

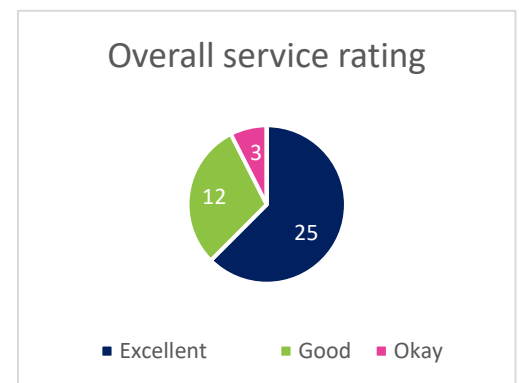
# Winter Access Funds Additional Appointments Evaluation Report – March 2022

## Overview

As part of North West London’s Primary Care Winter Access Fund (WAF), funding was made available for a number of WAF additional appointment hubs across Primary Care Network (PCN) level and at Practice level. These offered additional capacity and extended opening hours, allowing patients to have appointments at the weekend. The aim was to reduce pressure on other services, and to make appointments available for patients who had been waiting to receive face-to-face care. In many cases, the WAF additional appointment hubs were used by patients with long-term conditions who needed to have routine appointments and who may have faced delays to treatment due to the pandemic.

Healthwatch Brent have been asked to evaluate four weekend WAF additional appointment hubs to determine how effective they have been. These hubs were Mapesbury Medical Group, Freuchen Medical Centre, Jai Medical Centre at practice level, and Park Royal Medical Practice at PCN level. We went out and met with patients using these services to find out more about their experiences. In total we met with 40 service users across the four hubs.

The response from patients was overwhelmingly positive, with the majority saying that they were happy with the service provided and that they found weekend appointments more convenient. From 40 patients who we spoke to as part of our service evaluation, 100% said that they found weekend appointments more useful, 95% said that they found it easy to book an appointment and 93% said that they would rate their overall experience as excellent or good. We have included a breakdown of overall feedback below.



|  | Yes | No | N/A |
|--|-----|----|-----|
| Did you find it easy to book a weekend appointment?  | 38  | 2  |     |
| Have you tried to get a face-to-face appointment before being offered a weekend appointment? | 23  | 17 |     |
| Were you happy to be offered a weekend appointment?  | 40  | 0  |     |
| Is a weekend appointment more convenient for you?  | 40  | 0  |     |
| Were the reception staff friendly?   | 38  | 2  |     |
| Were you offered translating services if needed?   | 8   | 12 | 20  |
| Did the health professional listen to you?   | 40  | 0  |     |
| Did you have enough time to talk about your condition?                                       | 38  | 2  |     |

## Individual practice findings

### Mapesbury Medical Group (Windmill Main Branch)

All patients interviewed at Mapesbury Medical Group were very satisfied with the service they received from the WAF additional appointment hub. They were pleased to have the opportunity to book a weekend appointment, felt that they were listened to by the medical professional and said that staff were polite.

The WAF additional appointment hub allowed patients to get an appointment more quickly than would otherwise have been possible. 8 out of 10 of the patients had tried to get a face-to-face appointment previously, and the extended opening hours meant that this was now possible. Previously, these patients may have expected to wait up to two-weeks for their appointment.

Patients had been booked into weekend appointments through a variety of different methods:

- Patients with long-term conditions had been contacted directly by practice staff to offer them a weekend appointment
- Some patients had been offered a weekend slot when calling reception to book a face-to-face appointment
- One patient had become aware of the service when walking past the practice at the weekend and realising it was open.

The weekend staff at Mapesbury Medical Group included a Practice Nurse who could answer general medical queries, carry out nursing procedures and perform a variety of screening receptionists. They were supported by a Reception Manager and team of Receptionists and Office Administrators to answer non-medical queries.

Half of the patients we spoke to were under the age of 50, representing a younger demographic than those at the other WAF additional appointment hubs. Three identified as carers, and three had accessed translation services for their appointment.

### **Freuchen Medical Centre**

Overall, patients were happy with the service received at the Freuchen Medical Centre WAF additional appointment hub. 9 out of 10 stated that their experience was excellent or good, and 8 out of 10 said that staff were polite. Several of the people we spoke to said that they had struggled to get a face-to-face appointment previously, but that the availability of weekend appointments made it much easier.

The majority also found it easy to book an appointment, although a small number of respondents noted that the experience of booking an appointment could have been easier. Comments included:

- “It is difficult making an appointment over the phone; but when I come into the surgery it is easier.”
- “Making an appointment is not easy. They need to have a member of staff or volunteer who can speak Somali; that would help because I don’t understand them sometimes.”

Most patients accessing a weekend appointment had been contacted directly by the GP surgery to inform them that these appointments were now available, either by telephone call or text message. Patients said that they thought it was an excellent service because it made it easier for them to make an appointment. They also said that they had a good experience at the practice, and that it was easier to get blood tests. However one patient also noted that there was still a long waiting time if follow-up tests were required.

### **Park Royal Medical Practice**

The Park Royal Medical Practice hub served patients from several different GP practices across the Harness Care Primary Care Network (PCN), including, The Sunflower Medical Centre, Church End Medical Practice, The Surgery on Harrow Road, and Freuchen Medical Centre.

Overall, patients were very satisfied with their experiences and found it very convenient. Several respondents had found it difficult to book a regular GP appointment, and noted that getting an appointment through the WAF additional appointment hub was “much easier”.

Because the hub served patients across the PCN, patients were not necessarily able to see their regular GP. However, this was viewed as a suitable trade-off for being able to receive quicker care. One patient noted: "I prefer to see my own GP, but it was very good to see a doctor at the weekend."

Patients described staff as friendly and professional. When asked if they were satisfied with their experience one thought it was excellent, while seven thought it was good, and two thought it was okay. Most patients had been informed about the availability of weekend appointments by their GP, while a smaller number were told by family or friends.

One patient did share that, although the hub was able to see them quickly, it still took a long time for them to get the results from their tests.

### **Jai Medical Centre**

Jai Medical Centre used their weekend access appointments as an opportunity to offer more proactive care for most vulnerable patients, including elderly people and babies. The practice already carries out home visits for patients who are unable to attend the surgery but offering weekend appointments meant that patients could arrange to visit the GP at a time when their family member was available to support them.

For the elderly, a comprehensive geriatric assessment was completed, followed by a structured medication review focussing on polypharmacy and reduction in inappropriate prescribing. The GP then concluded with a full clinical assessment including review of social, physical and mental health factors. The surgery felt that this integrated approach to care, across the multi-disciplinary team, yielded excellent outcomes for their patients in terms of improving patient safety by focussing on holistic management – and this view was supported by the feedback of patients we spoke to. A nurse led clinic ran simultaneously, which centred on child immunisations and smears, again targeting those groups which were impacted by lack of face-to-face services during the pandemic.

Satisfaction levels at Jai Medical Centre were very high, and all ten people we spoke to said that they were very satisfied, that staff were friendly and that they were given enough time to speak about their condition. Several patients mentioned that they had struggled to see a doctor face-to-face previously – in one case an individual had not been able to see the doctor in two years – so the WAF additional appointment hub was seen as a welcome addition.

Practice staff had proactively contacted patients to recommend weekend appointments where they felt it was appropriate, and this was appreciated by the

patients. One patient stated: “My daughter is disabled, and the doctor visited my home, and he suggested a weekend appointment.” Another said that: “I am 87 years old recovering from a stroke and I have disabled daughter, this weekend appointment has helped me so much.”

The clinicians also shared positive feedback about their involvement, noting the fulfilment they felt because of delivering the service.

## Conclusion

Overall, our evaluation found the WAF additional appointment hubs to be highly successful for patients, with the vast majority of patients praising both the convenience of access and the quality of the service that they received. The WAF additional appointment hubs were particularly successful when they were used to target specific cohorts of patients, with practice staff proactively reaching out to patients who they felt may benefit from a weekend appointment – such as those with long-term health needs, or who needed support from a family member to attend the practice. Jai Medical Centre’s innovative approach to caring for elderly patients was particularly successful, and we would recommend that other practices adopt this approach.

In most cases, patients we spoke to found that booking an appointment through the WAF additional appointment hubs was significantly easier than trying to get a regular face-to-face appointment. In many cases, the hubs allowed them to receive treatment that they had been waiting to access for some time. Even in cases where patients were seeing a GP outside of their usual practice, they were happy to have the opportunity to receive treatment more rapidly. Some patients did note that, although the WAF additional appointment hubs meant that they had been able to book an appointment more quickly, they would still have to wait a long time for follow-up care or additional tests. This suggested that, while one-off weekend appointments were appreciated, patients wanted to see them as part of a wider commitment to improved access.





Healthwatch Brent

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