

Economic deprivation and access to healthcare in South Gloucestershire

Neighbourhood health and wellbeing insights – June
2026



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Introduction

Following feedback from both the South Gloucestershire's Local Advisory Group (LAG) and our independent research, we wanted to find out how healthcare access can be improved for people living in South Gloucestershire.

Our research across Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) shows that failing to accommodate individual access requirements and a lack of effective transport is a prevalent barrier to people receiving healthcare across the three areas (ref. 1).

In South Gloucestershire, public transport is important due to the area being 80% rural, compared to 20% urban (2). Members of the South Gloucestershire LAG told us there are 'pockets' of deprivation in South Gloucestershire that are often overlooked in research. The aim of this project was to understand how and why health outcomes suffer due to preventable, systemic barriers, such as lack of transportation to health services.

Local statistics

We used the 'South Gloucestershire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-29' to identify these communities and their obstacles. Below are some relevant statistics from the Strategy (2):

- Around 3% of people (9001) live in moderate economic deprivation.
- On average, people take less bus journeys compared to the rest of England and the South West.
- Adults cycle and/or walk to work less compared to the rest of England and the South West.
- Households in parts of Patchway, Kingswood and Cadbury Heath (amongst others) show more economic deprivation compared to the rest of South Gloucestershire.

The Strategy suggested ways in which health inequalities could be reduced in the year 2025-2026 (2):

- Involving the community in the decisions taken by the Health and Wellbeing Board
- Using resources effectively to provide more holistic support for people's needs

We wanted to see whether, in 2025, any changes have been made to improve access to healthcare services in South Gloucestershire.

Healthwatch feedback statistics

From our feedback data in the last 12 months, we received 21 pieces of feedback across BNSSG (two positive, the rest negative). Four pieces of feedback were from South Gloucestershire, 10 from North Somerset, and seven from Bristol.

This data contains feedback from various individuals regarding NHS services across BNSSG. Although limited, the data highlights a significant contrast between the high quality of clinical care and the systemic barriers patients face when trying to access that care. Focusing on South Gloucestershire, the data highlights a region struggling with the ripple effects of hospital closures and a fragmented public transport network.

Patients here are often forced into long, multi-stage journeys that turn routine medical appointments into day-long ordeals.

The feedback identifies specific "transport-disadvantaged" groups in South Glos:

- **Housebound individuals and wheelchair users:** Individuals report extreme difficulty booking and attending appointments, especially as some surgeries are shifting away from phone consultations back to in-person requirements.
- **The "Double Burden":** Patients with mobility issues often face a "double burden" – the physical pain of the journey and the financial stress of paying for taxis when public transport fails or is non-existent.

'Since the closure of Frenchay Hospital people in Kingswood have to travel to Yate walk in Centre which takes an hour on the bus and they only come every 2 hours, so it can take most of a day to get there and back.'

– Resident, South Glos

Co-produced recommendations

We asked people to suggest ways in which their access to NHS health services can be improved.

24% of respondents want appointments to be more easily available. 12% want more staff members in NHS services.

Many also want public transport access to be easier, such as having direct hospital-provided transport, free bus services, or simply more frequent bus services.

One respondent also suggested that NHS staff, like receptionists or doctors, should check whether someone can travel to their scheduled appointments. When this is not the case, NHS staff can try to accommodate transport or an appointment at a closer hospital or clinic.

“Appointment bookings for some health checks don't take into account whether you can get there easily by public transport from your home address. For example, I have been offered appointments in Yate which has no (bus) service at all from home.”

Other suggestions for positive changes included:

- More human-led services, and better phone call availability
- Increased funding into the NHS services
- Evening, weekend and video call GP appointments
- Simplified online booking system for appointments

One person had been satisfied with the help provided by the Juice Community Welcome Space in South Gloucestershire, but this is not accessible for them anymore due to changes in local bus routes.

A few people also wish for better continuity of care, as well as improved record keeping and patient record access.

“Talking to a human being and better patient record keeping between hospitals, medical centres and patients. Not all tests are available to patients so they cannot be proactive in their own treatment.”

“... make it easier to get an appointment face to face with a consistent G.P.”

A couple of respondents believe local targeted health awareness could be improved, so that people know where to go for specific support rather than overwhelming GP surgeries. More information should also be provided via post rather than online, for those who have limited access to technology.

“It’s not about the services available, it’s about educating people on the different ways to access services. Many just immediately call the GP surgery when they could seek help from elsewhere.”

This project noticed how the public’s perception of change is often dominated by ongoing issues around appointments and accessibility. By developing a communication framework that proactively links internal 'positive improvements' to the public’s primary concerns may help highlight changes that have taken place.

Without this explicit connection, strategic progress risks being overshadowed by persistent frustrations regarding appointment availability and accessibility.

What we did

We contacted multiple voluntary-sector organisations to help us gather their perspectives as professionals working with the local communities. We were unable to have in-depth conversations with professionals or members of the community as part of engagement work in Patchway and Kingswood.

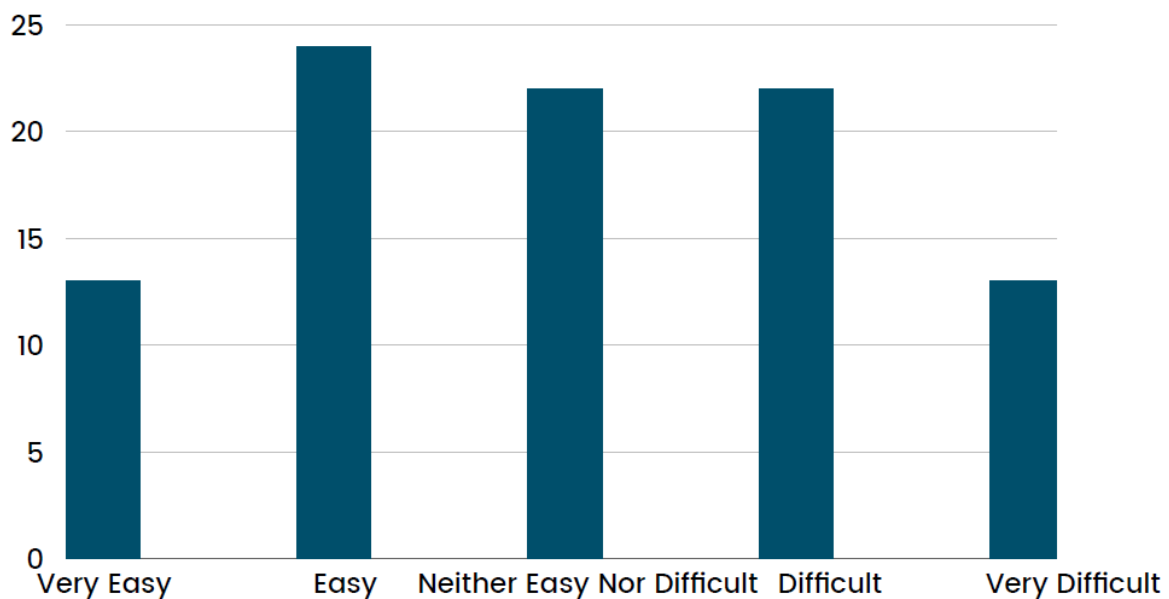
With the generous help of GP surgeries across South Gloucestershire, we were able to promote our short survey via text message, and the survey was shared online asking people about their experience of accessing healthcare, any changes they have benefited from and how they think access could be improved for them.

We received 94 responses.

What people told us

Difficulty accessing NHS services

In answer to how difficult it was for them to access the last NHS health service they had used, respondents found it generally easy, but answers were mixed.



60% of respondents did not have an 'Easy' or 'Very Easy' experience when trying to book or get to an appointment. Many of them gave a more detailed explanation:

- Long waiting times for an appointment or to speak to a member of staff from their GP surgery over the phone (17 respondents).
- Two out of these 17 respondents said they had to wait two weeks and one month respectively for a chance to see their GP.
- Two respondents shared they had to walk into the surgery in order to book an appointment, as this was not possible over the phone.
- Two respondents were not called back by their GP surgery.
- One respondent said their surgery is understaffed.

“I was waiting over a week to get the appointment, tried to call GP on Monday morning to confirm and called 17 times and still nobody answered.”

The majority of negative experiences were due to transport issues:

- Three people were dissatisfied with the public transportation to Southmead Hospital.
- Seven people complained of bus services not being frequent enough, having to take long journeys with multiple buses or not being able to get to appointments without having a car.

“I am reliant on public transport therefore any hospital appointment not in town is either impossible to get to direct or takes an age. We are not well serviced in Longwell Green.”

Three people said that even having a car does not make transport to services easier, as parking is scarce, especially for big hospitals like Southmead Hospital.

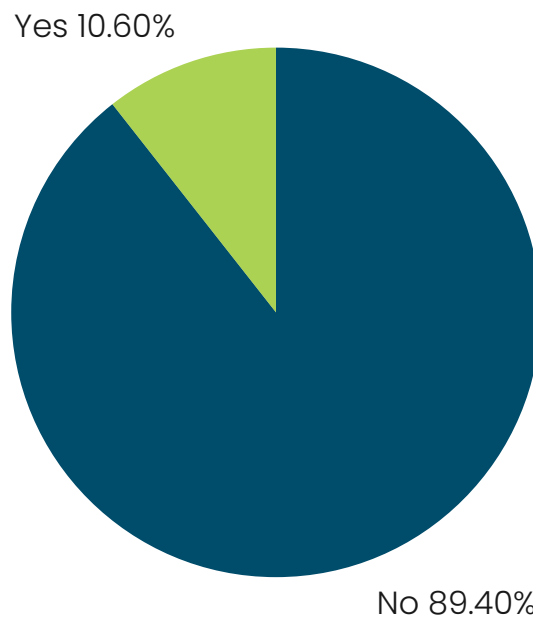
“Getting to Southmead Hospital is an absolute nightmare. (...) Considering this is now the main hospital, transport is appalling. Taxi is £25 each way and parking at the hospital is inadequate for the amount of people that now attend. It can take up to an hour to get parked.”

Some of those who found it easy to access NHS services said it was because they lived close to their GP surgery, they were able to use the NHS App or eConsult to book an appointment or were called back by their surgery within an appropriate timeframe.

Many residents in South Gloucestershire find it difficult to access NHS health services, mainly due to lack of effective and affordable public transport and due to long waiting times when trying to contact a GP surgery. Consistent with the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy, people living in Cadbury Heath and Kingswood find themselves unable to travel to GP surgeries and hospitals.

Changes implemented

We asked residents if they had noticed any changes in their local area that made it easier for them to access NHS health services. The majority (89.4%) answered ‘No’.



A few respondents expanded on their answer. The NHS App and online options such as eConsult have made it easier for people to book appointments, but this is not the case for those who are not able to set this up, such as some older people and people who do not have access to the internet. Two respondents were happy with the 'call back' system, and another praised the use of smaller community hospitals as clinics.

"I love being able to book regular bloods on the app as my work diary is difficult to manage."

From this we can assume that having reliable online and 'call back' systems to book appointments can help residents access healthcare services more quickly. We can see that existing facilities, such as community hospitals, can be an effective way to provide support to more isolated communities where public transportation is not available. Nonetheless, as most respondents did not notice any recent changes in their local areas, it is suggested that these improvements are not widespread across South Gloucestershire.

Limitations

we recognise how the population of South Gloucestershire is much larger than the group that took part in the survey (94) and that we engaged with and is therefore not representative. this piece of work is more a snapshot or insight piece that could help aid wider more extensive research and perhaps be a small but significant indicator of how people may be feeling in the area. We did not

collect information about the respondents' socio-economic status, and so do not know whether we have reached the more economically deprived households.

Next steps

People's responses suggest that there is a perception that changes have not been made to improve South Gloucestershire's access to health services, especially for those living in more economically deprived and isolated areas. This is contrary to the plans of the Strategy (2) mentioned above.

- Unreliable and expensive public transport remains one of the region's biggest barriers to healthcare, and people have told us this needs to be resolved.
- Providing service information via post may relieve the pressure on GP surgeries trying to deal with a great number of phone calls about people's various issues.
- Making the NHS booking system more accessible for those who struggle with technology may be a quick way of allowing people to book timely appointments.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the GP surgeries in South Gloucestershire that shared our online survey with their patients via text message.

References

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