

# **How easy do people in B&NES find it to order prescriptions?**

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## About Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset

Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset are the county's independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to make sure that those running services, put people at the heart of care.

As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care.

We are here to listen and understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services and to speak out on their behalf.

We focus on ensuring that people's worries and concerns about current services are addressed. We are totally independent and can provide you with impartial and independent signposting advice.

We are part of a network of 150 local Healthwatch across England and cover the whole of Bath and North East Somerset.

## What is this report about ?

We examined the effectiveness of different prescription ordering systems for the general population through research and surveys carried out in Bath and North East Somerset.

We asked people how they ordered prescriptions in BaNES, how effective they found this process and any challenges they faced. We also asked what would help improve the service.

## Acknowledgments

This report is based on research carried out by Sweeny Gracias a T-Level Health and Social Care Student.

## Context for the report

According to a 2021 report by the BBC 75% of all prescriptions are repeat prescriptions and around 15% of the population take 5 or more medicines per day.

In 2019 Age UK reported that around 10% of the over 65s ordered 8 plus medications weekly.

The system for ordering prescriptions has undergone significant changes over recent years, with the requirement to provide an online repeat prescription service being part of the GP contract since 2015.

The move away from paper prescriptions has seen a range of online Apps and email based systems working alongside the traditional options for phone and paper prescriptions.

## What we did

- The project, which was carried out between May and August 2023 included research on various prescription ordering services using an online survey and paper surveys completed at engagement sessions held in Bath. Thirty responses were received in total.

These were:

- Family Food and Play session at Foxhill
- Oasis food pantry in central Bath
- Age UK social club in central Bath

People were invited to add comments to each question / section in their own words. This provided valuable feedback about people's experiences in ordering prescriptions.

Every person completing the survey was using repeat prescriptions, either for themselves or a member of their family.

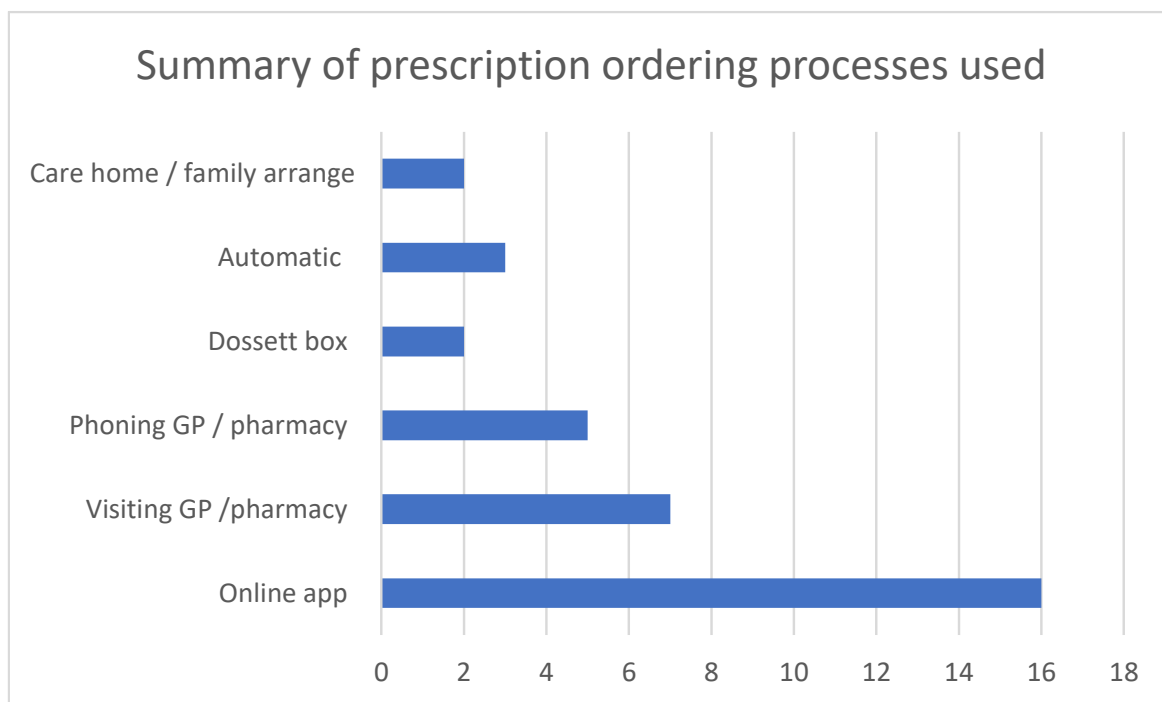
Some people were ordering or collecting prescriptions for more than 1 person in their household. One person was ordering between 12 to 14 repeat items.

# What did people in Bath & North East Somerset tell us?

## How did people order prescriptions?

The survey asked how people ordered their prescriptions, with options including specific Apps (including System One and the NHS App), Prescription Ordering Direct, email, calling the GP surgery or 'other'. The questionnaire is attached in the Appendix.

Fourteen people had ticked 'other' and once these responses were analysed and added into the figures it indicated that altogether just over half of respondents (16 or 53.33%) used an online app or process with 12 or 40% either phoning or calling in person to their GP or pharmacy. Five or 16.66% of respondents had a Dossett box provided or stated their orders were 'automatic' in some way without specifying a process.



(Note: the higher number of responses indicates that 'other' could include 2 or more responses)

A demographic summary of who responded is included in the Appendices.

## Summary of responses

- Just over half of respondents were using an online App to order prescriptions
- Overall, people responded that they found their method of ordering prescriptions worked for them, with 86.7% (26 people) answering positively.
- When asked how 'happy' people were with their prescription ordering service, on a scale of 1-10, 17 people (56.7%) scored 9-10, and 8 people (26.7%) scored 7-8, giving a total only slightly lower than the proportion of people who felt their method of ordering was 'efficient' for their needs.
- There were still challenges for over one third of respondents (11 people) in using their chosen method of ordering, including both Apps and other more 'traditional' methods of ordering prescriptions
- According to our survey GPs do not appear to have been routinely recommending people to use Apps, with one third saying their GP did recommend and just over one half saying 'No' with the remainder being unsure or not answering the question
- There was evidence of push back from some GPs to people wanting to order by phone, with some staff saying "They no longer take prescriptions over the phone"
- A number of people highlighted that they would need help in order to be able to use an App
- Some people experienced problems with their medication not being at the pharmacy when it was expected (across all methods of ordering)

## People's experiences using an online process

As the number of responses for each individual App used was low, it is not possible to draw conclusions about the specific Apps used. The responses have therefore been combined and summarised below as either positive experiences or challenges. This section also includes reference to ordering via email.

Responses about individual Apps are included in the Appendix.

## Positive experiences

Most people felt the system they used was effective for them, and they were generally happy with it.

"Repeats sorted automatically and gets reminder - it used to be difficult remembering the access code and the names of the medication when trying to use the online app. Now gets text reminder when it is ready"

"Usually this works fine - she receives reminders via email and then replies by email. All works okay"

"App works well"

## Challenges

People also gave feedback about difficulties they had with the various online systems. These included problems with getting Apps to work and issues with medication not being at the pharmacy when they went to collect it.

It is not clear from our survey where the fault was when medications were not ready to collect.

"Does not have email so can't use online services. Would have to get others to help"

"Need help to get online"

"Has trouble remembering the access code"

"Need to know how to get app to work so it can be used"

"Not being able to use the app when moved from HoB to Beehive. Needs someone to help to set up app on phone"

"GP surgery no longer uses paper- bit more effort now, have to remember to get prescription. Used to be automatic via boots"

"Have 12 - 14 different items of prescription and some are 2 weekly, weekly and monthly - so it is easy to forget and miss some items"

This person also noted that their GP was going to try and help them arrange their orders so they were easier to manage.

"The System /App gives a time to go and collect but the meds are not always ready when they go to the pharmacy to collect (happened a couple of times)"

"Possibly because of the specific meds being prescribed they can only order when down to 4 days supply and it takes 4 days to come through, so it can be a struggle to ensure that not left without meds especially if bank holidays etc "

Some responses indicated difficulties with cancelling repeats and one person expressed concern about this leading to unused medication being left lying around at home.

"Sometimes there is a repeat that is not required - difficult to cancel"

"When people don't have to request how do the doctors know people are taking the meds?"

This brought up concerns about medicine waste and safety when a large amount of medication was "hanging around near young children in the home."

## **Email:**

The survey responses indicated that 1 person used email to order their prescriptions from the GP. This was via a family member.

"Daughter does the ordering via email"

"Usually this works fine - she receives reminders via email and then replies by email"

## **The pharmacist's view**

In addition to responses from individuals about ordering prescriptions, an independent pharmacist gave their view that

"Online Apps work well for them as it reduces the number of phone calls they receive and the calls they need to make to GPs"



However, the majority of their customers for repeat prescriptions are elderly people and on the whole:

“they prefer to use the paper prescriptions or phone up”

“The number of different Apps does not matter for them as pharmacists but it is confusing for patients especially older patients”

## People’s experiences using ‘traditional’ ordering systems

For some people it appeared to be a positive choice to keep calling in person to the GP or pharmacy rather than use an online App or email. The good personal relationship, knowledge, and trust with the GP was very important, and they preferred, at least on some occasions to contact or see their doctor in person to discuss their or their family’s medication.

Comments included:

“Used to be able to phone up so had choice as to how to order.”

“Moved house and area but wanted to stay with previous surgery as has good relationship with GP there”

“All works okay as good relationship with pharmacist”

### Positive experiences

“Have been able to phone up and get through to the GP as well on occasions e.g. when son had tonsillitis prefer to speak to him face to face”

(Fine)“As long as you can get out to deliver form”

“Prescription requests are collected in a drop box at the surgery and then collected from patient's chosen pharmacy a week or so later”

## Challenges

Where people were not using an online app, but were ordering in person or over the phone, there were some challenges noted:

“Have to catch 2 buses to get to surgery – as moved house and area but wanted to stay with previous surgery as has good relationships with GP there”

Noted that the same person would like to be able to order over the phone – and this would be much easier than “go(ing) every 2 weeks as 3 people in household need meds”

“Just need to make sure orders enough days in advance and then collect 3 to 4 days later” and from the same respondent “It is also a challenge to get through to GP on phone if this is needed”

“Reception try to tell me they can’t take the request over the phone but I persist, telling them I am 84 years old and my only option, and then they do. It is also sometimes a wait to get through on the phone”

## Other issues raised about prescriptions and pharmacies

Related issues raised through the survey included prescriptions being sent to the wrong pharmacy and the medication not being in stock at the pharmacy.

“Prescriptions get sent to the wrong pharmacy all the time”

“The pharmacy didn't have it in stock”

“Number of pharmacies has reduced- have been advised that prescriptions might take longer”

“There is a waiting list for online packaging of prescriptions”

Having to pay for medication for long term conditions was also raised.

“For long term conditions such as ADHD it is quite hard to always have to pay each month for the rest of ones life.”

One person had experienced quite significant delays in being able to get a prescription following a hospital consultation.

“(We had) a specific issue though with a prescription which was made via the RUH at the end of a consultation about heart condition.

(We) left the RUH expecting that this prescription would get added to the regular prescription so waited a few days; then checked with the GP who said they hadn't received it; this went backwards and forwards for a while; tried ringing pharmacy who could 'see it' but it was not authorised.

Eventually it got authorised and then when went to collect (today) the pharmacy didn't have it in stock. Taken 2 weeks to sort out with lots of chasing. It needed clarifying at the appointment what would happen to get the prescription through.”

## What are the key findings?

- Whilst those responding were generally happy with their prescription ordering service there were challenges and issues across all methods.
- People found the text or App generated online reminders helpful
- Some people felt the automatic online repeat ordering led to an oversupply of medications and that these were not always easy to cancel
- A significant proportion of the population across all ages have issues accessing and knowing how to use online Apps for ordering prescriptions.
- Good relationships between GPs and pharmacies and patients are important and valued.
- Where people have multiple prescriptions including for other family members, managing the ordering of medications presented a significant personal challenge, requiring support.
- Some specific medications could only be ordered when the individual's supply had reached (say) 4 days worth of medication – this made ordering over holiday periods difficult
- People using all different methods sometimes experienced medication going to the wrong pharmacy or not being there when expected, and were unclear about why this was happening
- Whilst only 1 example was shared, the difficulty with the hospital prescription taking 2 weeks to get sorted impacted negatively on their health and well-being.
- The concern raised about unused medication lying around people's homes is an important issue and linked to wider issues of over prescribing, (costs and health concerns), as well as safety in the home.

## Recommendations

- Provide support where it is needed to help people use online apps including at GPs, pharmacies or other community venues on a regular basis
- Explore further to understand what is causing medication to be sent to the wrong pharmacy or not being available on time. If this relates primarily to patients not ordering correctly or on time, ensure that further support and guidance is provided at the pharmacy or GP
- Explore further to check that hospital prescription ordering is working as it should

- Maintain over the phone, in person and paper-based systems for those unable to use Apps

## Next steps for Healthwatch

- To share the findings with the Bath, Swindon and Wilshire Integrated Care Board including the relevant Operational Group
- To share the findings with organisations who may be able to assist in providing online support, including for older people in Bath & North East Somerset

# Appendices

## Questionnaire: With multiple ways of ordering prescriptions how well are they working for you?

### 1. How do you order your prescription? \*

- Email
- Prescription Ordering Direct (POD)
- System one (Systmonline)
- NHS app
- In practice
- Calling the GP Surgery
- Other (please specify):

Comments:

### 2. Is your selected method of ordering prescription efficient to your use? \*

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify):

Comments:

### 3. Were there any challenges? \*

- Yes
- No

Comments:

**4. What is the one thing that can be done to help serve you? \***

**5. How happy are you with your ordering service?**

\*

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Not at all likely	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	Extremely likely

**6. If you have used POD (Prescription Ordering Direct) have you found any barriers preventing you from accessing the service?**

**7. Does your GP recommend you to use online prescription? \***

Yes

No

Other (please specify):

Comments:

**8. Do you have repeat prescriptions? \***

- Yes
- No

**9. Where are you based? \***

- Swindon area
- Bath and North East Somerset
- Other (please specify):

**10. Do you identify as**

- Male
- Female
- Other (please specify):

**11. What age range are you?**

- 17 or younger
- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60 or older

**12. What ethnicity do you identify as?**

**White**

- British
- Irish
- Other

**Asian or Asian British**

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Any other Asian background



### Mixed

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and black African
- White and Asian
- Any other mixed background

### Black or Black British

- Caribbean
- African
- Any other black background

### Other Ethnic Group

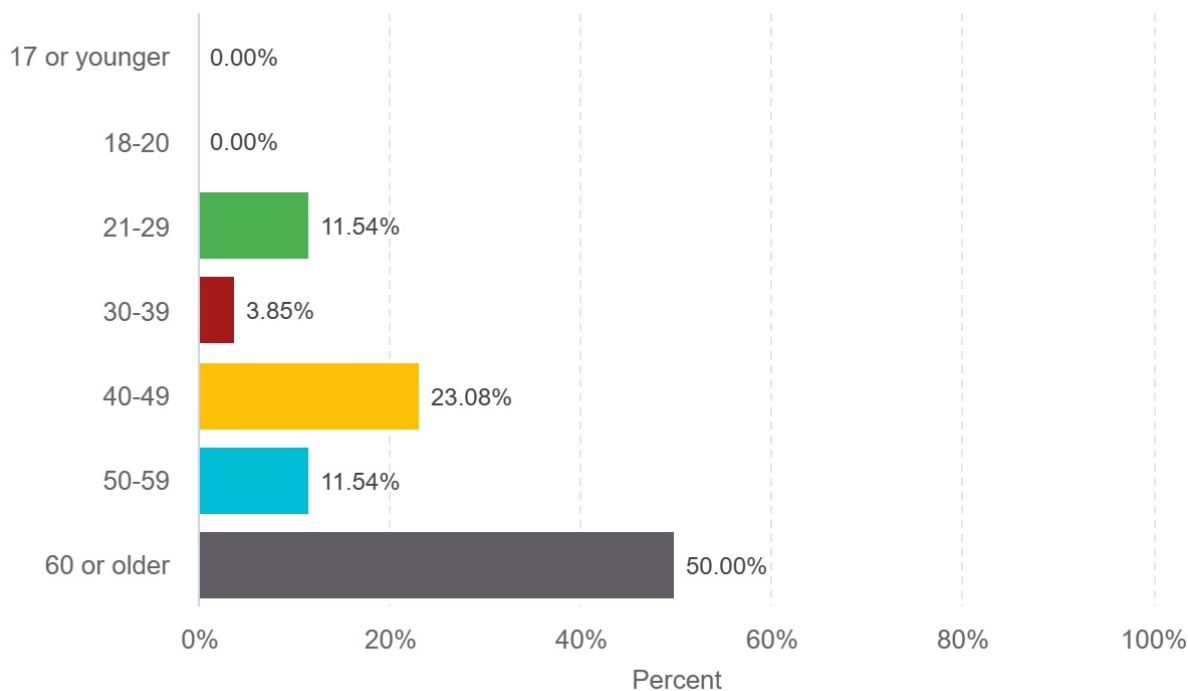
- Chinese
- Any other Ethnic Group
- I do not wish to disclose my ethnic origin
- Other (please specify):

### Who responded?

- 73% of respondents identified as female and 27% as male.

- 81% identified as White British, 7.7% as Irish, 3.85% as Indian, and 3.85% as Caribbean.
- By age:

### What age range are you?



### Issues and comments shared specific to each App

#### Prescription Ordering Direct (POD):

This online service allows people to order their prescription online via phone calls or an online form. It should be noted that, since the survey was completed, a decision has been made by the Integrated Care Board to discontinue with POD. This is in part at least due to the low take up amongst GPs.

In relation to this survey, there is only one GP Surgery in Bath &NES (Heart of Bath) that uses POD, and this limited the number of people taking part.

3 people responded about using this ordering service.

Comments included:

“Sometimes it is a bit difficult”

(Although noted the patient lived in a different area of the country, and had to travel to get prescriptions)

“Sometimes there is a repeat that is not required- difficult to cancel”

Two out of three had been advised by their GP to get repeat prescriptions through POD. All were 60 years or over. No specific barriers were identified.

### NHS App:

The NHS app is a multipurpose service that helps book and manage appointments at your GP surgery, get health information and advice and order your repeated prescription along with lots more.

The NHS app is well-known a national scale to be quite convenient within its various purposes including ordering repeat prescriptions. It is also the one that is recommended by most GPs to their patients.

Although we gathered limited feedback on the NHS app throughout the questionnaire most of them were quite positive, implying how easily accessible this service is to the public for ordering their repeated prescriptions. The respondents using the NHS app ranged in age from 20 to 29 years old followed by 60 and older.

4 people added comments for this app.

“Easy for repeats”

“Only used app once. Usually call the surgery. The App is easier.”

“All works ok”

However, a comment was made that having direct ordering via the app led to

“masses of medication piled up at home. When people don't have to request how do doctors know people are taking the meds? Also, Safety aspect of having lots of medication hanging around near young children in the home.”

It is unclear from the survey whether this applies to all Apps or if it is a matter of people not being aware of how to cancel or amend their orders.

**System one (System online):** System online is a website and app provided by TPP that allows patients to view their electronic medical record and manage appointments or order repeat prescriptions. There were mixed comments on how efficient it is to operate.

6 people were using System One.

“The System /App gives a time to go and collect but the meds are not always ready when they go to the pharmacy to collect (happened a couple of times). Possibly because of the specific meds being prescribed, they can only order when down to 4 days supply and it takes 4 days to come through, so it can be a struggle to ensure that not left without meds especially if bank holidays etc.”

“Very happy with everything”

“Email or text confirmation”

“Reminders would be very helpful but they don't get them. The old system when used to take paper slip to pharmacy worked well”.

“There is a waiting list for online packaging of prescriptions”

The users of System One who replied to the survey were between the ages of 40 to 60+.



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