

Oxfordshire's Health and Wellbeing Strategy: What do local people want?



**STAYING HEALTHY AND WELL
IN OXFORDSHIRE**

Tell us your views!

What helps you
stay healthy
and well?

What makes
this hard?

Your views will shape the county's new health
and wellbeing strategy

September 2023

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Executive summary

Oxfordshire **Health and Wellbeing Board** is a partnership between local government, the NHS and the people of Oxfordshire <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeeld=897>. It includes local GPs, councillors, and senior local government officers. Healthwatch Oxfordshire sits on the board as an independent voice.

The board has been set up to make sure there is coordination to improve everyone's health and wellbeing, especially those who have health problems or are in difficult circumstances. It meets four times a year, and meetings are open to the public.

The board provides strategic leadership for health and wellbeing across the county and makes sure that plans, such as the [Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy \(pdf format, 675Kb\)](#) are in place and action is taken to realise those plans.

By the end of 2023 the Health and Wellbeing Board will update the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. A lot has changed since the last strategy was made in 2018: Covid, a cost of living crisis, greater focus on health inequalities and prevention, and changes in the way health and care is organised mean that priorities will be different for the coming years.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire wanted to make sure that ordinary resident's views about health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire are central considerations in the way the strategy is built. We spent the summer out and about speaking to people face-to-face across the county, on the streets, at community events, and shopping centres as well as providing an online survey. We attended over 20 community events. **We spoke to over 1,114 people.** We also held a webinar for the voluntary and community sector to give their views, held jointly with Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA). Oxfordshire County Council did further engagement and ran separate focus groups to hear from communities that are sometimes seldom heard. Thanks to all those who gave their views.

We asked three questions:

- 1. Tell us what helps you stay healthy and well in Oxfordshire?**
- 2. What makes it difficult for you to stay healthy and well in Oxfordshire?**
- 3. What's most important to you - to support the health and wellbeing for all who live and work in Oxfordshire?**

This report is a summary of themes based on conversations with **1,114 people** in Oxfordshire about their health and wellbeing.

People told us **wellbeing was supported through** ability to:

- Access timely good quality and joined up health care - when and where needed.
- Live an active and healthy life, including walking, access to green space and healthy food.
- Have social interaction, with family life and community activities being important building blocks.
- Have enough money to make healthy choices, including liveable income, affordable housing, childcare and local services and work life balance.
- Access good infrastructure including being able to get around via transport, and active travel routes.

People told us about **challenges to their wellbeing**:

- The commonest response (n=250) was the **high cost of living**, which has a detrimental impact on people's ability to stay healthy and well. This included high housing costs, cost of food, and cost of access to facilities such as gyms and classes. People were feeling the pressure - especially those on low wages, single parents, and families.
- Healthcare was seen as an important priority to support wellbeing and enabling people to maintain healthy life - people noted challenges including **access to health and care** services (GP, dentist, mental health), and lack of joined up care (n=173).
- Lifestyle factors were also noted (n=121) where motivation and support to keep healthy set against **challenges of not enough time, caring responsibilities, and work life balance**.
- Infrastructure was seen as important (n=117) people commented on **lack of accessible and reliable public transport**, traffic and air pollution, impact of poorly maintained public spaces, pavements and cycle routes.
- People were challenged to make healthy food choices, when surrounded by pressures of 'junk food'. Cost of healthy food was increasingly difficult for many (n=93).

- Other challenges included work life balance, caring responsibilities, high cost of accessing gyms and sports centres. Mental health was noted in 27 responses, and included access to mental health support for adults and children.

When asked what was most important to people:

- Access to quality health care (n=256) and financial security and affordability (n=255) were the two most important factors to help Oxfordshire's residents to maintain health and wellbeing.
- Good access to psychosocial support (n=134) was also a clear priority, including access to mental health support, support to young people, and tailored culturally appropriate support for particular groups and needs.
- Affordable and accessible services, including for example being able to afford exercise classes, and being able to afford healthy food options were important.
- Other priorities noted were access to green space, and ability to get around the county including via roads, public transport and active options.

Voluntary sector views:

We also held a webinar to engage representatives of the voluntary and community sector. Participants comments reflected the themes raised by the public. In addition:

- They agreed that cost of living was a big challenge in the communities they served, and noted affordability and access, adding that people were cutting back on other basic necessities including household cleaning products, with impact on wellbeing.
- Participants said it was important that the new strategy '*speaks to people*', is not just '*another document on a shelf*' and uses accessible, clear and simple language, avoiding jargon.
- They also were keen to establish an ongoing dialogue with health and care system, to listen to the grassroots. Healthwatch Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) should support this.

Recommendations and next steps:

Healthwatch Oxfordshire will continue to make sure that the views of people expressed here are used to build the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and speak to the challenges and priorities raised. We would like to see the Health and Wellbeing Board ensure:

- '*You said - We did*' response in the strategy to show how people's views and concerns have been heard and used to influence the strategy design and action.

- Use of clear, accessible and jargon free language, which speaks to the person on the street.
- Opportunities for ongoing dialogue with communities, voluntary sector and health, care and local authorities to enable development of culturally appropriate, accessible and responsive services and infrastructure to support people in living healthy and fulfilled lives in Oxfordshire.

1 What we did

We wanted to hear as many people as possible from diverse groups across Oxfordshire. We asked three open-ended questions:

- 1. Tell us what helps you stay healthy and well in Oxfordshire?**
- 2. What makes it difficult for you to stay healthy and well in Oxfordshire?**
- 3. What's most important to you – to support the health and wellbeing for all who live and work in Oxfordshire?**

A questionnaire was developed and made available online and promoted through our networks and social media. We also collected basic demographic information to understand which groups participated and which didn't, as well as to enable the analysis of responses across different groups.

Healthwatch Oxfordshire team also spent the summer 'out and about', speaking to people face to face, randomly on the street, visiting community larders and community centres, and attending community events such as Play Days (see Figure 1 below). We tried to ensure a spread in geographical and rural / urban areas. The Healthwatch team asked people at these community spaces the three main questions and, later, manually entered the information into the online survey. We used paper forms, as well as offering children a chance to give their views using pictures.



Figure 1. List of community events and activities attended

- Tuesday 18th July 12pm – 4.30pm – Rose Hill Community Centre
- Wednesday 19th July 12pm – 4pm – Blackbird Leys Community Centre
- Thursday 20th July 10am – 1pm – Grimsbury Community Centre, Banbury
- Tuesday 25th July 10am – 3pm – Bicester Play Day at Gagle Brook Primary School, Bicester
- Wednesday 26th July 10am – 3pm – Banbury Play Day at Banbury People’s Park
- Saturday 29th August 10am – 3pm – Cutteslowe Play Day at Sunnymead Recreation Ground, Oxford
- Tuesday 1st August 10am – 3pm – Co-op at Albion Street, Chipping Norton
- Thursday 3rd August 10am – 3pm – Witney Play Day, Oxlease, Witney
- Tuesday 8th August 10am – 2pm – Royal Voluntary Service Corn Hill Centre, Banbury
- Thursday 10th August 9am – 1pm – Exeter Hall, Kidlington
- Thursday 10th August 1pm – 4pm – Keeping Active Day at Didcot Civic Hall
- Tuesday 15th August 10am – 3pm – Thame Charter Market
- Wednesday 16th August 10am – 3pm – Banbury Play Day at Princess Diana Park, Banbury
- Friday 18th August 10.30am – 3pm – Down to Earth Community Café at The Old Stables Stirling Close, Wantage
- Tuesday 22nd August 12pm – 4pm – Templars Square Shopping Centre, Cowley, Oxford
- Saturday 26th August 11am – 4pm – Carterton Carnival, Carterton Recreation Ground
- Tuesday 29th August 9am – 2pm – Sunshine Centre, Banbury
- Tuesday 29th August 11am – 1pm – Donnington Doorstep Family Centre, Oxford
- Saturday 2nd September 10am – 1pm – Abingdon Health Fest, Abingdon Market Place



Other outreach included on the streets at Headington High Street, and Cowley Road Oxford, and at Witney Pride Event.

Analysis of what we heard focused on developing themes – or categories and sub-categories, based on the content of responses. We read each respondent’s answers to the three questions and assigned them to one or more category, which were developed as analysis progressed. We compared responses across gender, age groups, and geographical area for similarities and differences. The report is based on what we heard.

This report is a reflection of what we heard from our conversations with people, and should not be seen as a representative sample, but is on the basis of views of the over 1,114 people we spoke to and reached. This report gives an insight using people’s comments into what people felt supported their wellbeing and what made it difficult to keep healthy and well in Oxfordshire. There were of course many more comments and responses, and these will be fed directly into consideration for the emerging strategy.

2 Results

2.1 Who did we hear from?

1,114 participants

***1,073 told us their gender identity**

- 814 female (73%)
- 257 male (23%)
- 1 trans woman (<1%)
- 1 gender queer (<1%)



Figure 2. Which age groups participated?

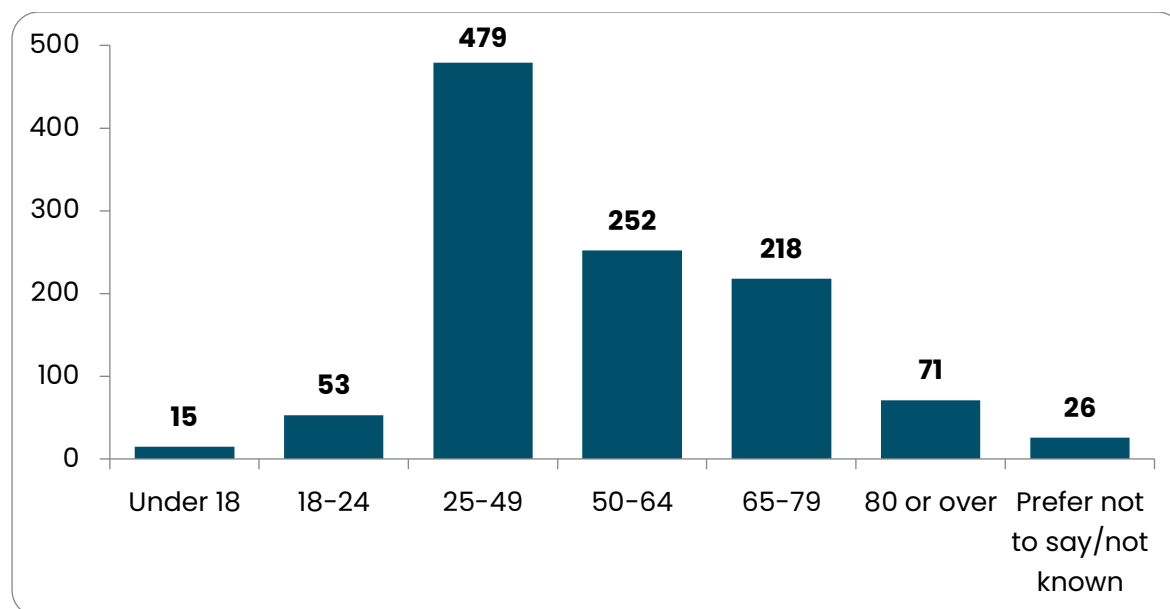
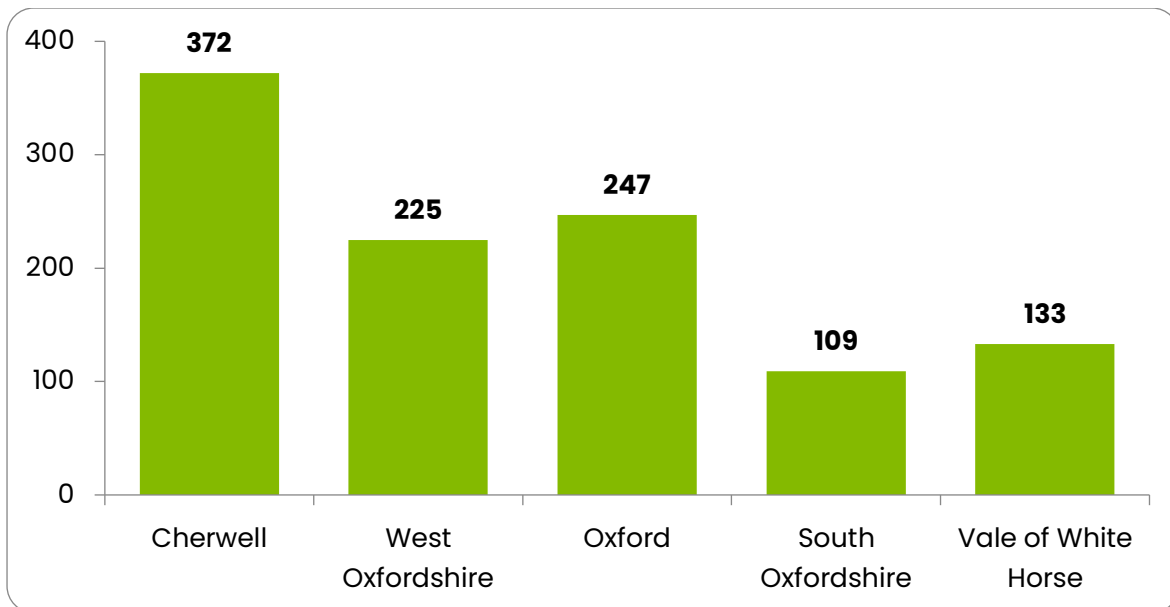


Table 1. Which ethnic groups took part?

Ethnicity	Number
Arab	1 (<1%)
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	1 (<1%)
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	1 (<1%)
Asian/Asian British: Indian	31 (3%)
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	23 (2%)
Asian/Asian British: Any other Asian/Asian British background	11 (<1%)
Black/Black British: African	23 (2%)
Black/Black British: Caribbean	15 (1%)
Black/Black British: Any other black/Black British background	5 (<1%)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White	2 (<1%)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White	2 (<1%)
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups: Other Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	4 (<1%)
White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	901 (83%)
White: Irish	2 (<1%)
White: Gypsy Irish/Traveller	1 (<1%)
White: Roma	2 (<1%)
White: Any other White background	34 (3%)
Any other ethnic groups	4 (<1%)
Prefer not to say/not known	28 (3%)
Total	1091 (100%)

Figure 3. Which Oxfordshire districts were represented?

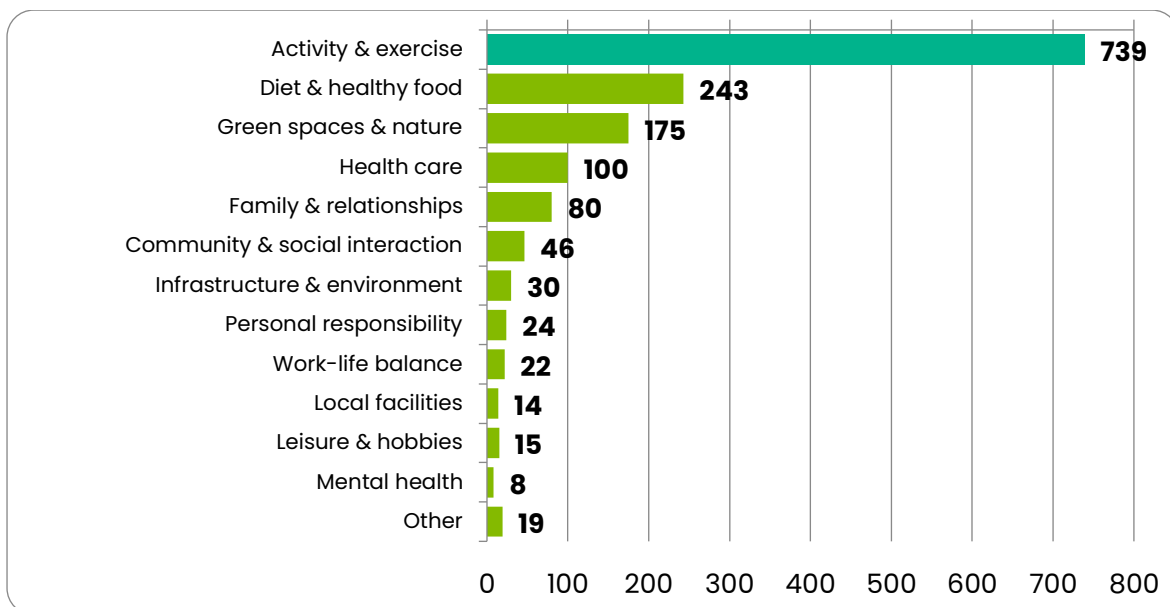


Note: 1091 people told us their district; 5 had no fixed address or were visiting

2.2 What helps you stay healthy and well in Oxfordshire?

A total of 1,078 people told us about the things that support their health and wellbeing. Figure 4 below summarises what we heard.

Figure 4. What helps you stay healthy and well in Oxfordshire?



*Note: people were able to give more than one answer

As the figure shows, the overwhelming number of people in Oxfordshire believe that activity and exercise best support health and wellbeing. Other popular

Several people did gardening or worked in their allotment, while older people sometimes exercised at home or tried to generally stay active.

*"I do three set of exercises each day when I get up."
(Man, 80 or over, Vale of White Horse)*

*"Walking, gardening and looking after my cat."
(Woman, 80 or over, Cherwell)*

2.2.2 Diet and healthy food

People clearly understood the importance of diet and good food for health, including in combination with physical activity and exercise. Specific comments included:

- "Eating good food". "Eating well but not too much"
- "Great local produce"
- "Access to cheaper healthy food. Getting food from a food bank"
- "Cooking from scratch at home"
- "Losing weight (diabetic)."
- "I am a Slimming World member"

2.2.3 Green spaces and nature

"University parks" *"Rural environment"* *"Walking routes"* *"Countryside"*
"Green spaces"
"Outdoor spaces" *"Nature"*

Green and blue spaces were important to people. Plentiful and attractive outdoor places encouraged people to go outside and maintain an active lifestyle:

"Easy access to the countryside for physical exercise and mental wellbeing"

People described having access to different types of outdoor spaces and how their use helps promote health and wellbeing:

"Use of footpaths, green spaces for walking, running, spending time with others."

2.2.4 Health care

A dominant opinion was that having **timely access** to an appropriate health care professional or service was key to supporting health and wellbeing:

"Being able to get access to health professionals' for advice on health matters."

(Woman, 25-49, Cherwell)

"An excellent, committed and readily available GP who has known me and my health issues for many years."

(Woman, 65-79, Cherwell)

"My GP when I get through." (Woman, 80+, Cherwell)

We heard that people seek advice and support from a range of sources, health services, and health care providers:

- GP practices
- Nurses
- Specialists
- Dentists
- Pharmacies
- Screening/medical checkups
- Private health care
- The internet

Quality of care also played an important role, including joined up care, communication skills and professional knowledge:

"Good communication between primary and secondary care. Access to really high quality specialist care who listen to your opinions and are willing and able to work with you to find the best outcomes and options. Having a range of different professionals at my GP practice, like diabetes nurses and physiotherapists so it's easier to access the most appropriate care."

(Woman, 25-49, Oxford City)

Some people noted that personal responsibility plays a role in maintaining health and wellbeing and that, with the right support of their health care provider, they are better able to manage their health condition:

*"I have several health problems but with the help of my excellent
GPS etc they are reasonably under control."
(Woman, 80 or over, Vale of White Horse)*

2.2.5 Other factors

Figure 5 above also shows that other factors support Oxfordshire residents to maintain health and wellbeing. They are listed below with quotes to illustrate examples:

- **Family and relationships**

*"Close contact with friends & family."
(Woman, 50-64, West Oxfordshire)*

*"Friends, the gym, playing the ukulele in a group, being a member
of local groups."
(Woman, 65-79, Vale of White Horse)*

- **Community and social interaction and community groups and activities**

*"Good community network; many classes to attend and join."
(25-49, no gender given, West Oxfordshire)*

- **Personal responsibility**

*"Being proactive and taking the initiative to exercise and eat
healthily."
(Woman, 50-64, Vale of White Horse)*

*"Keeping my mindset positive and try to eat 5 fresh fruit and veg."
(Woman, 50-64, Oxford City)*

- **Infrastructure and environment**

*"Having outside spaces such as parks is an easy means to
getting about on foot and cycling."
(Man, 25-49, Oxford City)*

*"There are great places and groups to walk with. This is good for
mental health, weight loss, mobility and general health if you can
access them."
(Woman, 65-79, Vale of White Horse)*

"I love the Blue Line health walks we have in Bicester. It encourages me to walk a good distance, without risk of getting lost!"
 (Woman, 50-64, Cherwell)

- **Work-life balance**

"Flexible working hours."
 (Woman, 25-49, South Oxfordshire)

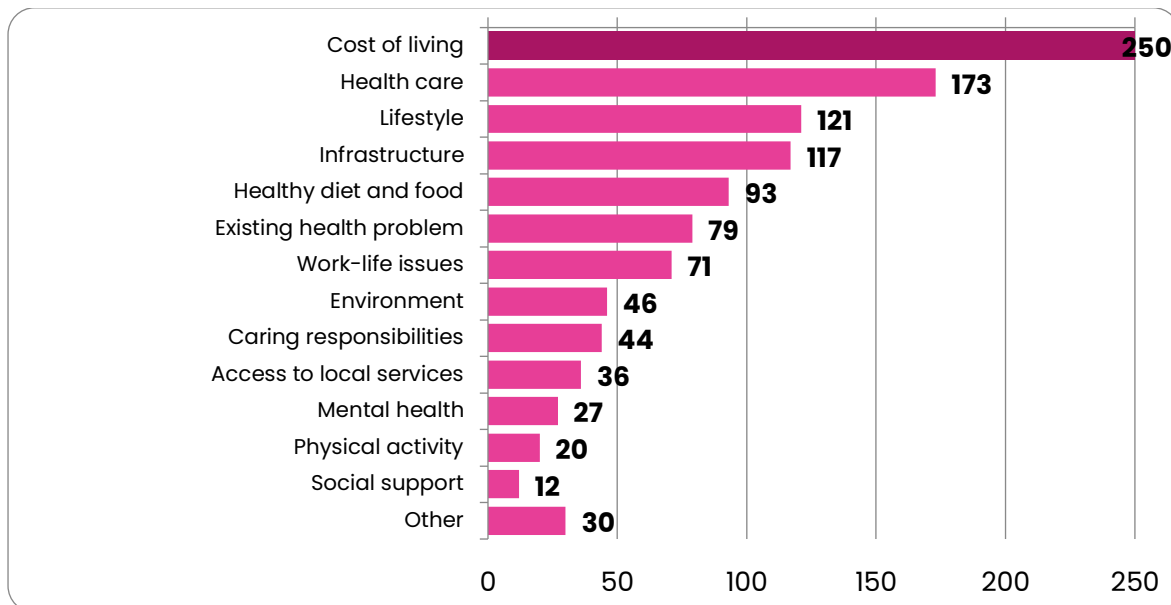
2.3 What makes it difficult for you to stay healthy and well in Oxfordshire?

Several people commented that they faced no particular difficulties in looking after their health and wellbeing:

"I don't find it difficult. I am in a good position, lots of walks in my area. I live in a very large village and am grateful that I have a lot of friends."
 (Woman, 65-79, South Oxfordshire)

However, most people said they experienced one or more of a wide range of challenges and barriers to staying healthy and well, which are summarised in figure 6 below.

Figure 6. What are the barriers to health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire?



*Note: people were able to give more than one answer

2.3.1 Cost of living

As figure 6 above shows, the commonest response (n=250) was the high cost of living, which highlighted how it has a detrimental impact on people's ability to

stay healthy and well. High costs can prevent them from buying essential items and accessing resources and services. Figure 7 below explores the commonest terms people described about their experiences of the cost of living.

Figure 7. Dimensions of the cost of living in Oxfordshire



The figure above highlights basic necessities like food and healthy eating, housing, and childcare, health needs. People told us they were having to make difficult choices on expenditure which impacted on being able to self-care. For example, the high cost of gyms, sports and exercise facilities was noted.

Students, those on low incomes, and single parents in particular said they find the cost of living extremely challenging overall. For example:

“I am a single parent cost of living makes everything so expensive.”

(Woman, 25-49, Oxford City)

However, people in working families also said that Oxfordshire is an expensive county and that they struggle to fulfil their needs:

“Price of everything from housing to food. It is cheaper in other areas. I work within the NHS & feel that we should be paid London waiting rates as the cost of living is so much higher here than other more northerly areas of the country.”

(Woman, 50-64, South Oxfordshire)

Housing costs, and high rent were noted as a pressure:

“Cost of living- rent has gone up by 30%.”

(Man, 25-49, Oxford, OX4)

Although people identified a wide range of activities that support health and wellbeing (see section 3.2.1 above), those that have to be paid for have become more expensive. Many people emphasised the prohibitive costs of healthy food

and use of sports and gym facilities, and that this type of activity was in many cases no longer affordable:

“Cost of living makes it difficult to afford things that would improve health (e.g. sports/exercise classes, gym, healthy food). It is also difficult to meet and connect with new people as there are few free activities or spaces (particularly targeted at young professionals) which would help improve mental health and reduce isolation.”

(Woman, 18-24, Oxford City)

“I would love to join the gym for yoga classes and dance but it isn't affordable.”

(Woman, 25-49, Vale of White Horse)

“Cost of anything class based, gym memberships, swimming etc-too expensive and can't deem it as a necessity budgeting wise.”

(Woman, 50-64, West Oxfordshire)

Some families told us that once regular activities like swimming with children had now become a luxury due to cost.

People also emphasised the impact of prices and inflation on their ability to buy enough quality food and healthy ingredients:

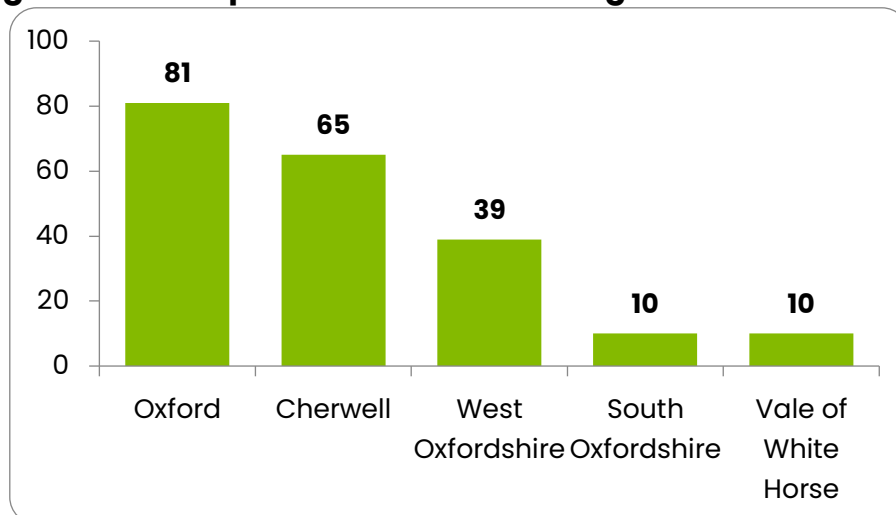
“Food prices have gone up so much. Used to buy branded food now buy own brand.”

(Woman, 25-49, Oxford City)

Some told us they were using food larders and other sources.

We compared how many people recorded cost of living as a difficulty across different districts in the county (Figure 8).

Figure 8. The experience of cost of living across Oxfordshire



As figure 8 shows, most of the 205¹ people who reported cost of living as a barrier to their health and wellbeing lived in Oxford City and Cherwell districts.

2.3.2 Health care

Access to health care was also a strong factor. People told us about problems they experience getting appointments with a doctor, finding an NHS dentist, and facing long waiting times for hospital treatment or follow-up. Typical comments included:

“Difficult to get GP and dentist appointments. Difficult to register for dentists for new residents.”
(Woman, 18-24, South Oxfordshire)

“Lack of primary health advice/checks, long waiting times to see GPs, lack of NHS dentistry, long waiting lists to see specialists, lack of pharmacies.”
(Woman, 50-64, Cherwell)

The chart below highlights these and other challenges that were present in the survey data, loosely grouped in to access and availability of health care provision of services, and organisational factors.

Access and availability	Provision	Organisational
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inability to get appointment with GP • Hospital waiting times • Lack of NHS dentists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote consultations • Getting prescribed medication • Care not joined up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff shortages • Parking problems

“I don’t have a mobile phone and worry if I get ill I can’t see anyone or contact a GP.”
(Man, 70 Witney)

“My wife has dementia, it’s very difficult to navigate the many different support agencies to come up with a care plan. Agencies should be more ‘responsive’ and joined up.”
(Man, 65-79, Cherwell)

“Easy access to health care. E.g., waiting times for mental health services are a worry, particularly CAMHS.”
(Man, 50-64, Vale of White Horse)

¹ Eight people did not record their district in the online survey.

2.3.3 Lifestyle

Comments on lifestyle issues included challenges to keeping healthy ranging from self-motivation to impact of long work hours, sedentary jobs, and lack of time due to family and caring commitments:



*"Motivation to stay healthy through exercise and diet is a problem and I find if there are any queries etc finding someone to talk to is not there."
(Woman, 65-79, Cherwell)*

"Being a full time carer." (Woman, 50-64, Oxford)

2.3.4 Infrastructure

Infrastructure issues were reported to impact people's ability to maintain health and wellbeing. These were grouped around four broad categories: transport and traffic, housing, public spaces, and accessibility:

Transport/traffic	Housing	Public spaces	Accessibility
Access to transport	Housing shortage	Unkept public spaces	Disabled access
Poor public transport	New housing developments	Poorly maintained pathways	Wheelchair-safe routes
Excess traffic and pollution	Building on rural land	Poor street lighting	Poor cycle paths
Dangerous roads			
Inadequate cycle paths			
Limited & card-only parking			

Comments relating to transport and traffic issues in Oxfordshire included:

“Lack of public transport in rural areas, we are two miles from nearest small town but you can’t get there by bus and cycling is really dangerous.”

(Woman, 25-49, West Oxfordshire)

“Poor public transport in Oxfordshire outside Oxford City which makes me dependent on running a car. I don’t know how I will cope when I can no longer drive...The focus of Hospital services on the JR which is costly, time-consuming and exhausting in terms of travel.”

(Woman, 65-79, Cherwell)

“Too much car traffic travelling too fast in residential and built-up areas.”

(Man, 50-64, Cherwell)

“Not being able to access things due to reduced mobility when there is no car access/parking or public transport available.”

(Woman, 50-64, Oxford City)

“Public transport is lacking and cycle paths/facilities out of the town centres are awful.”

(Man, 25-49, West Oxfordshire)

“Getting anywhere from villages on public transport...takes two hours from Bampton to Witney, and 2 hours from Carterton to Oxford for appointments, people with learning disabilities can’t get anywhere”

(Woman, 50-64, Carterton)

“Air quality, notice a lot of pollution when cycling.”

(Man, 80+ Vale of White Horse)

“Poor pavements for wheelchair users and mobility scooters.”

(Woman, 50-64. West Oxfordshire)

2.3.5 Healthy diet and food

Impact of the food environment and cost of food was clear in many comments. Feedback on difficulties accessing a healthy diet and food focused on:

- **Cost and availability of healthy food.**

The cost of living was noted as having a significant effect on people's ability to purchase healthy food options. Families, those with children, and people facing financial challenges spoke about the stresses of food bills and work-life balance.

*"The cost of living is crippling my family. As a mother I am constantly worried about how to feed everyone on a shoe string, when both of us work it shouldn't be this hard."
(Woman, 25-49, Cherwell)*

*"Poverty. I cannot afford to buy fresh fruit and vegetables."
(Woman, 50-64, Oxford City)*

A number of people made use of emergency food provision:

*"Food banks are a godsend for people like me."
(Man, 50-64, Oxford City)*

*"Access to cheaper healthy food. Getting food from a food bank."
(Woman, 80 or over, Cherwell)*

- **Presence of highly processed food.**

Comments focused on the impact of the unhealthy food environment, noting proliferation of 'fast food' options and 'temptations' of 'junk foods' high in fats, sugar and salt.

*"Too much ultra processed foods in shops, cafes and takeaways in town."
(Woman, 65-79, Cherwell)*

*"High sugar and high fat foods endlessly promoted and cheap."
(Man, 50-64, Cherwell)*

- **Abundance of junk food and fast-food restaurants.**

Many people commented on the impact of 'fast food' or hot food takeaways and pressures on people, including their proliferation in certain areas, as well as the impact on people's food choices where fast food was more affordable than healthy foods:

*"Volume of takeaways accessible in Blackbird Leys."
(Woman, 24-49, Oxford City)*

*"Fast food chains (food easy to get)."
(Woman, 18-24, South Oxfordshire)*

*“Fast food companies allowed to set up shop and advertise (typically more in poorer areas).”
(Man, 50-64, Cherwell)*

- **Temptation of snacks, takeaway food, and alcohol.**

*“Food temptation – too many junk foods.”
(Woman, 24-49, Oxford City)*

*“High sugar and high fat foods endlessly promoted and cheap.”
(Man, 50-64, Cherwell)*

2.3.6 Existing health problems

Many people who took part said they were managing an acute, chronic, or long term or severe health condition. Others were elderly or living with a disability, or caring for loved ones. Illness and older age can reduce mobility and make it difficult to lead a healthy, active lifestyle, and impacts on social interaction:

*“A knee issue prevents me doing as much as I would. I had two injections but no ‘regular’ reviews or follow ups except by a two-minute telephone call.”
(Woman, 65-79, South Oxfordshire)*

*“My obesity, increasing age and chronic conditions.”
(Man, 65-79, Vale of White Horse)*

*“Being disabled and not being able to leave the house unaided –the cost of someone to help me.”
(Woman, 50-64, Vale of White Horse)*

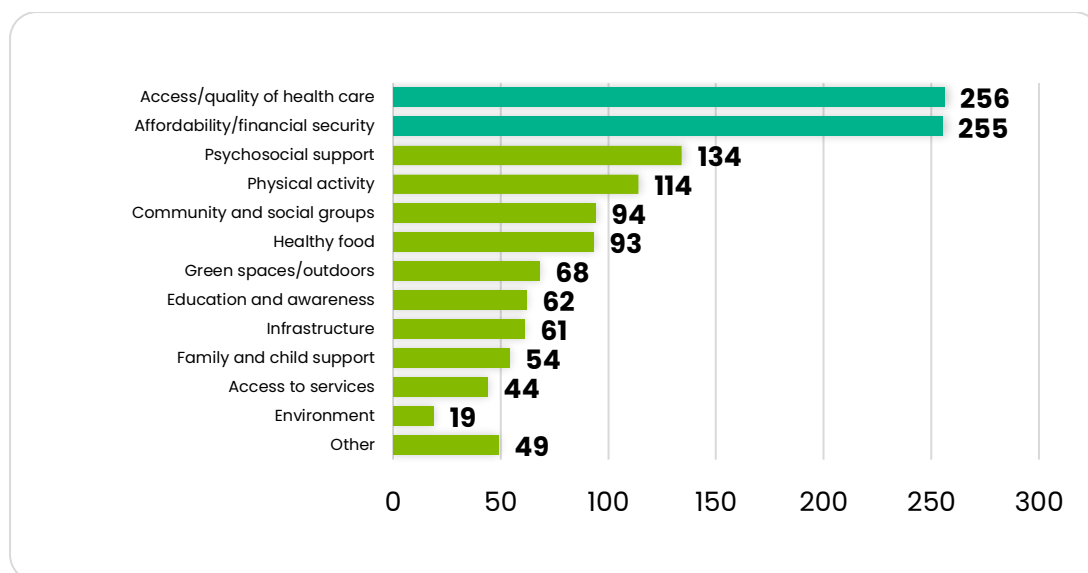
Similarly, visiting a GP or hospital appointment can be more complicated:

*“I have lung disease and it is so difficult to see my GP face to face. Lack of support for people with eye conditions.”
(Woman, 65-79, Vale of White Horse)*

2.4 What's most important to you to support the health and wellbeing for all who live and work in Oxfordshire?

Figure 9 below summarises the range of responses people gave when asked what was most important in supporting health and wellbeing of Oxfordshire’s residents.

Figure 9. Important factors to support health and wellbeing in Oxfordshire



*Note: people were able to give more than one answer

Figure 9 clearly shows that people consider access to quality health care and financial security and affordability by far the most important factors to help Oxfordshire’s residents to maintain health and wellbeing. Examples of comments included:

Health care including access and joined up care to GPs, NHS dentists, and mental health support:

*“Access to healthcare e.g. ability to easily see/speak to a GP, urgent care centres, pharmacies etc to prevent everyone going to A&E when not necessary.”
(Woman, 18-24, Vale of White Horse)*

*“Easy access to preventative healthcare and monitoring to enable early identification of issues.”
(Woman, 50-64, Cherwell)*

*“Better access to mental health services.”
(Woman, 25-49, Cherwell)*

Support to manage the high cost of living:

*“Enough income to be able to buy fresh fruit and vegetables. I live in a flat with no outside space, I cannot grow my own.”
(Woman, 65-79, South Oxfordshire)*

*“Access to affordable local fitness classes.”
(Man, 25-49, Oxford City)*

“Living wages” (Woman, 25-49, Oxford)

Next to these was psychosocial support for a range of groups and issues:

- Free, easily accessible mental health services
- Perinatal and postnatal mental health support
- Youth mental health services, and better support for SEND, less wait for autism diagnosis
- Culturally appropriate support for black and minority communities around trauma and racism as well as more specific groups in community settings
- Better awareness of Trans needs and support for people with gender dysphoria
- Tailored support for men
- “Community-based solutions for mental health support, loneliness, keeping well at home.”

“Better access to mental health support. No tailored support services for Black and Minority communities around trauma, and racism etc.”
(Woman, 18-24, West Oxfordshire)

“No support for men in Witney especially with mental health and suicide.”
(Woman, 65-79, West Oxfordshire)

Physical activity included the need for a wide range of affordable and accessible sport and exercise facilities as well as community-based activities. Some people also suggested education, information and support for self-care and to support people to be able to choose a healthier lifestyle, for example, affordable or free classes, and healthy eating promotion in schools.

“More things to do for everyone that is free and cheap.”
(Woman, 25-49, Cherwell)

“30 minutes free access to the gym and community exercise groups.”
(Woman, 25-49, Vale of White Horse)

“Free sessions for all -cost of access to leisure facilities is too expensive for people.”
(Woman, 65-79)

Many people valued the role of community and social groups in strengthening connection and wellbeing and felt this should be supported and resourced. Some noted specific need for culturally appropriate and accessible spaces and clubs.

This was closely followed by the importance of availability and access to healthy local produce and affordable food.

‘Other’ factors included:

- “More government funding”
- Tackling the unhealthy food environment and affordable food

- More support to those with families, and young children
- Support services for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly
- Employment and working and living wage
- Friendliness, smiling and having a cheerful outlook

3 Views from the voluntary sector

We held an online webinar in early September to hear from members of the voluntary and community sector, in partnership with Oxfordshire Community Voluntary Action (OCVA), and with input from a representative of Oxfordshire County Council Health and Wellbeing Board. It was attended by 19 people. Here, we fed back on what we had heard from residents, and gave this group a chance to reflect on any gaps and insights they wanted to add from the perspective of their groups with strong community links.

Language and information accessibility

Language and information about health and care and wider support needs to be accessible, clear and not always reliant on online information

“...language and terminology is absolutely a barrier.”

“...the Council website, for example, there's so much on there “go to this link, go to that link” rather than just saying a few simple top tips speaking to people. Just tell people without all the jargon... it's one of the big areas that I get fed back a lot by people out in the community.”

One group noted their success with holding community-based health and wellbeing events, in market places for example, and bringing health services to speak with people and suggested this could be adopted elsewhere, and could include health checks.

People noted the need for the final Health and Wellbeing strategy needs to be accessible and a document that *“really speaks to people”*.

Cost of living

Overall, the participants echoed the themes of what Healthwatch Oxfordshire had heard from local residents. Cost of living was pressing, noted across communities. Financial and physical access was also noted:

“Cost of living that has increased... we have found has had quite a significant impact. it's OK having free sessions for swimming or whatever ...It's actually getting there can be an issue as well.”

“I think sometimes we need to think outside of the box, especially if someone that is disabled or they just can't afford because they just don't have the money. It's an issue.”

“People are forgoing buying the basic cleaning products as well because they cannot afford quality food. But they're using, you know, filling up with poor quality food. So they are foregoing things like cleaning products which is having an impact on their mental health and physical well-being as well because there's a complete knock on effect. You know it's very much linked.”

Continuing the dialogue with decision-makers:

The group acknowledged a need to explore ways to better support the meaningful and responsive dialogue between communities, health and care and local government sector – there is potential for Healthwatch Oxfordshire and OCVA to work together to support and enable this ongoing dialogue.

“The whole sector is often very difficult to navigate, and yet we know that it has such a huge impact on everything that we do ... and it can often feel quite hard to have any influence.”

Other comments included:

- Central role of community and voluntary sector in being close to grassroots communities, and reaching where the statutory sector finds it difficult: *“as a sector, we know that (the strategy) influences every aspect of our lives and the people who we support, and so feeding into that strategy gives us the opportunity to see the person as a whole and reflect back that health and well-being”.*
- Encourage Town Councils to adopt a health policy.
- Food banks supplying personal care and other basic life necessities.
- Make sure focus is on all areas, including rural, not just Oxford and work to respond to and involve local community needs in planning care.
- Make sure things like finance, housing and transport are seen as drivers of health and wellbeing.
- OCVA noted example of more joined up work in areas of health inequalities, involving communities working with support from Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB). The 'Well Together' programme will focus on supporting grassroots action on health and prevention of ill health.

- Oxfordshire County Council outlined the next steps for the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, with consultation in October, for all to comment, and final adoption in March 2024. All are encouraged to contribute and comment and continue to give feedback.

4 Useful links

- Healthwatch Oxfordshire reports to Health and Wellbeing Board <https://healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk/our-work/reports-to-other-bodies/>
- Livewell Oxfordshire online resource and information <https://livewell.oxfordshire.gov.uk/>
- Oxfordshire Community and Voluntary Action (OCVA) <https://ocva.org.uk/>
- Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/residents/social-and-health-care/health-and-wellbeing-board/about-board>
- Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment <https://insight.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

Healthwatch Oxfordshire our friendly staff are here for you to help answer questions or give you information on health and care services in Oxfordshire. If you need more information or advice call us on **01865 520 520** from 9-4 pm Monday to Friday

Visit our website www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk (with translation facility)

email us on hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

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Vizita ami-nia sítiu www.healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk (ho facilidade tradusaun) haruka email mai ami iha hello@healthwatchoxfordshire.co.uk

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