good”. Extracurriculars kept them busy and distracted, it also gave people the opportunity to socialise and spend time with their friends.

Staying active came up a lot during our research. This involved working out, spending time with friends and family, and going outdoors, nature was mentioned a significant amount of times. Hobbies have a big positive impact on young people’s mental and physical health. Going out and farming were talked about the most, and for some it was as simple as getting out of bed and eating nutritious foods.

*“Socialising with others, and talking to my family.”*

*“Lived in York my whole life so used to the GPs and they’re nice – not bad waiting times – never waited more than a week and occasionally same day appointments.”*



Social relationships are what positively impact young people's mental and physical health the most. Speaking and seeing family and friends was spoken about multiple times, as well as the importance of having someone to speak to has a major impact for young people. Social relationships in education are important as it allows them to have a connection with others who are going through similar things and know they are not alone.

Overall, speaking to people, whether that be healthcare professionals or family and friends, has a major positive impact on young people's mental health and going out to see friends and family or working out and eating nutritious foods has a positive impact on their physical health.



*"Mind was a great organisation they listened. Spectrum first support autistic and ADHD students at uni and was brilliant."*

# What would make York a healthier city

Healthcare access is a major concern. Long wait times plague services, especially for GPs and mental health care, with short, ineffective appointments. Mental health care options are limited, and navigating the complex system is confusing, with inconsistent information and a lack of support groups. Trans healthcare access is particularly challenging. While there's increased awareness of cancer symptoms and a focus on safe water, specialized care is difficult to obtain. Increased funding and improved communication are needed across all healthcare services.

Community and infrastructure issues compound these problems. There's a need for more mental health services, especially in schools, and better access to trans healthcare. Affordable, healthy food options are lacking, and social spaces are often alcohol-centric. Pollution, drug access, and the high cost of healthy food, entertainment, and social activities are also concerns. Public transport is overcrowded and expensive, limiting access, particularly in rural areas. Improved cycle paths, pedestrian areas, and lighting are needed.



*"More things to do with friends in the centre of town that encourage activity instead of just having shops. Less need to spend money when doing social activities."*

Accessibility is another key challenge. Cobbled streets and poor transport options, especially in rural areas, limit mobility and contribute to social isolation. Navigating the healthcare system and understanding available services, including disability access, is difficult. Communication about appointments and services is poor. More affordable and frequent bus services, particularly connecting rural areas to city centers, are needed, along with increased access to outdoor activities and green spaces for people with disabilities. Education and referrals from schools to support services are also vital, along with more mental health support.



*“Overall yes, but for disabled people no. Due to poor access to transport, family can often be restricted to their home- for those who struggle with mobility, the cobbled streets are difficult for getting round- for this reason there is a reliance on public transport but this doesn’t work well in York.”*

# Which service did you access and how was that experience?

The 4 key themes we found were mental health, GP access, specialist care and urgent vs non urgent care.

In most cases referrals were easier to obtain than actual support. However, being inadequate with one saying they were “denied the opportunity to reschedule an appointment which was only missed due to insomnia caused by PTSD”. Another person who had a similar negative experience at Leeds Immunology stated “tried to blame everything I said on my mental health, called me crazy”, they also were not listened to by their GP and was refused acknowledgement. During crisis situations services were more responsive and immediate support was provided. GP consultations felt rushed and focused on generic advice rather than specific needs of the person. CAMHS was mentioned repeatedly for not doing an effective job of supporting those who needed it,” Found the CAMHS worker very rude and dismissive” and just general advice was given. A lack of support was given to people after turning 18, with no referrals to adult services.

*“The service I used was the NHS website I filled out their form about my migraines and we got a call around 3-4 weeks after that. When we got the call we went over my symptoms and they provided much needed help and made me understand it better.”*



Many young people are finding it extremely difficult to get timely and effective GP appointments. They face long waits, struggle with online booking, and rarely get face-to-face consultations. When they do see a doctor, they often feel dismissed and rushed, receiving unhelpful advice and lacking proper follow-up care, particularly for ongoing or complicated health issues. Although some people told us that same day appointments were quick and efficient, especially when getting prescribed medication. Regarding repeat prescriptions views were mixed, with some saying the NHS app simplified the process but others were confused.



eduardovieiraphoto

*"...lots of wrong diagnosis eventually  
got the right one (autism) but  
wrong for a long time."*



Experiences with the hospital were also mixed. Some claimed it was a positive and efficient experience, mainly for urgent issues like broken bones and head injuries, while others faced long waits even after being referred by a GP, and felt they were unheard and dismissed by the hospital staff.

Specialised care was also mentioned a lot. The wait list for specialists was excessively long, with some people having to resort to private healthcare. However once seen the experiences were overall positive. Long diagnostic processes and quite a few misdiagnoses meant people were not getting the help and support they needed. Gynecologists often dismissed what people had to say, even with a previous diagnosis outside of York, and pressured one individual into having an exam despite them telling the professional multiple times they were on their period. Trans healthcare is also a big issue, with not one positive thing to be said, and one person saying “im trans and f\*cking nobody will help me with it”.

*“I went to see a medical professional in uni and the experience was good.”*

When it came to accessing the GP it was made clear that there was a difference between how people are treated during urgent vs non urgent appointments. A number of young people said that their GP appointments felt rushed and useless as well as having long waiting lists up to 3-4 weeks. A sprained ankle resulted in a 6-8 weeks wait for a specialist, hindering the healing process and by the time of the appointment their ankle had mostly healed. However for some they managed to obtain an appointment quickly (same day) or received help through 111 which one person got referred to the ICE department stating “the overall experience was very positive- got a lot of good advice”. Majority of urgent A&E visits were prioritized and effective. A few responses mentioning the lack of follow ups.

*“The last service I used was my local GP. I was relatively easy to organise, but I could only have a telephone appointment. The call was short, friendly, helpful and followed up with a check in a few days later. However, if the option was there I would rather have spoken to my doctor face to face.”*



# What was your experience of moving from children's to adult services?

The experience of transitioning from children's to adult healthcare services are mainly negative. The key issues we found are lack of support and abrupt transitions, a decline in care quality, increased responsibility & independence, waiting lists & access, communication & information gaps and financial changes.

Upon turning 18 many people told us they had been "dropped" from CAMHS, with little to no planning for how they can move to adult services. Some were told to reapply which created more barriers. A lack of continuity in care was a major concern.

Adult services were perceived to be less caring and more focused on the condition rather than the individual and their needs. Children's services offered more advocacy and support which the adult ones are lacking.

The majority of people found the independence in adult services overwhelming, especially when using complex systems or lacking information about how to access specific services.

Compared to children services adult services were found to have a longer wait time. Accessing specific treatment or medications became increasingly more difficult during the transition, especially for those who are nearly 18, where you can no longer qualify for pediatric services but can not access adult treatments yet.

There is a lack of information about the process and how to navigate adult services, and communication when transitioning to adult services. Some experienced miscommunication and even blame from services during this time.

Having to now pay for prescriptions is a difficult change for some, especially those who need them quite frequently.

However some individuals claimed it was a relatively smooth experience, particularly if they remained with the same GP. Some appreciated the increase in independence.



*"It was difficult considering no one really talks about how to book your own appointment or anything I found it difficult to get help because I wasn't sure where to start so I just went to my parent for help."*

# Are you aware or do you attend any support groups for your health and wellbeing? If so, where do you attend?

64% of young people who answered our survey have no awareness of the support groups in their community. 21% of young people are aware but only 9% of those actually attend support groups. Support groups mentioned the most were specific/education based groups, as well as the Over the Rainbow Cafe based in the city centre for LGBTQ+ support. A few people mentioned they used to attend support groups but no longer do, with one person saying they “had a very bad experience- for this reason would not attend again.”

*“Yes- the over the rainbow cafe provides support (in particular queer support) and also support from their housemates.”*

*“No and I’m not aware of any.”*



# What has been your experience of dental care?

The responses we got regarding dental care were very mixed, with some people having positive experiences, expressing the helpfulness, professionalism and ease of booking (especially with private dentists). However, a significant number of people have had trouble accessing NHS dental care, the most common complaints being long wait lists, difficulty registering with an NHS dentist, cancelled appointments, dentist turnover, and poor communication. And for private/emergency dental care the biggest issue is the cost, and puts many people off.

Long waiting lists was the biggest issue young people are facing regarding dentistry, with many of them waiting months or even years for appointments. Some are even just placed on waiting lists with no estimated time frame given to them.

Many respondents told us they were unable to find NHS dentists who were accepting new patients, which meant some had to switch to private dental care.

*“When dentist appointments are available they are always great, but I have noticed that the wait times are getting longer and longer, and that appointments may be cancelled several times in a row before one becomes available. ”*

The high cost of private care was a barrier for some, and many were forced to move to private dentists due to the NHS lacking space. Even emergency dental appointments were unaffordable for some.

Repeated cancellation of appointments was mentioned multiple times. This led to further delays in treatment.

As well as this poor communication was a common theme, confusion regarding treatment plans and missed appointments due to it.

Changes in dentists was a concern, with some patients left to find new dentists.

Overall, the biggest issue is access to timely and affordable dental care, mainly within the NHS system. With some people avoiding dental care altogether due to fear, costs or just the inability to get an appointment.

*"I used to have an NHS dentist which was good but he left and told me to find a new one. I've not been able to find one for 2 years now."*



# Is there anything else you would like to tell us about healthcare in York?

Key themes we found in our research are mental health crisis, access barriers, service gaps, hospital experiences, systemic issues, positive feedback as well as some other concerns.

When it came to the mental health crisis young people said access was a major problem as the waiting times were long, difficult to navigate and there was a lack of support especially when transitioning between services. Assessments for ADHD and Autism were described as negative and felt as if they were dismissed by professionals.

Young people mentioned there was a problem with access barriers such as language and technological barriers. With some not having English as their first language or not having the right technology to try and get the help they need it made it difficult for those to make an appointment or speak with a professional.

Another theme we saw was service gaps. It was mentioned that there was a need for more mental health support within schools. There was also a lack of sexual health and endometriosis information for young women. When it came to trans healthcare it was mentioned multiple times how problematic it was especially after waiting a long time for an appointment.

However York hospital had a few positive experiences, although some had to wait up to 12 hours in A&E. One person mentioned being turned away with a suspected ectopic pregnancy and being told “I was too young to have an ectopic pregnancy”. Some others reported negative experiences related to epilepsy, a knee injury with inadequate treatment and cancelled appointments.

Many young people mentioned systemic issues like understaffing and underfunding. Some said there needs to be an improvement on the communication between services. It was suggested to make a flow chart for services to show when they’re available. One person stated “The current direction of the DFH and NHS England is directly at odds with improving care of children, teenagers and queer youth”.

*“I’m concerned about the ease of accessing healthcare. As a young person there is a bit of a learning curve for accessing healthcare independently for the first time but I feel like I am ok at picking it up quickly and being able to find the information I need. For a person who is not as good with technology or for someone with English as a second language it becomes much more difficult and frustrating, this is something I have seen first hand with my family members.”*

Other concerns mentioned the cost of healthy food and having to resort to unhealthy food choices as it is cheaper. The cleanliness of toilets in health care facilities, children's opinions being ignored in clinical settings and the lack of understanding of university students' needs.

However there was some positive feedback from the young people having positive experiences with their GP's, hospitals and ambulance services. The dedication of healthcare professionals is being acknowledged but hampered by the funding issues.

*"Yes, as there are plenty of healthy options however with the cost of living it makes it difficult to be healthy as unhealthy is the cheapest option."*



*"I think there needs to be more awareness for young people especially women where to go when it comes to sexual health such as contraception and abortions and how they can access this help as its not advertised enough and some are embarrassed to ask."*



# Recommendations

## 1 Introduce Cost of Living Support

Signpost food banks in schools, colleges, and community centers to increase awareness among young people. Offer youth-focused “pay what you can” meals in local hubs and youth centers to ensure they have access to affordable food.

Provide clear, accessible information on discounted transport options specifically for young people, with details shared through social media platforms and local resources.

Partner with pharmacies to offer discounts or subsidies on essential medications and guide young people on how to access free or low-cost healthcare services.

## 2 Reduce Wait Times for Mental Health Support

Work to shorten wait times for mental health services and provide interim resources. Place signs or posters in York’s hospitals and GP offices, highlighting available mental health resources and support options during wait times.

## 3 Tackle GP and Dental Wait Times

Address long wait times for GP and dental appointments within the York region, aiming to reduce delays and improve access to essential healthcare services for young people.

## 4 Create Affordable Social and Community Spaces

Establish affordable, accessible community spaces where young people can gather, socialize, and engage in activities to help reduce social isolation.

## 5 Transition to adult services

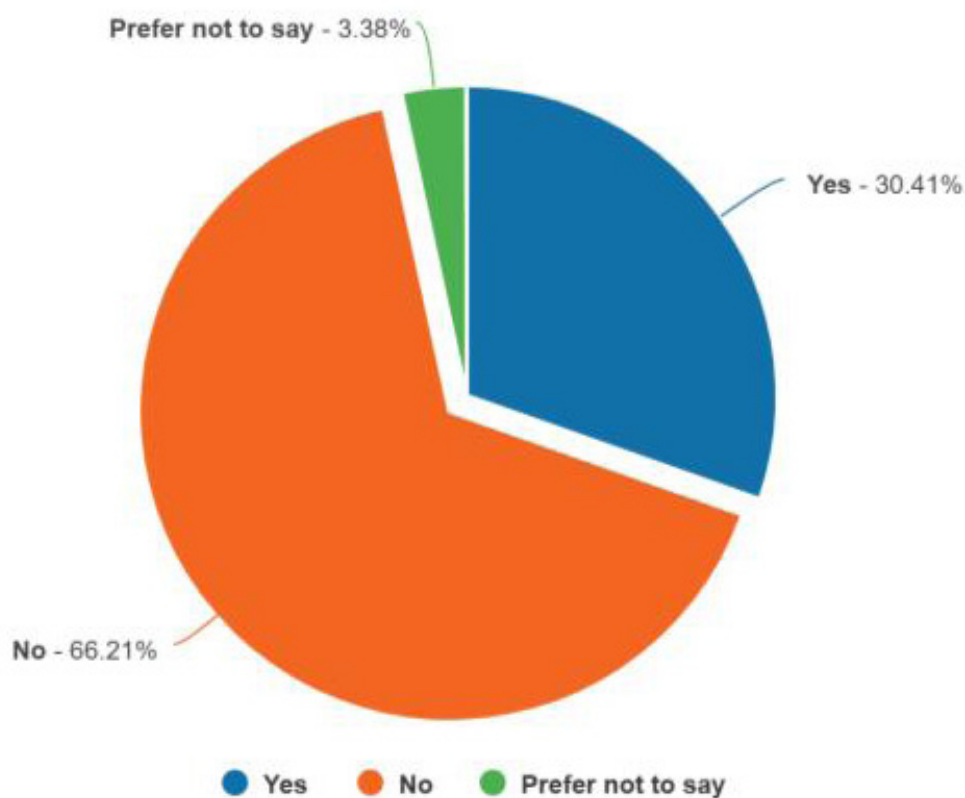
Provide guidance for young people transitioning to adult healthcare services, with clear information available through schools, posters, and social media in York to help them navigate the system and access necessary treatments.

## 6 Improvements to public transport

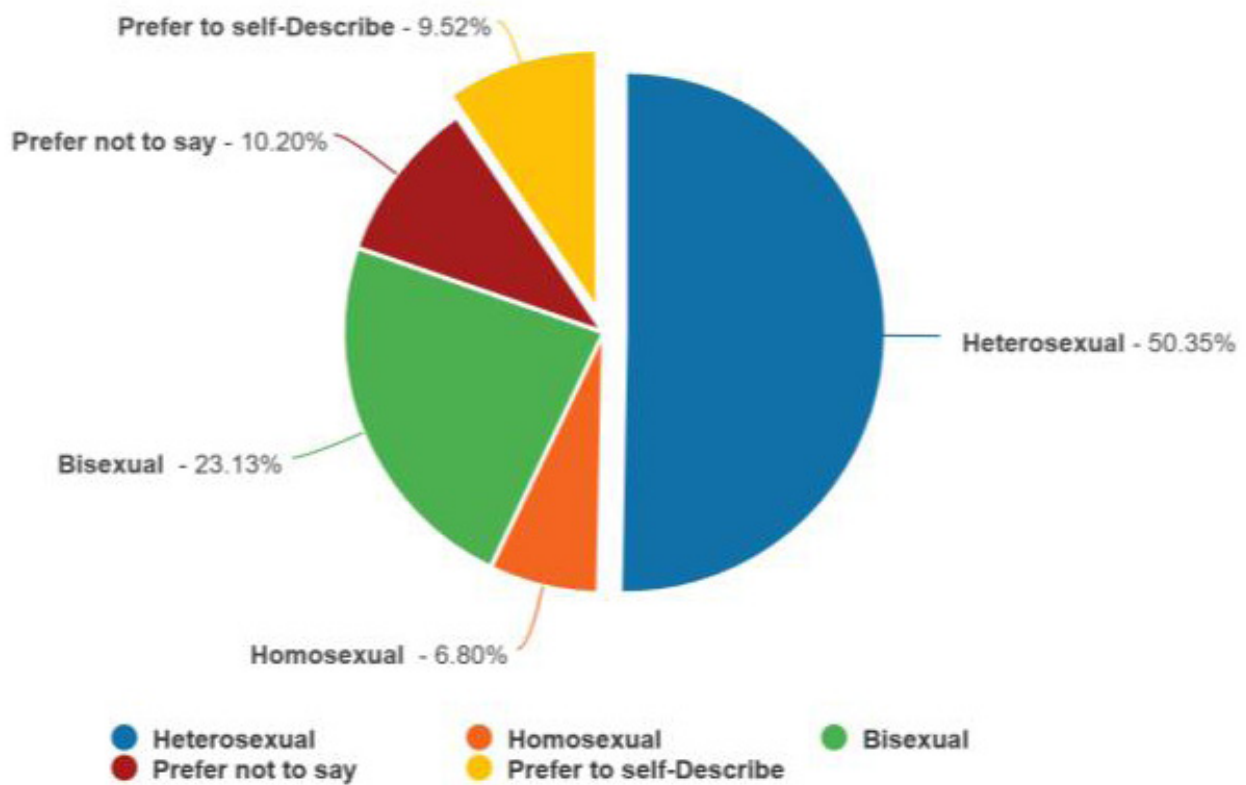
Invest in improving public transportation in the York region, expanding routes to rural areas to ensure young people have reliable and accessible transport options.



# Do you consider yourself to have a long-term health condition?



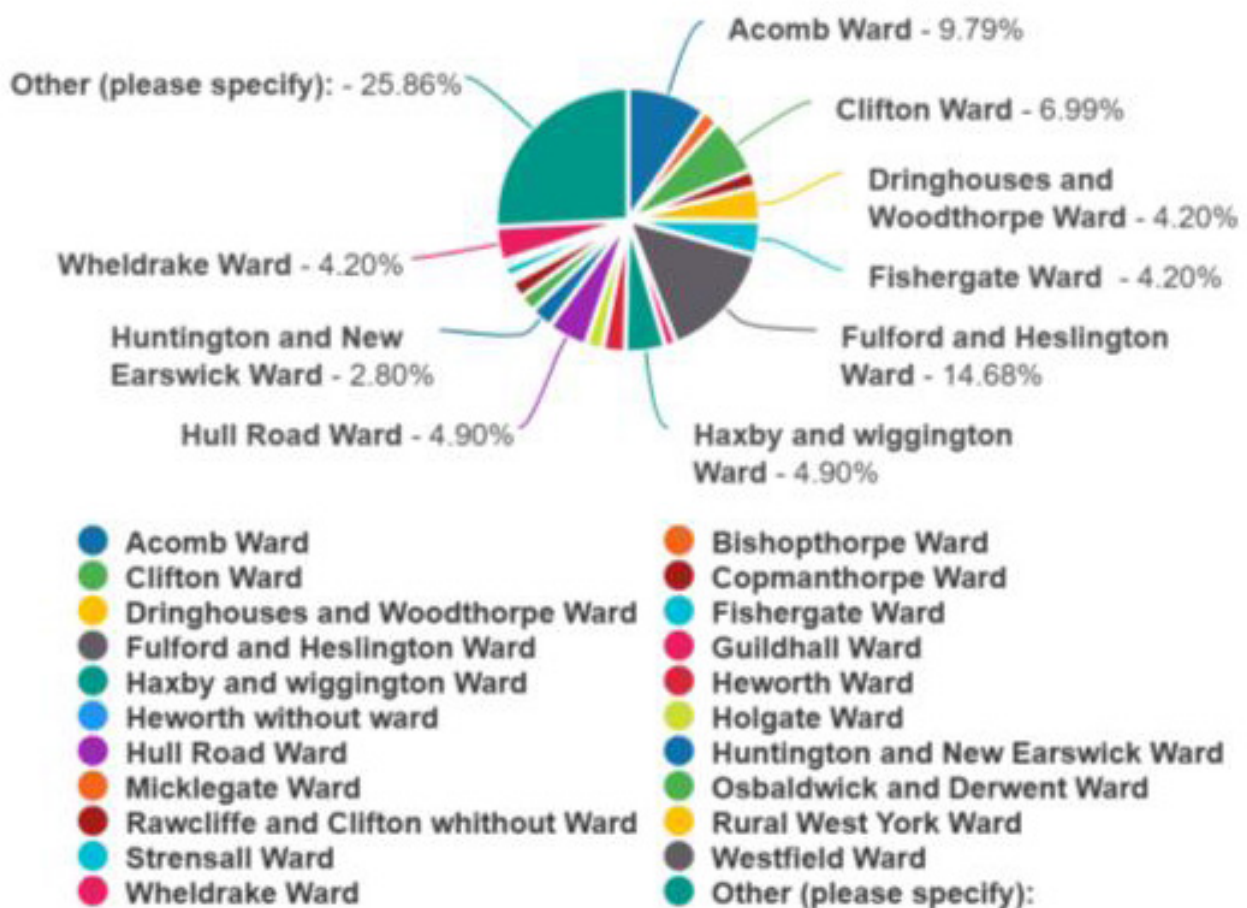
# What is your sexual orientation?



Self described:

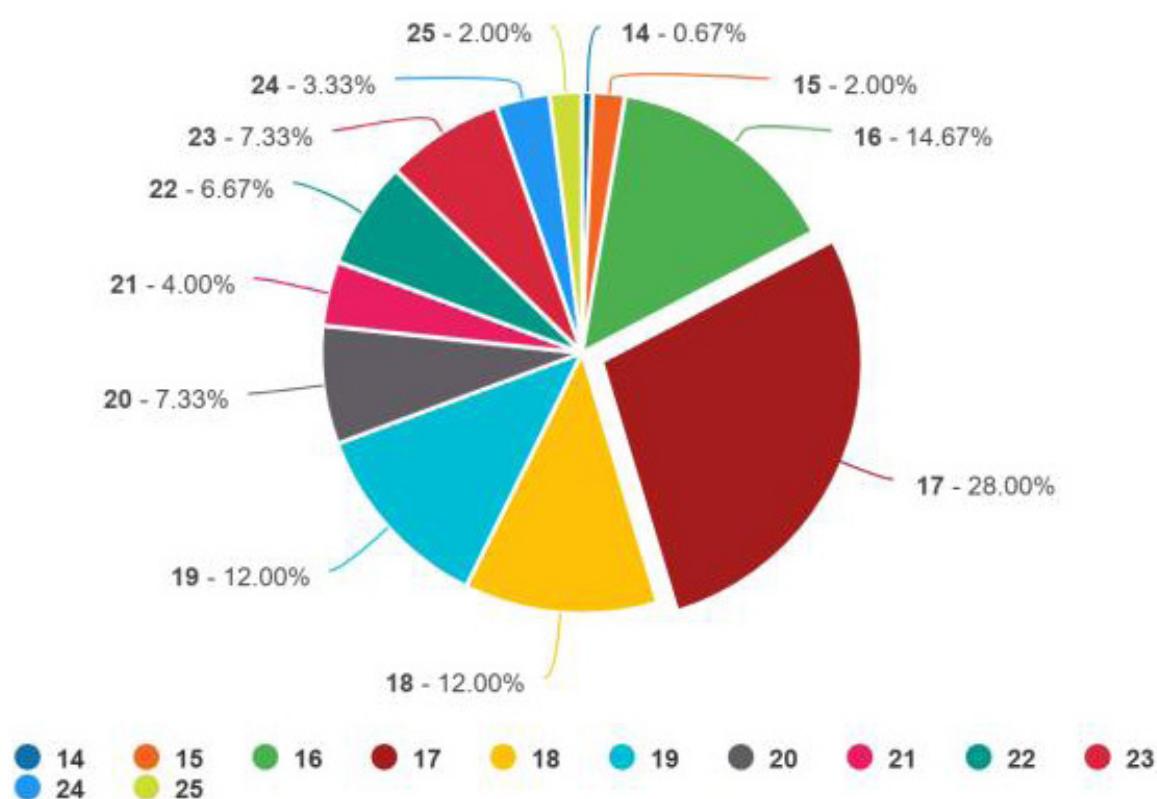
1 omnisexual,  
1 demisexual/biromantic,  
1 pansexual,  
3 asexual,  
6 queer

# What part of York do you live in?

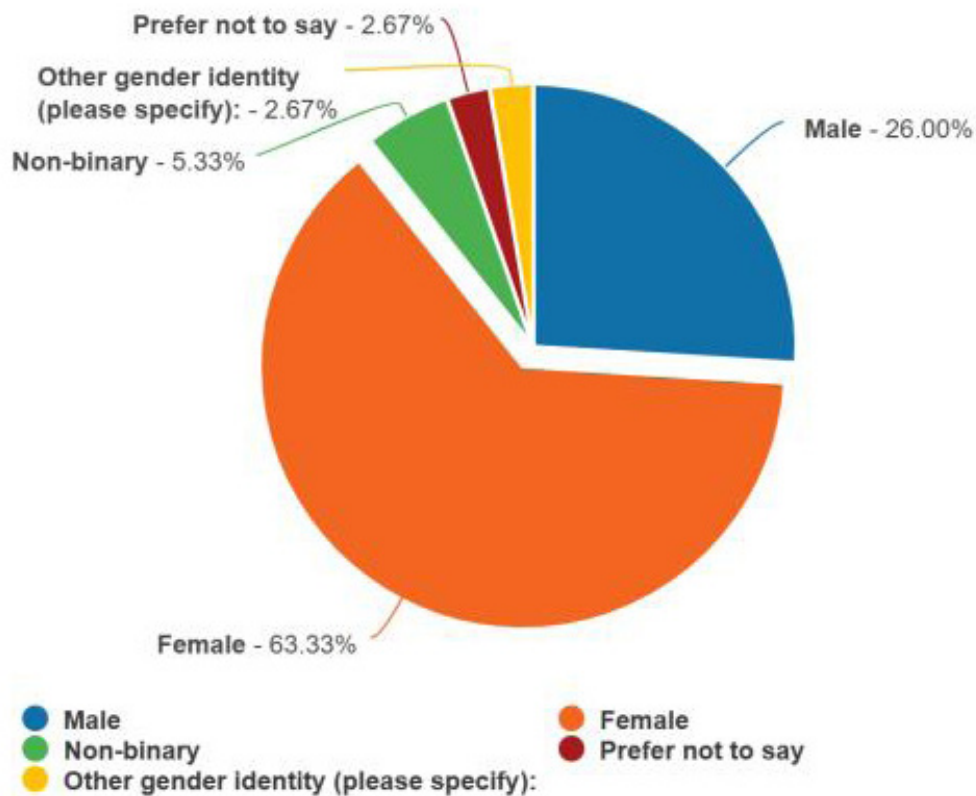




# How old are you?



# What is your gender?

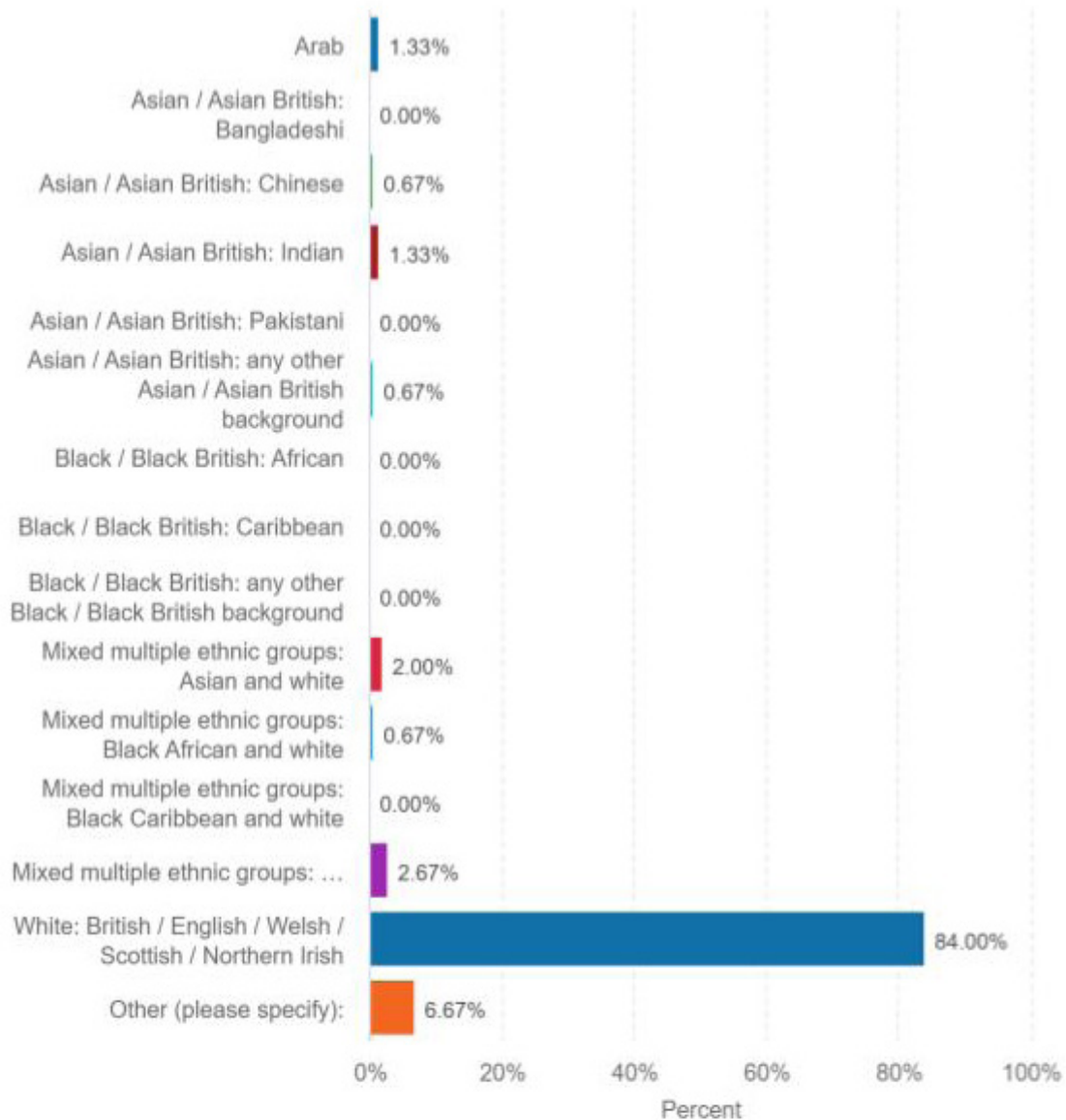


Other identities:

2 genderqueer

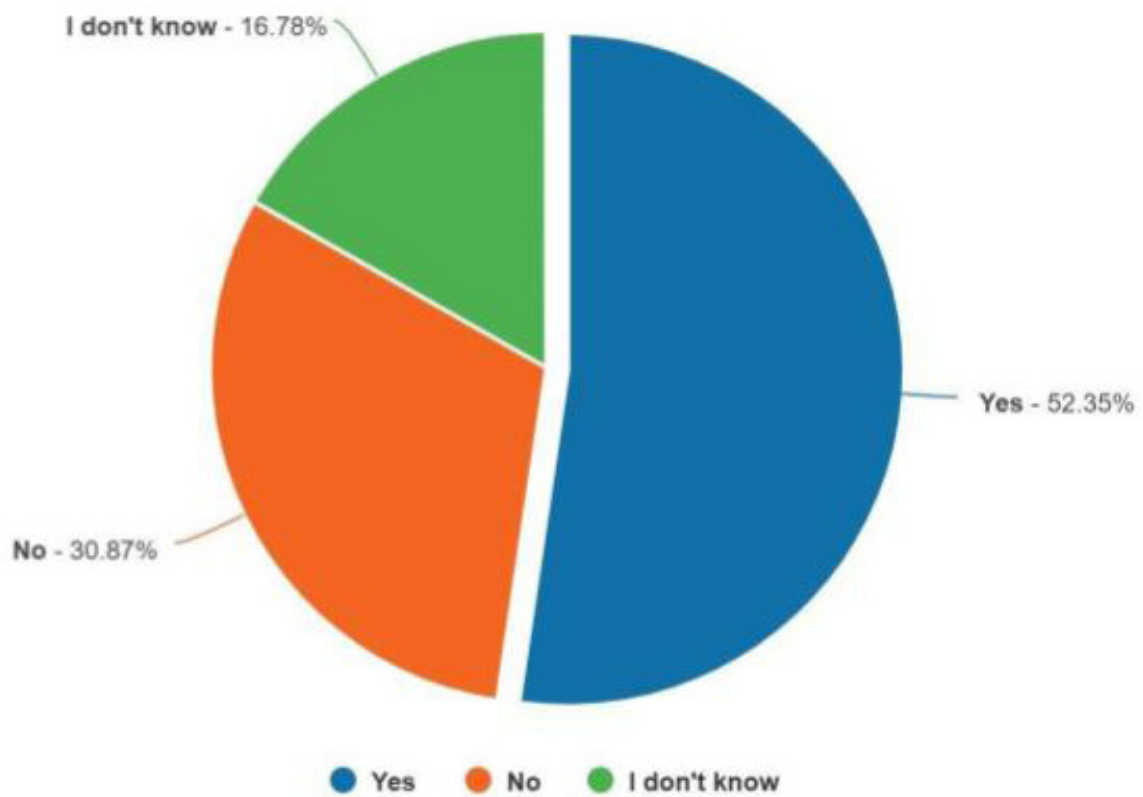
1 genderfluid

# What is your ethnicity?



- Arab
- Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi
- Asian / Asian British: Chinese
- Asian / Asian British: Indian
- Asian / Asian British: Pakistani
- Asian / Asian British: any other Asian / Asian British background
- Black / Black British: African
- Black / Black British: Caribbean
- Black / Black British: any other Black / Black British background
- Mixed multiple ethnic groups: Asian and white
- Mixed multiple ethnic groups: Black African and white
- Mixed multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and white
- Mixed multiple ethnic groups: any other mixed multiple ethnic groups
- White: British / English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish
- Other (please specify):

# Are you registered with an NHS dentist?





# Together we're making health and social care better



**healthwatch**  
York

Healthwatch York  
Priory Street Centre  
15 Priory Street  
York YO1 6ET

📱 [www.healthwatchyork.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchyork.co.uk)  
☎ 01904 621133  
✉ [healthwatch@yorkcvs.org.uk](mailto:healthwatch@yorkcvs.org.uk)  
📘 @healthwatchyork

modedesign.tv