

Maternity experience in Waltham Forest



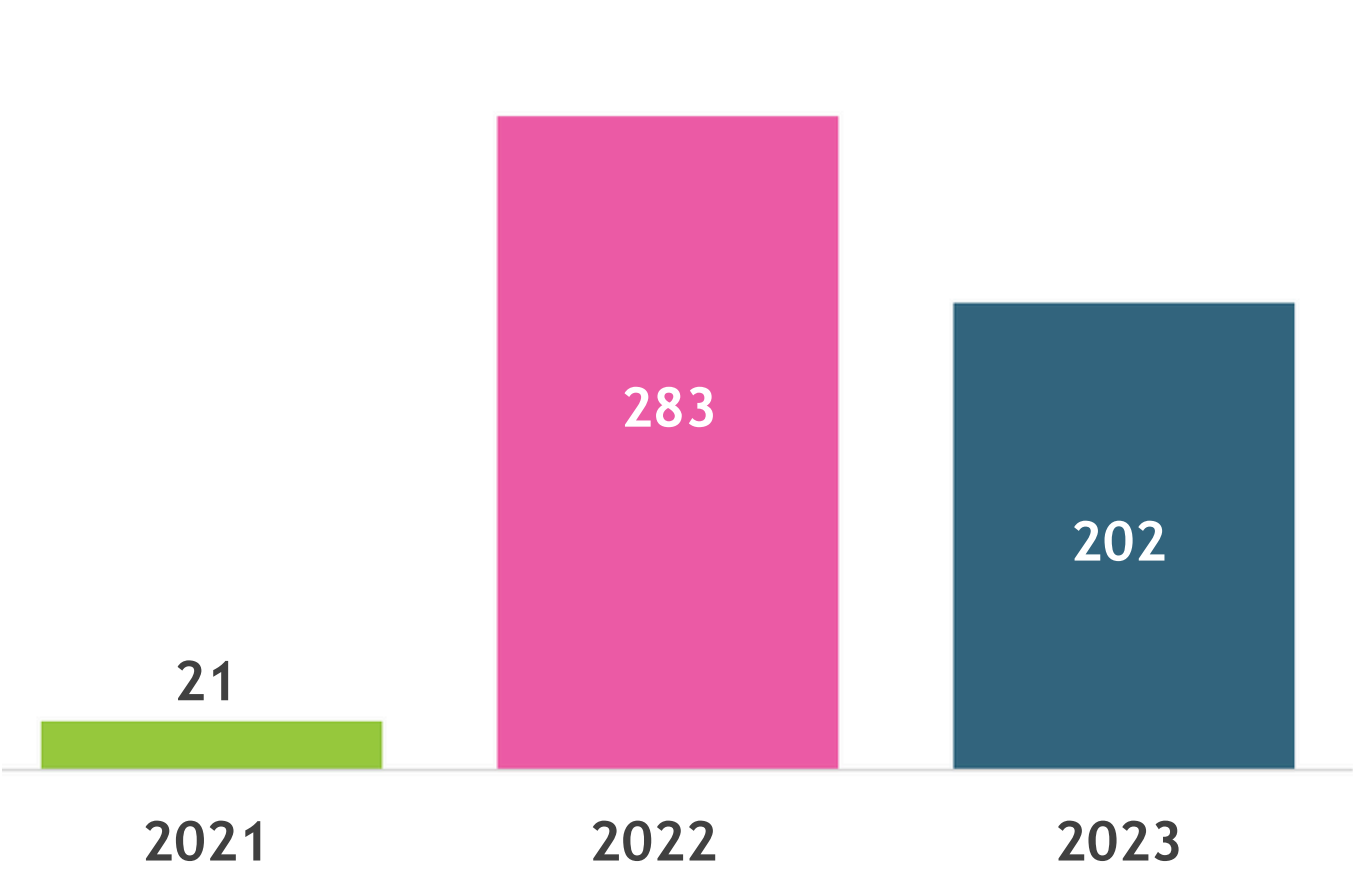
April 2021–April 2023



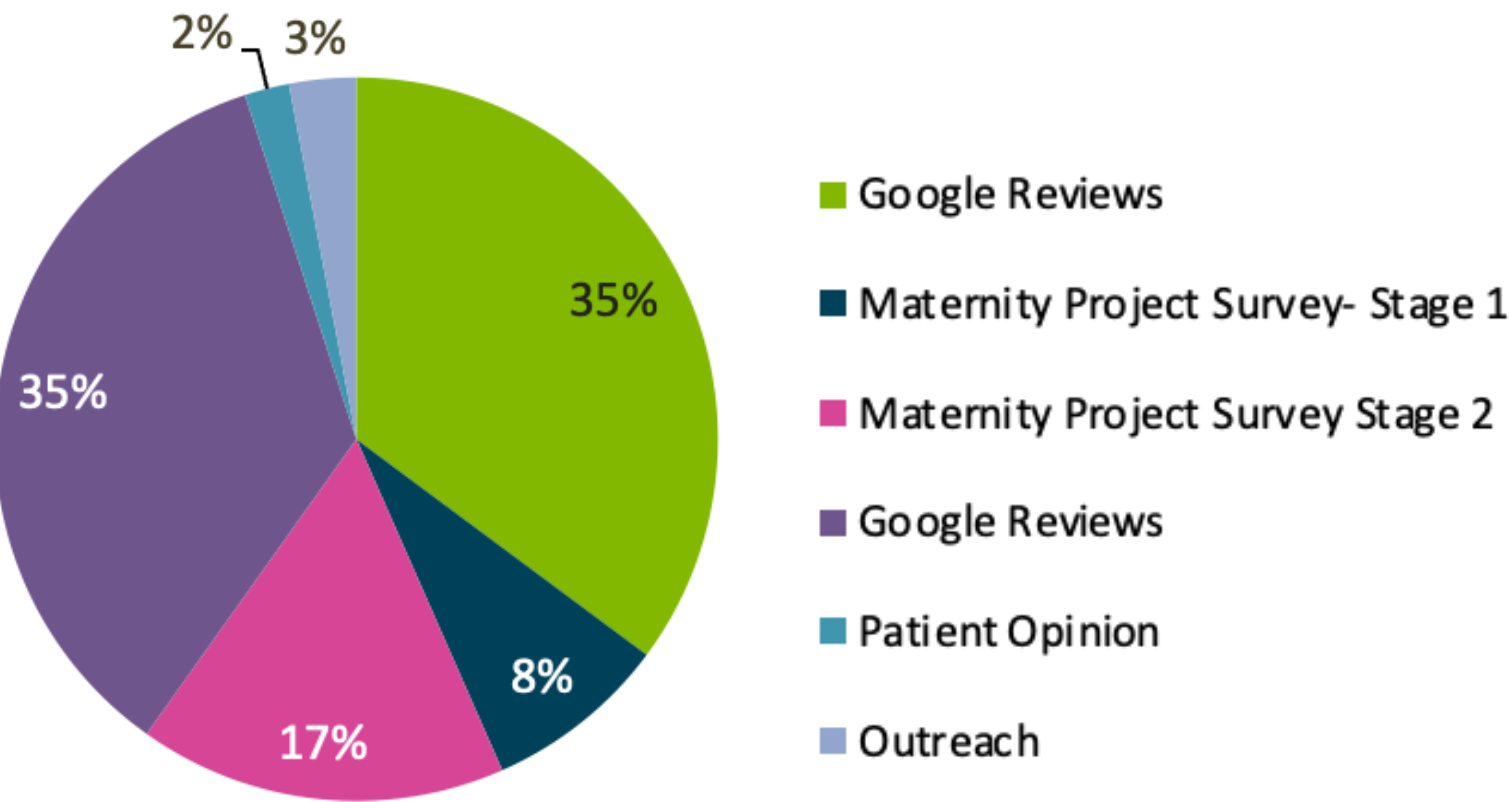
What we know about maternity experience in Waltham Forest

Between April 2021– April 2023, we received 506 comments– 2266 issues

When were comments received?



Where did comments come from?



Key findings



Maternity Voices

healthwatch

Using GP while pregnant



- 23% had a positive experience, 76% negative
- Patients are happy with doctors and nurses, but find GPs hard to access.



Waiting to give birth

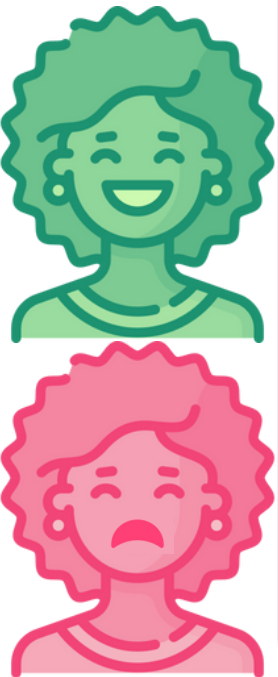
40% waited more than an hour to be admitted to the ward

Using postnatal services



Giving birth

- 67% felt midwives and doctors were helpful
- 33% felt that the service ran smoothly

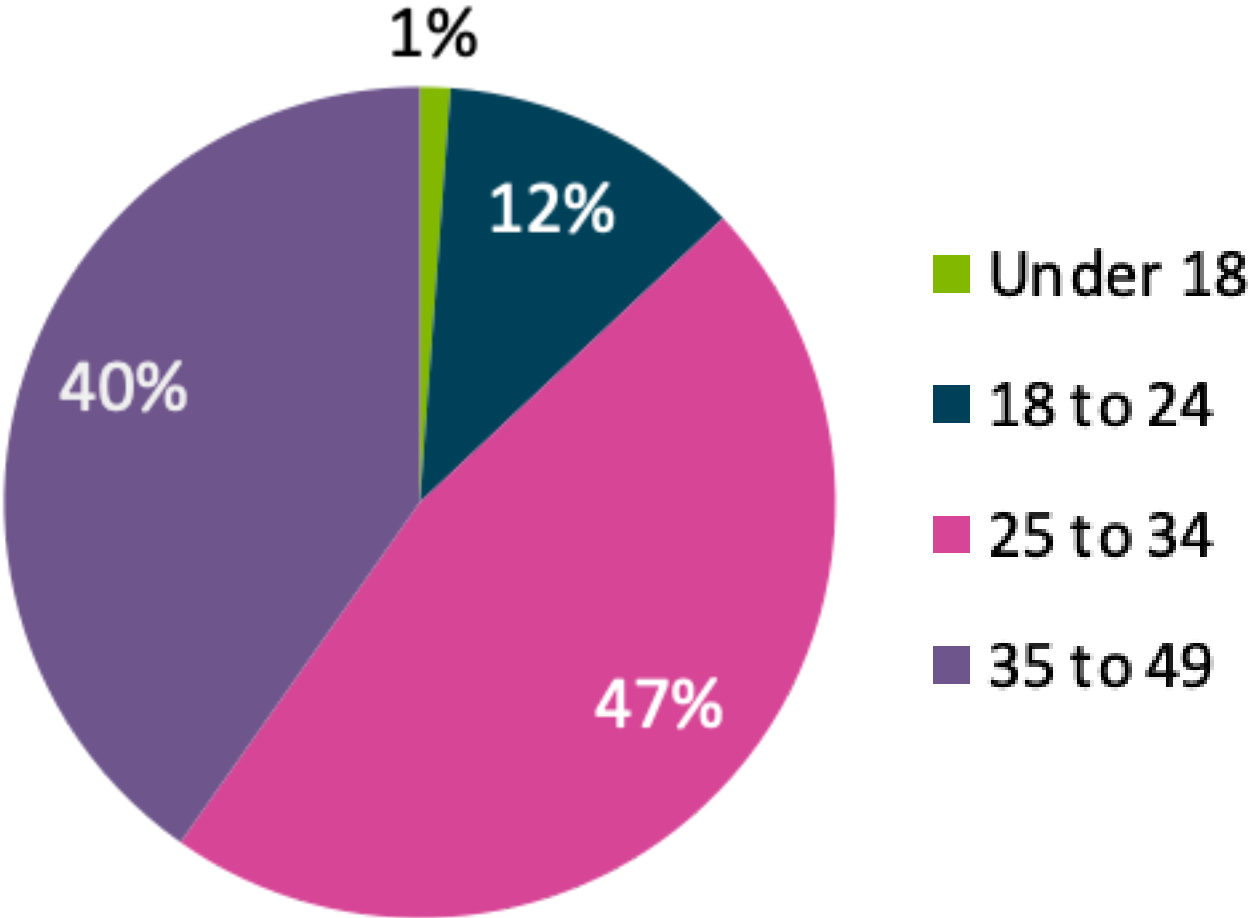


Most patients had a good experience of staying in Whipps Cross Hospital after giving birth.

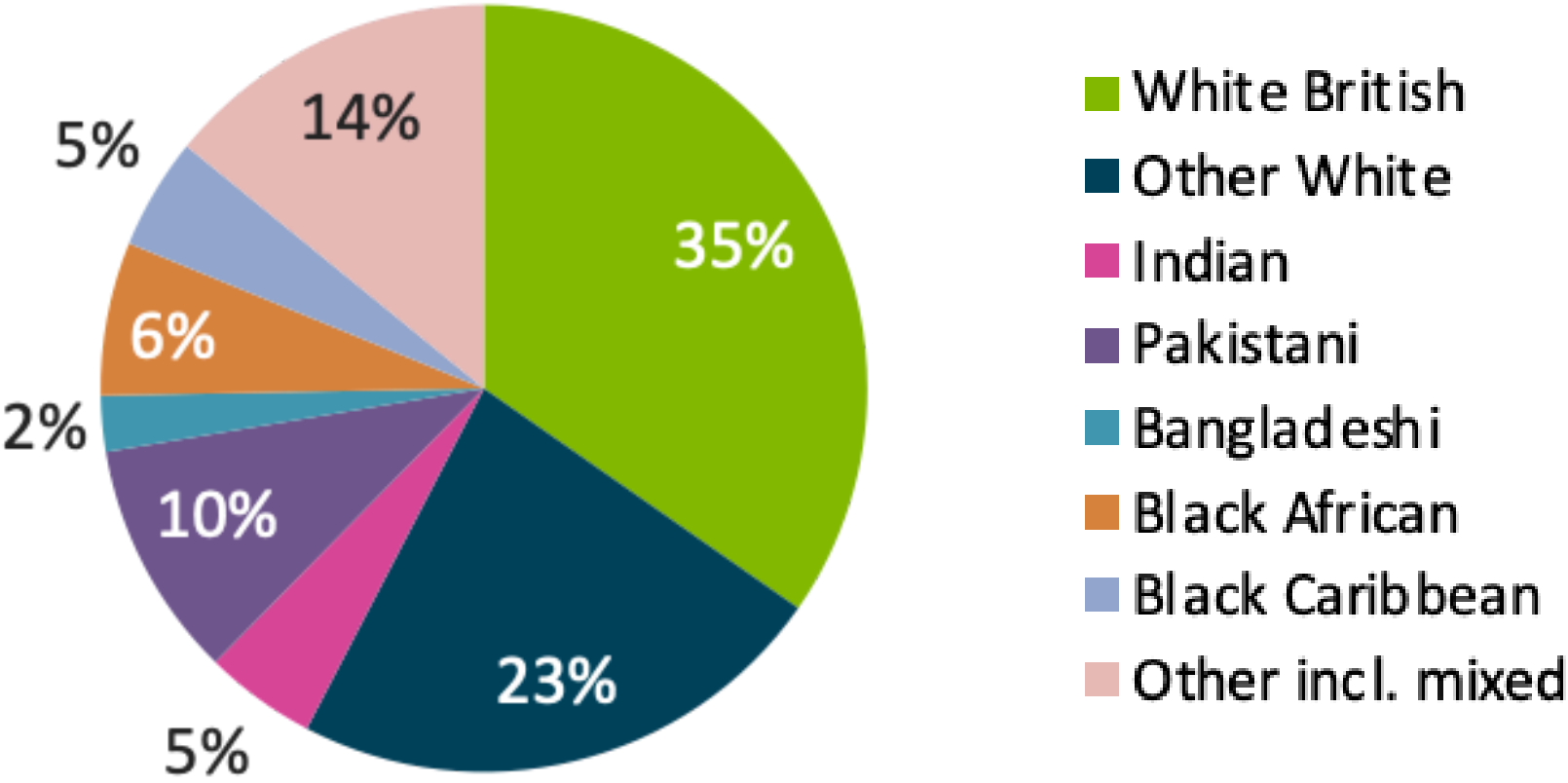
For postnatal appointments, lack of punctuality can be an issue, especially in poorly ventilated waiting rooms.

What we know about maternity experience in Waltham Forest

Age of respondents- where known

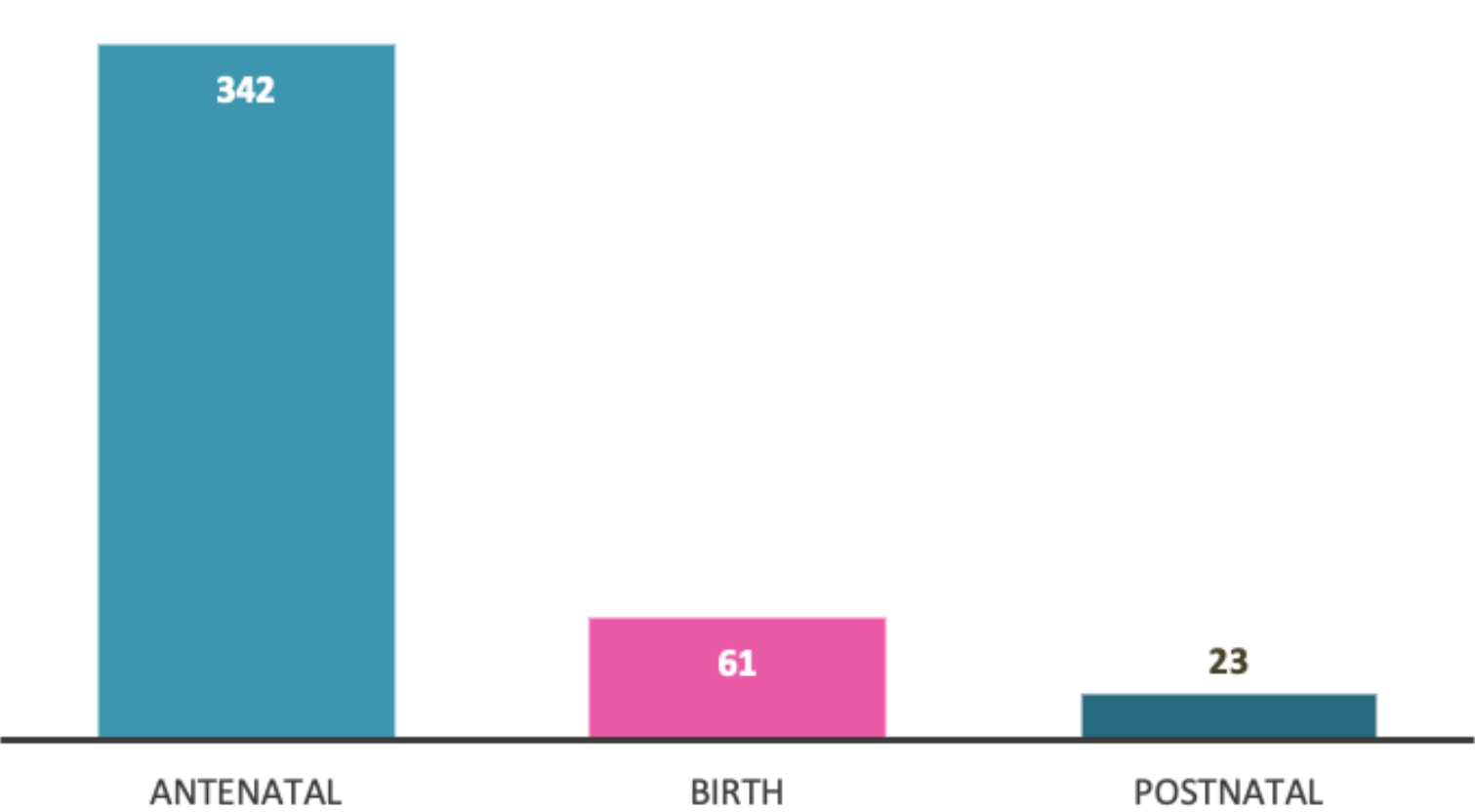


Ethnicity of respondents- where known



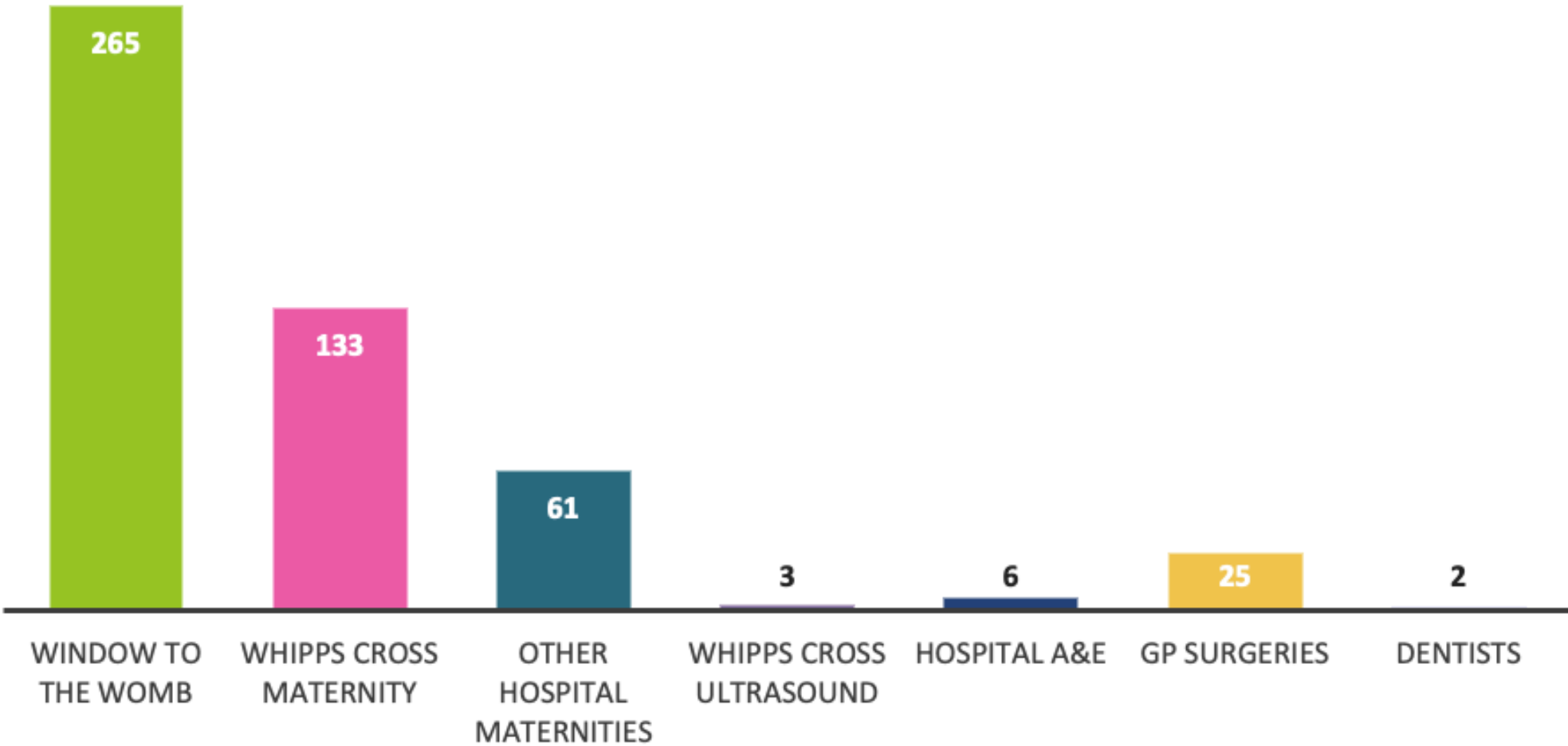
What we know about maternity experience in Waltham Forest

What stage of the birth process did comments refer to?



* Some comments referred to more than one stage

Most discussed services



Antenatal services

Expecting mothers feel involved in their care and supported by compassionate, competent doctors and midwives, but they wait too long for appointments and experience admin mistakes. Accessing GP appointments is particularly difficult and user-unfriendly.

Patient experience- all services

66%

7%

27%

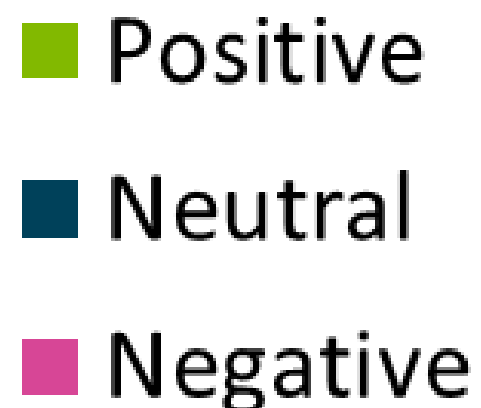
NHS services only*

55%

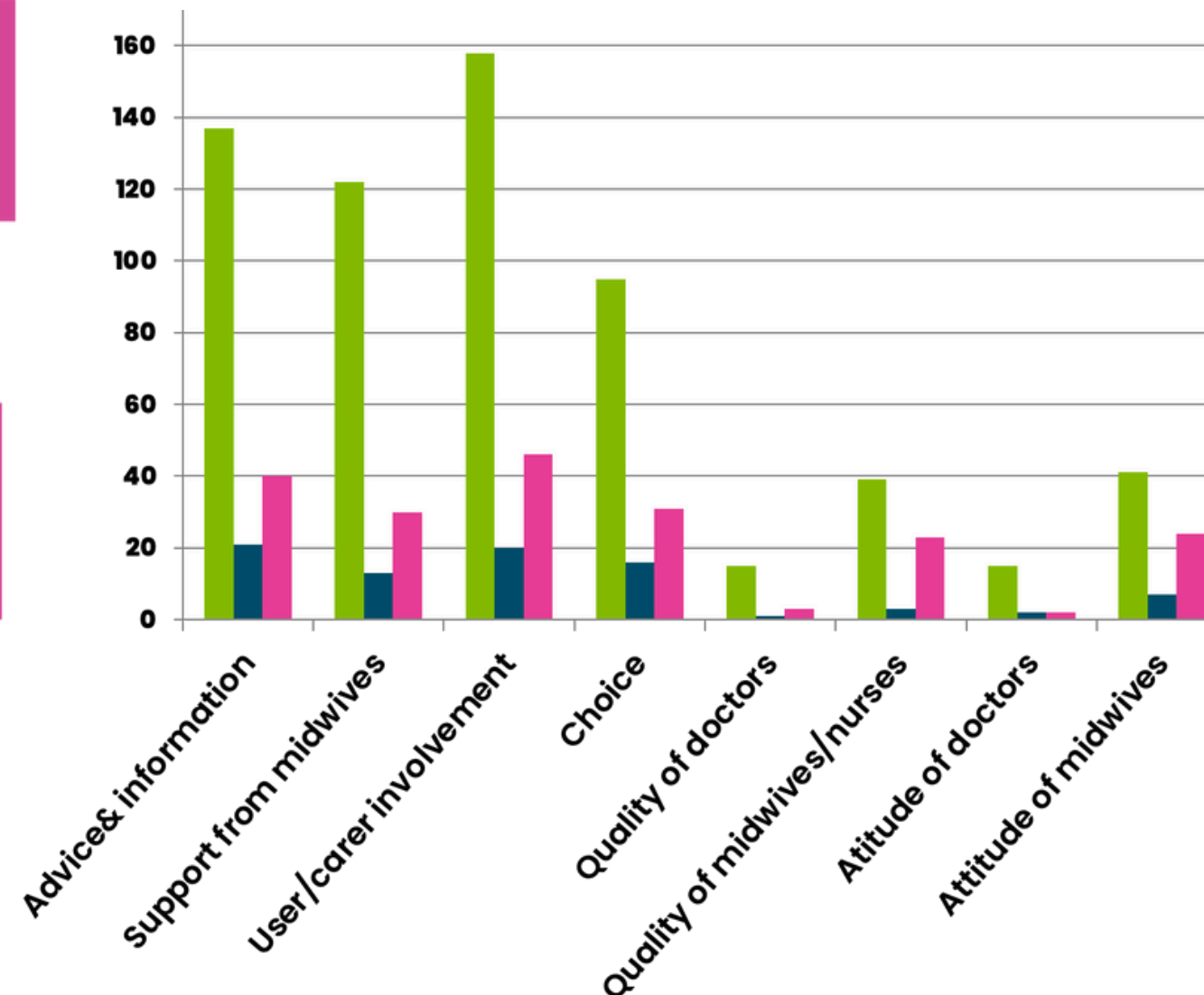
9%

36%

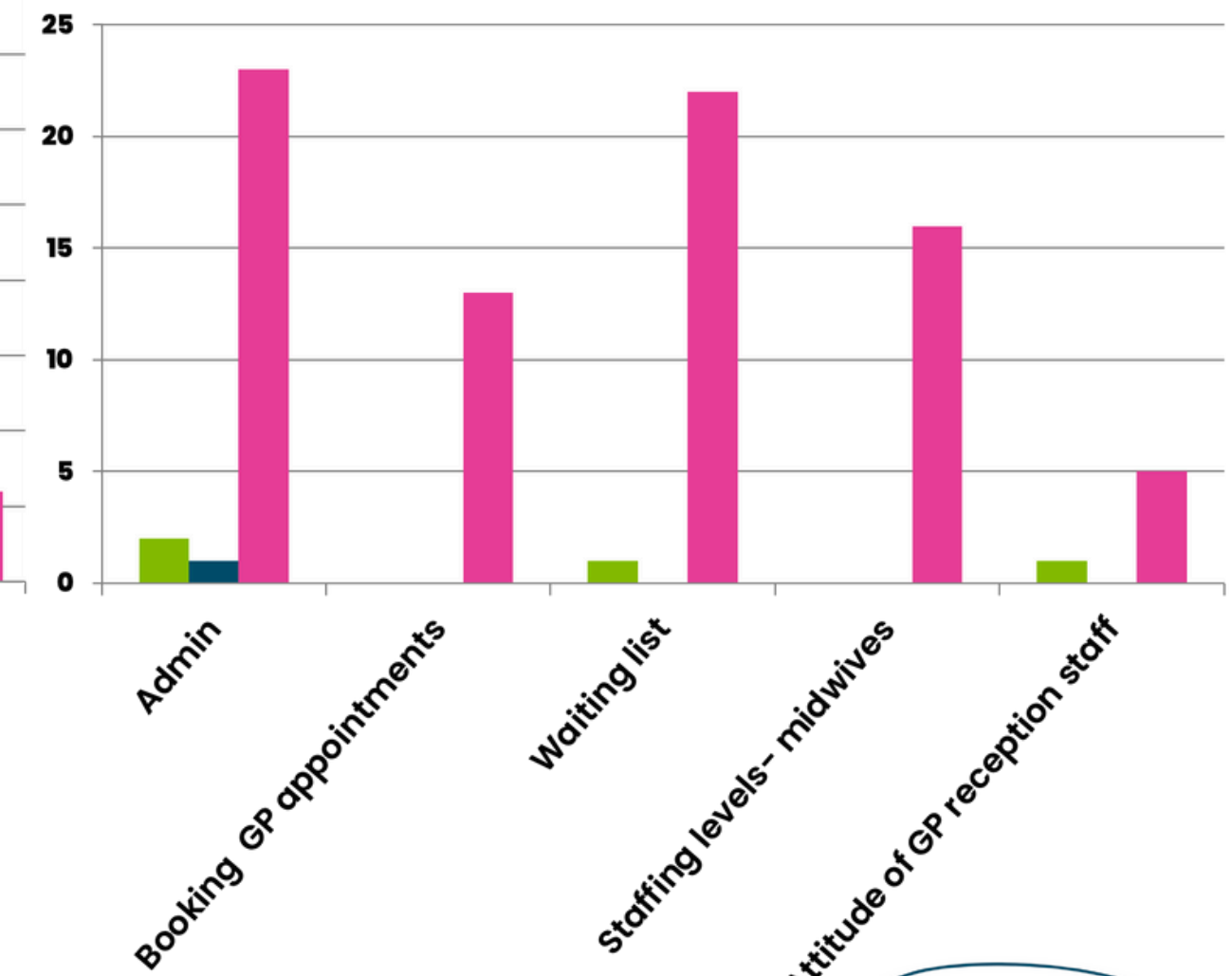
* Excluding Window to the Womb, a private sonography service



What works well



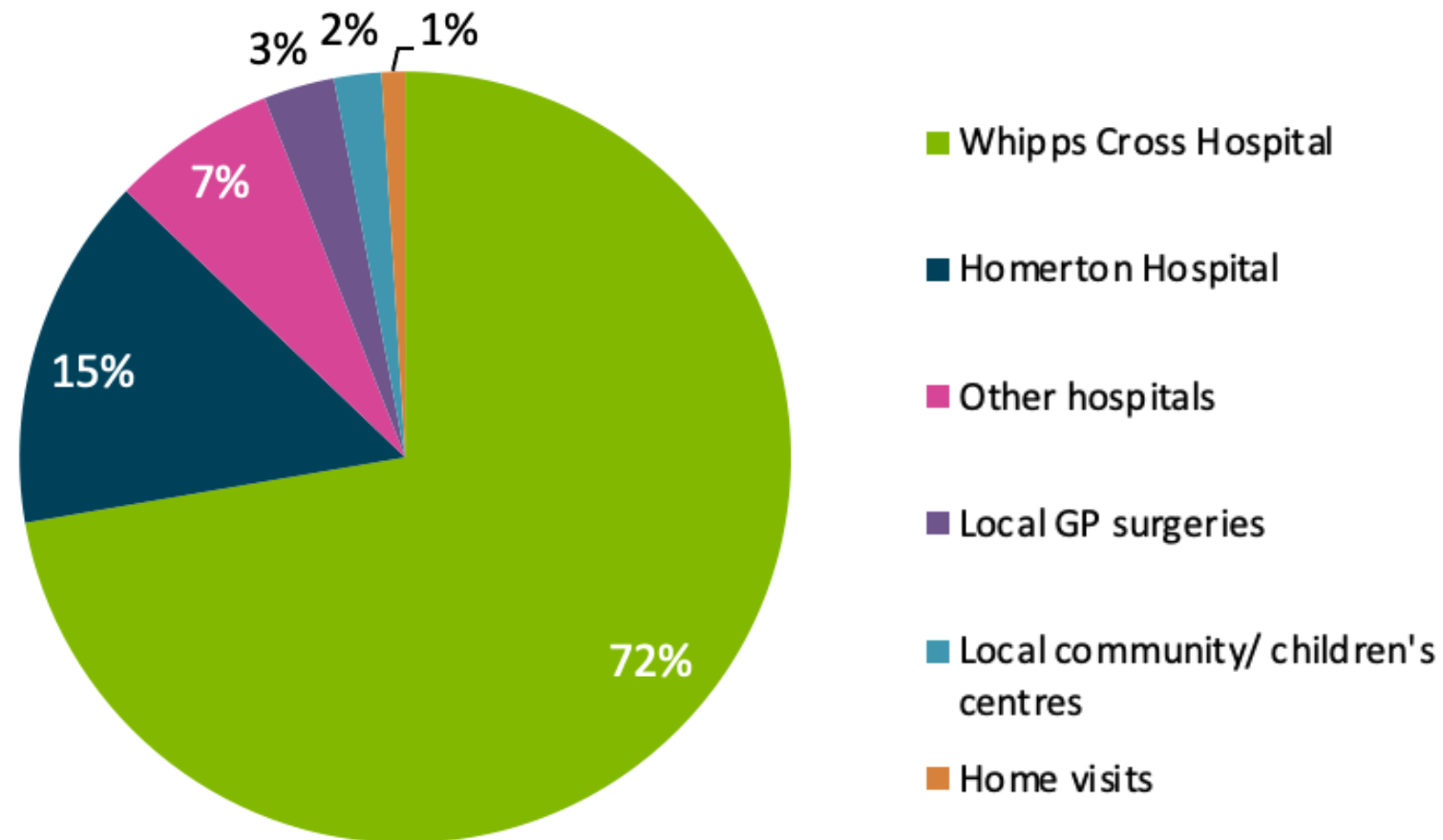
What needs improvement



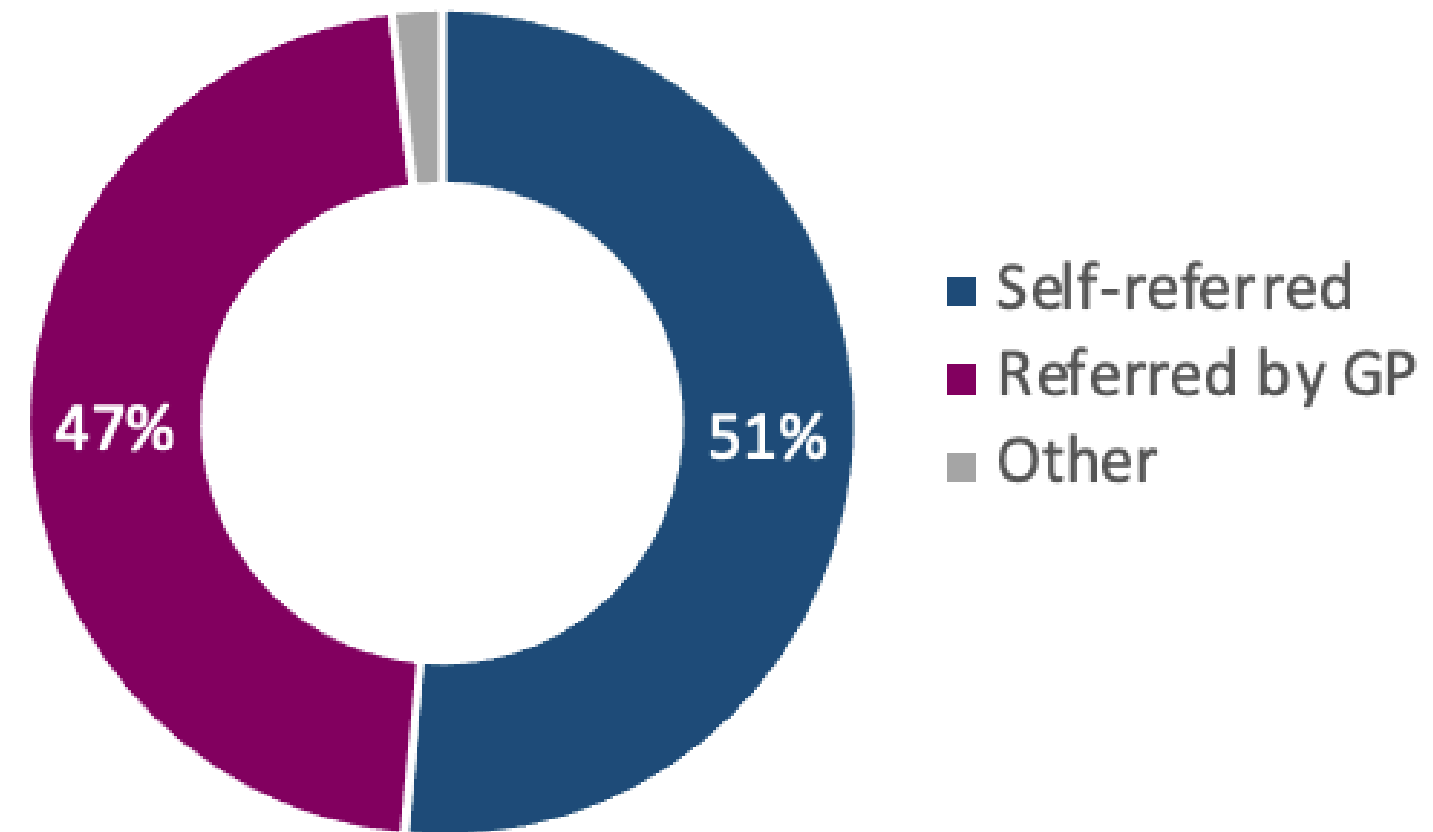
Appointment choices

Source: maternity Survey stage 1, 9 respondents

Where patients had appointments



How patients accessed antenatal appointments



38% of GP referrals

98% of self referrals

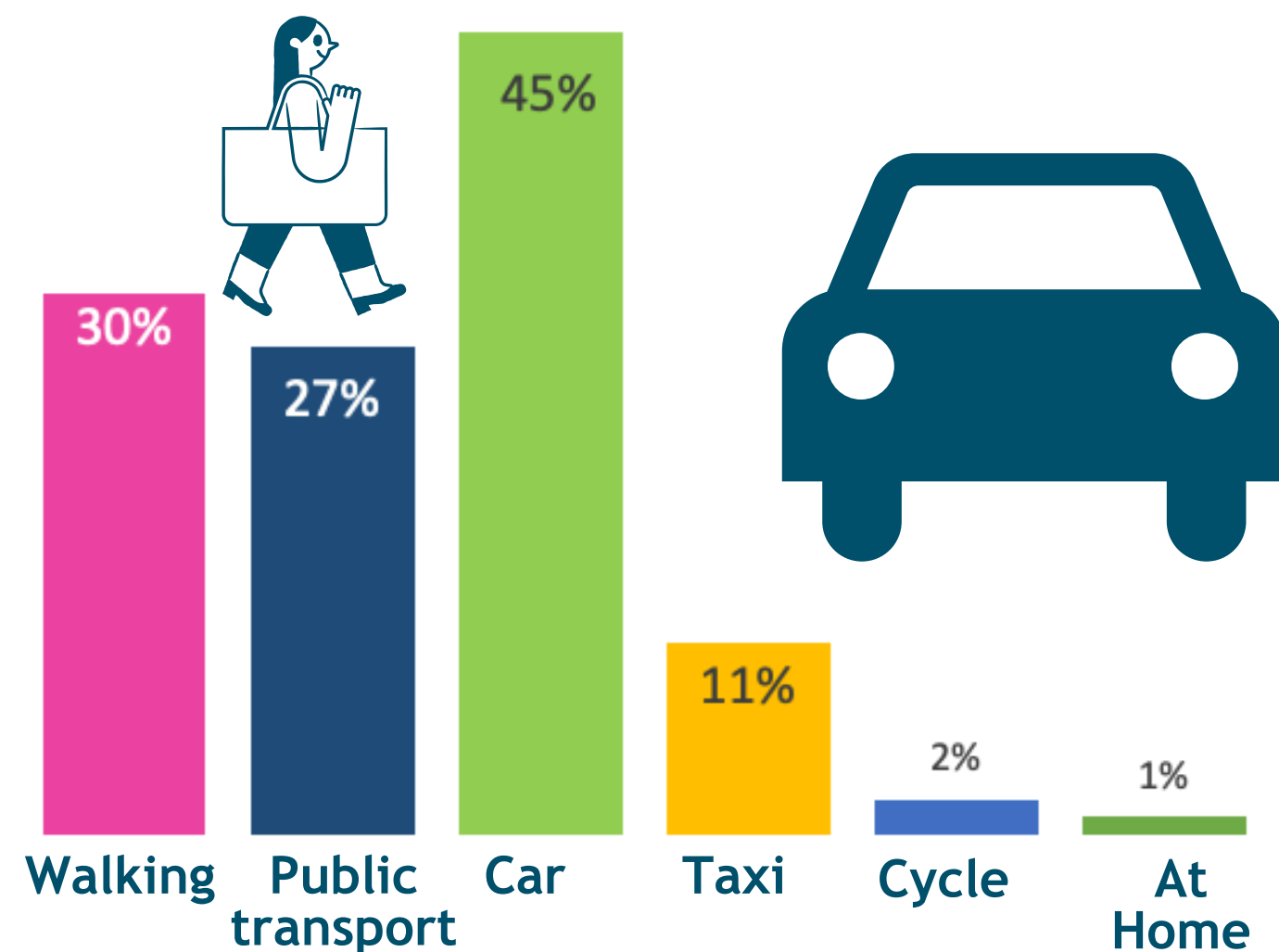
69% of all patients

said they had a choice about where to have antenatal appointments.

Travelling to appointments

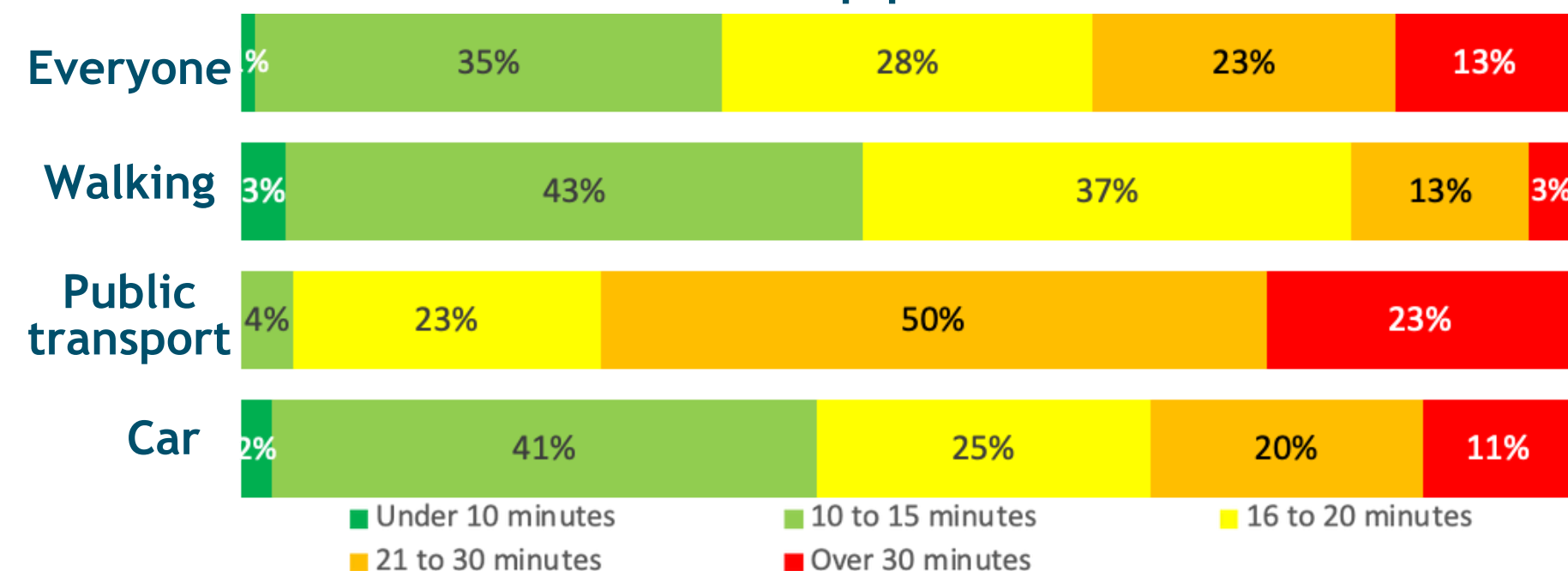
Source: maternity Survey stage 1, 9 respondents

How patients travelled to antenatal appointments

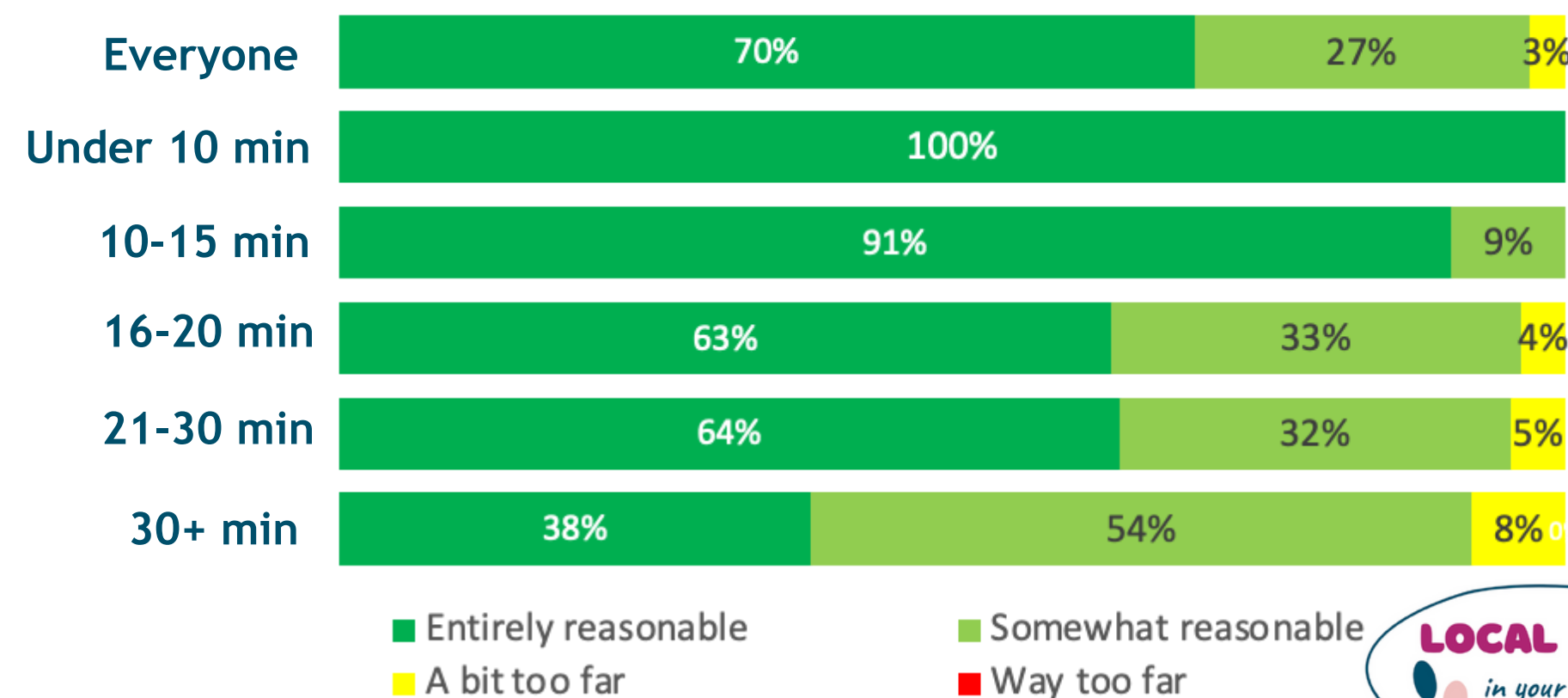


Mothers-to be travelled, on average, for **22 minutes** for an antenatal appointment.

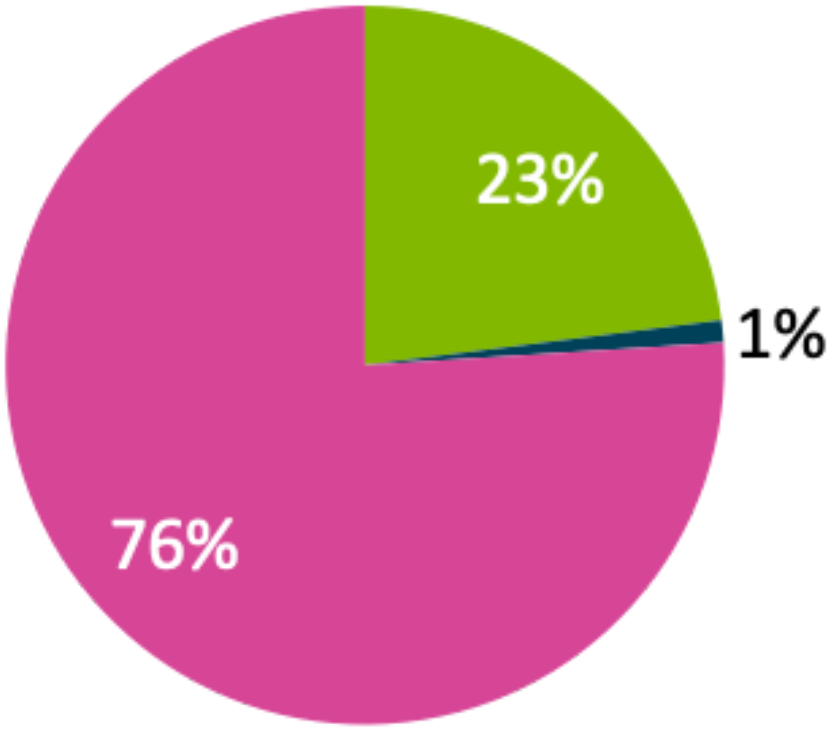
Travel time to appointments



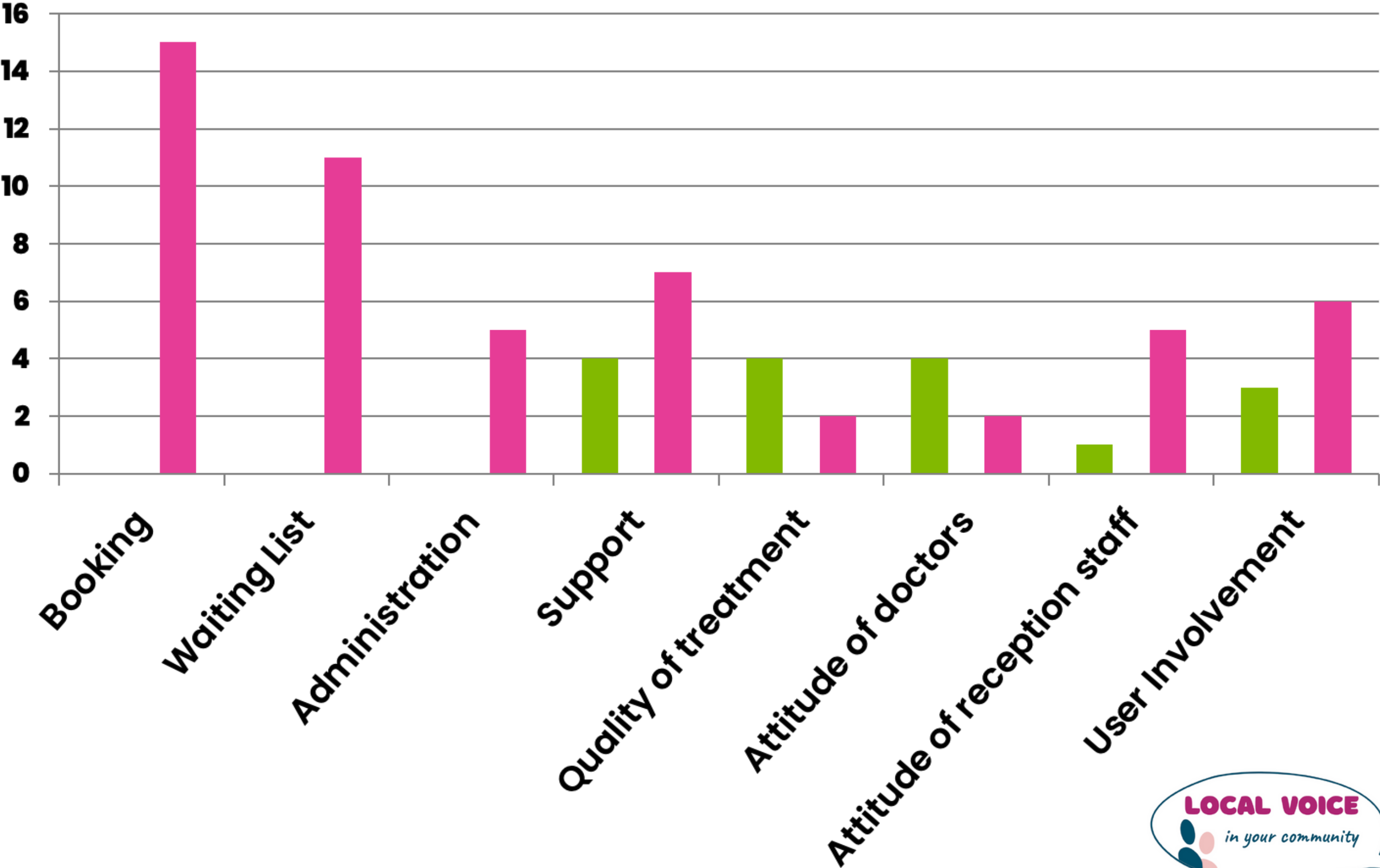
Opinion of travel time to appointments



Using GP surgeries while pregnant



- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative



Using GP surgeries while pregnant **healthwatch**

Feedback received from pregnant patients shows that they experience difficulties in accessing GP surgeries when they need to: booking systems are dysfunctional, waiting times are long and admin issues occur; in some cases, this leads patients to perceive their relationship with admin staff as adversarial; patients see GP receptionists as gatekeepers and, as a result of the inflexible systems they have to deal with to access services, they feel less engaged in their care.

On the other hand, there is no data that suggests there are issues with the quality of treatment

“ Have a spouse pregnant at 30 weeks, have not had a single appointment or cancellation in the next 3 weeks. They never answer the calls and when they do its always a no.

“ 100% useless. It is the worst GP practice I've seen. No way to see GP at all even when you are 37 weeks pregnant with medical conditions. I am terrified of what will I do with a new-born if I need medical help. Very rude receptionist just yells to go elsewhere and hangs up.

“ Booking appointments can be really tricky, as you have to phone up first thing. The overall care is good though.

“ GP spent time with me on the phone, took things seriously and gave me advice and care [GP surgeries should] make getting an appointment easier..

“ So far I've yet to be able to see a GP here. It says to use the online booking service, but this feature is always disabled. When I try to call up it normally says that the queue to call is too long and asks me to try again later.

“ The doctor has done everything I've asked for when I have the chance to talk to him. But the receptionists are the worst and the major obstacle. While pregnant I needed a fit to fly letter and they said it is not GP's responsibility (which it is, because midwives do not do that anymore and they are not doctors and don't have that authority). Unfair but this is the system in England. This caused me so much stress in pregnancy. If I call for an appointment they ask me if I went to the pharmacy, what medication I'm taking for that, what the pharmacist said, etc. a number of questions as if they are doctors and take responsibility for your health. When I make E-consultations they wouldn't hand them to the doctor.

Using GP surgeries while pregnant **healthwatch**

Case Study: when services don't work together

I am 12 weeks pregnant and I got a call from my midwife saying I have a urine infection and need antibiotics. I told her I have just registered with my GP and have been told it will take two weeks [to process the registration]. She told me to contact the practice and explain the situation and just get an email from them so she can send the information so that I can get my prescription, which I did.

My midwife then contacted me this morning to say she had a reply back from the practice to say I'm not a registered patient. I then had to call the practice again, explain the whole situation to them be told they will register me over the phone. Once they did that, I then got told the doctor will call me on Monday between 9am and 11am. At this point I was getting annoyed and responded by saying I am pregnant, I have an infection, I need antibiotics, you have the email from my midwife can a doctor just action it to which I got told they don't have the email as I wasn't registered. I responded by saying I am registered now over the phone- so what if I get my midwife to resend the email to which they still said no and said we don't have any appointments today so it will have to be on Monday.

I then hung up the phone and called my midwife, who was appalled, and said the fact the practice was saying they didn't have the email was untrue as she got a reply from them to say I wasn't registered. I then left it to my midwife to contact the practice. Once she had she called me back; she was annoyed, she said she had an argument with whoever she spoke to at the practice. Instead she had contacted the hospital registrar and got the prescription done for me. but I would have to pick it up from the hospital pharmacy.

I understand they couldn't do anything by me speaking to them but this was another healthcare professional contacting them which is absolutely appalling and unprofessional. This also meant that I had to take time off work, finish work early to then go from Ilford to Leytonstone by tube and bus as I don't drive to go to the hospital and pick up my antibiotics. I am very upset and annoyed and lets say I will be looking to register elsewhere because if I was treated like this over the phone- what's it going to be like when I'm registered and need appointments? I would not recommend this practice to anybody!



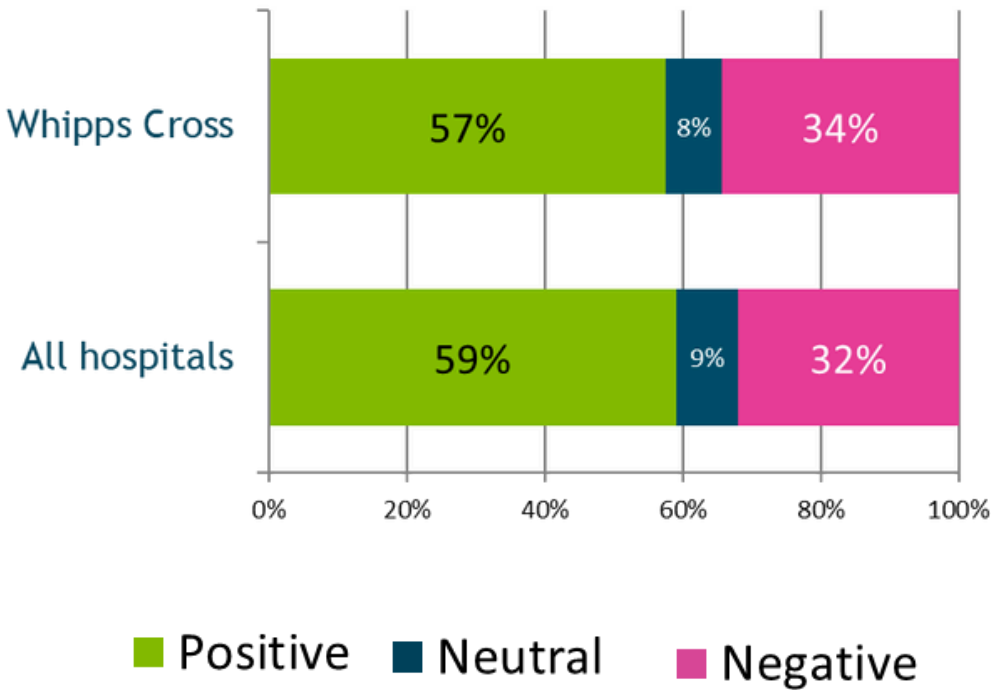
Giving birth

For the most part, mothers are happy with both doctors and midwives, which they see as caring, supportive and competent. While doctors and midwives generally communicate well, information from birth plans and other records is not always passed on efficiently. A minority of patients report judgemental comments from midwives.

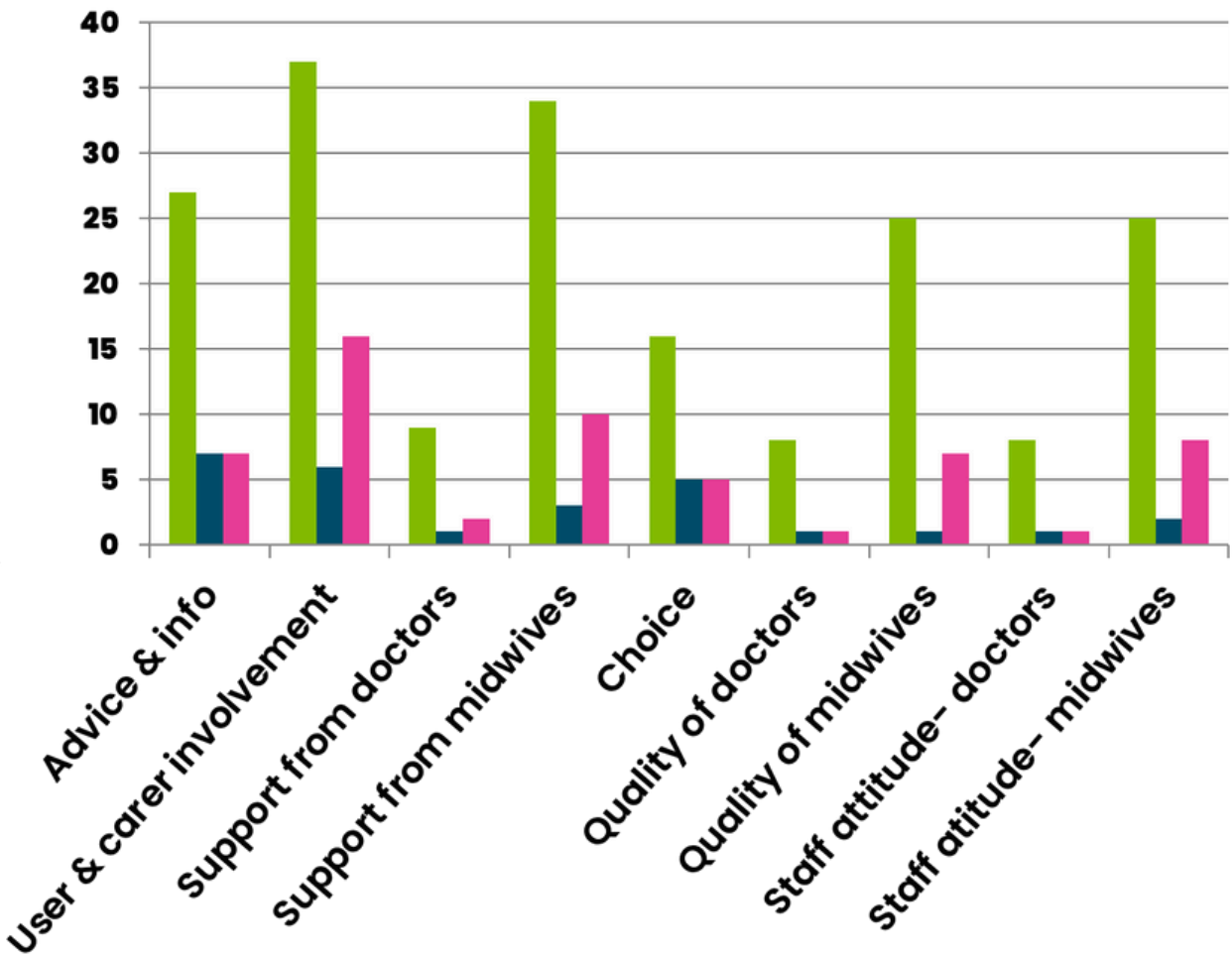
Some patients found the hospital buildings to be cramped or run down, and the bathrooms insufficiently cleaned. Flooding at Whipps Cross Hospital in the summer of 2022 has caused disruption to patients giving birth around that time.

65% of comments referred to Whipps Cross Hospital

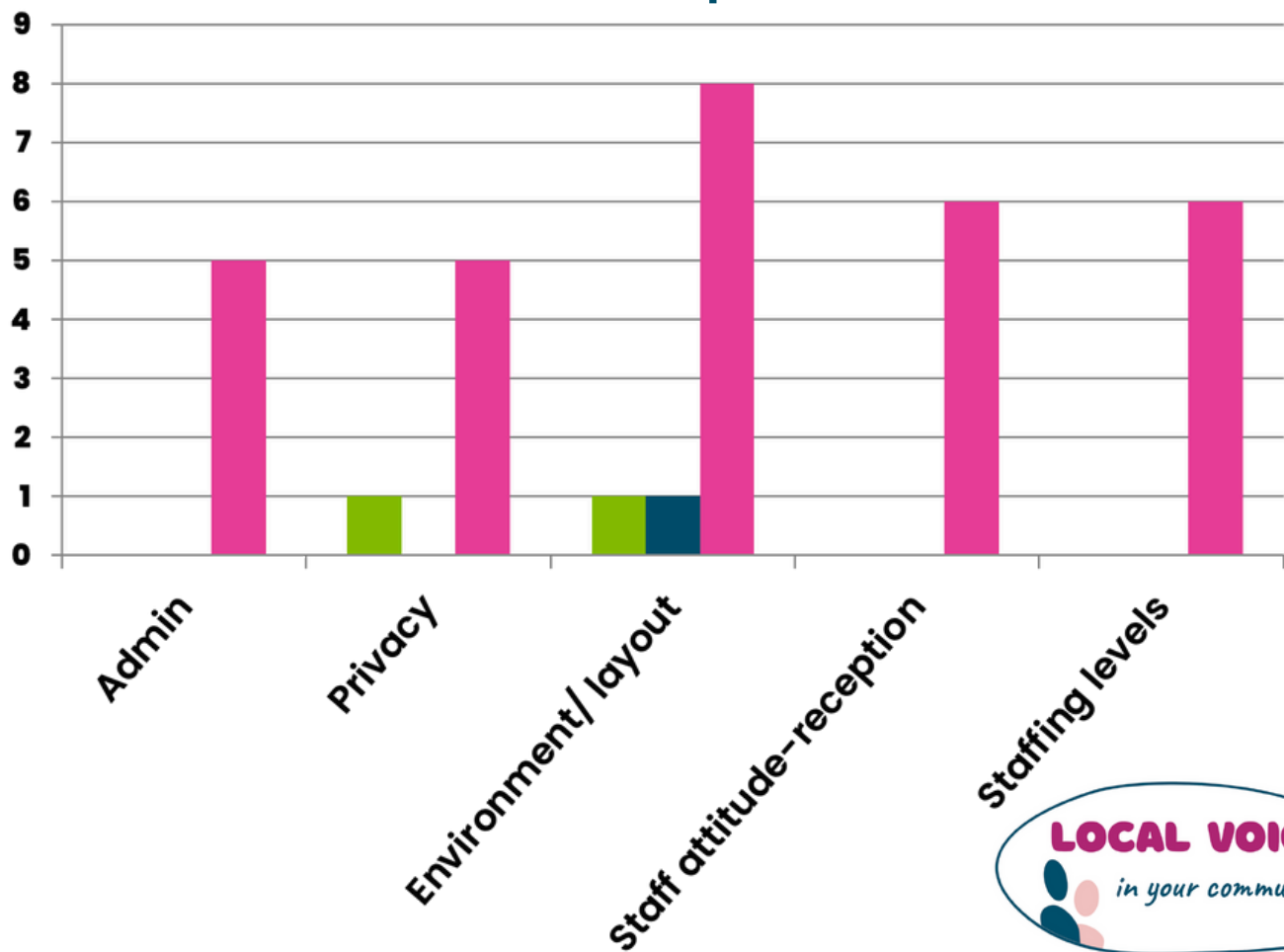
14% referred to Homerton Hospital



What works well

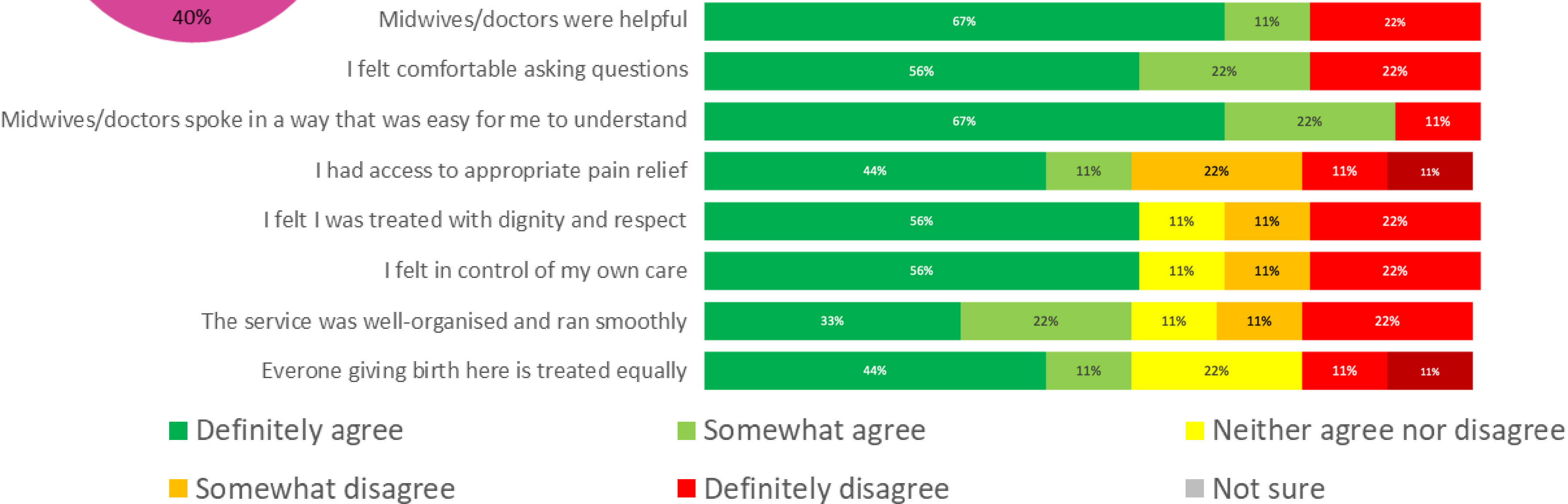
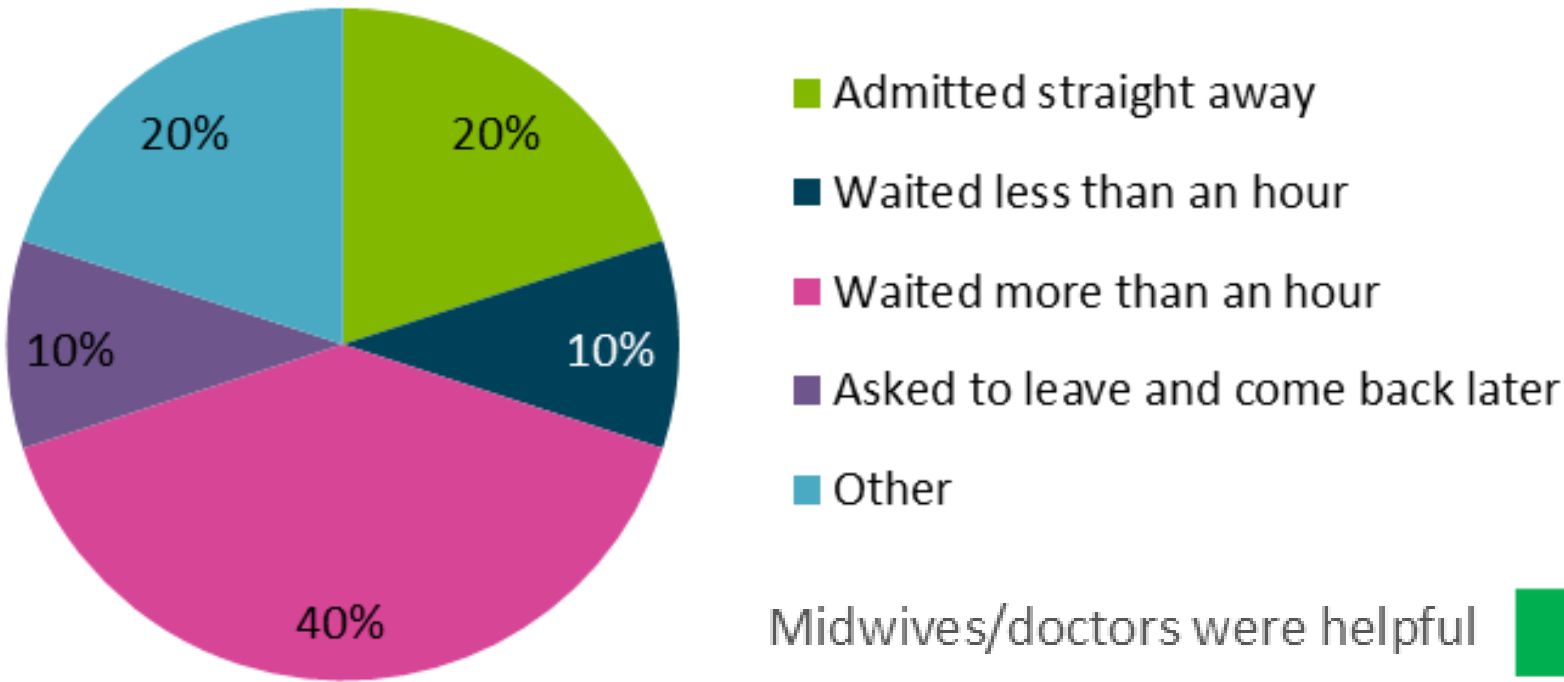


What needs improvement



Giving birth

Source: maternity Survey stage 1, 9 respondents)



Giving birth



Whilst I did not have any huge issues to deal with there was the odd comment that was made throughout my care that was judgement based. Also would appreciate medical professionals reading birth plan after admission given I spent time writing it as part of midwife appointments..



There was an amazing anaesthetist who talked me through my birth options based on my health condition. He made me feel listened to and safe.



Final c section was great, amazing team, explained everything. Night midwives very rude about my choice to have c section after failed induction.



All the staff was great under the circumstances, felt listened to and cared for. But facilities were poor. flooding meant the midwife led unit was closed.



The staff have been brilliant. They have gone through everything and answered all my questions. The communication between midwives has been excellent. The off-duty midwife arranged car parking; bloods, etc. They were helpful about decisions about C sections, also breastfeeding support; there was information on the WhatsApp group. The facilities are not good, e.g. the windows and no air conditioning.



Reception staff at the hospital are rude and abrupt. Being in a hospital environment can be scary, plus I am neurodiverse so often need extra help but felt like I was being fobbed off and that I was a nuisance.

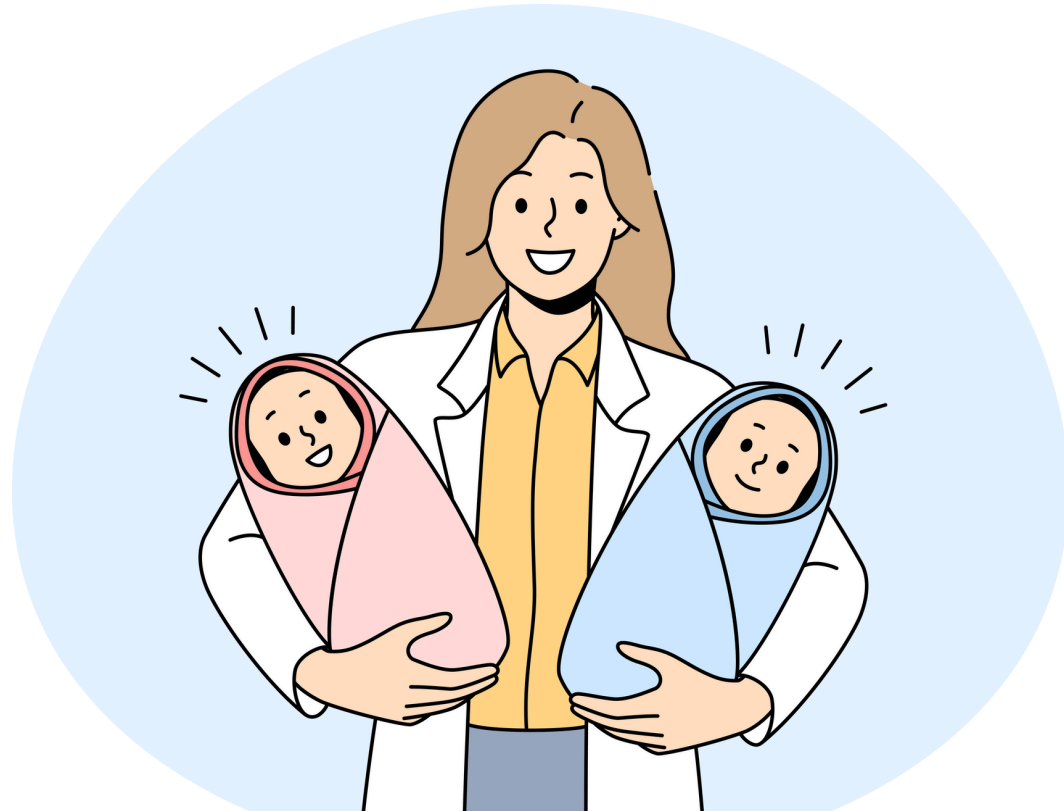


Postnatal services

Post-natal hospital care

We received generally positive feedback of the Neonatal unit in Whipps Cross Hospital.

New mothers receive good care on the Mulberry ward; however the ward can be noisy at night and some patients found the environment unpleasant.



GPs and postnatal midwives

New mothers found postnatal midwives helpful, but locations where appointment happen may not be accessible for residents of the E11/ South Leytonstone area.

Appointments over-running may be an issue, especially if waiting rooms get too hot or poorly ventilated.

Insufficiently thorough check-up by GPs, associated with poor provision of in-person appointments, under-staffed surgeries and generally poor access, may pose a risk to infant health.

Postnatal services



The community midwife appointments were further away than necessary – the Jubilee Centre in E11 used to be used for these and is 2 mins walk from my home but I had to travel to Wanstead Clinic on the bus instead. A replacement venue in South Leytonstone would have been very helpful as it was difficult to travel further particular towards the end of my pregnancy and after birth. The appointments themselves were great, I loved the midwives and felt listened to and reassured on each visit.



Had to wait well over 30 minutes for a midwife appointment, in a very hot waiting room on a hot summer day, with a new born baby. Our baby got very hot and distressed. Just not acceptable. Will be making a formal complaint.



The building might be old but the level of service is the best. I had my two babies there and had a great experience. Picked up babies from baby care unit and the nurses there were amazing. One nurse I called big mummer and talk about over the line of duty she was it. I have just been referred to Whipps again and within two days was seen. Now that is service.



My Grandson had some problems after birth and he stayed in the child care unit for the first week. From what his parents tell me they had first class attention and treatment from start to finish. The nurses and doctors could not have been more efficient helpful and caring. My grandsons treatment has resulted in a very healthy bonny baby. His adoring parents were also informed and cared for in every way, including a very reassuring overnight stay in comfortable accommodation. I do thank all the maternity staff for their care and professional treatment of my family.



Mulberry unit although everything has been done to make it comfortable looks very dated and need to be modernised like the rest of the maternity unit, it was very noisy at night and there feels there isn't enough staff especially when the dads leave at 8pm. It would have been good if their other child could have come into the ward to meet his new sibling. The food could be more interesting. Her husband has brought food in for her but he has to work and manage the child care so was making him very stressed.



My wife was induced and we had to wait around a long time and ended up having a C-section but cannot fault the high level of care during our stay. The staff on Mulberry were fantastic and a special thanks to [six midwives and a student nurse]..They were all so friendly and reassuring and supportive and it's refreshing to see such great care. During the C section and aftercare we were looked after by [surgeon's] team and in recovery by [two nurses] who were both so friendly and kind.

What difference can it make

Maternity equity and equality strategy – one page summary

Listening to our communities and their experiences and expectations



North East London



We want to ensure we...

- understand, and adapt our practice, to meet the cultural and social needs of all the pregnant women we care for.
- communicate with pregnant women and their families in a way that is accessible, transparent and kind.
- develop a culture of trauma informed care to better inform our practice and provide more positive experiences for pregnant women and staff.
- support the health and wellbeing of our staff by providing the resources and tools they need to care for their pregnant women.

To view the full strategy
and action plan:
[full report](#)
[summary report](#)

Our communities

One of the most diverse
populations in the country:



2.02 million people
live in north east
London



30,000 births per
year, the highest
birth rate in the UK



30% of our
population are born
outside of the UK



53% identify as
Black, Asian or from
an ethnic minority



5 of our boroughs
are in the 20 most
deprived in England

Talking to our communities

By working with Healthwatch
and Maternity Mates we spoke
to over 1000 people in our
communities about maternity
experiences:



952
survey responses



87
in-depth interviews



76
advocate survey
responses



5
focus groups

What our communities said

From all the rich insight collected, it was evident that some difficult experiences and poor outcomes could have been different with more accessible information, stronger communication, greater cultural awareness and a trauma informed approach. These form the basis of the key themes identified:

Engagement – listening to pregnant women and understanding their needs

Information sharing and trust – providing accessible information for all, with staff having greater awareness of cultural differences

Consent and co-production – pregnant women to be at the centre of decision making and involved in their care

Discrimination – ethnic minorities, some religious communities and young parents feel they face discrimination when using services

Life-saving care excellence – positive feedback regarding lifesaving care and clinical excellence

Pandemic impact and recovery – trauma for both staff and pregnant women

Supporting our communities

From the key themes, an action plan was developed as a commitment to make improvements and positive change, these are focused around:

Trauma informed care
Community signposting
Gathering feedback
Co-production
Tangible information
Digital information
Maternity helpline
Communication support for staff

Actions may change over time as further insight and experience is learnt, but this is the start of improving maternity care that is high quality, safe, equitable and personalised for all.

Delivery of these actions will be a collaborative approach between our maternity units, voluntary and community organisations and our communities.