

healthw@tch

Hackney

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Access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception in Hackney



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Introduction

Increased pressure on GP services, and difficulties accessing appointments mean that pharmacies are being increasing promoted as an accessible point of access for minor aliments and some other services. Theses include vaccinations and a range of common health concerns including access to Emergency hormonal contraception (EHC).

For this to be successful, it is important that these services are promoted and delivered effectively, and that people's experiences of this health service are positive. With this in mind Healthwatch Hackney decided to explore how accessible and young people-friendly local pharmacy services are with the help of some young volunteers and support from Public Health Hackney.

Public Health Hackney was a key partner for this project as they currently commission some of the services delivered in pharmacies including Emergency hormonal contraception. We worked with them to develop the project brief and materials so that it would be a mutually beneficial piece of work.

Our Aim

The aim of this review is to provide an overall snapshot of young people's experiences of pharmacies across Hackney through mystery shopping activities.

By doing this, we aim to improve the local sexual health services and to ensure these are accessible and inclusive to all young people and other residents regardless of their age.

We aim to evaluate the quality and access to emergency hormonal contraceptive with Public Health Hackney, who fund free access.

This includes assessing if whether the service was:

- A welcoming, inclusive, clear, friendly, safe, non-judgmental service.
- The service was visibly advertised in the pharmacy.
- The service offers strict confidentiality and is sensitive to a young person's right to a confidential service.
- The advice and information given was accurate and of a high standard.



Between May 2022 and September 2022, a team from Healthwatch Hackney, including volunteers run a 'mystery shopping' activity to gain an overall snapshot of the access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception in Hackney by phoning and visiting the local pharmacies.

Mystery shopping is one of many methods used to gather feedback about health and social care services and can be a useful means of exploring the real experience of service users.

Initial inquiries were made to assess the current provision of Emergency Hormonal Contraception services within pharmacies across Hackney. With help from Public Health Hackney and the Local Pharmaceutical Committee. Healthwatch Hackney collated information about the 38 community pharmacies in Hackney that signed up for the scheme of providing free Emergency hormonal contraception services.

According to Public Health Hackney, between March and November 2022, 38 pharmacies signed up to provide free access to Emergency hormonal contraception. We were able to call 37 pharmacies and mystery shopping the service via phone calls, which will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

We were not able to reach one pharmacy as it appeared that the provided phone number was not correct. A few pharmacies had wrong telephone numbers displayed and we were unable to reach then, meaning further research was needed.

In addition, based on the results of our mystery shopping calls we choose two pharmacies in each Neighborhood to conduct mystery shopping visits. Where possible, we chose one pharmacy where the staff said they provide free access to Emergency hormonal contraception, and another pharmacy where staff said that they do not provide free access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception, despite Public Health having signed up for them up to provide a free service.

Volunteer Recruitment and Training

Some of the volunteers who took part in this project were our existing volunteers. Other volunteers were recruited through the HackneyCVS.

Before carrying out the mystery shopping activities, volunteers were required to attend a comprehensive training session. The training sessions were designed to equip volunteers with the skills, knowledge and confidence needed to carry out the mystery shopping activities (telephone calls and visits) as well as to provide an understanding of what is expected of them. They covered things such as what mystery shopping is, what makes a good mystery shopper, common 'giveaways', the importance of confidentiality, useful memory techniques, role plays, exit/get out strategies and 'top tips' for each of the scenarios/activities.

The volunteers had the opportunity to go through the questionnaires, practice completing them and ask any questions. Following this, volunteers could decide whether they wished to take part in the project or not.

The mystery shopping project involved making telephone calls and carrying out visits to pharmacies. Volunteers were encouraged to review the training materials and 'top tips' sheets for each activity before doing them.

Telephone calls

We called the 38 pharmacies on the list provided by Public Health Hackney.

Findings from both exercises were crossed checked and confirmed full cover.

There were 2 possible scenarios that could have been allocated to the young mystery shoppers:

- Emergency hormonal contraception general inquiry about how to access them and if it is free of charge service.
- Emergency hormonal contraception general inquiry about how to access the service and if it is free of charge service. The volunteer pretends they are a young person calling from home and speaking quietly and do not want their parents to overhear the conversation. With this scenario, we wanted to access how accommodating the pharmacy staff will be in such a situation.

Volunteers were given scenarios that acted as guides for the calls (e.g. you have just moved to the area and would like to know how to access the service). They were also provided with information about the service for their own information.

Visits

16 pharmacies were visited between August and October 2022.

We selected two pharmacies in each of the Hackney Neighbourhoods.

Pharmacies were selected on the basis of the findings from our telephone mystery shopping. We selected one pharmacy where there was a charge for the EHC and one where the service was offered for free.

The visits involved looking out for certain information (posters, leaflets, signs, etc), taking in the general appearance and feel of the pharmacy, and the way volunteers felt they were spoken to.

Mystery shoppers were asked to ask to speak to a female pharmacist when they walk into the pharmacy. This was to give a sign to the person on clerk that the mystery shopper wants to discuss a sensitive issue.

One other volunteer was required to act as shy, worried and someone who needed help with EHC.

Methodology

Where the service was free of charge

23 pharmacies offered the service for free. Of these:

- 2 pharmacies were unable to offer the free service on the day due to the locum pharmacist not being trained to deliver the service
- 1 pharmacy run out of stock, but the mystery shopper was signposted to another pharmacy
- 2 pharmacists offered the mystery shopper to either pay for the service or have it for free under the NHS
- 3 pharmacists gave conflicting information to both mystery shoppers about the charge of the service, so more than one call was needed to be made to clarify.

What questions were asked?

- 7 pharmacists asked the mystery shopper if they lived in Hackney
- 3 pharmacists asked if the mystery shopper is registered with a Hackney GP
- 6 pharmacists did not ask any questions
- 3 pharmacists asked the mystery shopper when they had unprotected sex

Phone calls - findings

We called the following pharmacies

- Woodberry Wetlands Neighbourhood
- Armstrong Dispensing Chemist, N4 2EX
- Park Pharmacy, N4 2AA
- Rowlands Pharmacy, N4 2HE
- Safedale Pharmacy, N16 9DL

Springfield Park Neighbourhood

- Dunsmure Pharmacy, N16 5JY
- Green Light pharmacy, N16 6LU
- Land Pharmacy, N16 6TY

- Clissold Park Neighbourhood
- Allen Pharmacy, N16 9PA
- Benjamin Pharmacist, N16 7JD
- Safedale Ltd, N16 0AP
- Safedale Ltd (Albion Road, N16 0TA
- Superdrug Store, E8 2LX

- Hackney Downs Neighbourhood
- ✤ Asvacare Pharmacy, E5 9BU
- Day Lewis, E5 8BY
- F. A. Strange, E5 8EQ
- Hackney Pharmacy, E9 5BQ
- Hackney Marshes Neighbourhood
- Bees Pharmacy- Kalpesh Chemist, E5 0HD
- Clockwork Pharmacy (Mare Street)E8 1HP
- Clockwork Pharmacy 236 Well Street E9 6QT
- Clockwork Pharmacy 239 Well Street E9 6RG
- Regal Pharmacy, E5 0LP
- Safedale Pharmacy, E5 ONS
- Well Street Common Neighbourhood
- Bees Pharmacy, E9 5DG
- Silverfield Chemist, E9 6AS
- Clockwork Victoria Park Pharmacy, E9 7HD
- K. Sonigra Pharmacy, E9 7PX

- London Fields Neighbourhood
- Clarks Healthcare Ltd. E8 5QJ
- Dev's Chemist, E8 1NH
- Guardian pharmacy, E8 4AE
- Haggerston Pharmacy, E8 4HU
- J Edmunds Pharmacy, E8 2JS
- Kingsland Pharmacy, E8 4AA
- Norlington Chemist Ltd, E8 4PH

- Shoreditch Park & The City Neighbourhood
- Finstead Pharmacy, N1 5LG
- Judd's Pharmacy, N1 6BT
- Murrays Chemist, N1 7QJ
- Spring Pharmacy, N1 5LG
- Unipharm pharmacy, E2 8AN

Phone calls - findings

Pharmacies who charged for the free service

15 out of 38 pharmacies said they are charging for the service. Of these:

- 1 pharmacist said that they ran out of stock
- 5 pharmacists did not signpost the mystery shopper to another service for free Emergency Contraception
- 6 pharmacists voluntarily signposted the mystery shopper to other services including another pharmacy, GP practice or the local sexual health clinic
- 4 pharmacists signposted the mystery shopper to another free service only when asked
- 2 pharmacists invited the mystery shoppers to a consultation.
- 1 pharmacy gave conflicting information about the charge of the service "The first person said that I can have it for free with a prescription but wasn't able to tell me where to get the prescription from. Another person took over and said that they don't provide the service for free but I can try other pharmacies."

What questions were asked?

- 2 pharmacies asked when the mystery shopper had unprotected sex so that the call handler can tell the price of the appropriate pill
- 11pharmacists did not ask any questions and did not offer a consultation
- 10 pharmacists did not ask for any information but informed the mystery shopper of the cost of the pill

Phone calls - findings

We visited the following pharmacies

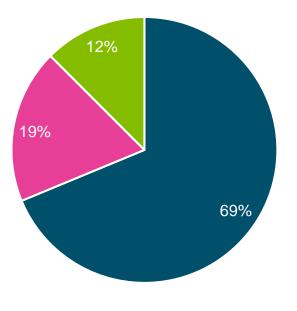
- Woodberry Wetlands Neighbourhood
- Rowlands Pharmacy, N4 2HE
- Safedale Pharmacy, N16 9DL
- Springfield Park Neighbourhood
- Dunsmure Pharmacy, N16 5JY
- ✤ Land Pharmacy, N16 6TY
- Clissold Park Neighbourhood
- Benjamin Pharmacist, N16 7JD
- Safedale Ltd, N16 0AP
- Shoreditch Park & The City Neighbourhood
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- London Fields Neighbourhood
- Clarks Healthcare Ltd. E8 5QJ
- Guardian pharmacy, E8 4AE

Mystery Shopping Visits

- 15 of the 16 visited pharmacies confirmed the findings from the telephone mystery shopping.
- Although all the pharmacies were visited after they signed up to provide free EHC according to Public Health Hackney, only 7 out of the 16 visited pharmacies said they were offering free Emergency Hormonal Contraception. Nine were only offering the over-the-counter pill.
- One pharmacy offered free service over the phone, however, requested payment for the same during the physical visit.
- Some mystery shoppers were not offered a consultation, especially when there was no access to free EHC at the pharmacy
- All pharmacies were accessible to young people by public transport
- During some of the visits, the mystery shopper was assisted by their friend. Their wish to attend the consultation accompanied by their friend was granted in all instances

Did you find the staff welcoming?

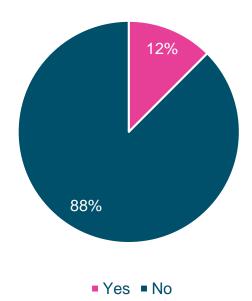


Yes No Neutral

"The main chemist sounds friendly and a little bit flirtatious."

"The woman in the clerk did not seem friendly neither did she look enthusiastic to serve me which seemed weird as she was very friendly and nice to the people that were in front of me. I don't want to round it down to racism but the people that were in front of me prior were white and she seemed extremely happy to serve them."

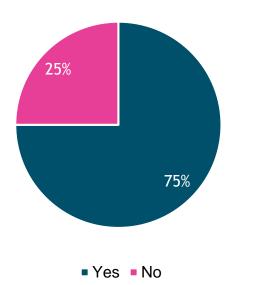
Did you notice any information within the pharmacy mentioning the EHC service anywhere within the pharmacy?



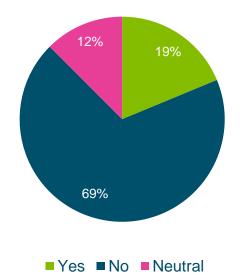
"There was an image on the consultation room door saying "This pharmacy is committing to providing a safe, comfortable environment where patients and staff can be confident that best practice is being followed at all times and the safety of all is of paramount importance."

"The pharmacy seemed cluttered and cramped I didn't look for a confidentiality statement."

Was it easy to see the location of the consultation room?



Did you notice a confidentiality statement anywhere in the consultation room?



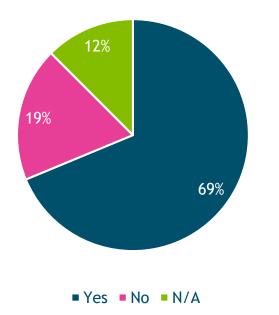
"I noticed a small door in the hall, which can probably be a consulting room, but there was no written sign on it, I am not sure there actually is any consultation room."

"Yes, The consultation was very clear to see as there was a big sign that said, "consultation room".

"It wasn't easy to see where the consultation room was as it was behind the front desk and the door was closed, the pharmacist opened my door from her end." "No, and medication from the previous customer was laying around, which made me think about confidentiality after I left myself."

" I did not see any confidentiality statement, but the pharmacist reassurance that everything was confidential." On the side of the form, it says in bold "private and confidential." which I think is a reassuring statement."

Did you feel comfortable during the consultation?

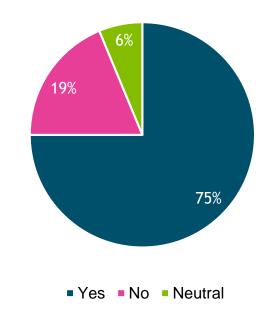


"I felt really uncomfortable and not helped at all, I just wanted to leave the chemist."

"I was quite disappointed as the pharmacist was both a female and a woman of colour. I did feel more at ease until she started speaking. She seemed to be in a rush, and she was not friendly or smiley."

"Yes, the pharmacist had a great sense of humour and the mood was very relaxing."

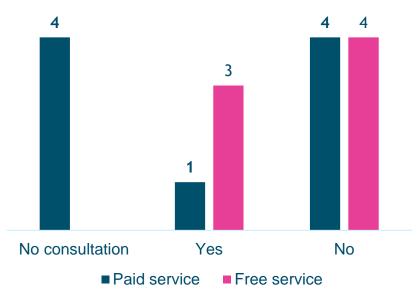
Did you feel you were treated with dignity and respects?



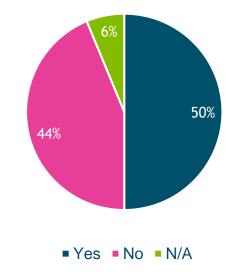
"Yes, I felt like I was being treated with dignity and respect, none of the questions were out of topic or to personal."

"I don't feel like I was treated with respect and the environment of the pharmacy seemed very moody as both the woman in the clerk and the pharmacist weren't friendly at all."

Did the pharmacist give you information about contraception in the future, e.g. safe sex?



Were you satisfied with the consultation outcome?



"He mentioned he could provide me with free condoms, but they had run out. He also suggested to consult with my GP about best type of long-term contraception such as pills or coil."

"The pharmacist did not give me any but seemed more concerned about me paying for a pill."

"She spoke to me about the different options of contraception, for example, the implant, the coil, the depo etc. She even went on to explain how each contraception was put in the body which I was impressed by." "Yes, it was a calm experience and the lady was very clear and articulated the information very well."

"No, I am not sure the pharmacist was fully aware of the sensitivity of the matter."

No....Overall, it wasn't the best experience as she gave me the wrong pill and did not recognise that."

"Not really, it wasn't thorough and I felt some risks were overlooked. "

Where the service was offered free of charge

One of the pharmacies that said they provide free access to EHC could not provide the free service on that day due to the locum pharmacist not having the required training.

- 7 pharmacies offered free access to the services
- All pharmacies voluntarily invited the mystery shopper to a consultation and asked for all personal details (Date of birth, name, address, when they had unprotected sex, when was their last menstrual cycle)
- · 3 pharmacies offered information about contraception in the future
- None of the pharmacists talked to the mystery shopper about safe sex

"The pharmacist did not give extra information about future options if the pill was to fail, and also did not talk about safe sex or any other form of contraception to avoid relying on emergency contraception. Did not speak about STI's at all or where I could get a screening, I felt like there was a lack of information that he did not include in the conversation like the side effects of the tablet or even the difference between Levonelle and EllaOne."

"The woman seemed very nervous and provided limited information about the different types of contraception. The lady didn't seem like she had knowledge of the different types of contraceptives, neither did she offer any types of contraception."

"He requested the contraception but before getting it, he talked through a lot of points such as the different types of contraception. For example, the coil, the patch, the implant, and the depo. He explained what they are and what they do but I told him I wasn't interested in contraception however I was impressed that he went into so much detail including stating statistics etc. He also explained the different contraception pills and the percentage of effectiveness."

Pharmacies who charged for the free service

- 9 pharmacies charged for the service although they had informed the Public Health Hackney that they would provide it for free
- Only 2 out of the 9 pharmacies offered consultation to mystery shoppers. On these two occasions, pharmacists invited the mystery shopper to the consultation room voluntarily.

"She invited me to the consultation room straight away and didn't discuss anything in front of anyone which I really liked in comparison to other pharmacies I have attended."

- Only one of the two pharmacies offered information about contraception in the future
- None of the pharmacists talked to the mystery shopper about safe sex
- Five pharmacists invited the mystery shopper into the consultation room only when the volunteer asked for a private conversation

"What I particularly didn't like was that the pharmacist did not invite me to the consultation room straight away but tried to ask me questions in the customer waiting area which I found very uncomfortable and inappropriate."

"She didn't initiate privacy when I told her that I need to talk to her in private. She spoke to me when there were a lot of people around, so I had to ask her if there was a consultation room."

- Two pharmacists did not invite the mystery shopper into the room telling them they cannot offer the service free of charge
- Four out of the 9 pharmacists voluntarily signposted the mystery shopper to another free service
- Five pharmacists signposted the mystery shopper to a free service only when asked by the volunteer

However, in two instances, the mystery shopper was told to google for this information. During one of the visits, the mystery shopper was told there are no pharmacies offering a free service.

What questions were asked

Only at 14 out of 16 instances, the mystery shoppers were asked questions to identify the appropriate pill.

• Where the service was free of charge, mystery shoppers were asked the standard question "usually read from a form".

Name and date of birth / The name of their GP / Their ethnicity / When was their last menstrual period? When they had unprotected sex / Is this their first time having emergency contraception

"The pharmacist gave an option to pay for the emergency contraception straight away. I refused and asked for the free ones. Before he asked me any questions he went to collect the tablets. We started completing the form for the free contraception. The questions asked where not personal or judgmental. The usual questions where asked. My name and GP address ? my ethnicity? If this was my first time having an emergency contraception?, when was the last period?- to see what pill would be more suitable for me, as there are two different ones."

• Where there was a charge for the service, the mystery shoppers were mainly asked about their last period and when the accident happened

Surprisingly, two mystery shoppers were specifically asked only about their age. One commented, "She asked for my age. I felt strange as I did not understand why she asked for my age, even though there is not a free service."

Another volunteer said "The pharmacist didn't ask me any questions, but she waited for me to speak and when I said, "I'm here for the".. she finished the sentence for me and said "contraception pill." Immediately, she said they are not free, and she didn't even ask about my situation or even try to figure out what contraceptive pill I needed. She told me that it was £25 straight away."

Feedback on the consultation room

- Mystery shoppers were able to enter and observe 15 out of the 16 pharmacies' consultation rooms
- Some mystery shoppers were not offered a consultation, especially when there was no access to free EHC at the pharmacy, so not all mystery shoppers were able to provide feedback about the consultation.
- On 9 out of the 16 occasions, respondents thought the consultation room was clean while 4 commented on the room being cluttered.
- 3 mystery shoppers commented that the room was accessible and another 3 said that the consultation room was not accessible.
- In 6 of the rooms, mystery shoppers said there were 2 chairs, and in another 6 that there was only 1 chair.
- On 7 occasions, the mystery shoppers said that the consultation room was too small. In another 6, the mystery shoppers said the consultation room size was acceptable.

"The consultation room was very small and it was decently cleaned but a bit cluttered. There was just one chair and there was enough distance between me and the pharmacist especially when it seemed like she was still social distancing as she wore a mask."

"It was a small room, with one chair inside the room. It was easily accessible. No clutter spotted."

Recommendations

Local Authorities and commissioners of NHS and public health services have an important role to play in providing accessible, safe and confidential services to all service users and particularly young people.

Based on the findings from both the telephone calls and visits made to pharmacies, we would like to make the following recommendations to improve access to Emergency Hormonal Contraception in Hackney.

This is to ensure these services are accessible and inclusive to all young people, and to other residents.

We identified the following areas for improvement:

Environment - physical environment, staff training, skills and attitude

These recommendations address the importance of the physical environment as well as the training, skills and attitude that the pharmacy staff need to deliver young people-friendly services.

Publicity

These recommendations address the importance of the content and design of the information available promoting a range of sexual health issues, including contraception, STIs, relationships, use of condoms and sexuality.

Patient's views and experience - monitoring and evaluation of the patient's experience

These recommendations address the importance of capturing young people's experience of access and delivery of the service as part of service development.

We recommend that Public Health Hackney, Local Pharmaceutical Committee and pharmacy leads convene a working group including young people to discuss the recommendations below and their implementation.

Support to create and facilitate this group is available through the Local Communications and Engagement Team which works with 16+ network, young System Influencers and public representatives.

Environment - staff training, skills and attitude

All pharmacy staff who are likely to come into contact with young people to receive appropriate training on:

- · Full range of contraceptive options, promoting positive sexual health, and preventing pregnancy and STIs
- Equality, diversity, to understand how to engaging and communicating with young people, in way that feels safe and friendly
- Understanding the sexual health needs of young people and how to discussing them in the context of sexual health and relationships
- · Managing sensitive and/or difficult consultations
- Safeguarding (Adults and Children) to enable staff to recognise signs of abuse and neglect and to act and report appropriately

All pharmacy staff who are likely to come into contact with young people should

- Be able to recognise and respond to different sexual health needs such as those relating to gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age and different sexual health issues
- Be able to encourage young people to make safe and informed choices, including resisting peer pressure and delaying early sex
- Be familiar with information about other local services for young people for instant signposting

Pharmacies to provide a safe and young people-friendly environment by ensuring maximum confidentiality. This includes proactively inviting service users to a private place (consultation room) as soon as the need is recognised.

- All staff routinely explain the confidentiality policy to young people to enable them to understand their right to confidentiality
- Staff to ensure that young people are not asked any potentially sensitive questions where they may be overheard by other staff members or other patients

Environment - physical environment

The right and appropriate environment and atmosphere are more likely to contribute to ensuring confidentiality for service users regardless of their age. It is important that services are young people friendly which will relate to physical arrangements as well as staff attitudes and actions.

Pharmacies should provide safe and young people-friendly environment by

- Ensuring leaflets and posters promoting confidentiality are available within the pharmacy
- Ensuring greater promotion of consultations room as a private and confidential space
- Ensuring full access to their consultation room as well as making sure it is accessable
- Ensuring a comfortable atmosphere in their consultation rooms by providing a clean welcoming environment

Publicity

- Public Health should provide information about the service in a variety of languages and formats also suitable for people with learning disabilities, physical disabilities or sensory impairments.
- The content and design of the leaflets should be co-designed with young people
- The leaflet should provide information about:
 - What the service offers
 - How to access the service, including young people's right to attend a consultation on their own without the involvement of a parent or a carer.
 - What will happen when they access the service
 - How to give feedback or complain about the service

- Young people's entitlement to a confidential service. This information to include: what data is collected, any limitations to confidentiality - who has (will have) access to this data, under what circumstances this information may be disclosed or shared.

- Leaflets should be distributed and made available in schools, social clubs, and other appropriate places where young people are more likely to attend. Digital information should be also available. More places for promoting services should be discussed with young people.
- Ensure leaflets and posters are available within pharmacies informing about the available services
- Emergency Hormonal Contraception consultations to include information about sexual and reproductive health and contraception in the future including reversible long-acting methods of contraception, condoms with information and guidance on correct use, free confidential pregnancy testing, referral to NHS-funded abortion services, sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing and treatment

Patient's views and experience - monitoring and evaluation of the patient's experience

Ensuring service users and in particular young people, have the best possible experience of care and support is essential for health services.

Services should be accessible and appropriate for young people. It is therefore important that young people are consulted, and their feedback and recommendations used to drive service improvements.

- A feedback opportunity should be offered to service users at the end of their consultation. This can be either given in a form of a hard copy or a QR code for online access
- The feedback form should include information about Healthwatch Hackney as an independent body service users can reach out to share their experience
- Patient feedback should be regularly reviewed and acted on appropriately
- · Reports on the patient experience to be shared with Healthwatch Hackney





Ensure more pharmacists are trained to deliver Emergency Hormonal Contraception consultation and provide other sexual health information



Ensure pharmacies are provided with enough stock of Emergency Hormonal Contraception for instant delivery



Ensure regular follow-up and monitoring of local pharmacies commissioned to deliver certain services free of charge to eligible residents



Contact us:

info@healthwatchhackney.co.uk

080 8164 7664 (FREE phone number)