

Men's Mental Health

Experiences of Support in Warrington



Introduction

Healthwatch Warrington is the independent voice of the public in health and social care in Warrington. We gather feedback from the public through engagement and projects, and use it to work with health and social care providers and commissioners to improve service delivery.



Men's mental health is a significant public health issue, with growing recognition of the unique challenges men face in accessing support and talking openly about their wellbeing. Social expectations, stigma and traditional gender roles can all act as barriers, meaning that men are often less likely to seek help until they reach crisis point. In addition to exploring mental health experiences, this work also aimed to understand how men access services in Warrington, and the factors that influence their engagement with these services. Understanding men's experiences of mental health support, alongside how they navigate and access primary care, is essential in shaping effective, responsive provision.

This report presents the findings of a survey carried out to explore men's experiences of mental health awareness, support, service access, and use of primary care services in Warrington. It captures the views of men from a range of ages, backgrounds, and circumstances, providing insight into both statutory and voluntary-sector services. The feedback highlights what is working well, where improvements are needed, and what men themselves say would make a positive difference to their mental health and wellbeing.

The findings aim to inform commissioners, providers and partners, supporting continued development of mental health services that are accessible, joined-up and responsive to the needs of men in Warrington.

Methodology

Healthwatch Warrington carried out this work to understand men's awareness of mental health, their experiences of support, and access to services in Warrington. The aim was to identify what is working well, highlight challenges, and gather suggestions for improving local mental health support.

A short survey was developed, including both closed questions to collect quantitative data and open-ended questions to capture personal experiences. The survey was shared through Healthwatch Warrington's networks, online channels, and community and voluntary sector organisations. It was open to men and people who identified as men and was completed voluntarily.

Survey data were analysed to identify key trends in awareness, access and experiences of mental health support. Open-ended responses were thematically analysed, with common themes and notable comments presented in the findings.

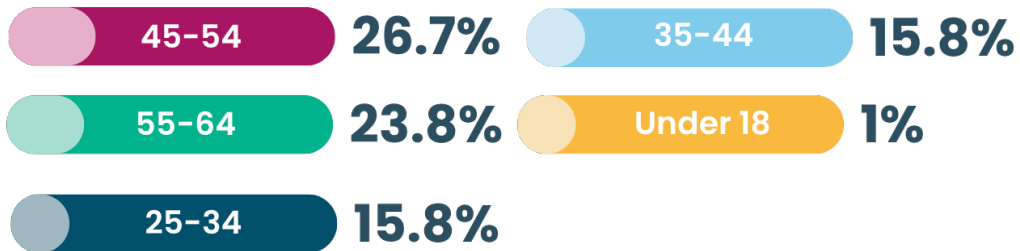


Who Took Part

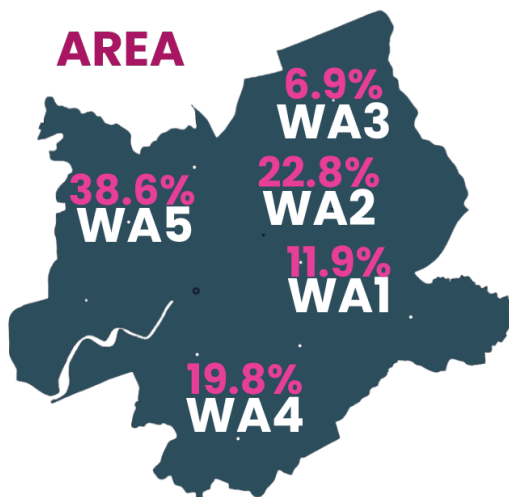
Most respondents were aged between 45 and 64. Younger men were under-represented. Half of the respondents were in full-time employment, while a significant proportion were retired (19%) or unemployed (13%). Geographically, responses were concentrated in WA5, WA2, and WA4 postcodes



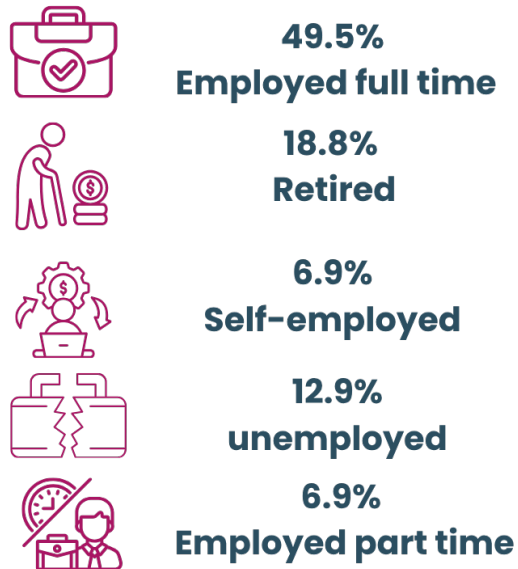
AGE



AREA



Employment Status



1% students & 4% didn't disclose

Findings

Mental Health Awareness and Diagnosis

A large proportion reported being *"very aware"* (52%) or *"somewhat aware"* (45%) of mental health issues. A significant number had been formally diagnosed with a mental health condition.

However, many reported not feeling adequately supported, even after diagnosis.



Key Insight:

The system requires a high level of patient initiative, which can be difficult during periods of poor mental health.

Access to Mental Health Support



Accessed Mental Health Services

Services Used

Respondents accessed a mix of clinical and community services, including:

- NHS Talking Therapies
- GP / Primary Care
- Warrington Assessment Team

Community organisations such as:

- Directions for Men
- Andy's Man Club
- More Than Men
- Offload (Warrington Wolves Foundation)

Engagement Patterns

Many respondents accessed multiple services, indicating complex needs.

Some individuals did not access support at all, despite reporting mental health challenges.



Key Insight:

The system requires a high level of patient initiative, which can be difficult during periods of poor mental health.

Service Experience and Satisfaction

Community and peer-led groups received consistently positive feedback:

Frequently rated "Very Good" for both access and quality

Described as:

- Welcoming
- Supportive
- Easy to engage with.



Key Insight:

Community groups are highly valued and often fill gaps left by statutory services.

Access to Mental Health Support

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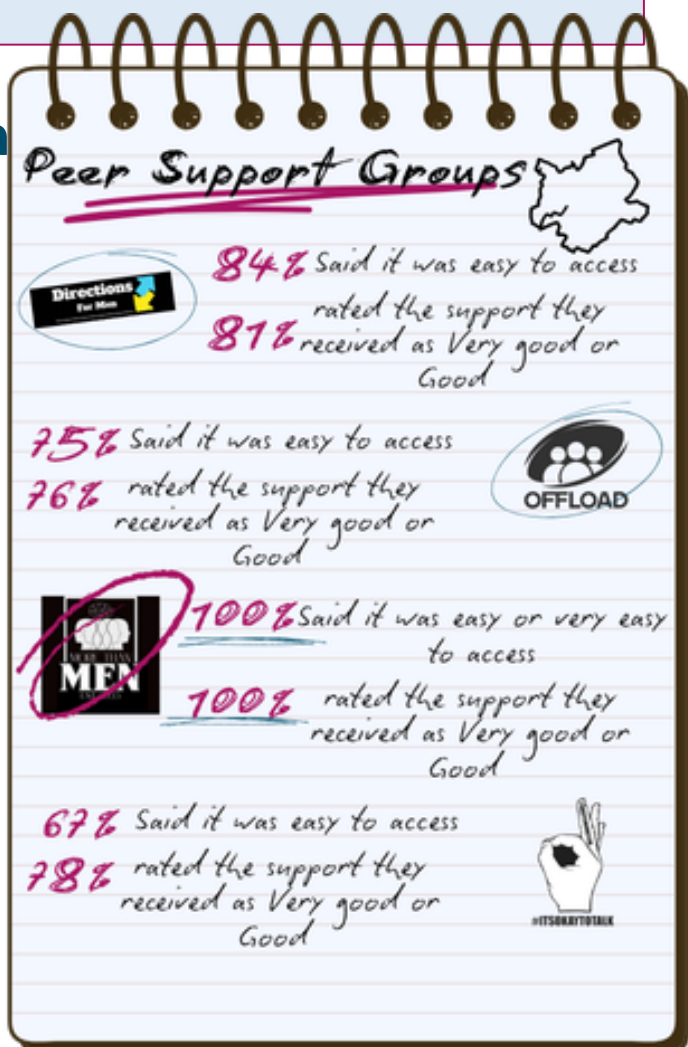
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Service Experience and Satisfaction

NHS Services

NHS services were rated significantly lower:



GP / Primary Care

35% rated access as Poor/Very Poor

Common issues: long waits, feeling dismissed, medication-focused care

'As it is nearly impossible to access an NHS GP for same day consultation it is a complete waste of time.'

NHS Talking Therapies

Mixed ratings; many found access slow and processes burdensome



Warrington Assessment Team

One of the lowest-rated services, with high dissatisfaction around access and follow-up

Conclusion

Overall, clinical pathways were described as slow, rigid, and difficult to engage with, particularly during crisis situations.

Common Issues Men May Face:

<p>Depression & Anxiety Feelings of sadness, worry, or stress that don't go away.</p>	<p>Work related stress Pressures around career, income, or job security.</p>	<p>Relationship difficulties Challenges with family, partners, or friendships.</p>	<p>Loneliness & Isolation Especially for older men or those without strong social networks.</p>	<p>Stigma of talking The belief that "real men don't ask for help," can prevent men from seeking support.</p>
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Information collated for the Healthwatch Warrington Website.

Key Barriers to Access

Respondents identified multiple barriers:

Structural Barriers

- Long waiting lists for therapy and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) diagnosis
- Complex administrative systems (forms, phone queues)
- Poor coordination between NHS voluntary/ mental health services

Personal and Social Barriers

- Stigma and shame around seeking help
- Fear of judgment in GP and pharmacy settings
- Anxiety associated with appointments and waiting environments



Stills from our Men's Matter Week video

Conclusion

These barriers combine to create significant unmet need, even among those actively seeking support.

Impact on Wider Healthcare Access

Mental health challenges affect access to broader healthcare services:

GPs: anxiety about phone systems and feeling judged

'I manage anxiety about waits, wait times, a lot of anxiety about parking most of the time.'

Dentists: severe access issues and cost concerns

'Scared of going to the dentist. Anxiety of pain, having to sit there and then the cost!'

Pharmacies: stigma around collecting medication

'Feeling judged to ask for my prescription at the pharmacy due to the medication being for depression.'

'Having to collect my prescription on a monthly basis and wondering what people think of me. ...sitting with other people waiting for my name to be called, hoping nobody speaks to me or interacts with me.'

A&E: long waits and unsuitable environments for mental health crisis

'Long waits and people not understanding mental health affects my ability to be seen and taken seriously.'

Conclusion

These findings demonstrate that mental health influences the entire healthcare experience, not just specialist services.

Differences Between Diagnosed and Non-Diagnosed Respondents

Respondents with a diagnosis - 57 individuals reported:

- Greater awareness but lower satisfaction with services
- More frequent experiences of stigma and systemic barriers
- Heavy use of both NHS and community support

Respondents with no diagnosis - 43 individuals

- Reported fewer experiences but still identified access issues
- Highlighted practical barriers such as GP delays and dental access

Conclusion

This suggests that engagement with the system increases awareness of its limitations.

Key Themes

Themes that kept on coming up included:

Awareness of Mental Health

People said that there was a need for more advertising of services and information about mental health generally. It was suggested that it would be effective to have advertising in public spaces that are frequented by men such as sports clubs, gyms and bars as well as in transport hubs.

'Advertising in places such as bus stops or on petrol station pump handles.'

'More local advertising in places where both young and older men use i.e. sports facilities and clubs.'

'Advertising on train stations.'

Others suggested that there should be more public outreach with events focused on men's mental health.

'Regular events promoting the importance of mental health not just based mental health week.'

'More stalls, shops, charity events.'

'Maybe introductions in work places, pubs, etc.'

It was also suggested that an online directory could ensure that all groups are promoted and their details shared.

Improve Integration Between Services

There were some comments about there being a need for agencies to work together, particularly in relation to joint working between the NHS and voluntary sector organisations.

'A more clear working relationship between clinical and professionals towards the voluntary sector.'

'Better integration of services.'

'Joined up services.'

Reducing waiting lists and making it easier to access services were also commented upon.

Strong demand for non-clinical, activity-based support

Through the data we found how popular and important peer support is for Warrington residents, many spoke about the need for more informal groups that may be activity based.

'More funding for these places and activity groups.'

'More creative based activities, I think could provide better therapeutic approaches.'

Some spoke about the need for peer support groups.

'Places where men can pop in for a chat with other men who have been through similar experiences.'

'More programmes and activities where people can go and take part in creating a positive atmosphere in getting men talking.'

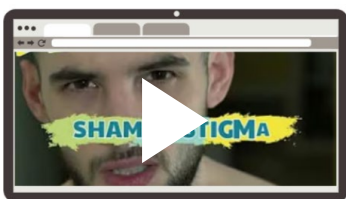
However, one person also commented that some peer support was lacking in depth and professionalism.

'Men were sharing some pretty heavy things but the support was 'that sounds awful...' Putting things into words, great, needs to be actual support.'

There was also a suggestion that there needed to be greater funding in general, and of groups in particular, from government sources rather than relying on charities to provide services.

'A warm welcoming community facility fully funded by the NHS as a central point for all the men's groups to work alongside.'

'More support for those with ADHD, a safe place to talk, every day, every night, not just by charities but provided by backing from the government's pocket.'



We took part in Men Matter Week, creating a promotional video using quotes from our survey and using clips from the **Community in Mind** collaborative video. to encourage more men to get involved,

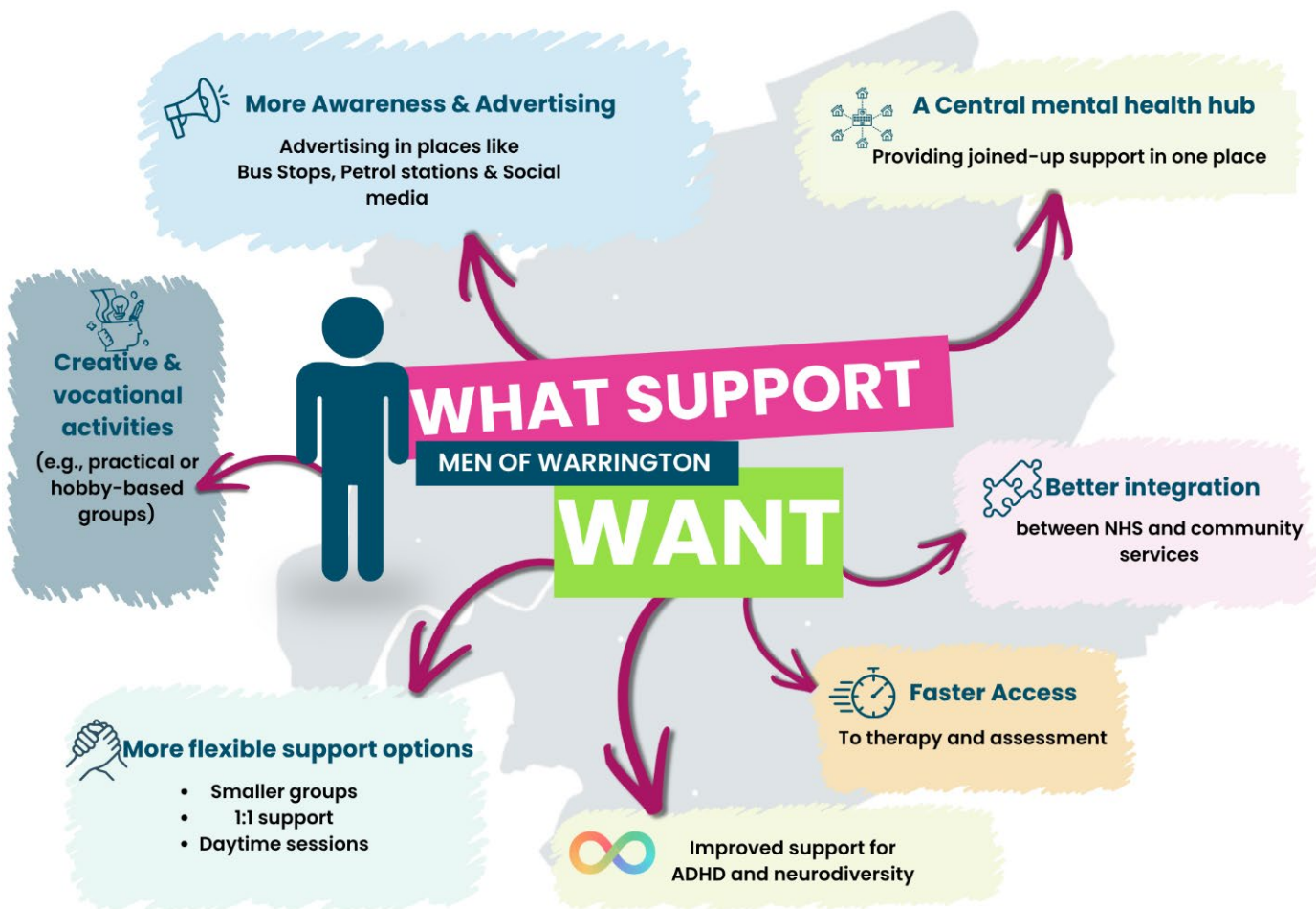


Accessing other support in mental distress

People were asked how their mental health impacts their ability to access other health and social care services. There were a variable number of responses for each service, but they were limited in number. Some said that their mental health did not impact on their ability to access particular services.

Although they were asked about each service type they had accessed individually there were common themes across the service areas in terms of the way people's mental health conditions impacted their ability to access them.

Anxiety about accessing dentists were mainly concerned with worry about pain, as well as cost. Issues in relation to pharmacies were mainly around feelings of stigma and shame in relation to being on mental health medication as well as a lack of privacy in pharmacies.



Conclusion

The feedback from survey participants provides a valuable snapshot of men's experiences and perceptions of mental health services in Warrington. Overall, respondents demonstrated a strong awareness of mental health issues and highlighted the importance of increasing visibility through targeted advertising in locations commonly used by men, alongside proactive outreach to promote available support.

Most respondents had accessed mental health services locally, and feedback on these services was generally positive—particularly for peer support provision such as Directions for Men, which received consistently strong feedback. However, participants noted that while a wide range of services exists, awareness of them is uneven. Some services are more visible and better promoted than others, leading to inconsistent signposting and access.

There was also a clear view that services require greater and more sustainable funding, with respondents emphasising the need for increased NHS investment rather than reliance on charity-led provision to meet growing demand.

In relation to accessing wider healthcare services, many respondents did not report significant impacts from their mental health. However, where issues were identified, they were typically linked to anxiety, long waiting times, difficulty securing GP appointments, and concerns about being judged when accessing services such as pharmacies.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that men's mental health support in Warrington remains fragmented and inconsistently accessible. While community-based services are highly valued and effective, NHS pathways are often experienced as difficult to access, slow to respond, and overly complex.

To improve outcomes, there is a clear need to:

- Strengthen and sustain community-based provision
- Reduce barriers within NHS mental health pathways
- Improve integration, communication, and signposting across services
- Invest in early intervention and preventative support

A more coordinated, accessible, and person-centred system, one that combines the strengths of both peer support and clinical services, will be essential to effectively meet the mental health needs of men in Warrington.

Recommendations

1

Provide More Flexible and Accessible Support Options

Not all men engage with traditional talking therapies.

Actions:

- ✓ Increase availability of smaller groups and one-to-one support
- ✓ Develop activity-based and vocational support (e.g. skills, hobbies, practical sessions)
- ✓ Offer support at different times, including daytime and weekends
- ✓ Provide drop-in options to reduce barriers to entry

2

Strengthen and Sustain Community Peer Based Support

Community services are highly valued and consistently receive strong feedback from users.

Actions:

- ✓ Provide long-term NHS-backed funding for organisations such as Directions for Men, Andy's Man Club, and More Than Men
- ✓ Support expansion of peer-led groups across Warrington
- ✓ Recognise community Peer Support organisations as core components of the mental health system, not optional additions

3

Improve Signposting and Navigation

Respondents reported confusion about available support and inconsistent referral pathways.

Actions:

- ✓ Standardise referral pathways across GP practices and NHS services
- ✓ Ensure professionals consistently signpost to a wide range of services
- ✓ Introduce navigation support (e.g. link workers or care coordinators)
- ✓ Create a single point of access for men's mental health support

4

Address Stigma and Promote Safe Access

Stigma and fear of judgement remain significant barriers to seeking help..

Actions:

- ✓ Include anti-stigma messaging in all awareness campaigns
- ✓ Promote positive male role models discussing mental health
- ✓ Improve privacy in settings such as pharmacies and reception areas
- ✓ Support peer-led engagement to normalise help-seeking

5

Expand Early Intervention and Preventative Support

Services are often accessed only at crisis point rather than earlier stages.

Actions:

- ✓ Invest in early intervention programmes and community outreach
- ✓ Introduce preventative support pathways through GPs and workplaces
- ✓ Increase availability of low-level support before escalation to crisis
- ✓ Promote mental health education in schools and community settings

6

Improve Integration Between Services

A lack of coordination between NHS and community peer support services creates fragmentation

Actions:

- ✓ Develop shared referral systems across NHS and voluntary sector service
- ✓ Encourage joint working agreements and partnerships
- ✓ Introduce roles that bridge services (e.g. community link workers)
- ✓ Ensure consistent communication across all providers

Responses

We shared the Men's Health Report with relevant groups and commissioners to gather their insights, feedback, and reflections. The purpose of this engagement was to ensure the findings resonate with those working across the system and to identify opportunities for collaboration and action.

Below is a summary of the responses received, highlighting key themes, observations, and suggested next steps.

Ian Webb & Nathan Savage, Founders | More Than Men

"The more light we shine on what groups like ours are doing the better because as much as we're preventative, We're doing so much work on the ground that's as if it's behind the scenes on preventing men to get to crisis point or helping them after crisis point.

The work that goes into all of it is thorough. It's about overcoming barriers of men attending groups and not just having that one agenda and showing everyone that it's not a one-size-fits-all kind of situation. We've got to be able to adapt and communicate in all aspects."

Thank you for letting us take part!

**Tim McPhee, Associate Director Integration,
Transformation & Partnerships, Mersey Care NHS
Foundation Trust**

We welcome this piece of work and the focus on men's experiences of mental health support in Warrington. It provides a helpful and timely insight into how services are being accessed and perceived, and we recognise the importance of incorporating lived experience into service development.

Overall, the key themes in the report align with what we are hearing through our own engagement and partnership work. In particular, we recognise:

- The challenges some people experience in navigating services and understanding how to access the right support at the right time
- The impact of waiting times and complexity within pathways, particularly when individuals are already experiencing poor mental health
- The consistently positive feedback regarding community and peer-led support, and the important role these services play
- The need for stronger integration, communication and signposting across NHS, primary care and voluntary sector provision

We particularly welcome the report's emphasis on prevention, early intervention, and the expansion of flexible and community-based support options. These are key priorities across Warrington Place and align with our broader system ambitions.

From a Mersey Care perspective, we are committed to continuing to work collaboratively with Warrington Place partners, including the ICB, primary care, local authority and VCFSE organisations, to:

- Improve the clarity and accessibility of mental health pathways
- Strengthen partnership working between statutory and community services
- Support the development of more holistic, person-centred approaches that better engage men
- Enhance signposting and navigation so people can access appropriate support more easily

We would welcome the opportunity to work with Healthwatch Warrington and partners to consider the recommendations in more detail and support their translation into practical actions at Place.

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to quality**

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