

# **Spotlight Report: Where do students aged 16+ go first for medical advice?**

Engagement period: September 2024

Report published: 4 March 2025

# About Healthwatch

## Healthwatch Shropshire is your local health and social care champion.

If you use GPs and hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services in your area, we want to hear about your experiences. We are independent and have the power to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to local feedback and improve standards of care. We can also help you to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice. Last year, the Healthwatch network helped nearly a million people like you to have your say and get the support you need.



We work to make your voice count when it comes to shaping and improving services. We use a variety of methods to find out what people like about services, and what could be improved and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen. Our reports go to:

- the organisations who provide services
- the commissioners who pay for services (e.g. Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care Board, Shropshire Council)
- service regulators (the Care Quality Commission, NHS England)
- our national body Healthwatch England to let them know how local services are working in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

We are not experts in health and social care and interactive surveys are just one of the methods we use to put a spotlight on services and ask people to share their views with us.

**We are very grateful to all those who took the time to talk with us and take part in our interactive survey. If you have an experience to share about the topics raised in the report, please do not hesitate to get in touch.**

## What we did

During July and August, we identified all Further Education College sites in Shropshire and contacted all 16 to explore the possibility of attending 'welcome week' events. We were able to schedule visits to five sites. Five other college sites told us that they did not host any induction week events and unfortunately, we did not hear back from the remaining six.

During **September** we attended 5 scheduled welcome week opportunities at 4 sites –

- SCG<sup>1</sup> London Road Campus (September 3<sup>rd</sup>)
- SCG English Bridge Campus (September 4<sup>th</sup>)
- SCG London Road Campus (September 5<sup>th</sup>)
- HLNSC<sup>2</sup> Ludlow Sixth Form Campus (September 9<sup>th</sup>)
- HLNSC Walford Campus (September 11<sup>th</sup>)

Unfortunately, a planned visit, to the North Shropshire Campus in Oswestry did not go ahead due to scheduling issues.

## Our Aims

We wanted to ask the students about where they would **first** seek out medical advice if they needed it. We wanted to do this in a way that was quick and engaging as we know from induction events in previous years that these events are very busy which restricts the amount of time we have to engage with each student.

We used an interactive voting activity and gave each student one counter to vote for one of nine choices which had been decided on by the Healthwatch team.

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<sup>1</sup> SCG – Shrewsbury Colleges Group

<sup>2</sup> HLNSC – Herefordshire, Ludlow & North Shropshire College

Where do students aged 16+ go first for medical advice

We asked...

## ‘Where do you look for medical advice?’

With the options of –

- Friends
- Family
- Teachers
- Internet
- Pharmacy
- GP
- 111
- NHS App / information
- Other (please specify)

We chose to ask this as we felt the data gained would be useful for **our ‘Pharmacy First’ project** which we were running at the time; helping to show the number of students that would choose to use their local pharmacy when seeking advice.

We hope that the data would also be beneficial for the **NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin ‘Think Which Service’ campaign<sup>3</sup>** which we have been supporting and promoting. The team behind this campaign have expressed interest in our results as this could help show how the public are thinking and in what localities the campaign has been most effective.

**healthwatch**  
Shropshire



**Pharmacy Services and Consultations.**  
Share your views to make a difference.  
Tell us about your experiences of pharmacy services and consultations in Shropshire.

Contact us:  
01743 237884  
enquiries@healthwatchshropshire.co.uk  
www.healthwatchshropshire.co.uk



**Integrated Care System**  
Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin

**Think which service?**  
Find out which service in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin can best help you: [Thinkwhichservice.co.uk](https://www.thinkwhichservice.co.uk)

Common ailments and illnesses Minor cuts, bruises and minor sprains, coughs and colds	<b>SELF CARE</b>
Need help fast but not an emergency? Feeling unwell? Unsure? Anxious? Need help?	<b>111.NHS.UK</b>
Health advice Fever, stomach upsets, bites, headaches, aches and pains	<b>PHARMACIST</b>
Symptoms that won't go away Ear pain, back pain, stomach pain	<b>GP</b>
Minor injuries Sprains, fractures, minor burns, skin infections, minor eye injuries	<b>MINOR INJURY UNITS &amp; URGENT CARE CENTRES</b>
Urgent mental health support Call the urgent helpline on 0800 190 5491 - available 24/7	<b>MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS HELPLINE</b>
<b>999</b> Life threatening emergencies Loss of consciousness, severe breathing difficulties, heavy bleeding	<b>A&amp;E</b>

<sup>3</sup> [Think which service - NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin](https://www.thinkwhichservice.co.uk)

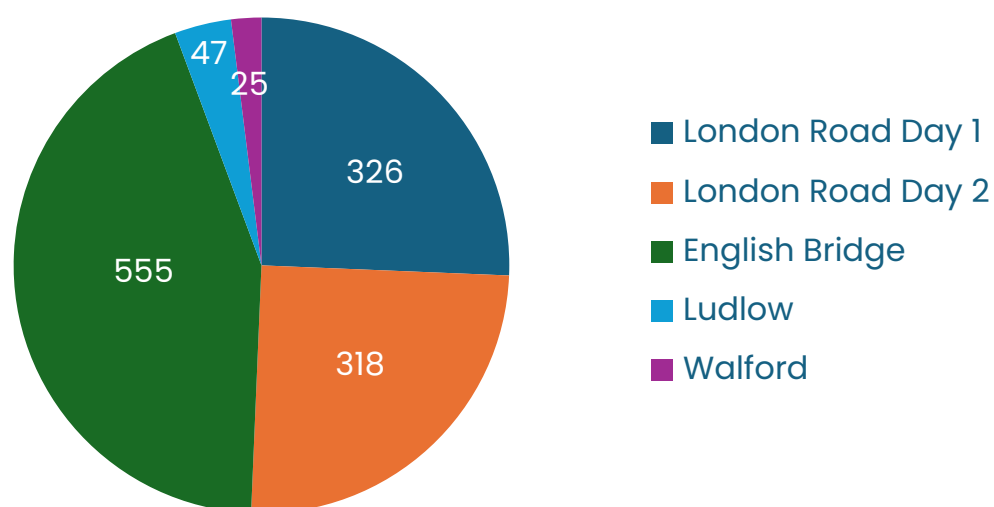
## Who we spoke to

Over 4,821 students are enrolled across the 4 college sites visited and we managed to speak to **1,271 students** across the 5 dates attended, which is **equivalent to 26%**. 4,200 in Shrewsbury, 277 at Ludlow and 344 at Walford.



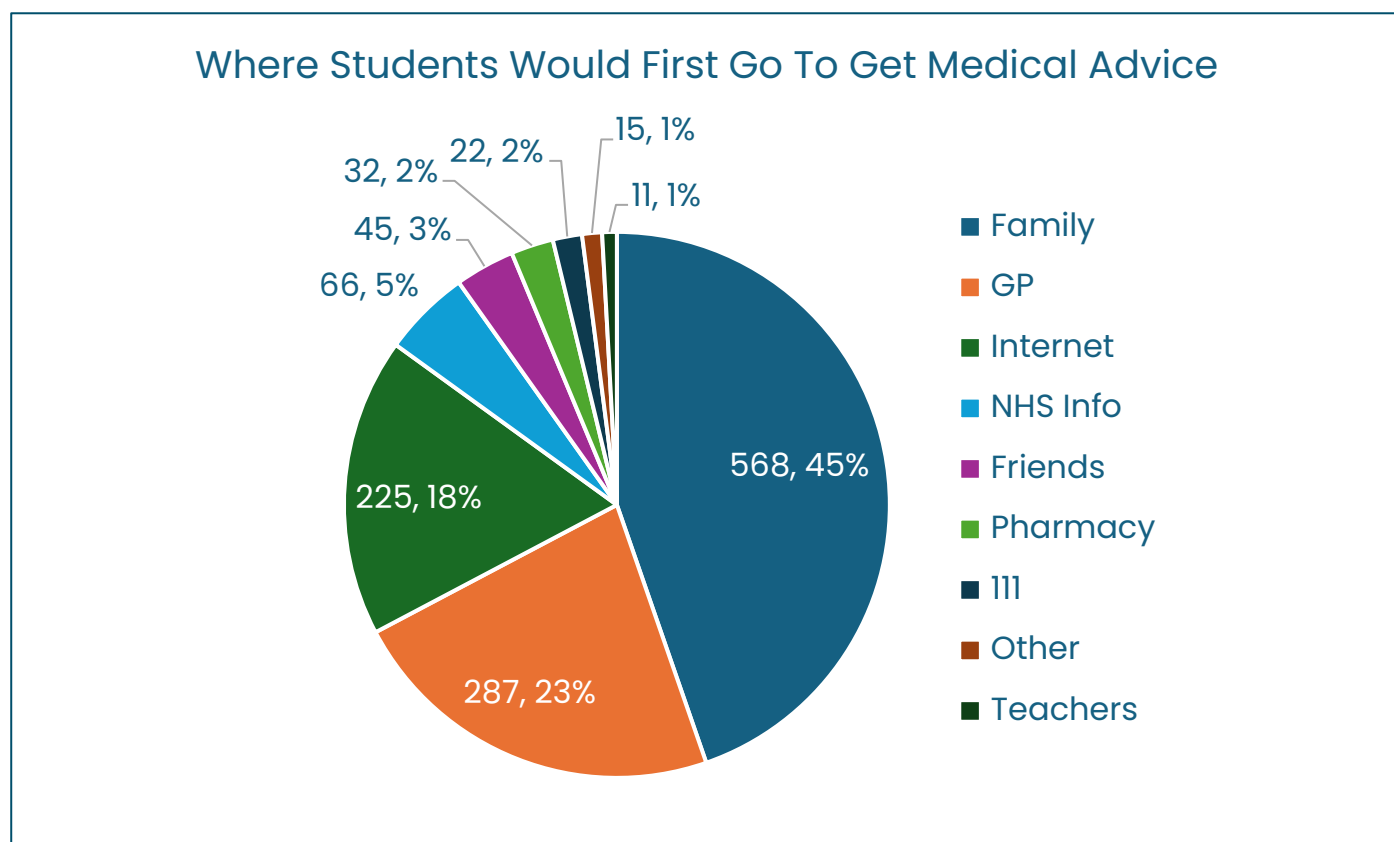
We spoke to the most students on a single day at the English Bridge campus, but we spoke to more overall at the London Road campus as this was spread across 2 days.

**Number of Students From Each Campus**



It is also important to note that we spent less time at Ludlow & Walford, therefore we spoke to less students as these sites were not hosting induction events but instead invited us to host a stall during the lunch break (roughly 45 minutes). Whereas the Shrewsbury College events had many organisations present and ran for 2 – 3 hours.

## What we found out



When asked where the students would first go for medical advice, the top 3 most popular responses were –

- **45%** said they would ask family members first
- **23%** said they would go directly to their GP
- **18%** said they would check the internet / Google search

## What people told us

Some students gave a brief explanation for their choice of vote, but the majority did not as it was very busy, and the stalls became crowded quickly.

When we asked some of the students who indicated that they would go to their **'Family'** first for medical advice, many said that it was because they had parents and relatives who were medically trained or worked within a medical setting whereas others said it was because they trusted their parents' opinion as they believed they had their best interests at heart. As most of the students were around 16 – 17 years of age, many of them would likely be still living with parents, carers and guardians although none of the students mentioned that they would seek advice here first because of this convenience.

There were a few students who voted **'Other'** and when queried they said that they would not seek advice from anywhere or anyone but would just leave whatever they were concerned about to resolve itself and that if it did not resolve, they would then seek urgent medical advice as a last resort. Most students who said this were male.

**'Teacher'** was the only option that ranked within the bottom 3 at all the induction events we attended, in total 0.85% of the 1271 (11/1271) students would go to their teacher first for medical advice. We were unable to establish the reason for this but the fact that we were talking to new students who had yet to build a relationship with their teachers may have a bearing on the responses.

## So what? Next Steps

The findings of this spotlight report will be shared with the Shropshire Colleges Group (SCG), the Herefordshire, Ludlow & North Shropshire College Group (HLNSC) and our colleagues in Public Health and in the local NHS.

This work will also inform Healthwatch Shropshire's work in to how to engage with young people and other possible future projects.









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