

Lewisham Mental Health Engagement

Patient Experience Quarterly Update
July–September 2025



Contents

Executive Summary	3
Executive Summary	4
Engagement Numbers	5
Ladywell Unit	6
Speedwell Centre	9
Lewisham Early Intervention Centre	12
Primary Care Mental Health Centre	15
Mental Health Support in GPs	18
Mental Health Support at Lewisham Hospital	19
Healthwatch Observations and Recommendations	20
Demographics	24

Executive summary

Introduction

Healthwatch Lewisham is the local health and social care champion. Through our visits to Mental Health services across Lewisham, we listen to patients' experiences to understand what is working well and what could be improved. This enables us to raise issues with the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust (SLaM) and decision-makers who have the authority to make meaningful changes.

We produce this report quarterly to provide a snapshot of patient experiences within each Mental Health Centre and to share recommendations for service improvement. This edition focuses on the experiences of 46 patients regarding the support they received from their Mental Health Centres, as well as from their GPs and local hospitals in relation to their mental health needs. The findings reflect visits to SLaM coordinated Mental Health Centre between July and September 2025.

Key Findings

- Approximately half of the patients reported not receiving sufficient information about their mental health rights, advocacy services, talking therapies, and support options to help them stay well in the community
- Many patients noted that staff could further improve open and timely communication regarding requests, complaints, and emotional support.
- More than half of the patients felt they were not fully involved in their care planning. They also reported challenges accessing GP and hospital services, often feeling that these services did not fully understand their mental health needs
- Patients continue to face wider social challenges, including limited empathy from their social networks, lacked adequate support with daily living, difficulties securing employment, managing finances, and issues related to addiction.

Recommendations

- Continue to ensure clear and comprehensive sharing of information on mental health rights, advocacy services, talking therapies, and post-discharge support
- Strengthen empathetic communication between staff and patients, increase peer-support visits, and allocate trained volunteers to engage with patients and assist with basic needs.
- Encourage greater patient involvement in care planning and provide tailored support for daily living, wellbeing, and opportunities to gain employment.
- Work closely with patients' social networks and VCSEs to provide group discussions, community-based support, and training sessions to aid patients' reintegration and long-term recovery..

Executive summary Contd.

Conclusion

The findings highlight the continued need for clear information, effective communication, active patient and carer involvement, and strengthened mental health support to help patients remain well within the community.

As the local health and social care champion, Healthwatch Lewisham remains committed to working collaboratively with SLaM to implement these recommendations and support continuous improvements in the quality of care across Lewisham's Mental Health Units.

SLaM has provided their responses to our recommendations. The responses can be found in the Healthwatch Observations and Recommendations section of the report.

Engagement Numbers



46 mental health experiences were shared with us, helping us to raise awareness of this issue and improve care.

14 visits

were carried out to different mental health venues across the borough

Date of visit	Location	Number of Service Users	Number of Carers/ Family members	Total
24/06/2025	Speedwell Centre	5	0	5
19/06/2025	Ladywell Centre	7	1	8
08/07/2025	Primary Care mental Health Team	1	0	1
10/07/2025	Ladywell Centre	6	0	6
15/07/2025	Speedwell Centre	2	0	2
22/07/2025	Lewisham Early Intervention Team	3	0	3
05/08/2025	Ladywell Unit	4	0	4
12/08/2025	Lewisham Early Intervention	1	0	1
12/08/2025	Primary Care Mental Health	2	0	2
18/08/2025	Speedwell	3	0	3
26/08/2025	Early Intervention Centre	2	0	2
11/09/2025	Ladywell Unit	5	1	6
18/09/2025	Lewisham Early Intervention	3	0	3
16/09/2025	Speedwell Centre	3	0	3

Ladywell Unit

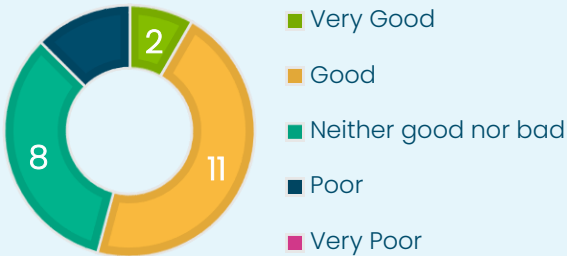
Data snapshot

Between **July– September 2025**, we spoke to

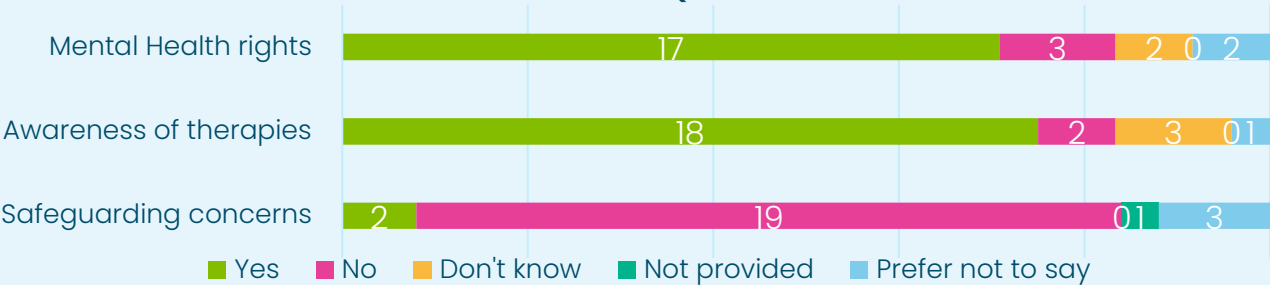
24

people who shared experiences of Ladywell Centre

Overall Experience



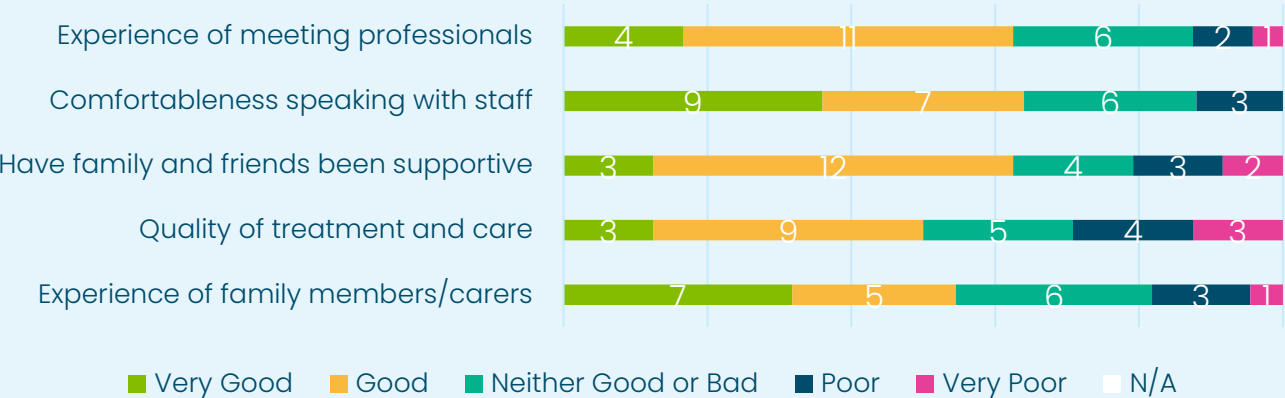
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Ladywell Unit

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"The Staff are usually available. You can go them for support. The staff population are diverse as well, so you feel more comfortable."

"Consistent care coordinator and family psychoeducation session . Help with returning to work."

"My weekly visits to the center made me whole and feeling of not alone in my journey. All my medications given are clearly explained."

"They [the staff] explain everything; They sent monthly medication reviews and appointment reminders."

Negative comments

"I felt death threats from other patients and felt forced to take medications. I do not get the support I need from family because they want me to remain here."- Inpatient

"Too many professionals at review meeting—felt overwhelming. I would value a single "who to call" card with work hours and crisis options."

Ladywell Unit

What people told us about the service

Patient recommendations

"There should be better support with complex emotional need at times"

"I would like more support on how to get along with the community; I find it hard to communicate with other people."

"I would like to be more involved with my care plan."

"Weekend activities limited; clearer timetable posted on the ward. Issued repeat promptly but couldn't view discharge plan until letter arrived; would like shared access to summary."

Speedwell Centre

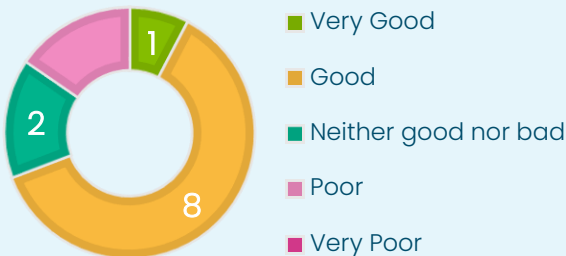
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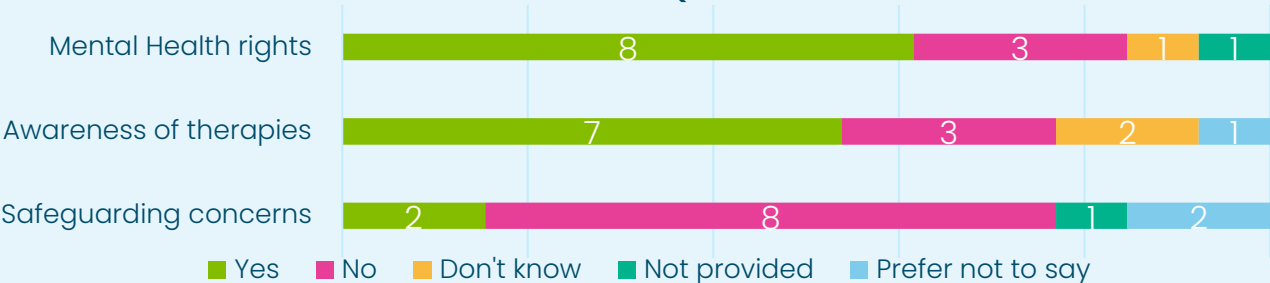
13

people who shared experiences of Ladywell Centre

Overall Experience



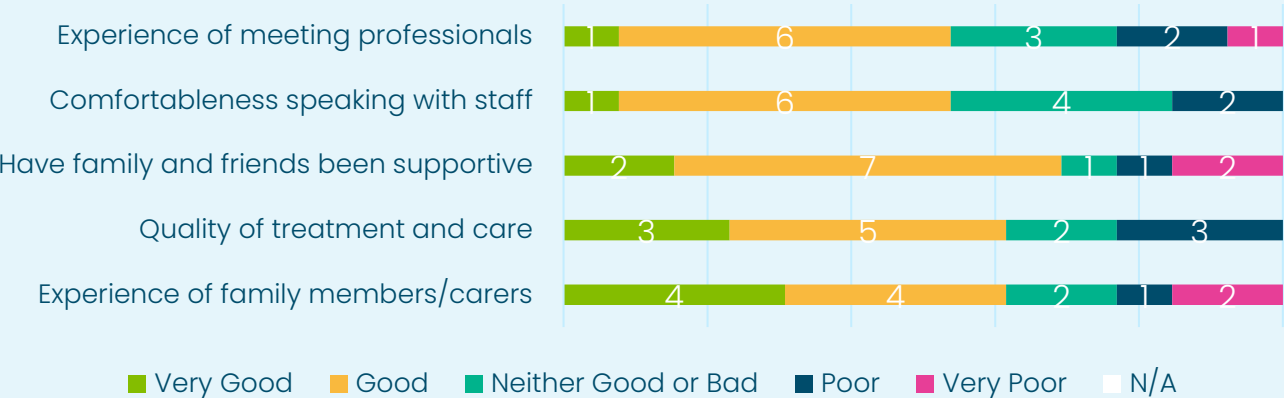
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Speedwell Centre

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"The staff have been excellent. I consistently receive prompt signposting to appropriate support services, and joint sessions are arranged when needed to include my partner. I have also been provided with a structured sleep-routine plan, which has been very helpful."

"Physical-health checks (BP, weight, lipids) caught rising cholesterol early. Employment specialist helped me negotiate phased return to work."

"Joint sessions including partner; practical support with sleep routine; culturally awareness improved, thanks to my Therapist."

Negative comments

"The care plan felt overly jargon-heavy, and my CMHT appointment was scheduled two weeks after discharge, which does not align with the expected 7-day follow-up standard."

Speedwell Centre

What people told us about the service

Patient recommendations

"I would also like support in finding suitable employment. I believe that having meaningful work to focus on would help keep my mind occupied and reduce the likelihood of experiencing triggering thoughts or situations."

"I would like additional support with managing daily living, as I often struggle to integrate and feel connected with my peer group in the wider community.."

Lewisham Early Intervention Centre

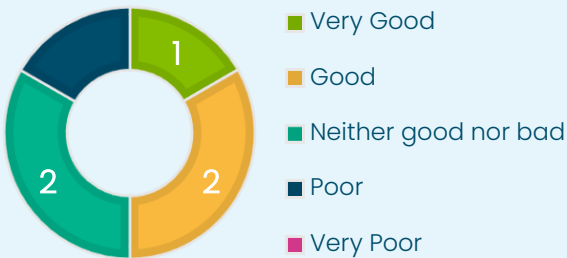
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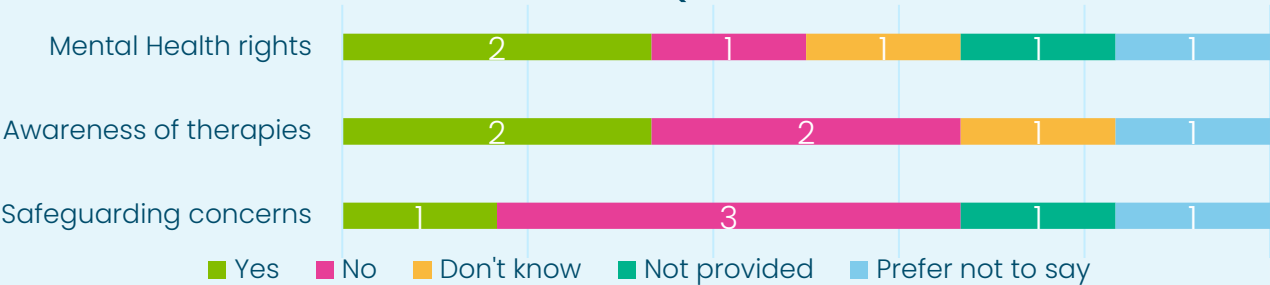
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people who shared experiences of Ladywell Centre

Overall Experience



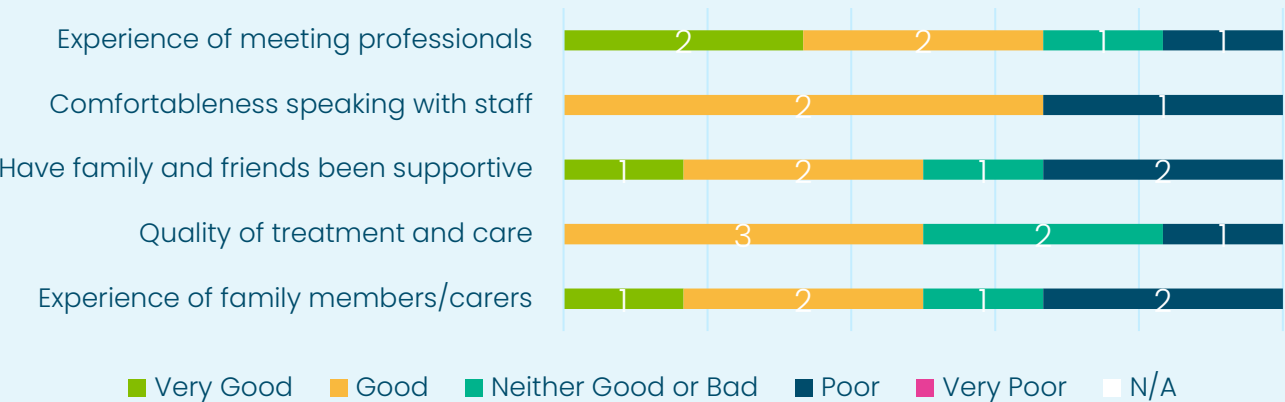
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Lewisham Early Intervention Centre

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"The joint appointment reduced repeating my story. The SMS reminders have been helpful and I prefer the evening slots due to work hours."

"They [the staff] make you feel safe; I have anger issues, and they know how to calm me down before any incident."

Negative comments

"I still have issues with reading the leaflets, if they can provide translated leaflets that will be great.."

Lewisham Early Intervention Centre

What people told us about the service

Patient recommendations

"There should be better support with complex emotional need at times"

"I would like more support on how to get along with the community; I find it hard to communicate with other people."

Primary Care Mental Health Centre

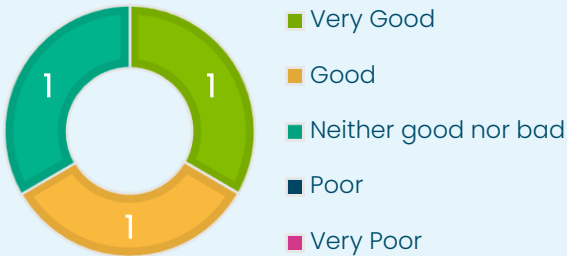
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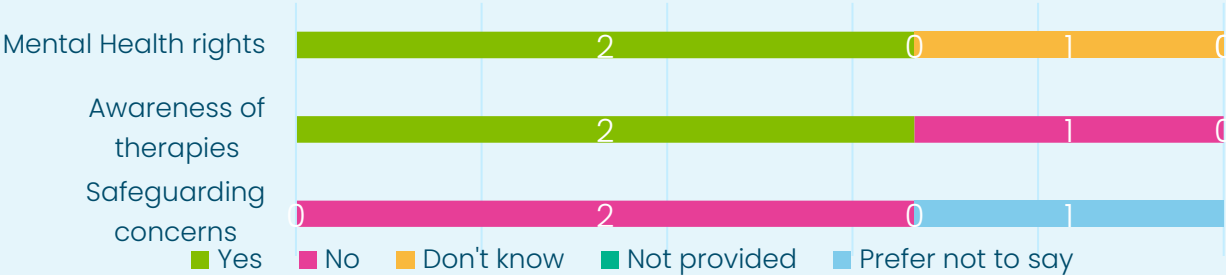
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people who shared experiences of Ladywell Centre

Overall Experience



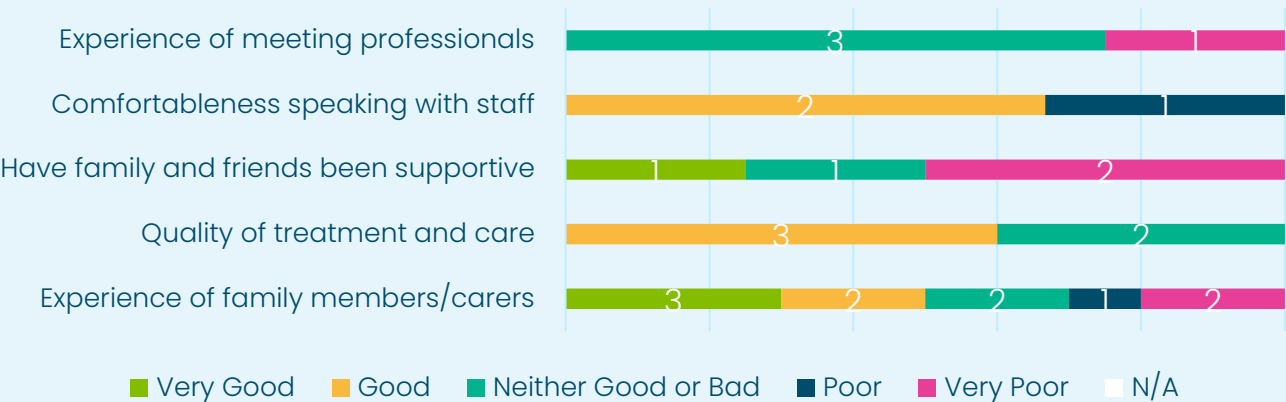
Awareness Questions



Most important aspect for mental health support



Rating of Specific Service Areas



Primary Care Mental Health Centre

What people told us about the service

Positive comments

"The care professionals understand my needs as a mental health patient and do their best to support me in my recovery.."

"I feel that I am responding well to the medication and the therapy sessions provided by my care team.."

Negative comments

"At times, I am not fully aware of what is happening with my care plan and do not feel completely involved in the process. While I understand that the team aims to make the best decisions for my wellbeing, I would like to be more actively included. Communication also needs to improve to support this."

Primary Care Mental Health Centre

What people told us about the service

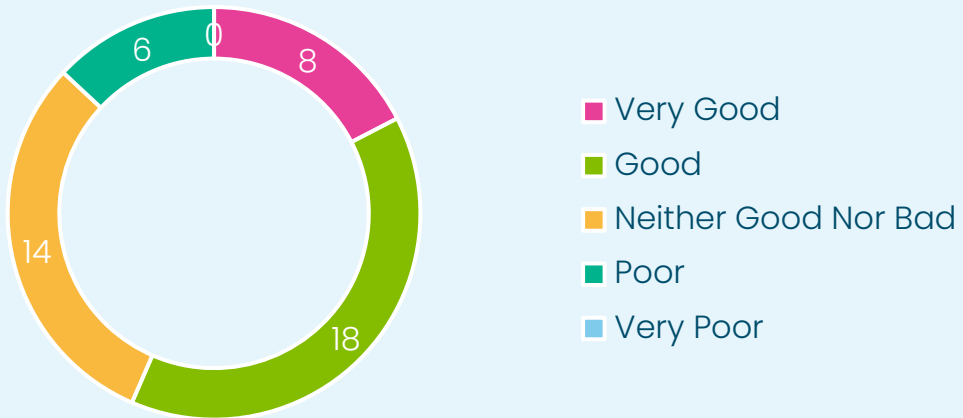
Patient recommendations

"There should be better support with complex emotional need at times"

"I would like more support on how to get along with the community; I find it hard to communicate with other people."

"More peer support and with daily living"

Mental Health Support in GPs



Positive comments

"The reception team were welcoming, and I was pleasantly surprised to receive a same-day appointment. The experience was smooth, and I hope this level of service continues.."

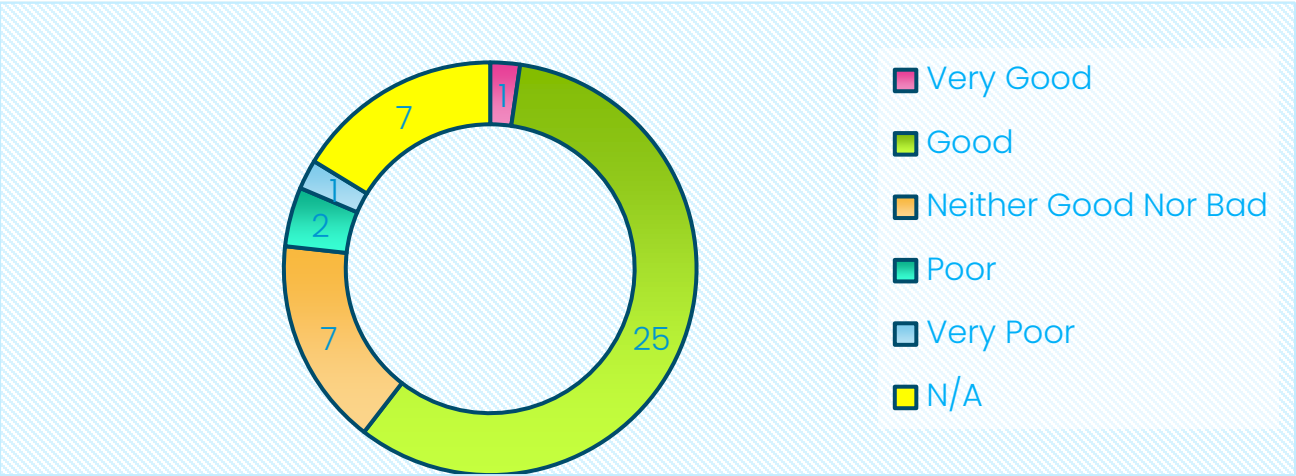
"They [the staff] make you feel safe; I have anger issues, and they can calm me down before the incident."

Negative comments

"It is difficult to book an appointment with my GP, and I also struggle to communicate with the reception team because I do not speak or understand English well.."

"The GP was supportive; however, they appeared unfamiliar with the appropriate therapy pathways. I feel that the GP did not have a clear understanding of my mental health needs. "

Mental Health Support at Lewisham Hospital



Positive comments

"There is always Staff available day and night. You can go them for support. The staff population are diverse as well, so you feel more comfortable."

"The staff are friendly, helpful, and patient. The signage leading to the department was clear, and both written and digital communications were effective, as letters and emails reached me promptly.."

Negative comments

"The nursing staff were supportive; however, activities were limited at the weekend, and my medication was changed without a clear explanation initially."

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. Support

1. **Observation:** A quarter of the 46 patients reported that they did not receive any information on mental health rights or advocacy services.

- a. **Recommendation:** Ensure patients are informed of their mental health rights and available advocacy services through information leaflets provided at registration and by discussing these rights during meetings or sessions.

Response from SLaM: "Lewisham community mental health teams governance meetings are used to check that people's rights are being discussed. Work is underway to ensure standard information about advocacy and complaints services is available across our 5 community mental health centres – which are currently being restructured.

POhWER (advocacy service provider) attended the community managers meeting in 2025 and once the community teams are restructured, we plan to continue to build close links between POhWER and our 5 community teams."

2. **Observation:** 12 out of 46 patients (26%) stated they were not aware of any available talking therapies.

- a. **Recommendation:** Continue actively informing patients about available talking therapies during weekly or monthly sessions.

Response from SLaM: "We plan to develop a more consistent approach to sharing information with service users in our community mental health centres, to highlight the therapy options available to them, along with other interventions.

More accessible information about psychological therapies and voluntary sector support available is being trialled in Heather Close Community Mental Health Centre (the national pilot site for a neighbourhood mental health centre in Lewisham)."

3. **Observation:** 33 out of 46 patients (70%) said they felt comfortable communicating requests and complaints to staff, while 13 out of 46 (30%) reported feeling either poor or neutral comfort, noting delays in staff response to requests.

- a. **Recommendation:** Encourage staff to maintain open communication with patients regarding any delays or challenges in fulfilling requests, helping to foster understanding and manage expectations.

Response from SLaM: "Staff receive induction in our community teams, including standards for ensuring service users are given follow-up appointments at the end of each appointment and communicated about these.

In addition, we are introducing new appointment cards, 'sorry we missed you cards' and a series of new standard appointment/change of appointment letters (all co-designed with service users).

Work is also underway to standardise text appointment reminders to service users with phones, which will be trialled in Heather Close Community Mental Health Centre, along with the cards and letters.

The aim is to roll these out across our community teams later this year once the restructure of the teams is complete."

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. Support

4. **Observation:** Half of the patients expressed dissatisfaction, stating they needed more mental health support to help them stay well in the community. The support they highlighted includes access to services, daily living assistance, peer support, cultural awareness, and guidance on managing episodes. A few also mentioned inadequate support from family and friends.

- a. **Recommendation:** Continue providing empathetic care and consider facilitating additional visits from peer support workers or allocating trained volunteers to engage with patients and offer emotional support.

Response from SLaM: *"There are new peer support workers funded and appointed in Heather Close Community Mental Health Centre. There are also plans for centre members to take on additional voluntary peer roles in helping to run the centre.*

Volunteer roles will be developed in the other community mental health teams later in the year, learning from Heather Close. The Trust is developing a new peer support/lived experience strategy which will inform future planning in this area."

- b. **Recommendations:** Communicate with patients and carers about how best to support them in maintaining stability and independence in the community.

Response from SLaM: *"Employment specialists currently in post in community mental health teams will be spread across the teams more effectively as part of the community services development programme.*

See response to Observation 7 for more information about our VCS Collaborative and the support available to support people in the community."

5. **Observation:** 9 out of 44 patients (21%) reported that they—or their carers—were not fully involved in their care plans. They felt excluded from discussions related to planning and implementing their care.

- a. **Recommendation:** Actively involve patients and carers in care planning, as this supports better understanding, cooperation, and outcomes for all parties.
- b. **Recommendation:** Improve communication regarding care plans and treatment to ensure clarity and shared decision-making.

Response from SLaM: *"The use of Dialog + is being rolled out across the Trust to improve conversations with service users/carers about their needs in different areas of their lives and to agree together the actions needed – which will inform their care plan. These will be reviewed regularly and updated and also include questions about people's experience of their care and treatment.*

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. GPs and Hospitals

6. **Observation:** More than half of the patients reported that their GPs and local hospitals do not fully understand their mental health needs. Many were dissatisfied with the services received, noting frequent challenges such as delays in getting appointments and difficulties accessing appropriate support.

- a. **Recommendation:** Strengthen communication channels by encouraging timely updates between GPs, hospitals, and mental health teams to ensure understanding of patients and their care plan.

Response from SLaM: *"Community mental health teams are reintroducing link meetings with the GP practices in their areas. Service managers will meet with GP practices to coordinate care, escalate issues and develop shared solutions. This is part of our community services development programme but also supports the wider NHS goal to develop more neighbourhood-based care."*

In addition, we continue to provide some primary care mental health nurses who work across a group of GP practices to support practices in responding to people with mental health needs.

We work closely with University Hospitals Lewisham, by providing a mental health specialist matron supporting those with mental health needs in the acute hospital and liaising with our inpatient and community services."

- b. **Recommendation:** Support carers and families by providing accessible educational materials on how to navigate what is often considered a complex network of GP and hospital services.

Response from SLaM: *"A Trust project is underway to develop new information for families/carers. This includes ward and community team guides (to be trialled in some wards/teams in 2026), a guide to adult mental health services in Lewisham SLaM and a series of factsheets for families/carers to replace the current SLaM families/carers handbook. The webpages for families/carers will also be updated as part of the project."*

- c. **Recommendation:** With patient consent, organise regular open and empathetic group discussions involving patients, families, and close friends to promote shared understanding and support during recovery.

- d. **Recommendation:** Develop strategies for patient on how to maintain their own wellbeing. With the support of carers/family members.

Response from SLaM: *"Heather Close Community Mental Health Centre is trialling a day programme which includes a mix of activities and groups for service users and also for families/carers. As part of this it is planned to introduce some carer-focused sessions run by the Recovery College, a carers support group and carer listening events."*

Learning from this work will inform the approaches taken in the other community mental health centres.

The VCSE Cooperative (see below) also includes peer support groups."

Healthwatch observations and recommendations

1. GPs and Hospitals

7. **Observation:** Patients continue to experience challenges securing employment and managing finances after discharge, which can increase vulnerability to drug misuse and further mental health difficulties.

- a. **Recommendation:** Collaborate with VCSEs (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise organisations) and local councils to provide support and education on addiction, employability skills, and financial literacy during the patient's stay.
- b. **Recommendation:** Support the formation of peer-support communities for discharged patients to improve emotional support, reduce isolation, and enhance reintegration.

Response from SLaM: "In 2026, SLaM has funded the Lewisham VCSE Cooperative, which is a new partnership of organisations from the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. This includes local charities, not-for-profit organisations, community groups and national mental health charities.

They provide free, community-based support for anyone living in Lewisham who is struggling with their mental health or wellbeing. Please see this link for details of the VCS organisations providing a range of support <https://slam.nhs.uk/lewisham-vcse-getting-support-for-your-mental-health-in-the-community>.

A new post was established in Lewisham SLaM to support this programme, our community partnerships officer, who works with local voluntary organisations in the borough to build links with our teams.

Mind is one of the commissioned providers, and their vocational workers support people into employment."

- c. **Recommendation:** Offer 1:1 or family-based coaching and social prescribing sessions to help patients understand their discharge plans, address concerns, and connect with essential resources for housing, employment, and ongoing care..

Response from SLaM: "Please see above. Family therapists are in post, working across our community mental health team, to provide a mix of family therapies.

Employment specialists work across our community teams to provide advice on getting and maintaining employment. Mind's vocational workers also provide support for service users seeking education/employment or volunteering.

Heather Close Community Mental Health Centre has commissioned Bench to provide dedicated housing support for service users and this will be a 'test case' to see how the additional voluntary sector support for housing is used."

Demographics

Gender	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Man(including trans man)	41	19
Woman (including trans woman	54	25
Non- binary	4	2
Other	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Not provided	0	0
Total	100%	46

Ethnicity	Percentage %	No of Reviews
White	39	18
	7	3
	37	17
	17	8
	0	0
	0	0
Total	100%	46

Age	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Under 18	20	9
18-24		
25-34		
35-44		
45-54		
55-64		
65-74		
75-84		
85+		
Prefer not to say		
Not provided		
Total	100%	46

Disability	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Yes	28	13
No	63	29
Prefer not to say	9	4
Not provided		
Total	100%	46

Demographics

Long-term condition	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Yes	52	24
No	41	19
Prefer not to say	7	3
Not provided		
Total	100%	46

Sexual Orientation	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Asexual	0	0
Bisexual	2	1
Gay Man	2	1
Heterosexual/ Straight	83	38
Lesbian / Gay woman	4	2
Pansexual	0	0
Prefer not to say	9	4
Not provided	0	0
Total	100%	46

Religion	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Buddhist	2	1
Christian	39	17
Hindu	7	3
Jewish	0	0
Muslim	11	5
Sikh	0	0
Spiritualism	14	6
Agnostic	0	0
Other religion	2	1
No religion	18	8
Prefer not to say	7	3
Total	100%	46

Pregnancy	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Currently pregnant	0	0
Currently breastfeeding	10	5
Given birth in the last 26 weeks	10	5
Prefer not to say	80	36
Not relevant		
Total	100%	46

Demographics

Employment status	Percentage %	No of Reviews
In unpaid voluntary work only	0	0
Not in employment & Unable to work	57	26
Not in Employment/ not actively seeking work - retired	7	3
Not in Employment (seeking work)	4	2
Not in Employment (Student)	0	0
Paid: 16 or more hours/week	17	8
Paid: Less than 16 hours/week	15	7
On maternity leave	0	0
Prefer not to say	0	0
Not provided		
Total	100%	46

Unpaid Carer	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Yes	20	9
No	67	31
Prefer not to say	13	6
Not provided		
Total	100%	46

Borough	Percentage %	No of Reviews
Lewisham	95	42
Out of borough	5	4
Total	100%	46



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