



NEW HOSPITALS

REPORT

2024-25

NHS YOUNG RESEARCHERS

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MEET THE TEAM

RAAGHAV



Hi! My name's Raaghav, and I'm from London. I joined the Youth Forum because I'm very passionate about equality in healthcare, and I am keen to improve our current system by having a voice in the future of the NHS. I joined the New Hospitals subgroup so that I can have an impact on such an important issue in a challenging healthcare climate.

VERONICA



Hiya! I'm Veronica from London. I joined the Youth Forum because I feel it's important for the younger generation to fight for equity and a brighter future within the NHS. Being part of New Hospitals means a lot to me, as it allows me to be a voice on an important and challenging issue in healthcare.

LILA



Hi!! I'm Lila and I'm from Manchester. I joined the NHS youth forum because of my passion for accessibility in healthcare. I want young people to feel represented within the NHS and that services are receptive to their diverse needs. The New Hospital sub-group has been an amazing opportunity to ensure our viewpoints are reflected in the future infrastructure of the NHS.

PRINCESS



Hi! I'm Princess from Manchester. I joined the Youth forum as I'm incredibly dedicated to equity and equality, particularly for forgotten groups within healthcare and become that voice that challenges injustices! I joined the New Hospital Sub group get insight into some challenges that people face and bring them too light within the structure and function of hospital across England.

RAVEENA



Hello! I'm Raveena, a medical student from South East England. I joined the Youth Forum because I am immensely grateful for the care the NHS provides, and I see it as an opportunity for me to give back in some way! I'm deeply passionate about the New Hospitals project as it allows me to make a tangible impact on hospital infrastructure, which will influence patient care for many years to come.

ESME



Hi! I'm Esme, and I am from The Peak District. I joined the NHS Youth Forum because I am passionate about amplifying young people's voices and pushing for positive changes to our healthcare system. The New Hospitals project has offered an amazing opportunity to shape the spaces in which we receive healthcare and further highlighted the importance of ensuring that inclusive and accessible healthcare spaces are the standard.

MAYA



Hi! My names Maya and I'm from London. I joined the youth forum after having my own experience in hospitals and wanting to use this to help make positive changes for other patients in the future. The New Hospitals group is so important to me as I can use my experience as a patient and student nurse to have a huge impact in the future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The NHS Young Researchers is a group of 25 young people across the UK looking to share feedback, thoughts and ideas on the changes they want to see within NHS England and the wider health services.

The New Hospital Programme was set up in 2020, combining eight existing hospital building projects with the pledge for 40 more, which were to be completed between 2021 and 2030. Since the Labour Government came into power, a review has been carried out and the timeframe has been changed.

Over the last 12 months, the NHS Young Researchers have been working in consultation with the New Hospitals Programme to understand how the design of New Hospitals could be improved so they are better suited to the needs of children and young adults.

MOBILITY AIDS

Our study found that while most hospitals have adequate equipment to assist people with mobility aids, improvements are needed in resource accessibility and ensuring a safer, more navigable environment.

FACILITIES

The survey revealed major issues with hospital facilities, especially waiting rooms, which people found uncomfortable and isolating. Responses highlighted the need for welcoming and patient-centred designs to improve patient experiences.

SIGNAGE

24% of respondents reported that signage requires improvement. Hospital signs can be cluttered, misleading, or even absent, which can make navigation difficult. Improved wayfinding can reduce stress and enhance the hospital experience for patients and visitors.

PARKING

Inadequate parking can cause delays in patient care, added stress for visitors, and difficulties for hospital staff, affecting overall hospital efficiency. Addressing this issue is essential to ensuring a smooth and accessible experience for everyone using the facility.

LAYOUT

Many people found the layout made the hospital environment disorientating and stressful. This hinders wayfinding and can make the experience over stimulating. We need to prioritise creating more space for people to navigate between departments and sub categorise spaces to minimise over flow.

ACCESSIBILITY

20.6% of responses to our survey rated accessibility for those with mental health requirements and learning disabilities as poor, due to bright lights and loud noise. Common recommendations included additions of sensory rooms and less harsh lighting to create a lower stimuli environment.

OUR AIMS

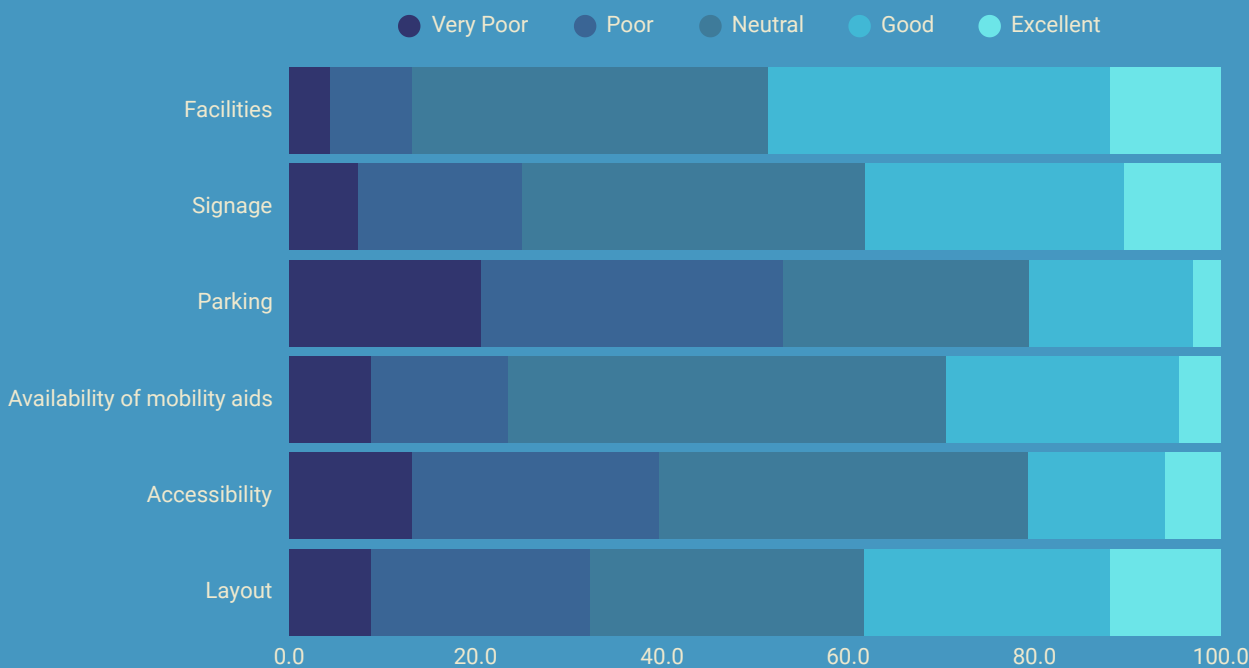
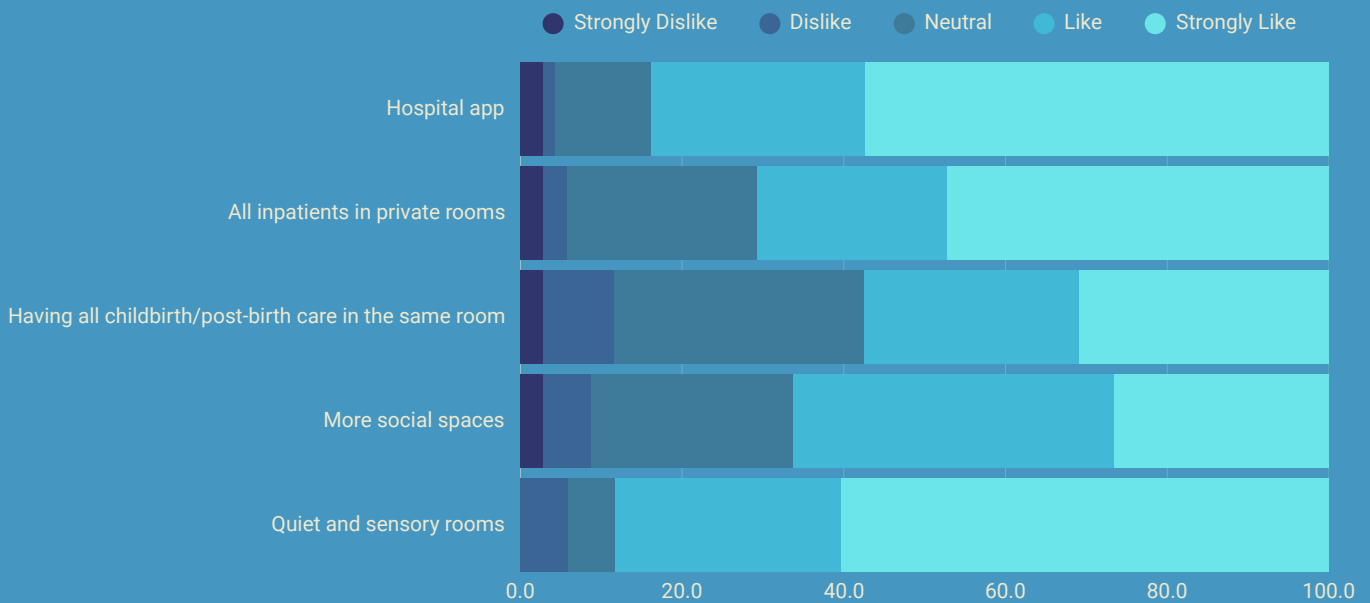
Through our survey and consultations we aimed to give a voice to young people across the country in order to make hospitals a more accessible environment to promote equity.

METHOD

In September 2024, after consulting with the NHS New Hospitals Programme team, we launched a nationwide survey targeting schools, hospitals, NHS Trusts, and other key stakeholders across England.

This approach helped us identify what is currently working well in hospitals, as well as areas where improvements are needed. Additionally, we sought feedback on some new ideas we were considering.

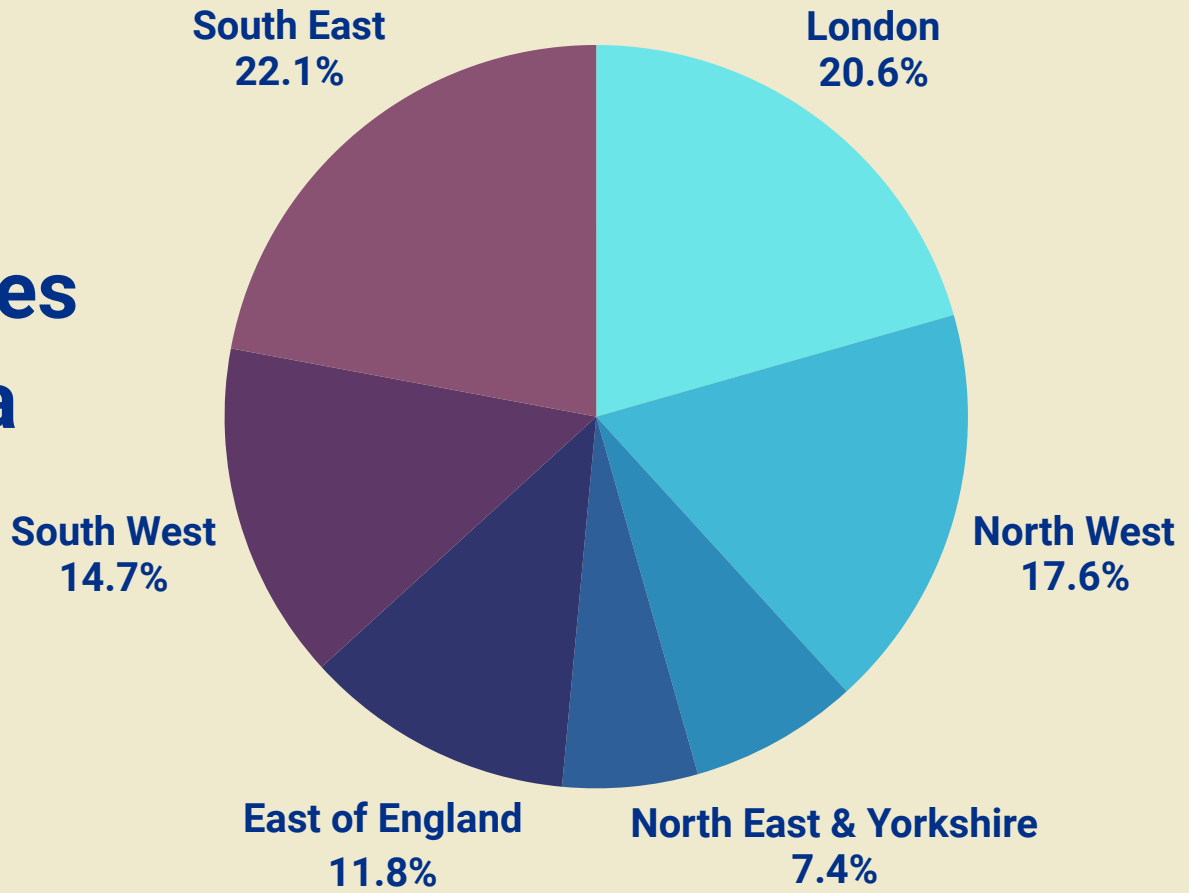
A summary of our key findings is provided below:



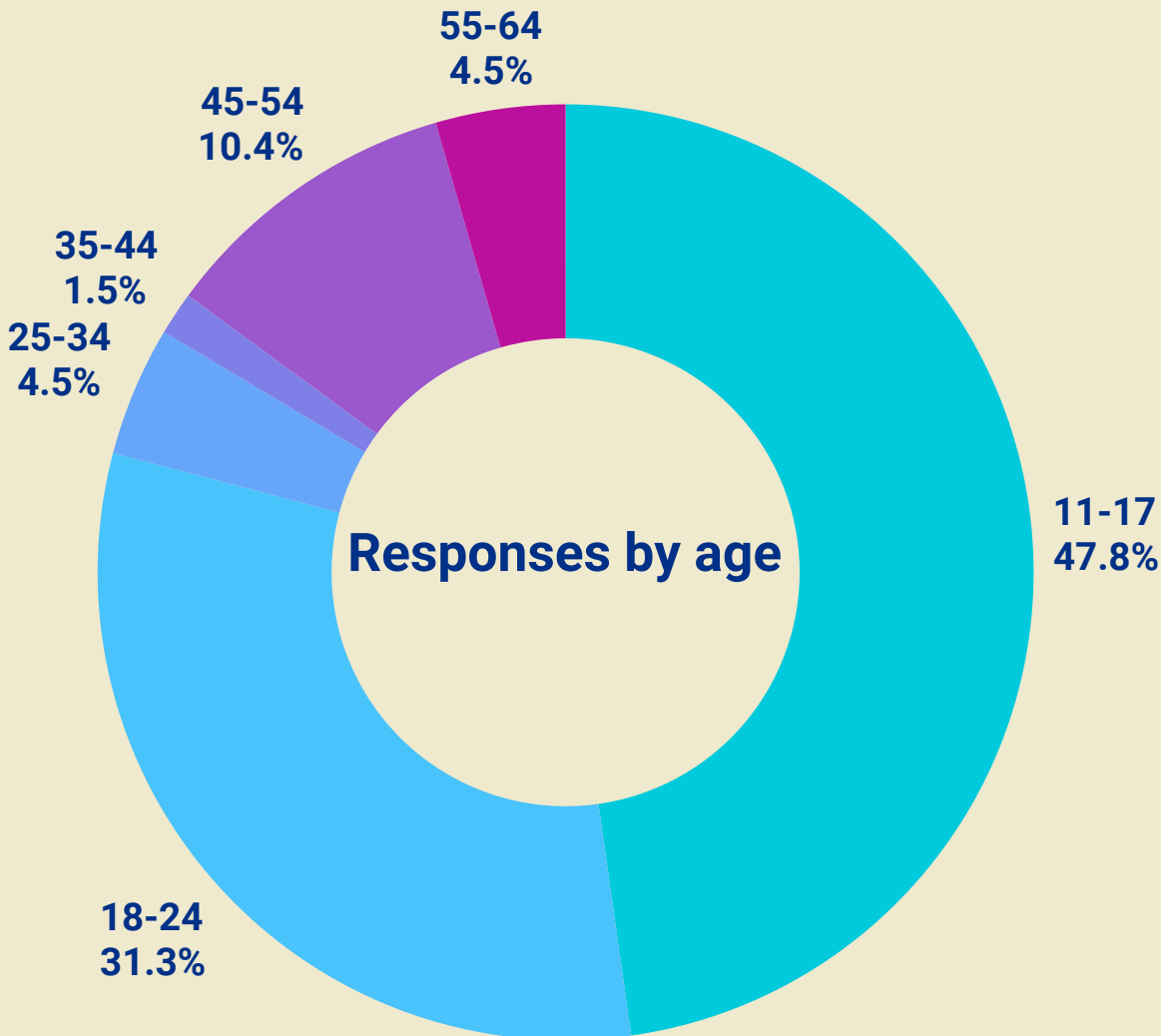
The survey gathered both quantitative and qualitative data, focusing on people's real-life experiences to uncover valuable insights which inform this report.

DEMOGRAPHICS

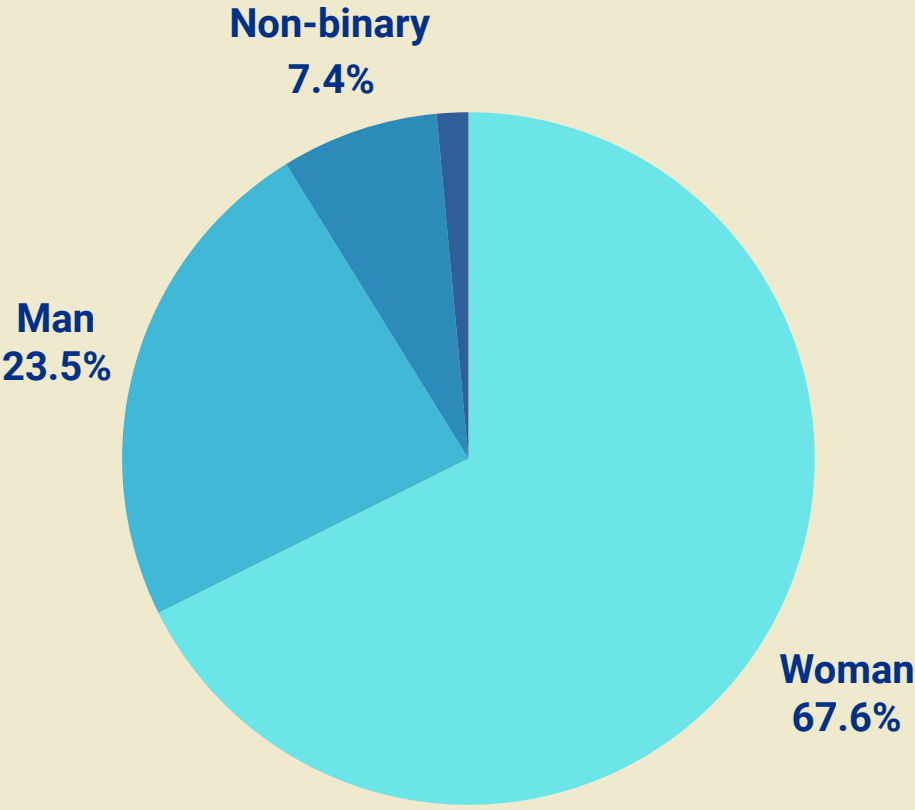
Responses by Area



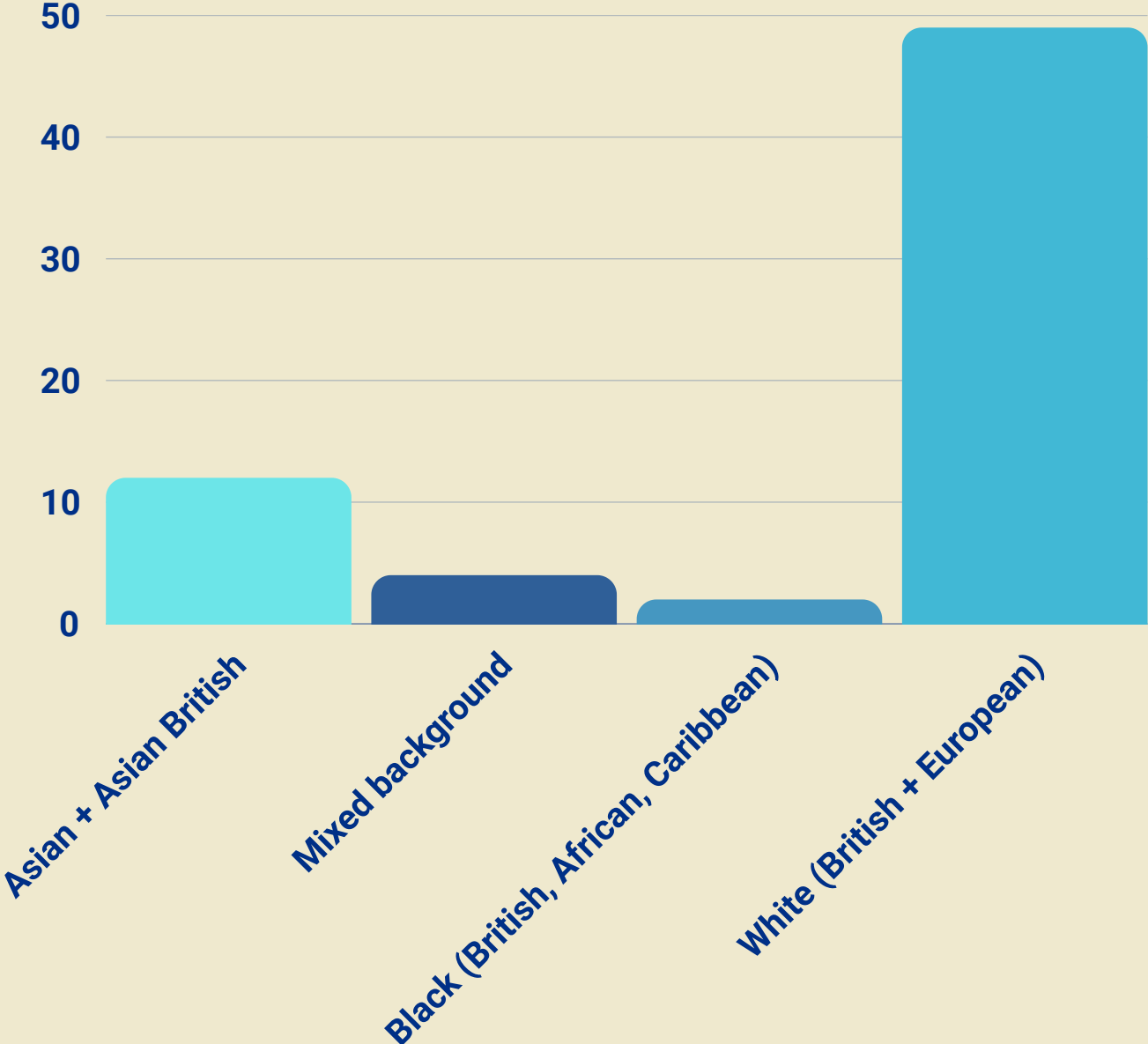
Responses by age



Responses by Gender Identity



Responses by Ethnicity



AREAS OF FOCUS

AVAILABILITY OF MOBILITY AIDS

We planned to assess the availability of mobility aids. This measures how easily individuals with mobility challenges can access assistive devices like wheelchairs, crutches, and walking sticks. This area of study complements the other areas of the research. The data and observations gathered can be used in conjunction with assessing the layout and signage as it ensures that individuals with both mental and physical needs are not only able to navigate spaces effectively but access appropriate mobility aids ensuring that care is specialized, holistic and the necessary tools are implemented to enhance the mobility of all the service users without discrimination.

'Walking distances for those with impaired mobility, not just older patients but those with fractures, broken legs/limbs and other health conditions...'

'Long distances to walk for patients with poor mobility, eyesight and disability'

'Parking could be better for those who are wheelchair dependent'

We observed that there were not many responses regarding improvements or concern about the availability of mobility aids but this could be due to the smaller nature of the study where only 23 survey participants were disabled. As well as this the environment that many people have already become accustomed to, hospitals have not always had the best assets for those with mobility limitations, this could explain the ambiguous responses that were unsure if the recommendations they suggested were feasible. A careful approach to the design and layout of the hospital must be considered as shown by above quotes, those with mobility restrictions will struggle with a design that is not cohesive which can exacerbated the experiences of those with disabilities in a hospital compared to those without. A mindful approach must be implemented with potentially rest stations, more comfortable and adapted seating areas, easier access to walkers or crutches and consideration for parking spaces for those who are wheelchair dependant.

3.01

The average score rating from 1-5 in terms of the accessibility of mobility aids

23

Responses from those with reported disabilities

47.1%

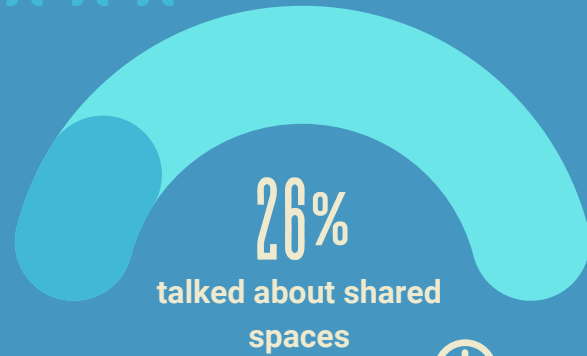
Rated 'availability of mobility' aids as 'neutral'

FACILITIES

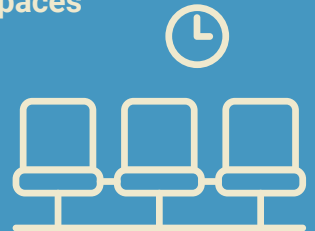


One of the most common themes we encountered was the issue of waiting rooms, mentioned in 35% of answers. Survey respondents wanted them bigger and more comfortable, with comfier chairs, a less clinical feel, easy-to-find information, and good cleanliness. Having clean toilets nearby was also a very common request.

Beyond waiting areas, respondents wanted hospitals to be more welcoming and inclusive. This means things like special sensory spaces and support for neurodiverse people. Furthermore, there was a clear message that wards should feel less plain, maybe with some local art to add brightness and character. To help people feel less lonely, respondents suggested having prayer rooms and shared spaces where people can meet. Practical things like kitchens, indoor and outdoor play areas for kids, and more shops and cafes in the hospital were also suggested.



'[Waiting rooms] can be incredibly intense spaces'

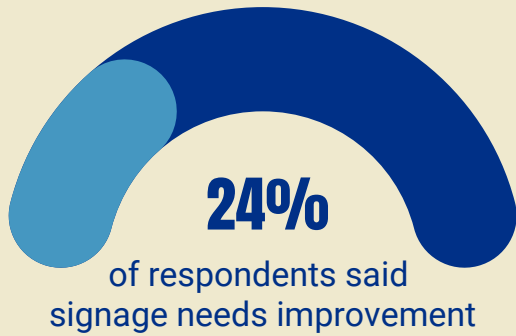


'You are in a waiting room for hours at a time with no real access to food or drink'

Finally, the survey looked at the needs of different groups of patients. Some respondents mentioned that teenagers can feel out of place on children's wards, so having spaces designed for them would be ideal too. Ideas like libraries, entertainment, and dedicated outdoor areas for patients and visitors were also put forward.

Overall, the survey emphasised the importance of creating patient-centred spaces in new hospitals that address both physical and emotional well-being.

SIGNAGE



The survey responses highlighted signage as a key area for improvement. 35% of respondents mentioned signage in their responses, with 24% explicitly stating that it needs to be improved.

Hospitals can have complex layouts and individual buildings are often disconnected, so clear signs are essential for navigation.

Poor signage can add to a patient's stress during an already difficult time, making it even more important to ensure clear and accessible wayfinding.

The quality of signs varies across hospitals - some signs are cluttered and respondents found the excessive information overwhelming, while other signs lack crucial details. Some signs were even incorrect. Many respondents struggled to locate key areas such as outpatient clinics, specific wards, canteens, and finding their way back to the main hospital. Unclear signage can also make it difficult to distinguish between staff versus visitor areas. Volunteers providing directions were helpful when signage was inadequate. As well as signs, hospital maps could also be clearer to aid navigation.

QUOTES FROM RESPONDENTS

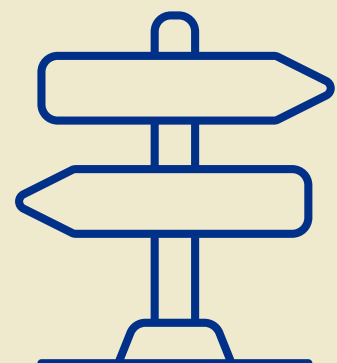
"Signage to the ward/main hospital was really difficult to follow. Finding the dining room was difficult"

"If it wasn't for volunteers guiding people, I'd still be wandering around!"

"More obvious signage (staff vs visitors area gets confusing)"

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

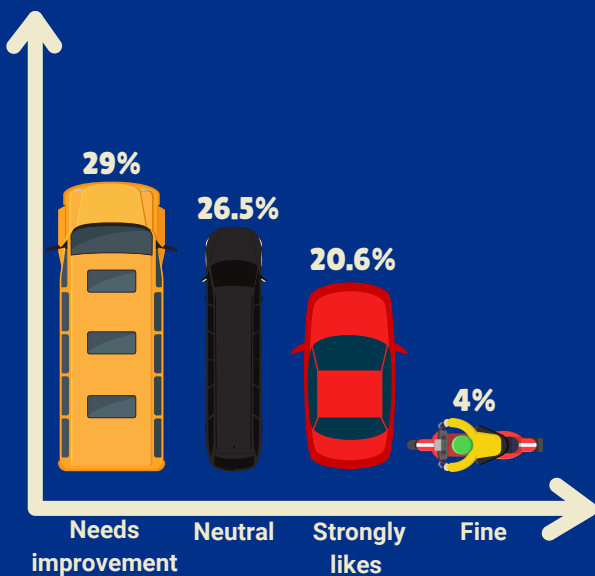
- Clearer and consistent signage
- Clearer maps
- Colour-coding to differentiate between blocks
- Interactive, touchscreen kiosks
- Personalised navigation on hospital apps
- Estimated walking distances, as seen in airports



PARKING

We found that patients' experiences with hospital parking were largely consistent, with many expressing similar concerns, such as high costs or inadequate capacity to accommodate everyone. In our survey, 29% of respondents stated that parking needs improvement, while only 4% felt it was sufficient. This suggests that perceptions of hospital parking vary depending on the region in England. A common request was for parking facilities to be located closer to different parts of the hospital, as elderly or disabled individuals often face challenges navigating long distances from the parking area to their destination.

Patient Responses on Parking Adequacy



"parking is horrendous and disgracefully expensive"



"very expensive and parking is not always available"



"car park is far too small and too expensive"



"Better parking for the wheelchair dependant"



Addressing Parking Challenges for Patients:

In addition to the demand for increased parking spaces, patients have emphasized the need for more affordable parking fees and improved support for individuals who are wheelchair-dependent. Addressing these issues would not only make it easier for patients to attend all their appointments without financial or physical strain, but also create a more inclusive and patient-focused environment, enhancing the overall experience for everyone accessing hospital services.

Improving parking availability, affordability, and accessibility would reduce stress and create a more supportive environment for patients and visitors, ultimately enhancing their overall healthcare experience.

not always possible to wait when you are overwhelmed.

LAYOUT OF HOSPITAL SPACES



They can be incredibly intense spaces

35% percent of responses cited hospital waiting rooms are in the greatest need of improvement

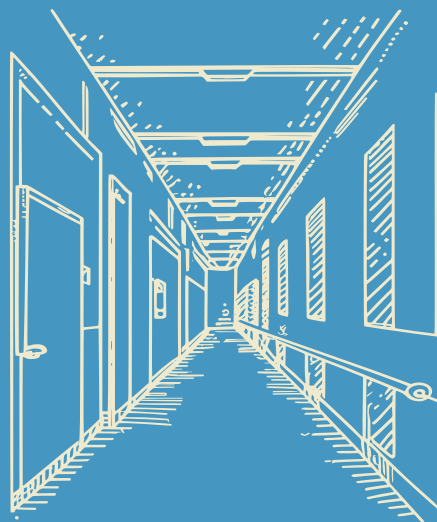
We suggest making more 'waiting zones' to cater to different needs and reduce the amount of 'intensity' people are exposed to. For example, providing one for young children, adolescents as well as young adults and the everyday. We also suggest creating a system of 'accessible waiting'; for those who have no clinical need to be in the waiting room to instead allow them to be in areas like quiet rooms or areas with overflow seating.

We suggest making areas of the corridors wider near to maps and corridor junctions to create a 'stop and think' bay which should help way finding to feel less overwhelming and make signage more effective.

Additionally, where possible natural light and higher ceilings would help make the corridors less intense and disorientating.

"corridors can get very crowded in some parts and very sparse in others"

"Corridors - mainly no windows and poor signage so easy to get lost."



16% of responses made reference to hospital corridors needing the most improvement



[moving patients] "needs adequate space, bed to trolley transfers."

"overcrowded and very small and bland."

We suggest maintaining a flexible layout to hospital departments. This would allow for movement of equipment to help generate space for patient transfers. Additionally, using natural light bright paint and artwork can help make a calmer environment to help it seem less cramped. In patients having access to outdoor spaces could also help.

40% of respondents referenced the hospital layout as being overcrowded or cramped

We have seen largely consistent responses with patient experience of hospital layout contributing to the environment being overwhelming. Across the board when layout was raised by respondents, it was in a negative light. For outpatient areas, concerns were focused on the environment in waiting rooms and way finding. To improve, having smaller, sub-sectioned waiting rooms as well as a clearly defined accessible waiting policy may alleviate this. For inpatients, a key issue raised was the "gloomy" nature of the hospital layout.

LAYOUT OF HOSPITAL BUILDINGS



"Overcrowded"

Waiting rooms

Corridors

Key Areas To Address

The key areas of concern that were identified focus on the availability of essential facilities, access to outdoor spaces, and the ease of navigating hospital layouts. Ensuring that hospitals have a sufficient quantity of necessary facilities is crucial for meeting patient needs and maintaining efficient healthcare delivery. Access to outdoor spaces is also a significant factor, as it contributes to patient well-being, recovery, and overall mental health. Additionally, the complexity of hospital layouts can impact both staff efficiency and patient experience, making clear, intuitive navigation a critical aspect of hospital design. Addressing these concerns can lead to a more effective, accessible, and patient-friendly healthcare environment.

"More outdoor spaces, if no open space outside possible, then a roof garden or terraces."

"Easy to add on new departments / wards / extra space when required."

"Less confusing, simpler design so easier to find places inside the hospital."

We advise approaching the layout of New Hospitals with these key issues in mind; prioritising simple, straightforward designs; creating easily accessible and modifiable units. A simpler and more standardised hospital layout can help to enhance efficiency, safety, and patient experience by improving navigation, reducing confusion, and ensuring consistency. By enabling patients, visitors, and staff to move more easily, stress and delays in reaching critical areas can be decreased. A predictable design increases would aid staff efficiency, allowing medical professionals to locate equipment and respond to emergencies faster while reducing onboarding time for new personnel.

"Joined up working needs the most improvement. This would have a knock-on effect on efficiency and ultimately cost reduction."



ACCESSIBILITY FOR THOSE WITH MENTAL HEALTH REQUIREMENTS AND LEARNING DISABILITIES

A common theme we found was that people with mental health requirements or learning disabilities said that hospital environments were not accessible to them. Busy environments, bright lights and loud noises make hospitals challenging places for these individuals. Only 13.2% said they strongly agree that hospitals are accessible for those with mental health requirements and learning disabilities.



2.16% of the population have learning disabilities



‘Everything can be overheard.’ (referring to no privacy when meeting with counsellors)

‘Wards need more sensory spaces.’



Four responses outlined experiencing sensory overload from hospitals due to loud environments and harsh lighting, highlighting the need for calmer sensory spaces.

Common suggestions included adding calmer lighting to wards and waiting rooms in order to try and create a less intimidating environment. As well as this responses showed that additions of adolescent spaces would further create calm spaces.



RECOMMENDATIONS



Facilities:

Make waiting rooms more welcoming.
Make hospitals feel less impersonal, with more social spaces and local art.

Accessibility:

Include low stimuli/sensory rooms.

Calmer/less harsh lighting
Separate adolescent areas.

Quiet rooms for therapy meetings.

Visual timetables on white boards for those with ASD to give more structure and certainty in a changing environment.

Mobility aids:

A cohesive and mindful layout that takes into consideration those who may need rest, and provide larger chairs and wheelchair-friendly wide hallways.



Layout:

Sub-categorise the waiting room to prevent overstimulation.
Allow patients without urgent needs to wait in quieter spaces, using buzzers to notify them when it's their turn.

Add 'stop and think' bays in wider corridor areas to ease congestion and allow patients to process information without feeling rushed.

Prioritise access to outdoor spaces.

Ensure single occupancy rooms remain spacious while maximising overall capacity.



Parking:

Prioritise accessible and affordable parking for patients, visitors, and staff.

Sufficient spaces, including disabled and emergency drop-off zones.

Smart parking systems, like real-time tracking of parking availability and pre-booking to reduce congestion.



Signage:

Clearer, more consistent, and colour coded signs.

Maps that are easier to interpret.

Integrate digital tools such as interactive kiosks, hospital apps with personalised navigation instructions, and estimated walking distances.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A huge thank you to the Voice and Influence team at Barnardo's, who have provided us with a platform to complete this project and have continuously supported us throughout the process.

We are incredibly grateful to the NHS England New Hospital team, who provided us with valuable guidance and information.

Finally, a big thank you to anyone who contributed to this project by completing our survey! Your responses are going to help shape future NHS policy!

For more information about the NHS Youth Forum and Young Researchers, visit <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/nhs-youth-forum> or email us at NHSYouthForum@Barnardos.org.uk

This project was supported by Bronte Edwards and Daisy West from the Barnardo's Voice and Influence Team



THANK YOU

FOR YOUR SUPPORT

