



Barriers to GP Registration

Launch event 18 May 2023



Why we wanted to help make it easier for patients to register with a GP

- We were contacted by a number of local people who told us they found it difficult to register with some Haringey GPs as the reception staff insisted on proof of address or identification.
- Everyone has a right to register with a GP even if they don't have these documents.
- NHS guidance states that there is no requirement to prove identity, address, immigration status or an NHS number in order to register as a patient, but **proof of address and ID are routinely required by GPs in Haringey.**



What are the rules?



I have the right to register and receive treatment from a GP practice

I do not need a fixed address.

I do not need identification.

Anyone in England can see a GP.

Society's most vulnerable people can be prevented from getting NHS care

There can be many reasons why people do not have ID or documentation showing their address.

Some groups of people this problem particularly affects include

- People fleeing domestic violence staying with friends or family
- People living on a boat, in unstable accommodation or street homeless
- People staying long term with friends but who aren't receiving bills
- People working in exploitative situations whose employer has taken their documents
- People who have submitted their documents to the Home Office as part of an application
- People trafficked into the country who had their documents taken on arrival



Our GP Registration project

From October 2022, Healthwatch Haringey checked every Haringey GP practice to find out if they would register a new patient without proof of address or ID.

We did this in three ways

1. Calling the practice and introducing ourselves as Healthwatch Haringey
2. 'Mystery shopping' GP practices through phone calls
3. 'Mystery shopping' GP practices through practice visits.

We wanted to make sure that practice staff know what the rules are and know how to help people who can't provide ID or proof of address.



Do you need to see a doctor?

Everyone in England has the right to register with a GP (General Practice) doctor's surgery, regardless of immigration status or not having a fixed address.

Find out more inside >>



We've produced a leaflet explaining people's right to see a GP

This leaflet is on our website.

It has been printed.

It has been translated into

Turkish

Spanish

Polish

Bulgarian

Somali

Headline findings

How many Haringey GPs require ID or proof of address before a new patient can register?

39 surgeries were called in the mystery shopping telephone survey

- 24 out of 39 said they needed to see proof of address.
- 30 out of 39 surgeries said they needed to see ID.

39 surgeries were visited in person*

- 20 out of 37 required proof of address.
- 20 out of 37 required ID.

(*One would not answer questions, one was closed, so 37 were surveyed).



Four surgeries did not ask for documents

We added together the results of our two telephone surveys:

Number of surgeries requiring either proof of address or ID or both (Healthwatch Haringey and mystery shopping calls, 39 surgeries surveyed)

Documents required 35

No documents required 4

No documents were required at

- **Bounds Green**
- **Havergal**
- **Queenswood**
- **Somerset Gardens**



■ Documents required ■ Documents not required

Further barriers to GP registration

Our research showed Haringey residents face further hurdles to registration with a GP.

- When mystery shoppers visited Haringey surgeries, they found four surgeries who would **only allow online registration**, meaning that people who could not access a smart phone or computer were excluded.
- The in-person mystery shoppers found **only 11 surgeries offered any help with filling in the registration form**, such as interpreting or translating the form into a community language, or offering help from staff who could speak the patient's language.
- We sometimes found it **difficult to get through on the phone**. We waited over 20 minutes for a member of staff to answer the phone at seven surgeries.



Some other findings

- 10% of GP surgeries in Haringey told us on the phone they would register a patient without seeking proof of address or ID. But the in-person mystery shoppers found 32% of surgeries would register them without documents. This suggests **going to the surgery in person offers the best hope of registering without documents.**
- One practice said they **never asked for documents** and this didn't cause any additional problems.
- One practice claimed to be full up – but checking on their website and on the NHS website - they were in fact taking new patients.
- We called one practice three times on different days but the line was busy with no queuing system. We finally got through by calling another branch and asking to be put through.
- We waited for the phone to be answered for more than an hour at one surgery. Then we got cut off.



Causes of staff failure to register – a complex picture

We looked at research done by other organisations into the causes of the refusal to register without documents and we produced an anonymous online survey for Haringey reception staff.

- **We found a number of complex interlocking barriers including, but not limited to:**
- An overarching **lack of resources in the NHS**, particularly lack of staff charged with reception duties and the consequent unmanageable workloads.
- **Contradictory NHS guidance** - e.g. a 'gatekeeping' role and liability for collecting correct patient information
- **Inadequate support** for frontline staff including administrative barriers in the NHS system
- The **'hostile environment'** including beliefs about 'deservingness' for some groups
- Concerns that patients without documents are **more burdensome**
- Perceived **risk of fraud** leading to potential issues around e.g. patient safety




Good practice

Despite the challenging environment for NHS staff we found some very good practice.

- Our in-person mystery shoppers **noted friendly and welcoming reception staff in 22 surgeries**. Staff were recorded as welcoming, friendly, sympathetic, and pleasant.
- **We got through to a member of reception staff in 3 minutes or less at 20 surgeries.**
- **Three surgeries in all three of our surveys did not require ID or proof of address**
- Havergal
- Queenswood
- Somerset Gardens

They demonstrate that an inclusive registration policy is possible.





It has been a huge change for the Practice and its team to adopt the Safe Surgery guidelines, but it has truly been a success for all our patients. We have been able to register patients with much more ease and if we do experience any difficulties patients have been very accommodating to help verify any discrepancies.

Trudy Galka, Practice Manager, Havergal Surgery



Recommendations for GPs

Our 15 recommendations for GP practices are based on national research, our own findings and the good practice we have seen in Haringey.

Key recommendations include:

1. Practices should remove the requirement for ID and proof of address when registering new patients
2. Practices should brief all reception staff regularly that failure to provide documents should not prevent patient registration
3. Practices should assure reception staff that they will not be held personally liable for any consequences of incorrect information being supplied by patients
4. Practices should engage with Doctors of the World with a view to accessing training and becoming a Safe Surgery
5. Reception staff should be made aware of the resources available for translation / interpretation when registering new patients, and should always offer these when requested by a new patient who seeks help with the registration form



Recommendations for the NHS

1. The most effective way to remove barriers to registration would be for the NHS to state clearly in guidance that GP practices *should not request* ID or proof of address.
2. Hospital Accident and Emergency should offer pro-active support and advice about registering with a GP.

We hope that North Middlesex Hospital will agree to put up our posters and give out our leaflets to any patient arriving in A&E who does not have a GP, as some of these patients will have previously tried to register without documents and been turned away.



Next steps...


When we started this project in 2022, we wanted to make sure we could use the research to make tangible changes where these were necessary.

Over the next few months, we shall:

- Co-ordinate with partners, particularly NCL ICB, to communicate with practices ensuring that, following this report, they are aware of their responsibilities to remove barriers to registration
- Share with each GP practice their own individual results
- Share with NCL ICB and Haringey GP Federation the findings from each practice in relation to ID and proof of address
- Provide a Healthwatch Haringey online briefing to GP practices who request it
- Publish, print and distribute through the voluntary sector leaflets and posters in English and five community languages informing people of their right to register with a GP even if they do not have documents
- **Carry out and report on a review of GP practices to find out if more GPs have removed barriers to registration.**



We hope to achieve...

- More GP practices follow government guidelines and do not require proof of address or identity.
 - More people from refugee or migrant backgrounds and people affected by homelessness find it easier to register at GP surgeries without the need to provide proof of address or identity.
 - More people from refugee or migrant backgrounds can register at GP surgeries with confidence that their details will not be shared with the Home Office.
 - More people working in the voluntary sector can understand how to support people to safely register with a GP.
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How you can help?

- Have the people you know experienced barriers when trying to register with a GP? We'd like to hear about that.
- Have you heard of any good experiences? We want to highlight good practice.
- Would you be able to take posters and / or leaflets to give to people you know?
- Do you have any in-person events, drop-ins or meetings? Invite us to speak to volunteers or staff.



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