

Victoria Walsh
Chief Officer
Healthwatch Worcestershire
Civic Centre
Queen Elizabeth Drive
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WR10 1PT

4 March 2026

Dear Victoria

RE: How patients access NHS information report

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the recommendations set out in Healthwatch's report regarding how patients access information. NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB) is committed to strengthening the way we communicate with our communities and welcome the feedback provided. The report has been shared with system partner communication leads via the Worcestershire Place Communications Cell and our collective responses to each recommendation are set out below.

1) Adopt a blended communication strategy

We recognise the importance of adopting a blended communication approach that reflects the varied preferences and needs of the Herefordshire and Worcestershire population. Digital platforms, including the NHS App and GP practice websites, are now central to how many people access information. However, we are clear that these must be complemented by effective non-digital channels such as printed materials, community outreach and face-to-face engagement.

Work is already underway with all system partners to ensure that communications align with the Accessible Information Standard where possible, including the provision of easy-read and alternative formats. We will continue to develop our monitoring of inclusion metrics to ensure that increasing digital delivery does not inadvertently widen health inequalities.

2) Clarify and promote the purpose of less understood NHS services

We acknowledge the need to improve public understanding of services that are less well recognised, such as GP Out of Hours and Minor Injuries Units (MIUs). While awareness of core services like GPs and A&E remains high, we accept that confidence in choosing the right urgent care option is variable, particularly among people with learning disabilities.

MIUs in particular continue to be an area of focus for us and their promotion has been a key part of our winter communication plan this year. We routinely promote our MIUs through a combination of digital and traditional media to maximise awareness and ensure we are reaching people who may not use social media or who may experience digital exclusion. In addition, we have utilised community groups and our local MPs to support broader engagement and ensure these services are promoted as widely as possible. An FAQs section is available on Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust's website to support patient awareness of the range of injuries and conditions that can be treated at Worcestershire's MIUs.

Collectively we are focused on developing clearer, plain language information and guidance supported by visual materials and digital content, and we are promoting these resources through GP practices and our respective website and social media channels. There remains further scope to strengthen this work through community venues available to us in Worcestershire to ensure all communities feel confident navigating urgent and emergency care pathways.

3) Increase awareness and accessibility of the NHS app

Increasing awareness and accessibility of the NHS App continues to be a priority for us. Although awareness pleasingly appears to be strong across much of the Worcestershire population, disparities remain for some groups, for example people with learning disabilities. Promotion through GP practices, MIUs and outpatient clinics is already in progress, as well as various community engagement activities including working with local libraries as part of a national NHS App library partnership.

We are also committed to testing usability with people who experience health inequalities and to maintaining traditional communication and engagement routes such as hosting regular NHS App drop-in sessions for people without access to, or confidence in using, digital technology.

4) Use data to guide decisions

We agree that communication activity should be informed by robust insight and performance data. The ICB and system partners do already review analytics from digital platforms, including the NHS App and their respective websites, to better understand patterns of use and areas of high demand. These insights are being used to prioritise content development and plans, such as our recent WorkWell advertising campaign.

We will, however, continue to strengthen how this intelligence is shared across system partners to support consistent, evidence-based messaging across the system.

5) Work with partner organisations to communicate with hard-to-reach audiences

Partnership working remains fundamental to reaching communities who may otherwise be underserved. Collaboration with local authorities and voluntary and community sector organisations is ongoing to promote key messages and provide information in accessible formats through trusted community leaders. We remain committed to the principles of co-production wherever possible to ensure that materials that we develop are relevant, clear and accessible, and we recognise that sustained effort will be required to further reduce

inequalities in access to information and services. We will continue to progress this through both our Worcestershire Place Communications Cell and our Worcestershire Engagement Network.

I hope this provides assurance that collectively we are working together in Worcestershire to improve the way that people access information about NHS services. We do however acknowledge that there is a lot more for us to do, and that continued focus and collaboration will be essential to ensure that all residents can easily access, understand and act on NHS information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Grove', written over a horizontal line.

Tom Grove

Director of Communications and Engagement
NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire ICB

Copy to

- Richard Haynes, Director of Communications and Engagement (Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust)
- Fi March Cormie, Head of Marketing and Communications, Herefordshire and Worcestershire Health and Care NHS Trust