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LLAIS GWENT: ENGAGEMENT AT GP SURGERIES IN GWENT FEBRUARY 2025



**People's feedback about their access to GP Practices
in Gwent**



In February 2025, Llais made a number of representations and conducted a series of on-site engagements at various GP Practices across Gwent, to gather feedback from the community regarding their experiences with accessing services. The aim was to understand the challenges faced by people and to ensure their voices are heard.

This was driven by us being made aware of concerns about access to GP services towards the end of 2024 by people and communities. Of particular concern were issues reported to us relating to practices managed by the GP Partnership of Dr Ahmed and Dr Allinson, and E-Harley Street Primary Care Solutions – a management company set up by the GP partners with responsibility for the administration of their practices.

We will continue our on-site engagement exercises at other General Practices across Gwent to gain a balanced view of people's access to services.



We organised to go to the following practices across Gwent:

GP Practice:	Borough:	Visited:
Brynmawr Medical Practice	Blaenau Gwent	18.12.24
Pontypool Medical Centre (Main Surgery)	Torfaen	13.01.25
Pontypool Medical Centre (New Inn Surgery)	Torfaen	13.01.25
Pontypool Medical Centre (Goytre Surgery)	Monmouthshire	13.01.25
Bevan Health & Wellbeing Centre (Tredegar Medical Practice)	Blaenau Gwent	14.01.25
Aberbeeg Medical Centre	Blaenau Gwent	15.01.25
Blaenavon Medical Practice	Torfaen	16.01.25
Lliswerry Medical Centre	Newport	16.01.25
Rhymney Integrated Health & Social Care Centre (Meddygfa Cwm Rhymni Practice)	Caerphilly	17.01.25
Meddygfa Gelligaer Surgery	Caerphilly	17.01.25
Bryntirion Surgery (Main Surgery)	Caerphilly	31.01.25
Markham Medical Centre	Caerphilly	31.01.25



Across all GP Practices we attended, it was clear that most people struggled to access GP appointments via telephone, often waiting long periods of time to get through. By the time the phone is answered, appointments are often fully booked, requiring people to try again the next day. However, when people do manage to get an appointment to see a clinician, most are happy with the care and treatment received.

Below is a summary of feedback received at each GP Practice we attended:

Brynmawr Medical Practice:

People were eager to share their views with us. Unfortunately, people told us they struggled to make an appointment at the practice. When waiting in the queue on the telephone, quite often there are 30 people in the queue. When they eventually get through, they are told there are no appointments available. However, people told us that when they can get an appointment, the nurses and doctors are "great," although people would like some continuity of clinicians as many are locums.

We were told there had been instances when the practice shuts at 4pm due to a lack of clinicians. A notice on the entrance door notified patients of the 4pm closure. It was noted by one patient that anyone with an appointment after 4pm are not notified and when they turn up, the surgery is shut. There is no information about what the patient should do next, so they have to go through the whole process of getting an appointment again.

Whilst engaging with people at this practice, there was a sense of community concern. People felt worried about others accessing the practice, some people told us, "People are going to die."

"Since May/June (2024) there has been a decline in the service"

"Appalling, no continuity of care"

"Every time you see a doctor; you have to start from the beginning"

Pontypool Medical Centre (Main Surgery):

We were told by people at this practice that they find it difficult to get an appointment, with some describing it a “nightmare” to get through on the telephone. People told us the Doctors and Nurses are “lovely” and “great.”

Some people told us of the issues they experience with some receptionists being “unhelpful” and “impatient.”

“Terrible – I can’t get a routine appointment when I come once a month for my medical needs. Always late and often do not have the injection that I need. It takes ten minutes to queue to check-in for my appointment. The Nurse is lovely, just a poorly run surgery”

“Trying to get an appointment is a nightmare. You get cut off when you’ve been on the phone for an hour – it’s very frustrating. There are not enough doctors for the volume of people in the area. It’s a worry when you need to see a doctor and you can’t get an appointment for that day”

“Mental health needs to be taken more seriously as on several occasions my partner was told by a doctor that he didn’t look depressed. This caused him to not want to get mental health support”

Pontypool Medical Centre (New Inn Surgery):

In common with the Main Surgery in Pontypool, people told us of their struggles to get an appointment. People spent long periods of time on the telephone trying to get through.

One person told us they had booked an appointment to see a doctor but when they arrived, they were informed that there were no doctors on site, so they were turned away.

“It’s taken one month for an urgent blood test”

“The service is terrible. I’ve got an ongoing issue with my iron levels, and I have been unable to get an appointment to get it checked for the last six months. Doctors don’t call back; receptionists are rude, and I’m constantly made to feel like I should continue to suffer as there are no appointments available at all”

"My experience with the staff at New Inn has always been pretty good. The problem that we have is that we have poor access to doctors. I worry that at the time in my life when I may start to need the NHS, it is no longer there for me"

Pontypool Medical Centre (Goytre Surgery):

A frustration shared by many people at this practice was that they had to travel to the branch surgery in New Inn to receive their vaccination. Most of these people told us they had mobility issues but were still sent to the other practice.

Most patients were happy with the service they received from this practice. We were told this surgery provides a pharmacy service which was positively spoken about by people.

"I am very happy with my experiences with this branch surgery. I feel very fortunate as unlike the main surgery in Pontypool, it's much easier to get through on the phone – you can ring and be the 4th caller on the line, whereas Pontypool you could be 40th in the queue and not get an appointment"

"A good surgery but the practice is worse since being taken over. A company has taken over and now I don't see the same GP each time I visit"

"I had an appointment as my legs were weeping. I went to the surgery and saw a nurse but there were no dressings available. I waited for the dressings to arrive at the surgery, but they never did. I had to queue outside in the cold to get an appointment"

Bevan Health & Wellbeing Centre (Tredegar Medical Practice):

People told us they struggled to park at this centre. Others told us they were pleased with the care and treatment received from clinicians. There were also some difficulties in accessing appointments at this practice.

"The Receptionists, Nurses, HCA, and GP's I have encountered over the past 7 months have been so professional, working under immense pressures and short staffing. A credit to the surgery, thank you"

Aberbeeg Medical Centre:

People at this surgery told us that staff were great, but they found it difficult to book appointments. One person told us their elderly mother booked a home visit, but a GP "never arrived."

Staff told us that there had been issues with locum doctors who had cancelled their clinics at short notice, due to not being paid.

"Hard to get appointments but eventually do. All receptionists are helpful and try their best. Overall, it's hard in these trying times but eventually get me to the best place for me"

"Unable to get an appointment when I ring in the morning as there's not enough doctors in the surgery. Good receptionist"

"Put in a prescription seven days ago. It hadn't been done, so I am waiting for the doctor to sign it off. Dr Poole is great and really helpful. Nurses are friendly too. All staff are nice – I just wish there were more appointments and tighter processes for paperwork"

"Very good experience, accept waiting times on the phone"

We attended a public meeting for this practice on Wednesday 12th of February 2025. People expressed their concerns in relation to:

- Access to appointments
- How the GMS contracts are awarded
- Access to prescriptions
- Long waits on the telephone "8am bottleneck"
- Lack of GPs in the surgery
- Loss of public confidence

The Health Board gave reassurance, but highlighted that there will be a transition period as of the 1st of March in relation to recruitment, transfer of staff, etc. The Health Board are also looking to develop a patient participation group to enable people to be involved in the future planning of services.

Blaenavon Medical Practice:

Of the people we spoke to at this practice, most seemed happy with the service received. However, some people have issues when wanting to book appointments.

People told us the signage to direct you to the surgery was poor and needed improvement.

"Good service when I have seen nurses and doctors. On the whole, happy with the appointment system"

"Access to an appointment was difficult. Long waits but staff were very supportive. Not very good directions, need better signage"

Lliswerry Medical Centre:

People told us they were happy with care and treatment received at this practice, although there were some issues accessing appointments.

"I used to be with a surgery in Chepstow which was up to date with online bookings etc. I was able to speak to a clinician on the day. Now I'm registered with this practice, the system is very dated. I.e., have to phone/visit in the morning and it's hard to get an appointment. The practice needs more investment"

"Happy with care – but no staff!"

"All good, no problems"

Rhymney Integrated Health & Social Care Centre (Meddygfa Cwm Rhymni Practice):

Overall, people were pleased with the service they received at this surgery and gave positive praise about staff. However, people did tell us they found it difficult accessing appointments.

"Hard to get a doctor's appointment, but staff are excellent"

"I came into the surgery for a diabetic review and in my appointment, I experienced chest pain. The Nurse did an ECG immediately, I was called in to see a doctor with the results. I was checked over and referred onto a cardiologist that day. The service from start to finish was second to none"

“Reception staff are so helpful; it makes the whole process better”

“I think accessing NHS services takes a long time. Sometimes it can take a long time for an appointment, but the receptionists are excellent. They do anything to help”

Meddygfa Gelligaer Surgery:

People gave positive feedback about accessing services at this surgery. Although, people told us it's difficult to get through on the telephone for an appointment.

One person told us that when her son was sent away with medication for a condition that didn't improve, she was refused an appointment with the practice and was told she was exaggerating. Unfortunately, her son's condition deteriorated and was taken to hospital where he was diagnosed with sepsis.

“I can be on the phone for over an hour waiting. You ring in the morning at 8am and all appointments have gone, so that means ringing 4-5 days in a row. When I get seen, the service is good”

“When you get an appointment it's fine. Telephone waits are long. Quite often you get through and all appointments have gone. I came in person to book an appointment and was told they were all gone, so to ring tomorrow”

“Brilliant! They can't do enough for you. With my wife being ill and me feeling down, they've been amazing”

Bryntirion Surgery (Main Surgery):

People told us of their frustrations about the long wait to get through via telephone to book an appointment. One person told us the service was “absolutely shocking” – they waited over an hour on the telephone to make an appointment and “gave up” so went into the surgery, to be told he couldn't book an appointment.

One person called the surgery to find out more about the delay in receiving their prescription, they waited two hours on the phone, for the line to then cut off.

Someone told us their experience of trying to get an appointment for a week as they felt unwell. When they were finally able to get an

appointment, they were sent to the hospital urgently as they were having a stroke.

“Waiting time on the phone is too long – 90 minutes! Very difficult to get a doctor’s appointment. Reception staff are helpful when you get through and doctors are caring”

“Getting through is impossible. I phone bang on 8am, and there’s already 32 people ahead of me in the queue. I then spent 50 minutes on hold, only to be cut off. I needed an appointment to discuss test results. It took me three days to book one. The system in place is not very good”

“Personally, I am unhappy with my experience with this surgery. The receptionists do not answer the phones. I tried ringing and was on hold from 13:10 to 17:50, only to be told my daughter couldn’t see a doctor. Receptionists had a bad attitude when I complained. I’ve just seen the doctor and I have no complaints they were really lovely”

Markham Medical Centre:

During our time at Markham Medical Centre, it was noted that people received a very quick service from checking in at the reception desk, to being called for an appointment.

A member of staff spoke to us about the contractual issues with E-Harley Street Primary Care Solutions. Informing us staff had not had their pensions paid into since April 2024, “accounts” were on hold for a number of things like the franking machine and texting service, meaning they were unable to text and post letters to patients.

General Practice Update:

After our multiple representations made by Llais and our planned on-site engagement visits, we have been made aware by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board, that they have received formal notification of resignation from the GMS contracts at the following practices:

- Aberbeeg Medical Practice
- Blaenavon Medical Practice
- Brynmawr Medical Practice
- Bryntirion Surgery
- Tredegar Medical Practice

This means that the Health Board will directly manage these practices and will decide their future position once stabilised. The Health Board confirmed that there was no breach of GMS contract. People will receive written confirmation via their practices of the change of contract holders.



It is clear that change needs to be made to improve people's access to appointments at their GP Practice. Therefore, we made the following recommendations or "representations" to Aneurin Bevan University Health Board – on behalf of people who took the time to give us their feedback. Included are the responses from the health board.

1) Self-check-in machines:

Whilst engaging with people at GP Practices, there were some practices where the self-check-in machines were not in operation, meaning there were long queues at the reception desk. What is the plan moving forward regarding effective use of the self-check-in machines?

Response:

While self-check-in machines are not a contractual requirement for GP practices, the Health Board recognises their potential to improve patient experience and reduce the workload on reception teams. Therefore, we will be reinstating these devices when five of the practices reviewed come under Health Board management in the near future. For those remaining practices, and the wider GP practice network, we will link with Neighbourhood Care Network teams to support and encourage practices across Gwent to consider their utilisation, where they are not already in operation.

2) Access to appointments:

Access to appointments via telephone was the main area of concern for people across all of the GP practices we went to. People told us of the long wait in queues and when they got through, quite often, all appointments had gone, meaning they would have to do this all over again the next morning.

- Is there a requirement for people to call at 08:00 am for a same day/routine appointment?
- Are people able to go to their surgery in person and book an appointment?

- What are your plans to improve people's access to appointments?

Response:

Access to GP services is a key priority for the Health Board. Although the nationally agreed access standards are being met in the practices visited, we will be reviewing systems and processes, particularly for the five practices returning to Health Board management. Our goal is to ensure the right blend of access options is available for the patient population. Additionally, the Health Board is committed to developing a Patient Participation Group (PPG) in each practice, which will play a crucial role in shaping access options to the services, we would welcome Llais representation in these PPGs.

3) NHS App:

Are you going to extend full access to the NHS App for these surgeries, to enable people to book appointments with clinicians?

Response:

The recently announced GMS contract for Wales emphasises the need to improve the uptake and access to NHS Wales services, including the use of the NHS Wales App and the requirement for GP practices to enable the repeat prescribing function. The new contract will also require practices to assist patients with Welsh Identity Verification Service (WIVS), which supports the onboarding for patients for the NHS Wales app. The Health Board will continue to promote the use of the NHS Wales App and explore the full range of services that can be enabled through it.

4) Positive feedback for clinicians:

Despite access issues, patients praised the care and treatment received from doctors and nurses. Staff working under immense pressure were often commended for their professionalism.

THANKS



We thank everyone who shared their views and experiences with us. Additionally, we would like to thank the staff at the GP Practices for their warm welcome to our teams.

FEEDBACK

We'd love to hear what you think about this publication, and any suggestions about how we could have improved it, so we can use this to make our future work better.

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