

Views and experiences of accessing NHS services in Coventry

GPs, Pharmacy, and more ...



August 2024

Contents

Introduction	3
Who we spoke to	3
What we found	5
Access to health care overall	5
Mental health.....	6
GP services	6
Pharmacy services	10
Tests and scans	11
Where do you get information about which service to use?	12
Conclusions	14
Recommendations	15
Acknowledgements	15
Appendices	16
More about participants.....	16

Introduction

Healthwatch Coventry is the independent champion for NHS and social care.

The Healthwatch Coventry mission is to hear experiences of NHS and social care services. An important part of our mission is to enable those in Coventry who do not have strong voice or are ignored to share their experiences of barriers to accessing care.

We gather the experiences of local people on an ongoing basis through community outreach which includes stalls at the City of Coventry Health Centre, Central library, and community settings.

Between April and June 2024, we carried out additional outreach in other community settings including a carers event, a support session with Inini, an organisation working with refugees and asylum seekers with their mental health and Out in Cov, a group working with refugees and asylum seekers who are LGBTQ+.

We complete surveys with people to get a snapshot of their experiences during this time, covering the areas of:

- Overall feeling about access to NHS services
- GP services – how easy people find it to access services
- Mental health support
- Pharmacy services
- Tests and scans
- Getting information

The Pharmacy First scheme was launched in January 2024¹ so we have included questions about people's use of community pharmacy services.

Who we spoke to

We spoke to 140 people about their experiences of local NHS services. We spoke to more women than men and a higher proportion of those we spoke to said they had poor physical health.

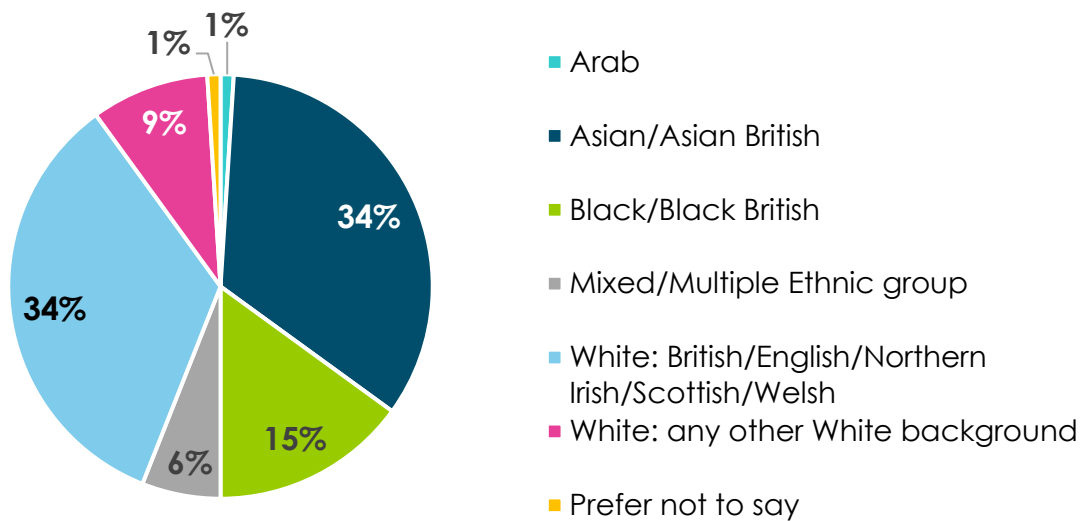
- 37% were male, 60% female and 3% preferred not to say.
- Nearly a fifth, 19% said they had quite poor physical health.

¹ <https://www.healthwatchcoventry.co.uk/advice-and-information/2024-02-12/what-can-pharmacy-first-scheme-do-me> viewed 19 July 2017

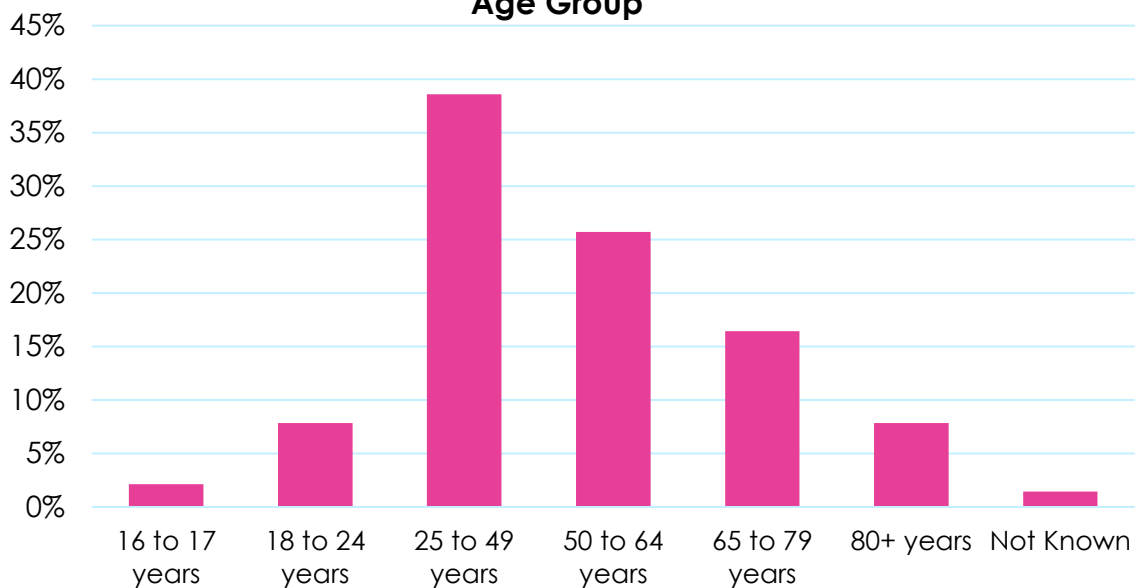
- 65 people (46%) said they had a long-term health condition.
- 26 people (19%) considered themselves disabled.
- 22 people (16%) said they were a family/unpaid carer for someone else.

The people we spoke to were diverse, reflecting the population of Coventry.

Ethnicity



Age Group

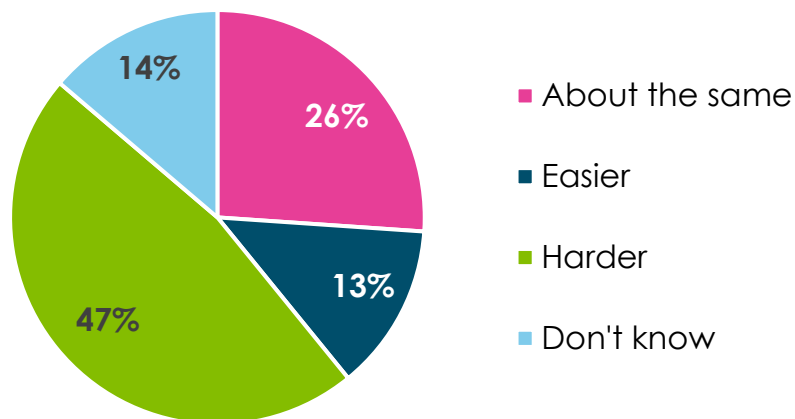


What we found

Access to health care overall

- 47% felt access to healthcare overall was getting harder in Coventry. This is 2% less than in our last survey sample where 49% said it was getting harder.

What is your rating of access to healthcare?



Reasons why people felt it was getting harder to access healthcare centred on:

- Access to GP services
- Waiting times
- Concerns about demand versus capacity

Some were aware of staffing issues or other bigger picture problems impacting on access.

Given up looking for help for mental health services. Hard to use GP services. App is poor to make appointments. Want a general health check and check bloods and hormone levels as over 40 but finding this difficult to arrange. Also, Mental Health assistance so poor I gave up - had one appointment - very poor.

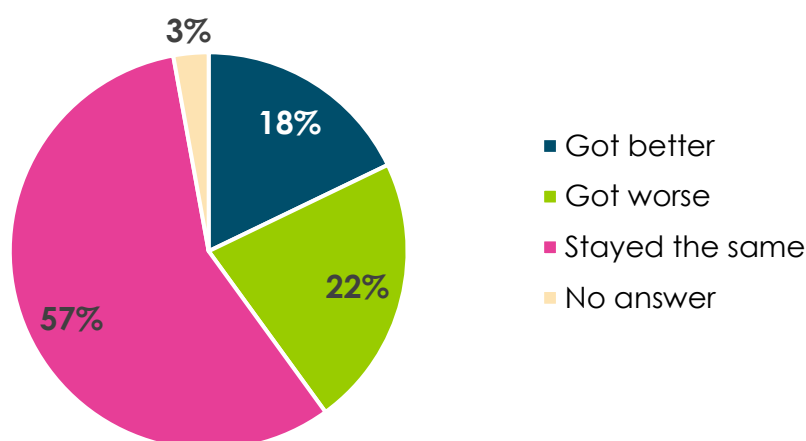
Just seems like you can't see anyone for years

Longer wait times and greater demand for services

It's getting worse. 5 weeks to get dental appointment. 4 weeks waiting to see GP"

Mental health

- For the majority, 57%, their mental health had stayed the same and 31 (22%) people felt it had got worse
- 33 people said they had sought extra professional support for their mental health.



“I believe the appointment dates or gaps between appointment and illness is for longer than it should be, [when] suffering from mental health problems”

GP services

People were registered with different GP practices (see appendices for more information). Three people were not registered with a GP.

A high number of the people we spoke to had been in touch with their GP practice recently. 55% had contact with their GP practice within the previous month and a further 19% had been in contact with their GP practice in the previous three months.

Last contact with GP practice	Count	%
In the last week	42	30%
In the last month	35	25%
Within the last three months	26	19%
Within the last six months	9	6%
Over six months ago	19	14%
No answer or not registered	9	6%
Total	140	100%

- 54% said getting through to their GP practice on the phone as difficult or very difficult and 35% found this easy or very easy. This is a change from

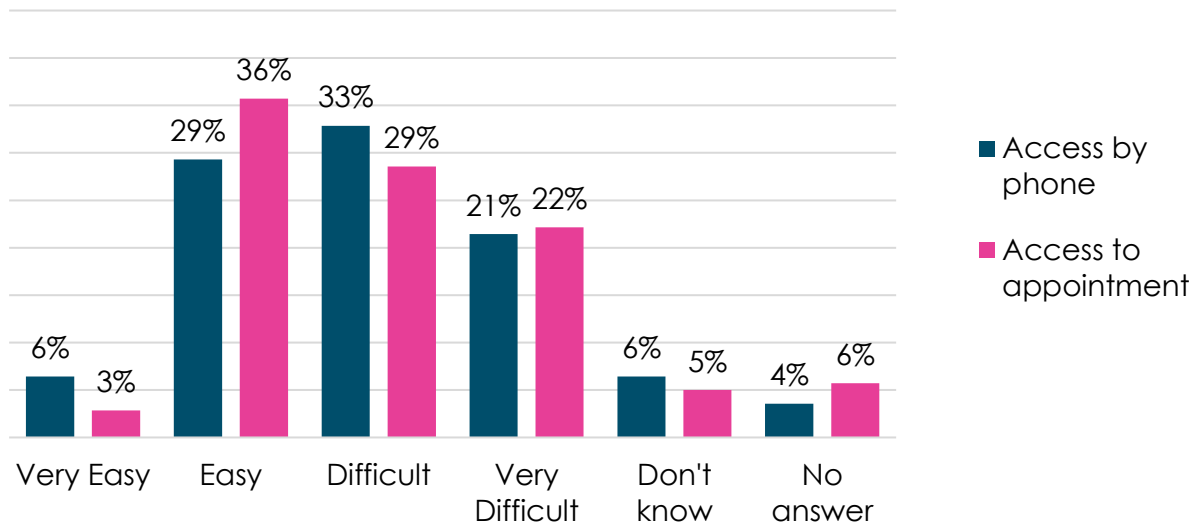
what we found in January - March 2024, as now more people are finding getting through on the phone to be difficult.

Issues people described include long phone queues, having to call at 8 am when this was time they were at work or going to work and long periods of time waiting on the phone.

- ☞ *Have to call early to get an appointment often left on hold and have to go in person to get appointment*
- ☞ *It's not very good that you can only phone from 8 am then in a queue of 20-30. Not convenient time when it's on the way to work at that time*
- ☞ *I can easily contact the GP service and book an appointment. I get the appropriate help. I am happy with my care I get.*
- ☞ *Lack of available appointments, often get referred to other surgeries for OOH [out of hours] appointments, over phone appointment first and then face to face - time consuming*

➤ In total 51% found getting an appointment at their GP practice was very difficult or difficult and 39% found getting an appointment very easy or easy.

Access to GP services



- ☞ *We can never get an appointment. When we do it's a phone appointment. Can never get through on the phone*
- ☞ *Trying to get an appointment is so difficult, sometimes I give up*

It's become increasingly difficult to see the same doctor, or even a doctor at all in the last few years

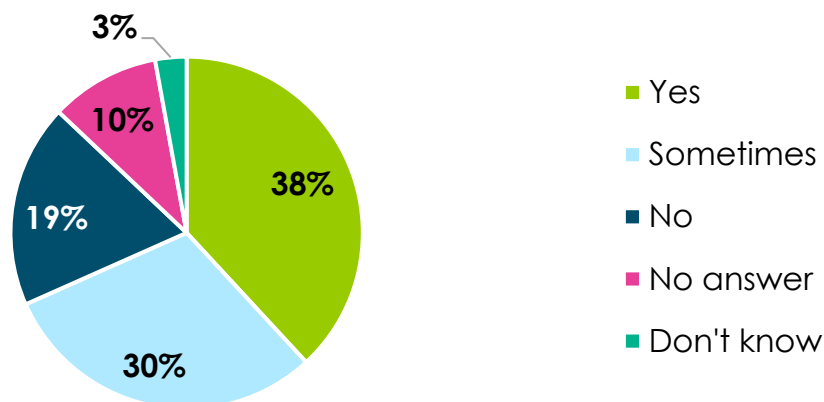
It's hard to get a doctor's appointment so we have to come to the walk in centre and waited 4 hours

Phone, online and face to face appointments

There was a mixed picture with people having different experiences about the format of GP appointments and if they thought this met their needs e.g. face to face or phone appointment etc.

38% felt it was as they wanted/needed, 30% said it sometimes was and 19% said it was not as they wanted.

Are appointments delivered in a way that works for you?



A third of people (48) expressed negative sentiments and comments about their GP practice.

Issues highlighted include a lack of continuity of care, and length of time to wait before an appointment is available, examples are:

I had talked to my doctor over the phone. I couldn't understand part of the conversation

Not offer the specific time/ it was only calls and we should wait all day to receive calls

I really not happy because my GP is not work well, I am sick, but they don't help me

I asked for face-to-face appointment, they given one appointment on the phone and given me 3 weeks' time for in-person appointment

- 🗨️ *Nowadays face to face GP appointments are none but telephone appointments easier*
- 🗨️ *Very hard to get a face to face diagnosis I was misdiagnosed and had to go to drop in centre*
- 🗨️ *no regular doctor ...No continuous healthcare*
- 🗨️ *It's so bad, it is very difficult. I wanted to see my own GP, kept seeing Student GPs, as main GP left practice*

Other issues highlighted included issues related to medication, accessing services when unable to get to the GP practice and a concern about a GP practice building.

- 🗨️ *Everything is a battle to sort - from obtaining an appointment to sorting out medication*
- 🗨️ *Delay signing prescriptions by doctor, sending prescription to chemist, slow service at chemist, giving out DOB and address in front of other people at chemist, long call waiting at GP*
- 🗨️ *Told that they only visit permanently housebound patients at home. Told to ring ambulance if not well enough to manage. Ambulance service said that they wouldn't be able to get to me for 48 hours and that I just needed an appointment with GP not hospitalisation. Got nowhere with it*
- 🗨️ *GP Practice could do with some investment. i.e. old and in need of repair*

Examples of positive feedback are:

Access/ flexibility	🗨️ <i>I can easily contact the GP service and book an appointment. I get the appropriate help. I am happy with my care I get.</i>
	🗨️ <i>Fast and easy to get an appointment whenever needed</i>
	🗨️ <i>We get to book appointments online which I think is far better than calling them as it might be quite difficult getting an appointment</i>
Positive feeling - patient focus	🗨️ <i>I feel like it's more difficult than it needs to be in many areas, but I am grateful that my son gets priority appointments because of his asthma.</i>
	🗨️ <i>My GP is pretty professional, calm and patient</i>

	<p>Doctor was nice, very helpful</p>
	<p>They've always been there for me, shortage of mental health services overall</p>

Pharmacy services

- 80% thought it was easy to visit a community pharmacy
- 62% had visited a local pharmacy within the previous six months.
- 55% said they were likely or very likely to go to a pharmacy for minor illness help. However, 32% said they were unlikely to do this or did not think they would do this at all.
- 62% rated their experience of community pharmacy positively. Nine people said they had a bad experience.

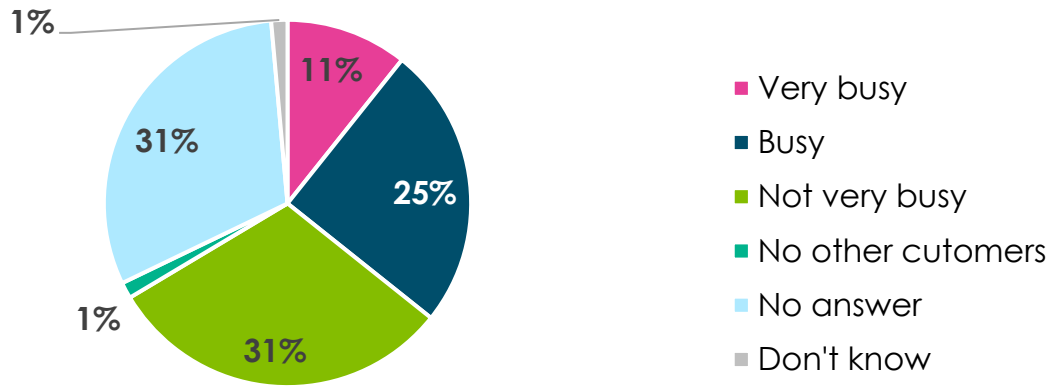
What people used pharmacies for

We asked people to select multiple categories to show for what they used pharmacy. Collecting or buying medication was the most common reason for visiting a pharmacy.

To collect prescription medication	76
To buy over the counter medication	34
For health advice or information	21
For help with new medicines	3
For emergency contraception service	4
For something else please say what	7
No answer	44

How busy was the pharmacy?

With recent pharmacy closures and reduction in opening hours we asked how busy people found the pharmacy when they visited, 32% said it was not busy and 36% said it was busy.



Tests and scans

Overall people who had experienced a test or scan were mainly positive about these.

Sentiment about tests and scans	%
Positive	67%
Mixed	11%
Negative	4%
Neutral	15%
Unclear	2%
Grand Total	100%

Blood tests

52 of the 76 people who had used the blood taking service rated their experience positively.

Rating of blood tests	Count
Very Good	26
Good	26
OK	21
Poor	2
Very bad	1
Grand Total	76

“I didn't wait for so long; it was quick and easy”

“Stoney Stanton road bloods good but getting longer to get appointments”

“CoCHC [blood taking] to adopt a booking system machine i.e. using DOB etc. Saves queues”

“The service was very good. But I need to choose a chemist far away”

“[Blood tests] are challenge, how to book online”

29 people had received an x-ray and 17 rated this as good or very good experience and 7 rated it as ‘OK’.

“X-ray and CT scan - Very good service just a bit slow”

27 people had received a heart test and 12 rated this as good or very good experience and 9 rated it as ‘OK’. However, two people said they had a poor experience of a heart test.

15 people had experienced a colonoscopy or gastroscopy test, the findings are as below:

Rating of Colonoscopy/Gastroscopy tests	Count
Very Good	3
Good	3
OK	7
Poor	2
Very bad	0
Grand Total	15

“Staff were rude to me and saying horrible things upsetting me. They showed no empathy when I was in a lot of severe pain after the colonoscopy and were more interested in getting me out of hospital than looking after my wellbeing”.

Where do you get information about which service to use?

Getting information to help people find which NHS services to use is important and can be challenging, so we asked people which sources of information they used.

- 106 people had used the NHS website, and 65 people had used NHS 111 by phone or online.

- 96 people said they had got information about which NHS service to use from their GP practice
- 74 people said they got their information from friends and family.

Information source	Count
NHS website	106
NHS 111 online	29
NHS 111 phone	36
Social media	20
GP practice	96
Friends/family	74

Digital access/exclusion

- 8% had no access to the Internet and 5% relied on public or work access to go on the internet.
- 84% used a mobile phone or home Internet access.
- Of the 11 people who had no access to the internet, eight people were from Asian, black or minority ethnic groups of different ages, and three were white British between 64 and 80 years plus old.

💬 *"I think it's getting harder for the older generation because everything is mostly done online".*

Access to the internet	%	Count
Yes, on home Wi-fi/ broadband	75%	105
Yes, on a mobile network	9%	13
No access to the internet	8%	11
Yes, on public Wi-fi	3.5%	5
Yes, at work	1%	1
No answer	3.5%	5
Total	100%	140

Two people commented about the closure of Prescription Ordering Direct service (POD).

“The POD closed down, now I struggle ordering medication”

“Coventry POD closed - Alternative app difficult to navigate”

Conclusions

Healthwatch Coventry has been asking local people about their feelings about overall access to local NHS services and to GP services for 18 months. We have reached diverse groups of people to hear what they think about local NHS Services.

Whilst there has been some change in how people rate access to services from quarter to quarter with some improvement since last year. However, a significant proportion of people are saying that access to some services can be difficult for them.

Since the beginning of 2024 just under half think access to health services is getting harder for them in Coventry. At this point last year 62% felt it was getting harder.

A higher proportion of the people we spoke to this quarter said they had poor health, so they are more likely to be seeking medical support.

The number of people saying it is difficult or very difficult to get through to their GP practice on the phone has increased to slightly over 50%. There was a small decrease in the number who said they found getting an appointment difficult – this is also slightly over 50%. At this time last year this was rated at 58%.

19% said the format of the GP appointment was not right for them, this is a small increase from 14% in the last period.

People feel positively towards community pharmacy although this has not yet fully translated into a willingness to go to pharmacies instead of GP practice (e.g. for Pharmacy First Services).

There was high use of the NHS website as a trusted source of information. However, this is not necessarily available to those who do not have personal or home-based internet access.

GPs are a significant source of information. Friends and family are also a source of information for many.

Although 33 people out of 140 were seeking additional support for their mental health, there were no clear reasons or identifiable characteristics as to why this would be.

Recommendations

- For local NHS managers and planners to reflect on the experiences we have gathered as evidence of the concerns of local people and the variance in experiences of different people and work to address this.
- For local NHS managers and planners to use this evidence as part of work to address inequality of access to GP services and broader health inequality in the local population.
- To acknowledge the report as part of wider evidence from Healthwatch Coventry and other organisations.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to the City of Coventry Health Centre (a multi-use NHS building), Coventry City Council Central Library and Library Services, for letting us use their spaces for a stand.

Thanks to all the people who took part in the survey and spoke to Healthwatch Coventry.

Appendices

More about participants

Ethnic Group	%	Count
Arab	1%	1
Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi	2%	3
Asian / Asian British: Chinese	8%	11
Asian / Asian British: Indian	15%	21
Asian / Asian British: Pakistani	4%	5
Any other Asian / Asian British background	5%	7
Black / Black British: African	13%	18
Black / Black British: Caribbean	1%	2
Any other Black / Black British background	1%	2
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups background - any other	1%	1
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White	2%	3
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White	3%	4
White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh	34%	47
White: Any other White background	9%	12
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean & White	1%	1
Not known	1%	2
Total	100%	140

Sexual Orientation	%	Count
Heterosexual/Straight	72%	101
Lesbian/Gay woman	2%	3
Gay man	4%	5
Bisexual	3%	4
Asexual	2%	3
Prefer not to say	10%	14
Not Known	7%	10
Total	100%	140

Postcode	%
CV1	16%
CV2	12%
CV3	19%
CV4	11%
CV5	12%
CV6	22%
CV8	2%
Not known	6%
Total	100%

GP practices people were registered with:

Allesley Medical Centre	1
Allesley Park Medical Centre	1
Allesley Village Surgery	1
Alliance Teaching Practice	3
Broad Street Surgery	2
Broomsfield Park Surgery	3
Cheylesmore Surgery	2
Clay Lane Medical Centre	2
Dr Bano and Partners	3
Dr Princewill and Partners	2
Dr Sani and Partners	1
Edgwick Medical Centre	1
Engleton House Surgery	2
Forrest Medical Centre	11
Forum Health Centre	1
Gables Medicentre	1
George Eliot Medical Centre	3
Godiva Medical Centre	1
Harnall Lane Surgery	2
Henley Green Medical Centre	3
Holbrooks Health Team	2
Holyhead Surgery	1
Jubilee Health Centre	3
Kensington Road Surgery	5
Kenyon Medical Centre	8
Limbrick Wood Surgery	1
Mansfield Medical Centre	2
Meridian Practice	8
Moseley Avenue Surgery	4
Paradise Medical Centre	2
Park Leys Medical Centre	1
Phoenix Family Care	3
Priory Gate Practice	5
Springfield Medical Centre	1
St George's Road Surgery	3
Stoke Aldermoor Medical Centre	2
Walsgrave Health Centre	1
Willenhall Oak Medical Centre	1
Willenhall Primary Care 1	1
Windmill Road Surgery	3
Wolston Surgery	2
Woodend Health Centre	2
Woodside Medical Centre	5
Not Known/not registered	28
Grand Total	140



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