

Exploring Healthcare Barriers in the Farming & Rural Communities of North Yorkshire

healthwatch
North Yorkshire

Alicia Rose

Research & Projects Coordinator



Introduction

- Healthwatch North Yorkshire is the **independent champion** for people using health and social care services in North Yorkshire.
- We **gather feedback** from local communities about their experiences of health and social care and **work with service providers and commissioners** to improve care.
- Healthwatch North Yorkshire have recently undertaken two specific projects on the topic of **rural health & care**:

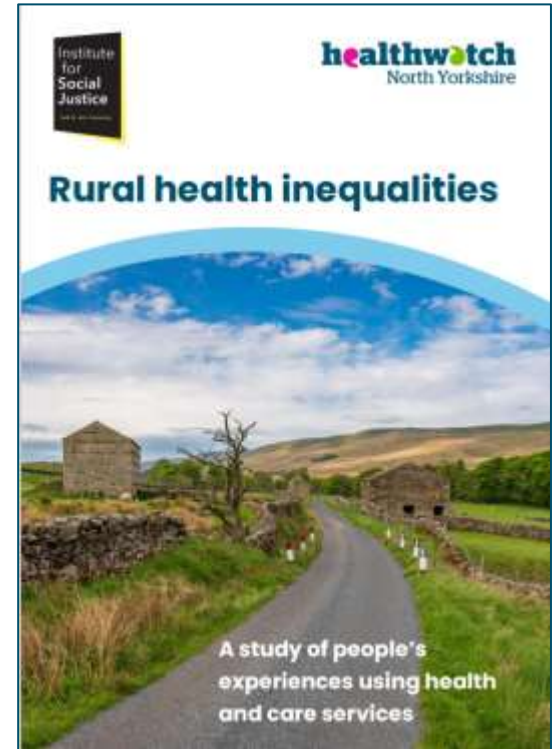
1. Rural health inequalities

2. What stops the farming community getting help when unwell?



Rural Health Inequalities

- **Aim:** to understand how rurality impacts on people's access to, and use of, health services in North Yorkshire.
- This research explored whether rurality is, and should be, considered as a **health inequality**.
- How data was collected:
 - **Survey**- 213 responses
 - **Focus groups**- spoke to 31 people



Key issues facing rural communities

- Access issues –
 - Key barriers were interlinked around a loss of health provision caused by increasing distance to services, inadequate transportation, and the inaccessibility of health care professionals.
 - People miss appointments because of inadequacies in public transport or simply because “it’s too difficult to go”.
- Health care in rural areas costs more –
 - Service provision and development is often limited by short-term funding. It does not always take account of people using services, for example travelling tourists, with budgets based on the local population.
 - Recruiting and retaining health care staff in rural areas is also a challenge.
- Reduced services–
 - The withdrawal of local services contributes to problems of distance not just in terms of ‘decay’ but ‘disappearance’ of health services and support.



Key issues facing rural communities

- Digital issues-
 - Providing more digital health care could increase access but would not suit everyone and **in-person options** should still be made available.
 - A key challenge for rural areas is the availability and reliability of **digital signal and connectivity**.
- Reliance on community support-
 - Community services fill the gaps where local health services had been withdrawn.
 - Lots of services were heavily **reliant on volunteers** who were stretched across multiple services.
- Reduced wellbeing-
 - The barriers to accessing local health services mean people feel **abandoned** and are **less likely to seek help** affecting their long-term health and wellbeing.



What we heard

“It's not uncommon that some of our patients travel over an hour to get to a specialist service. And if they've got pain, they've got fatigue, they've got incontinence issues, they just can't travel that far.”

NHS healthcare professional



“My son had a ruptured appendix. It was critical. I was told the ambulance would take hours, so I took him myself. If I had waited for the ambulance, he may not have survived.”

Member of public



Some outcomes of this project

- Our report has influenced a new project by Hambleton & Richmond Local Care Partnership which will focus on grouping appointments and non-emergency clinics around postcodes to reduce missed appointments, will pilot the delivery of clinics in village halls, and open up clinics so people can self-refer.
- North Yorkshire Council are working on a Rapid Rural Needs assessment and have used the findings of our report to inform this. They are then planning to produce a Rural Strategy.
- Rurality Summit to be held by Healthwatch North Yorkshire & Community First Yorkshire in March 2025.



What stops the farming community getting help when unwell?

- **Aim:** to explore what might be stopping the farming community in North Yorkshire from getting help for health and well-being issues and what services could do to make them work better for this community.
- We worked in collaboration with farming support organisations, North Yorkshire Council and the NHS.
- How data was collected:
 - **Survey**- 149 responses
 - **In-person engagement & interviews**- spoke to 71 people



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**Farming community -
Share your views**

**What stops you getting help when
you're unwell?**

Fill in our short anonymous survey by
scanning the QR code or go to:
www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/farming

Your insight will help to improve the
services and support available to you.

Preliminary findings

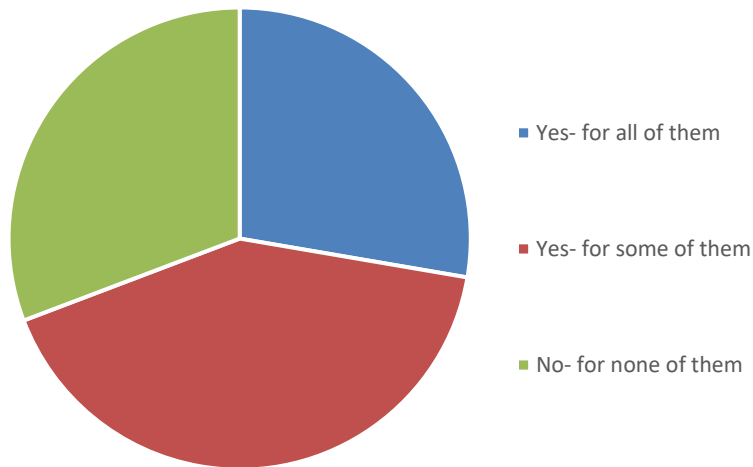
- When asked if they had experienced any health or wellbeing issues in the past year:

74% had experienced back, joint, knee, shoulder or muscle pain

42% had experienced stress & anxiety

31% had experienced sleep problems

Did you seek help in relation to any of these problems?



Barriers to accessing services

- **Top 5** barriers to accessing health services:

1 **40%** said it is hard to arrange health appointments around their farming work

2 **36%** said they don't have time to attend health appointments due to their farming work

3 **28%** said they don't feel that their problems are severe enough to seek help

4 **27%** said they don't think that staff in health services understand the farming way of life and its pressures

5 **20%** said they don't like asking for help

What we heard

"We don't like to bother the NHS with 'minor' ailments, aches and pains

"They don't look after themselves as well as they look after their animals. Farmers are renowned for that, looking after the animals better than themselves"

"I just put up with [back problems], it was normal to just put up with things, it wasn't bad enough to stop working but in the long run it would have given more problems"

"If a farmer comes to the doctor and spends 20 minutes travelling, half an hour sitting waiting, 10 minutes for the appointment and then 20 minutes getting home, all that time has to be made-up at another point. Also, he has taken an extra 10 minutes to wash before he comes to the doctor too. He's easily then spent an hour to do the 10-minute appointment"

"Farmers' mindset is a big barrier. Farming culture makes it a stigma to have physical or wellbeing problems – we just get on with things"

Facilitators to accessing health services

- **Top 5** facilitators to accessing health services:

1

57% said having drop-in clinics at local farming sites where no appointment is needed (e.g. field nurses at auction marts)

2

50% said healthcare professionals who understand the farming way of life and its pressures

3

46% said more flexible appointment times

4

42% said farmers walk-in day at your GP practice (a day where farmers can drop-in to the practice and speak to a doctor/nurse, have blood pressure taken etc)

5

36% said mobile health units in local villages/towns

Examples of good practice

“The Field Nurses saved my neighbours life. He had his blood pressure done and it was so off the scale they told him to come back in a bit and then they tested him three times and blue lighted him to James Cook Hospital where he had triple heart bypass surgery. He wouldn't have been here if that hadn't been there”

“There is lots of farmers out there that don't realise how much help is out there”

“We had a really understanding consultant at Airedale who said with the waiting list you'd probably be getting an operation in November and asked if that would work. It was good to have a consultant that got that he didn't really want an operation the first week in April because that would have been a bit of a nonstarter really [due to lambing]”

For more information

- Our **farming report** will be released on our website in Spring 2025.
- Read the full **rural health inequalities report**: [Rural health inequalities | Healthwatch North Yorkshire](#)
- For any questions or more information email Alicia: alicia.rose@hwny.co.uk

www.healthwatchnorthyorkshire.co.uk

t: 01423 788128

e: hello@hwny.co.uk

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