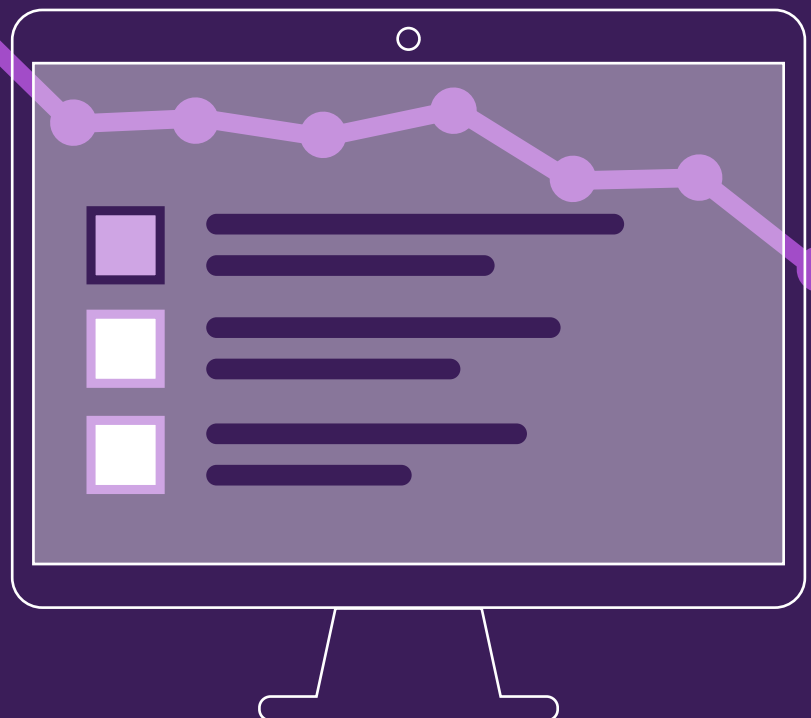


Public satisfaction with the NHS and social care in 2023

Results from the British Social Attitudes Survey

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March 2024





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Introduction and key findings

Introduction

The National Centre for Social Research's (NatCen's) British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey has been conducted annually since 1983. Each year, the survey asks people what it's like to live in Britain and what they think about how Britain is run, including measuring levels of public satisfaction with the health and care services.

The most recent BSA survey was carried out between 12 September and 31 October 2023. It asked a nationally representative sample of 3,374 people (across England, Scotland and Wales) about their satisfaction with the National Health Service (NHS) and adult social care services overall, and 1,206 people about their satisfaction with specific NHS services, as well as their views on NHS priorities, principles and funding.

In the context of prominent national discussions about taxation and health care spending, for 2023 we introduced a question asking people whether they would rather the government increase taxes and increase spending on the NHS, keep taxes and spending on the NHS at the same level as now, or cut taxes and spend less on the NHS.

The King's Fund and the Nuffield Trust jointly sponsored the 2023 BSA survey health and care questions reported here.

The BSA is a 'gold standard' nationally representative survey that uses a robust methodology to explore public views on a wide range of issues. The methodology uses random probability sampling to select British households to take part.

From 1983 until 2019 the survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews. This method was not possible in 2020 due to social distancing rules in place for Covid-19, so that year the BSA survey interviews were conducted primarily online with a telephone option also available. Since then, this method has continued, with households receiving a letter inviting up to two adults to take part online, or over the phone if they preferred.



Key findings

Satisfaction with the NHS overall in 2023

- Overall satisfaction fell to 24% – a 5 percentage point decrease from 2022. This is the lowest level of satisfaction recorded since the survey began in 1983. Since 2020, satisfaction has fallen by 29 percentage points.
- 52% of respondents were dissatisfied with the NHS, the highest proportion since the survey began.
- The main reason people gave for being dissatisfied with the NHS was waiting times for GP and hospital appointments (71%), followed by staff shortages (54%) and a view that the government does not spend enough money on the NHS (47%).
- Of those who were satisfied with the NHS, the top reason was because NHS care is free at the point of use (66%), followed by the NHS has a good range of services and treatments available (53%) and the quality of NHS care (52%).

Satisfaction with social care services in 2023

- 13% of respondents said they were satisfied with social care. This is the lowest level of satisfaction recorded since the survey began. 57% were dissatisfied with social care.
- The top reason for dissatisfaction with social care was pay, working conditions and training for social care workers not being adequate (57%), closely followed by people not getting all the social care they needed (56%) and there not being enough support for unpaid carers (49%).
- Satisfaction with social care is lower than satisfaction with the NHS overall or any of the individual NHS services asked about – general practice, dentistry, inpatient, outpatient, and A&E services. Similarly, social care services had the highest levels of dissatisfaction.



Satisfaction with different NHS services in 2023

- 34% of respondents said they were satisfied with GP services; the lowest level of satisfaction recorded since the survey began. Since 2019, satisfaction with GP services has fallen by 34 percentage points.
- Satisfaction with NHS dentistry fell to a record low of 24% and dissatisfaction increased to a record high of 48%.
- 35% said they were satisfied with inpatient services (unchanged from the previous year). 44% said they were satisfied with outpatient services, down 1 percentage point from 2022. Both services remain at record low levels of satisfaction.
- 31% said they were satisfied with A&E services, up 1 percentage point on the previous year.

Attitudes to NHS funding, priorities and principles

- 84% of respondents said they thought the NHS had a major or severe funding problem.
- When asked about government choices on tax and spending on the NHS, 48% chose 'increase taxes and spend more on the NHS', 42% chose 'keep taxes and spending the same', and 6% chose 'reduce taxes and spend less on the NHS'. Those in the highest monthly household income quartile were more likely to choose 'increase taxes and spend more on the NHS'.
- On being asked what the most important priorities for the NHS should be, the top two cited by respondents were: making it easier to get a GP appointment (52%) and increasing the number of staff in the NHS (51%). Improving waiting times for planned operations and in A&E were chosen by 47% and 45% of respondents respectively.
- As in the previous two years, a large majority of respondents agreed that the founding principles of the NHS should 'definitely' or 'probably' apply in 2023: that the NHS should be free of charge when you need to use it (91%), the NHS should primarily be funded through taxes (82%) and the NHS should be available to everyone (82%).



1 How satisfied is the British public with the NHS overall?

The 2023 BSA survey took place in the year of the 75th anniversary of the NHS – a time for reflection on the past, present and future of the NHS.

The past few years have been challenging for the NHS. A decade of squeezed funding and chronic workforce shortages followed by a global pandemic has left the NHS in a continual state of crisis. With the NHS unable to meet the expectations and needs of the public, satisfaction with it has fallen sharply in recent years. The 2021 BSA survey saw the largest recorded year-on-year drop in satisfaction, which then fell further with the 2022 survey recording the lowest level of satisfaction since the survey began in 1983.

In the year between the 2022 and 2023 BSA survey fieldwork periods, the waiting list for planned care in England had reached 7.8 million by September 2023, with similar lengthening waiting lists in Scotland and Wales. Waiting times for urgent and emergency care hit record highs, for example, patients in England were waiting nearly 40 minutes on average for an emergency ambulance in September 2023 ([NHS England 2023b](#)). In A&E departments, 12% of patients were waiting more than 12 hours for care in the first two quarters of 2023/24 ([NHS England 2023a](#)). In primary care, many people are still worried about timely access to GP services ([The Health Foundation 2023](#)). Similarly, people are struggling to access NHS dentistry, resulting in nearly 6 million fewer courses of NHS dental treatment in 2022/23 compared with pre-pandemic ([Williams et al 2023](#)).

On top of this, 2023 saw the longest sustained period of strike action in the NHS's history, with walkouts affecting doctors, nurses, paramedics and other staff groups. There were also concerns about the state of NHS buildings, with slow progress on the government's promise of 40 new hospitals and fears of unsafe material in NHS buildings ([Department of Health and Social Care 2023a](#)). High-profile scandals in 2023, including the criminal conviction of Lucy Letby and the events that led to Martha's rule ([Department of Health and Social Care 2023b](#)), also raised concerns about patient safety, the quality of care and the management of the NHS.



There are signs of recovery in some areas: the longest waits for planned care have been effectively eliminated ([NHS England 2023d](#)) and hospital activity has almost returned to pre-pandemic levels ([NHS England 2023c](#)). However, the future brings uncertainty for the NHS with huge challenges ahead. In this election year, health and care will be a key issue for many voters. What do this year's results tell us about public opinion on the NHS?

Overall satisfaction with the NHS in 2023

For more than 40 years, the BSA survey has asked a representative sample of the public how satisfied or dissatisfied they are 'with the way in which the NHS runs nowadays'. In 2023, 24% of the public were 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the NHS (see Figure 1 on page 9), the equivalent of fewer than 1 in 4 people reporting being satisfied. This is a statistically significant drop of 5 percentage points on the previous year (see Box below for a definition of statistical significance). This fall in satisfaction makes 2023 the year with the lowest level of satisfaction recorded since the survey began in 1983. Only 4% of respondents were 'very' satisfied with the NHS.

The past three years have seen large declines in overall satisfaction. In 2021, satisfaction dropped 17 percentage points to 36%. In 2022, satisfaction dropped by 7 percentage points and reached a record low of 29%, a record now surpassed by the 2023 results.

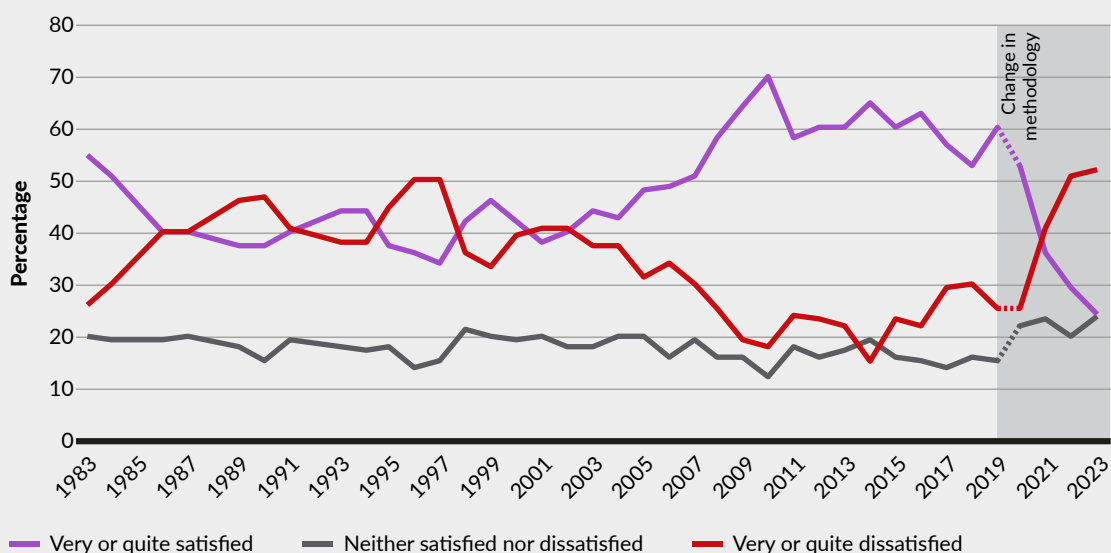
Statistical significance

If a change or difference is statistically significant, this means we can be 95% confident that the survey result reflects a real change or difference in public views, rather than being down to chance. Where a change or difference is not statistically significant, we cannot be confident that it reflects a real change or difference in public views.



Figure 1 Public satisfaction with the NHS, 1983–2023 K

Question asked: 'All in all, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays?'



Source: The King’s Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of NatCen’s BSA survey data. 2023 sample size = 3,374. This question was not asked in 1985, 1988 and 1992; ‘don’t know’ and ‘refusal’ responses are not shown, in 2023 these response categories were selected by 0.41% of respondents. Data has been carefully weighted to minimise differences due to the change in methodology between 2020 and previous years. For an interactive version of this figure, please visit: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16551191>

Before 2021, the lowest level of satisfaction recorded was in 1997, when satisfaction reached a low of 34%. From 2001 to 2010, overall satisfaction increased from 38% to 70%. There was then a sharp fall in 2011, down 12 percentage points, to 58%. Satisfaction then remained relatively stable over the next decade, with small fluctuations up and down until 2020, when satisfaction was recorded at 53%.

Public dissatisfaction with the NHS also rose slightly in 2023, from 51% in 2022 to 52% in 2023, but this was not statistically significant. This is the highest level of dissatisfaction with the NHS since the survey began.



How does satisfaction and dissatisfaction vary by population group?

The BSA survey gives us the opportunity to analyse results broken down by different population groups: age, sex, ethnicity, monthly household income, country and political affiliation (see the methodology for definitions). In this section, we look at satisfaction and dissatisfaction among these different groups in 2023 and how this has changed over time.

Across all population groups, the analysis looks at whether the results are significantly different from the survey average. We also examine whether the year-on-year changes are statistically significant, which offers a sense of how confident we can be in these findings.

Satisfaction and dissatisfaction in 2023

Figures 2a and 2b on pages 11 and 12 show satisfaction and dissatisfaction in different population groups in 2023 and how these differed from the average for the whole survey.

Satisfaction with the NHS was low across all population groups in 2023. There were no statistically significant differences in satisfaction between groups or statistically significant differences to the survey average of 24%.

However, there were some statistically significant differences for dissatisfaction. Black respondents were significantly less dissatisfied (33%) compared with the survey average and white respondents (52% and 53% respectively).¹ Additionally, the respondents in the highest monthly income quartile were more dissatisfied than those in the lowest quartile (56% and 45%).

In 2023, Conservative supporters reported higher levels of satisfaction than Labour supporters (29% and 24% respectively); however, this difference was not statistically significant. Levels of dissatisfaction were similar across supporters of both parties.

¹ While this result is statistically significant it should be treated with caution. The sample size is small and unlikely to be representative. See methodology for further detail.



This follows a pattern seen in previous BSA surveys, with supporters of the political party in power generally reporting higher levels of satisfaction than supporters of the main opposition party (Appleby 2018). However, it is noteworthy that the gap between supporters of these parties has narrowed over time. When satisfaction dropped to 34% in 1997, there was a 17 percentage point difference between Conservative and Labour supporters (45% versus 28%), compared with a 5 percentage point difference in 2023 (see Figure 3 on page 13).

Figure 2a Percentage of respondents in different population groups who are 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the NHS, 2023 **K**

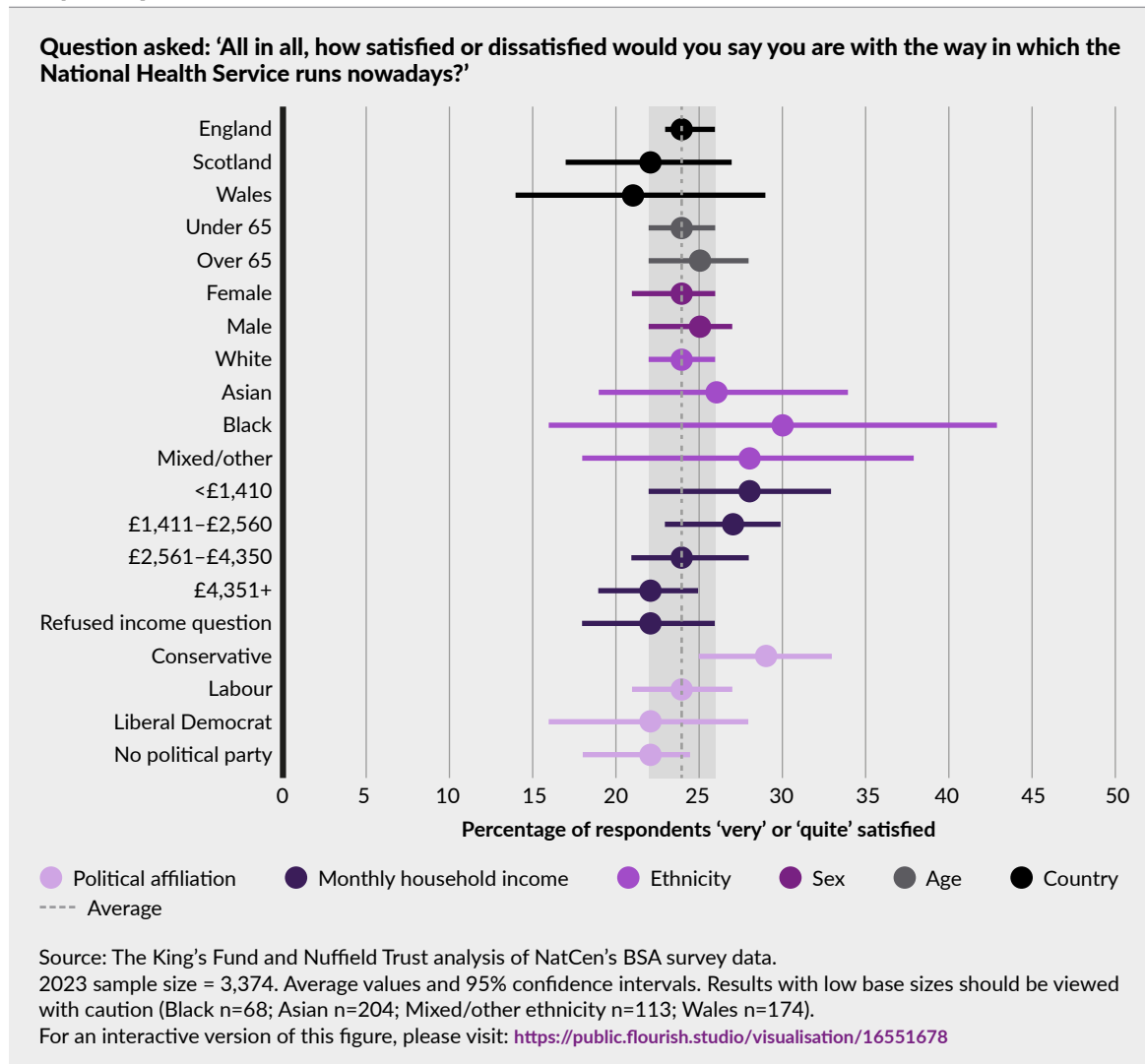




Figure 2b Percentage of respondents in different population groups who are 'very' or 'quite' dissatisfied with the NHS, 2023 **K**

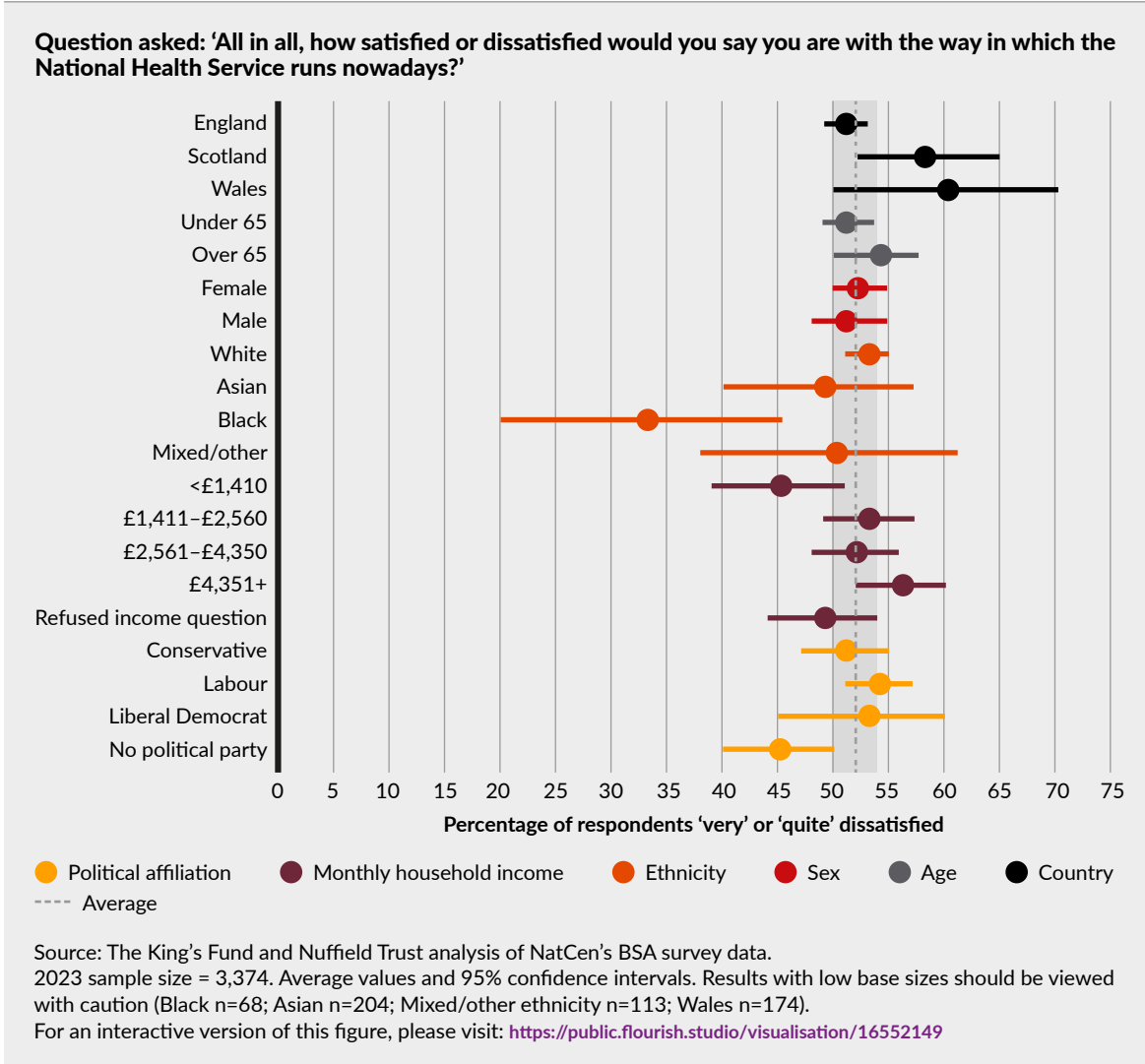
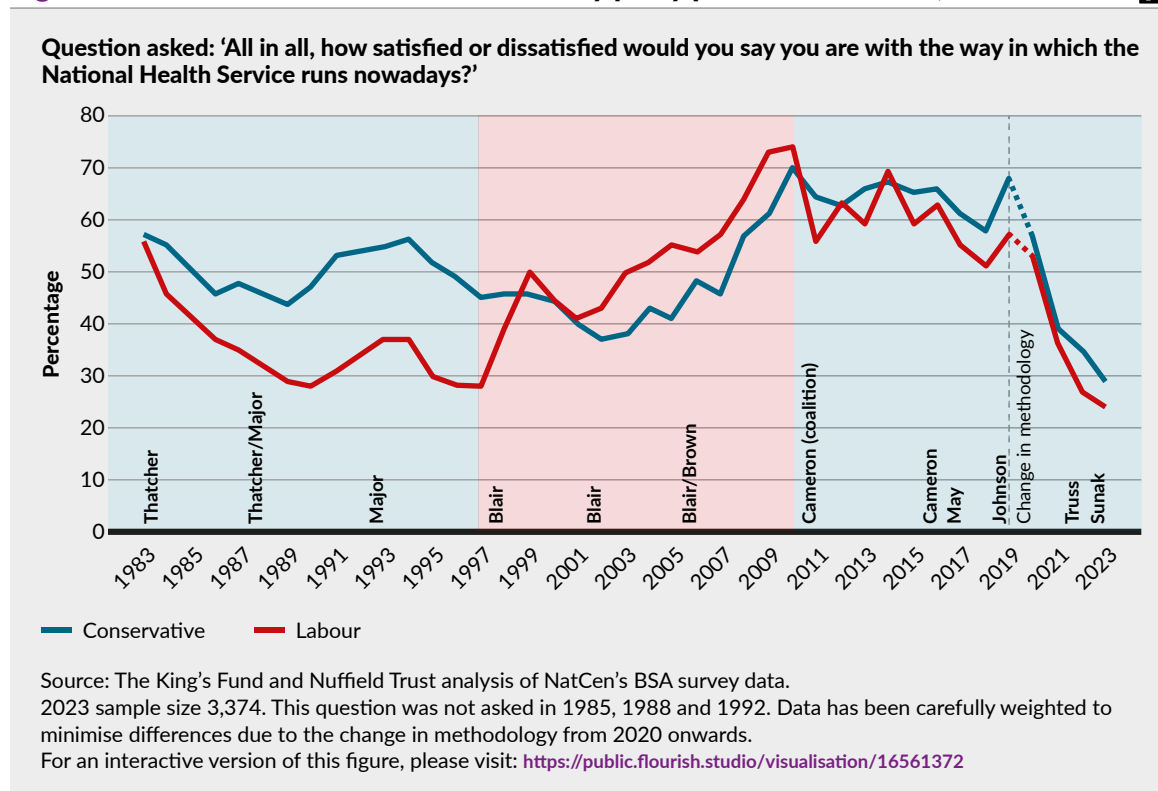




Figure 3 Public satisfaction with the NHS by party political affiliation, 1983–2023 



Changes in satisfaction since 2022

Between 2022 and 2023 satisfaction dropped in almost all population groups (see Figure 4 on page 14), although the decrease was only statistically significant for some groups.

In England, there was a statistically significant decrease in satisfaction between 2022 and 2023 (29% to 24%). Satisfaction also fell in Scotland and Wales, but the changes were not statistically significant because of the smaller sample sizes.

Only white respondents showed a statistically significant fall in satisfaction between 2022 and 2023. For other ethnic groups, the changes were not statistically significant.

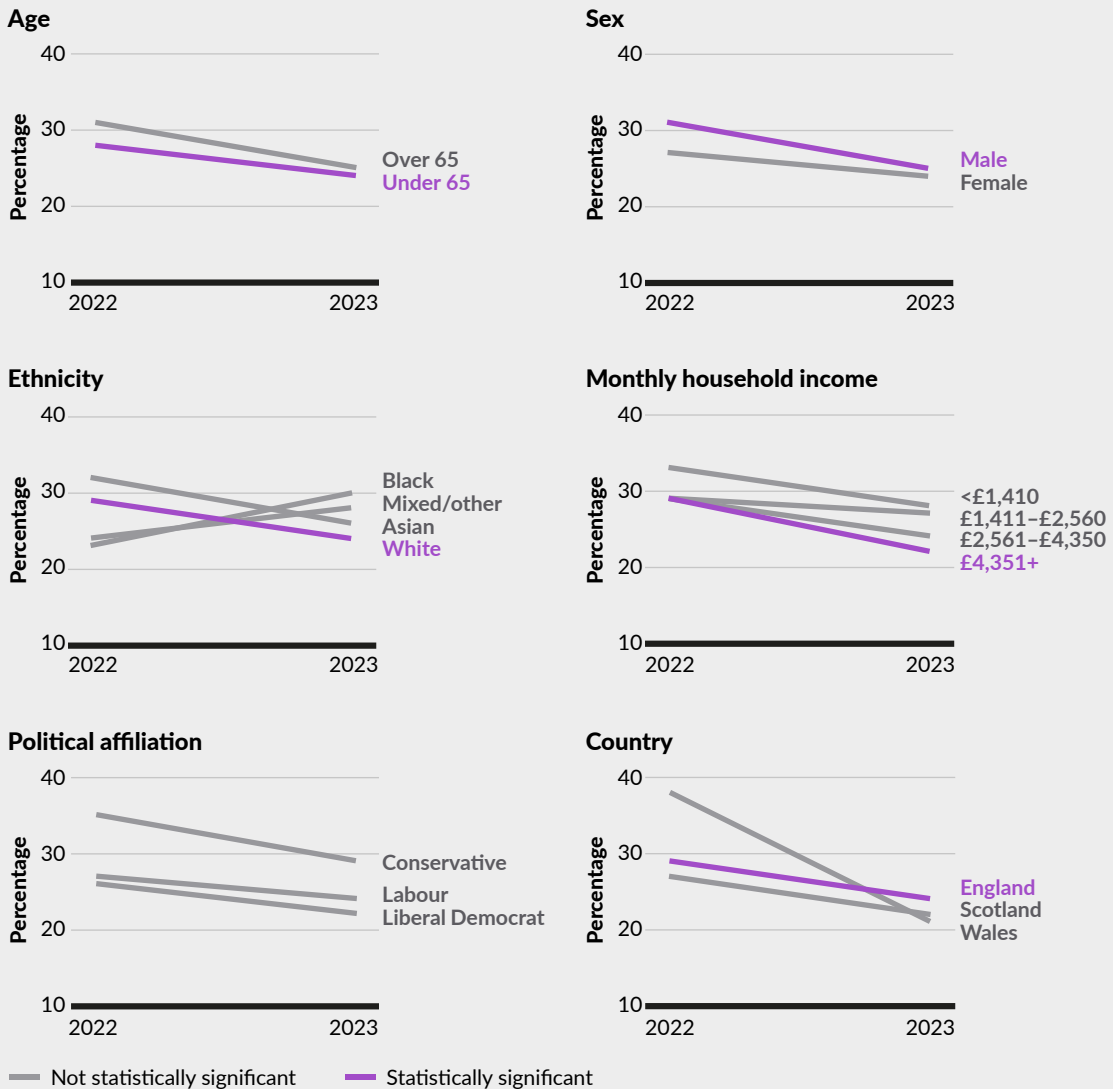
The decrease in satisfaction was statistically significant for adults aged 18–64 (down from 28% in 2022 to 24% in 2023), male respondents (31% to 25%), and people in the top quartile of monthly household income (29% to 22%). For all other groups, it was not statistically significant.



Figure 4 Percentage of respondents in different population groups who are 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with the NHS, 2022 compared with 2023



Question asked: 'All in all, how satisfied or dissatisfied would you say you are with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays?'



Source: The King's Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of NatCen's BSA survey data. 2022 sample size = 3,362; 2023 sample size = 3,374. Purple results are statistically significant at 5% level. Grey results are not statistically significant, and some categories have low base sizes (Black n=68; Asian n=204; Mixed/other n=113; Wales n=174) For an interactive version of this figure, please visit: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16561661>

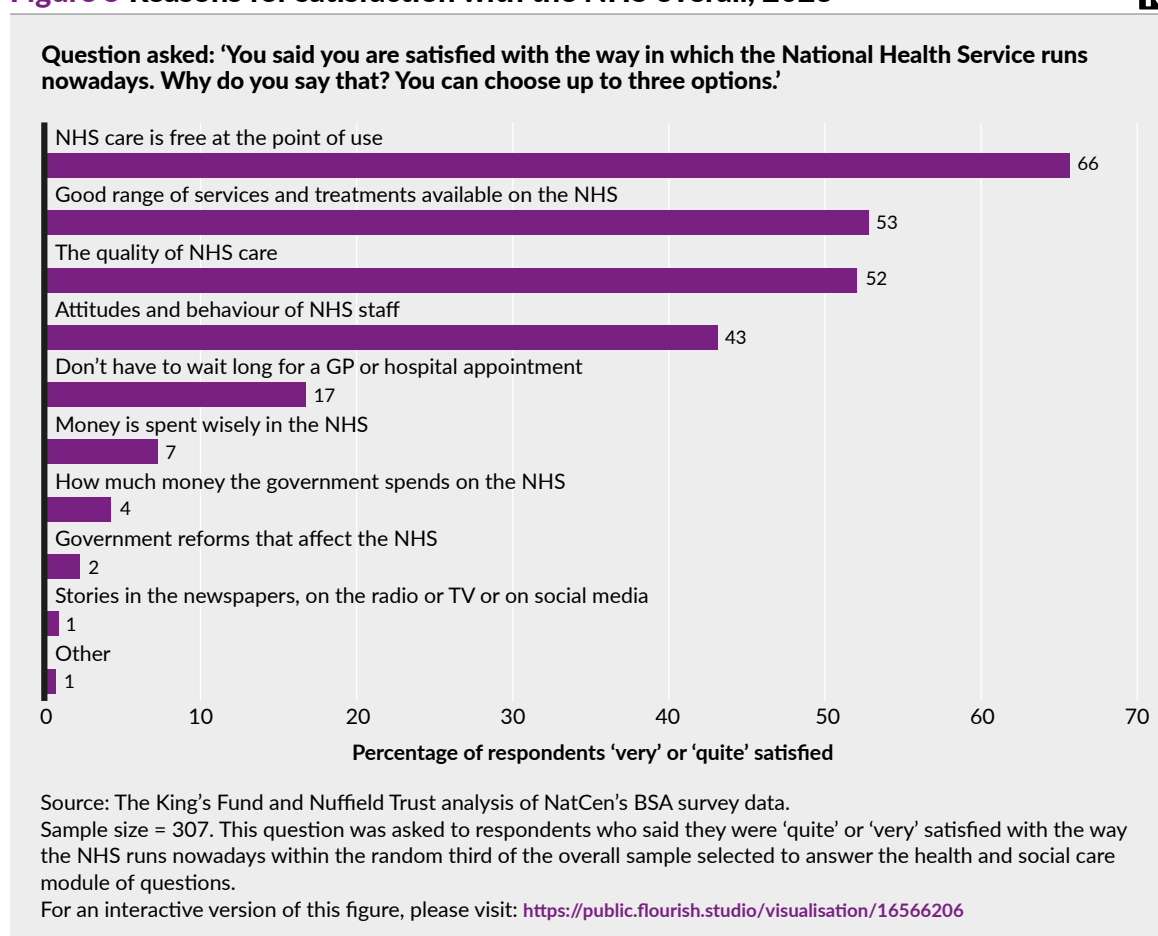


Why is the public satisfied or dissatisfied with the NHS?

Since 2015, the BSA survey has included questions that explore what lies behind the overall levels of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the NHS. Respondents are asked to pick up to three reasons for the answer they gave to the overall satisfaction question.

As Figure 5 shows, of people who said they were satisfied, 66% said they were satisfied because ‘NHS care is free at the point of use’, 53% because there was a ‘good range of services and treatments available’ and 52% said they were satisfied because of ‘the quality of NHS care’. 43% said that the ‘attitudes and behaviour of NHS staff’ was a reason for being satisfied.

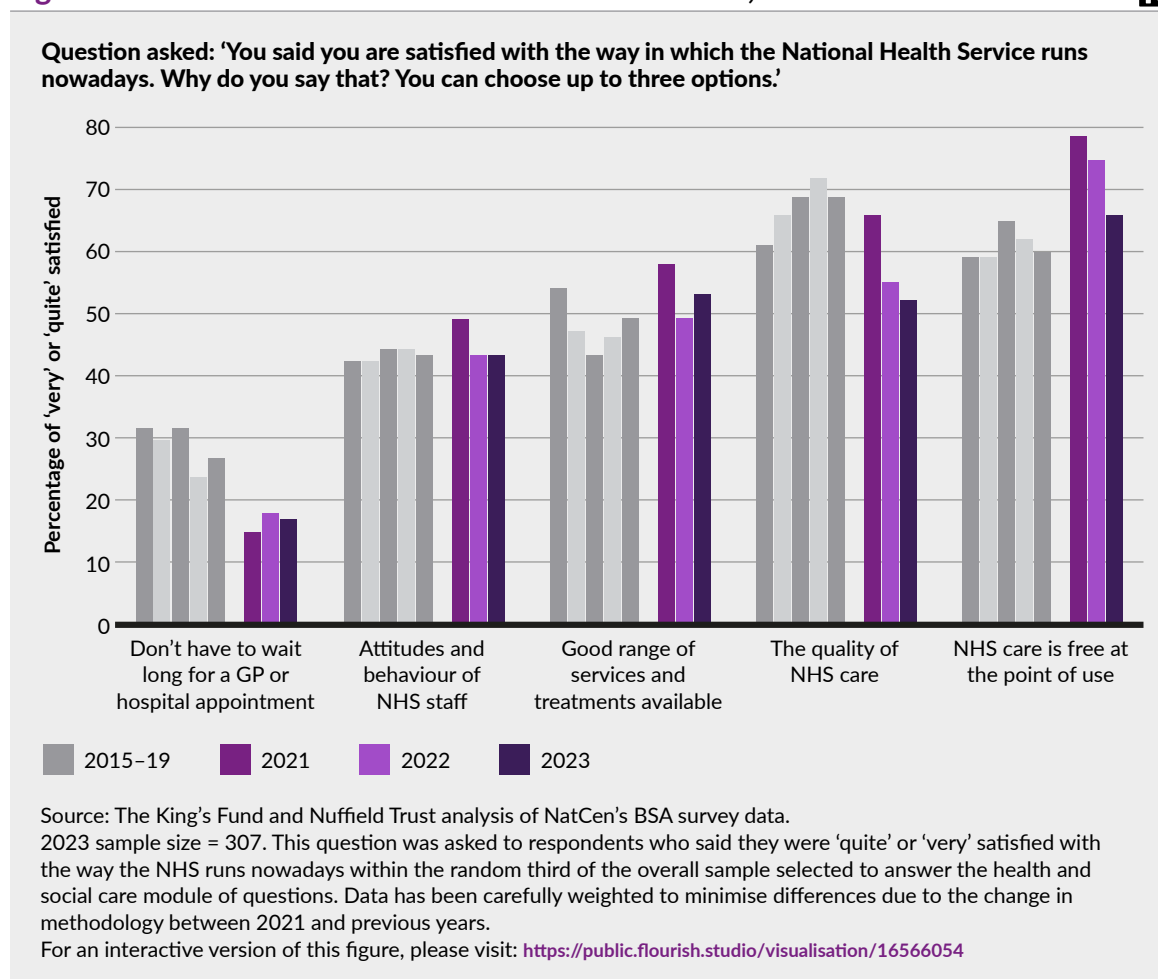
Figure 5 Reasons for satisfaction with the NHS overall, 2023





While the top five reasons for satisfaction have not changed since this question was introduced (see Figure 6), there has been a swap between the top three reasons. In 2021, ‘NHS care is free at the point of use’ became the top reason for satisfaction for the first time, and this has continued in 2022 and 2023. This year, a ‘good range of services and treatments available’ has risen to the second most common reason and ‘the quality of NHS care’ has dropped to the third most common reason for satisfaction, decreasing from a peak of 71% in 2018 to 52% in 2023.

Figure 6 Reasons for satisfaction with the NHS overall, 2015–2023





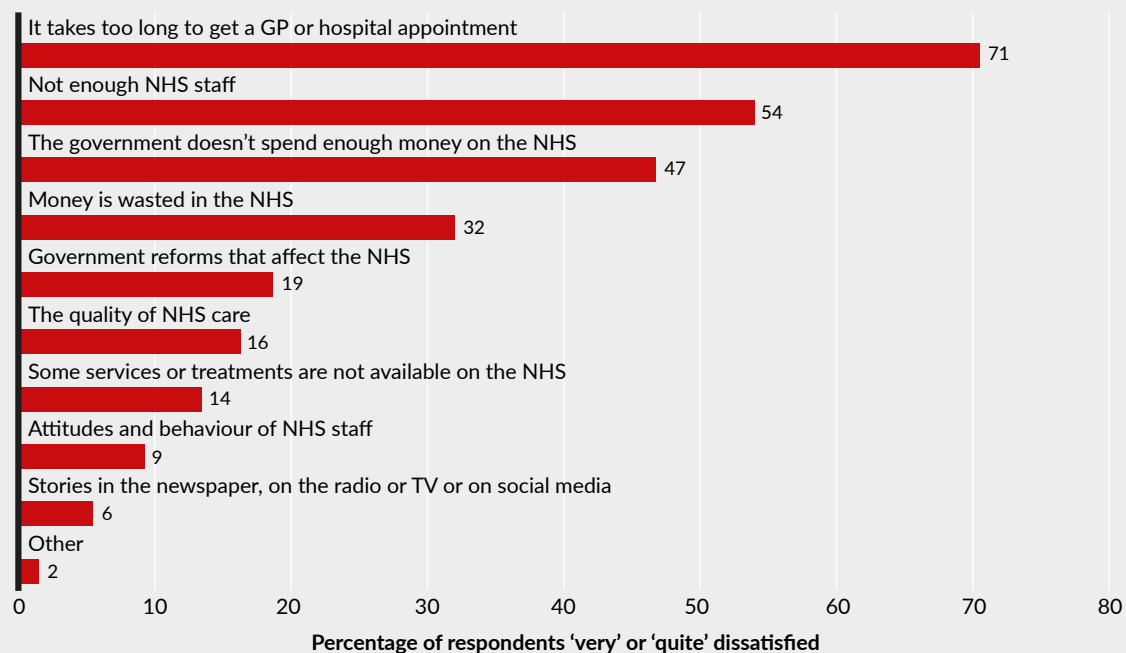
Each year, respondents who are asked this question can select one, two or three reasons for satisfaction, or choose not to answer the question. In recent years, fewer respondents have been choosing three reasons for satisfaction: in 2021, 82% chose three reasons for satisfaction compared with 67% in 2023. This may explain why the total percentage choosing the top two reasons for satisfaction (care is free at the point of use and quality of NHS care) has fallen by 13 percentage points between 2021 and 2023.

The top three reasons for dissatisfaction with the NHS in 2023 relate to access, staffing and funding (see Figure 7). 71% said they were dissatisfied because ‘it takes too long to get a GP or hospital appointment’, while 54% chose ‘not enough NHS staff’.

Figure 7 Reasons for dissatisfaction with the NHS overall, 2023



Question asked: ‘You said you are dissatisfied with the way in which the National Health Service runs nowadays. Why do you say that? You can choose up to three options.’



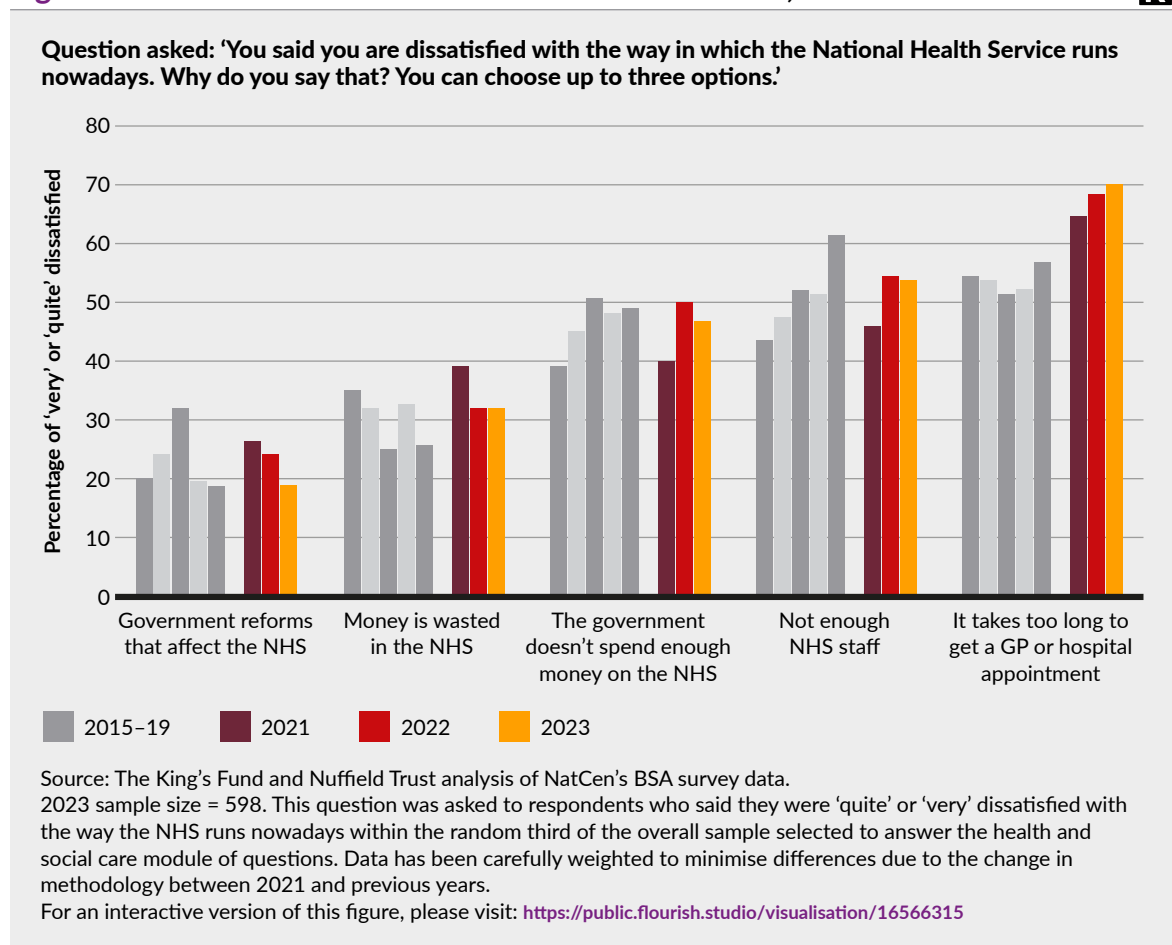
Source: The King’s Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of NatCen’s BSA survey data. Sample size = 598. This question was asked to respondents who said they were ‘quite’ or ‘very’ dissatisfied with the way the NHS runs nowadays within the random third of the overall sample selected to answer the health and social care module of questions. For an interactive version of this figure, please visit: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16566267>



47% said they were dissatisfied because ‘the government doesn’t spend enough money on the NHS’ and 32% felt that ‘money is wasted in the NHS’. 19% highlighted ‘government reforms that affect the NHS’ as a reason for dissatisfaction.

Since the question was first asked in 2015, the top three reasons for dissatisfaction with the NHS have not changed: length of waiting times, staff shortages, and the government not spending enough money on the NHS (see Figure 8). However, since the 2021 survey there has been a change in the ranking. In 2021, dissatisfaction because ‘it takes too long to get a GP or hospital appointment’ overtook concerns about ‘not enough NHS staff’ as the most common reason chosen. Dissatisfaction because ‘it takes too long to get a GP or hospital appointment’ has increased from 57% in 2019 to 71% in 2023. Meanwhile, dissatisfaction because there are ‘not enough NHS staff’ has dropped from 62% to 54% between 2019 and 2023.

Figure 8 Reasons for dissatisfaction with the NHS overall, 2015–2023 **K**





NHS and social care in the media: 2023

The British Social Attitudes survey is a survey of public satisfaction rather than patient experience of health and care services. Many factors are likely to influence reported satisfaction, including national debate in the media around the NHS and social care.

Fieldwork for the BSA survey was carried out between September and October 2023 during a period of significant developments in health and social care, including unprecedented industrial action, and widespread and sustained problems with NHS performance and quality of care.

Before the survey period (January–August 2023)

2023 started as 2022 ended – with many NHS nurses and paramedics on strike. There were also reports that large numbers of NHS trusts were providing food banks for their staff during the cost-of-living crisis.

In January, the media reported on NHS data for the preceding month showing A&E performance was the worst since modern records began. There was also a focus on gridlocked hospitals, resulting in delayed ambulance handovers leading to patients waiting more than an hour and a half on average for an ambulance when they had a condition such as a stroke or heart attack.

In his first major speech of 2023, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak set out his five ‘pledges’ to the electorate, one of which was that NHS waiting lists would fall within two years.

May saw evidence that a strong economy requires a healthy workforce, as national statistics revealed that more than 2.5 million people were not working due to health problems.

The big health policy news of the summer was the publication of the long-awaited NHS Long Term Workforce Plan, which set out to reverse the chronic workforce issues hampering the NHS with commitments to train more staff, retain current staff, and reform staff training and working practices.

Just ahead of the survey period, the NHS (and its sister service, social care) turned 75 – but compared with previous ‘birthdays’ for this national institution, the mood music was more muted than celebratory.

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NHS and social care in the media: 2023 *continued*

During the survey period (September–October)

September saw strong indications of rising financial pressure in the NHS, with national media reporting soaring financial deficits hitting a number of NHS trusts as a result of inflation and strike action.

There were calls to introduce Martha's rule – a proposal to give patients and relatives the power to get a second medical opinion, named after Martha Mills, a 13-year-old girl who died of sepsis. September also saw the launch of a public inquiry into the 'cover-up culture' and failings in care that led to neonatal nurse Lucy Letby being able to murder seven babies and attempt to kill six others at an NHS hospital, despite senior doctors raising the alarm.

The Covid-19 inquiry continued to hear (often damning) evidence from former officials and politicians on the UK's response to the pandemic. Meanwhile, many media outlets reported on the news that a number of NHS hospitals had buildings made from RAAC (reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete), putting them at risk of collapse.

Throughout the survey period, the theme of people struggling to access the care they need was never far from the headlines. People reported very long waits to get a GP appointment. NHS performance statistics showing rising waits for planned hospital care – despite the Prime Minister's pledge that they would fall – were widely reported by the media along with the estimate that by August one million appointments and treatments in England had been postponed due to strike action.

In October, the media reported on warnings from the health care watchdog the Care Quality Commission, among others, that cost-of-living pressures and NHS backlogs risked creating a two-tier health service in England, where people who cannot afford to pay wait longer for care. The state of NHS dentistry was also becoming an increasingly political issue, with media reports of 'dental deserts' in England where people were crowdfunding for their dental care or literally taking matters, such as tooth extraction, into their own hands.

The survey period coincided with the political party conferences and many media outlets covered Prime Minister Sunak's announcement of plans to create a smokefree Britain.

continued on next page



NHS and social care in the media: 2023 *continued*

In late September, the first joint strike action by consultants and junior doctors took place, triggering the biggest walkout in NHS history. This was the third walkout by consultants and the sixth by junior doctors in 2023. This widespread industrial action continued into the winter – becoming the biggest concern for the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Victoria Atkins, who replaced Steve Barclay during a government reshuffle shortly after this year’s survey concluded.



2 How satisfied is the British public with social care services?

The BSA asks respondents about their satisfaction with social care services aimed at those who need assistance due to illness, disability or old age.

The past decade has been very challenging for adult social care – a lack of comprehensive reform and insufficient funding has left social care struggling to provide support of the right type to those who need it (Oung 2023). For example, needs assessments are vital to giving people access to the right care, but in August 2023, just before the fieldwork period for the 2023 BSA survey, nearly 250,000 people in England were waiting for an assessment of their needs. Of these, 34% had been waiting longer than six months (Association of Directors of Adult Social Services 2023).

Finding enough staff to meet demand for care has been a particularly severe issue since the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2022/23, adult social care in England had the second-highest vacancy rate on record, with 9.9% of posts unfilled (Skills for care 2023). Meanwhile, the effect of vacancies in the sector was also felt in Scotland and Wales. Vacancies can lead to further delays for people who need care, as after waiting for an assessment, there may not be enough services locally to meet identified need.

Delays to assessing need and to providing services has real impact on the quality of people's lives. This impact is felt by those who draw on social care to live their lives – both working-age adults and older people – and the approximately five million people who provide informal unpaid care in the UK (House of Commons Library 2023).

The BSA survey asked a representative sample of the public how satisfied or dissatisfied they are 'with social care for people who cannot look after themselves

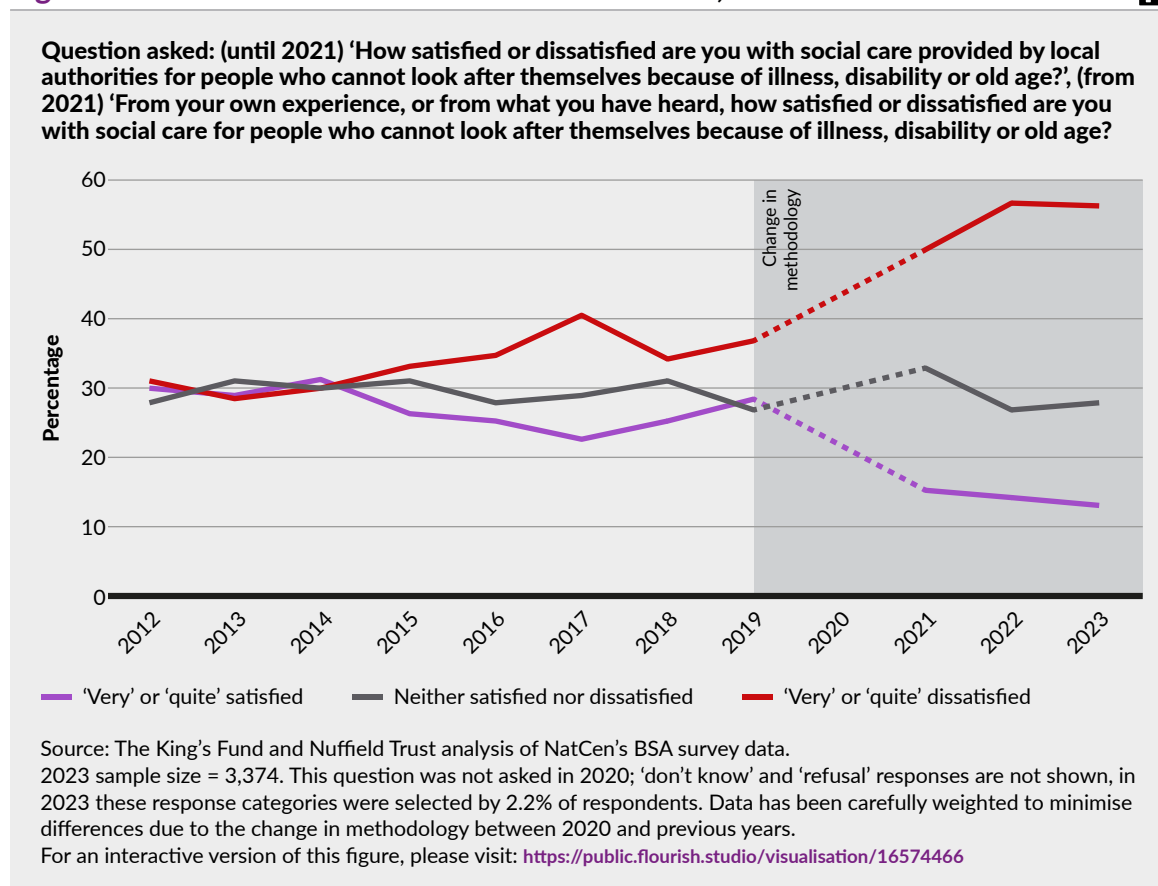


because of illness, disability or old age'. In 2022, the sample size was increased to the same number used for the NHS overall satisfaction question, and this continued in 2023. This larger sample size (3,374) enables more detailed analysis of differences in responses between demographic groups.

Overall satisfaction with social care

As shown in Figure 9, in 2023, 13% of respondents said they were 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with social care. Of these, only 2% said they were 'very' satisfied. 57% of respondents said they were 'very' or 'quite' dissatisfied with social care. Among these, 23% were 'very' dissatisfied, and the remaining 34% were 'quite' dissatisfied. Additionally, 28% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with social care. There were no significant changes to these figures compared with 2022 when satisfaction with social care was 14%.

Figure 9 Public satisfaction with social care services, 2012–2023

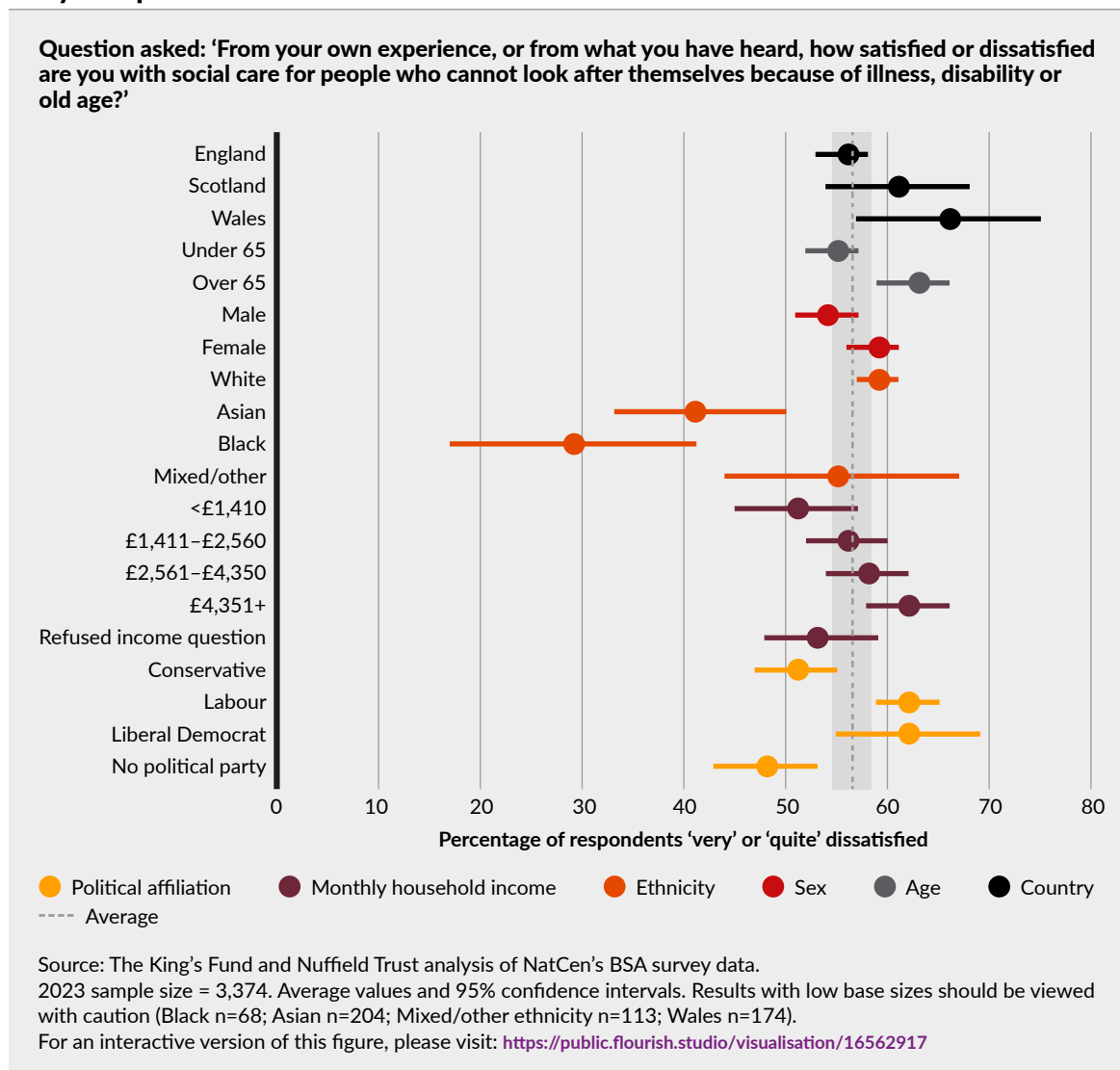




How does dissatisfaction vary by population group?

The following section focuses on the respondents who said they are dissatisfied with social care. This is a much larger group of people than those who said they are satisfied, allowing more meaningful estimates of population differences. Figure 10 shows how dissatisfaction differed among different population groups and from the average for the whole survey.

Figure 10 Percentage of respondents in different population groups who are 'very' or 'quite' dissatisfied with social care services 2023 **K**





Dissatisfaction with social care differed significantly by age, ethnicity, monthly household income and political affiliation. Respondents aged 65 and over were more dissatisfied (63%) than respondents aged 18–64 (55%). White respondents were more dissatisfied (59%) than Asian respondents (41%), and Black respondents were less dissatisfied (29%) than white respondents.²

Those in the highest income quartile were more dissatisfied (62%) than those in the lowest (51%). Also, supporters of Labour (62%) and the Liberal Democrats (62%) were more dissatisfied than Conservative supporters (51%) and those with no political affiliation (48%). While other groups also showed differences in dissatisfaction levels relative to each other, these differences were not statistically significant.

There have been no statistically significant changes in dissatisfaction for any of these demographic groups compared with the 2022 survey.

Why is the public satisfied or dissatisfied with social care?

For the third year in a row, the survey included questions that explored why respondents were satisfied or dissatisfied with social care by asking them to pick up to three reasons for the answer they gave to the overall satisfaction question.

The most common reason given for dissatisfaction with social care services was ‘the pay, working conditions and training for social care staff are bad’ (57%), followed closely by ‘people don’t get all the social care they need’ (56%) (see Figure 11 on page 26). The next most common reason was ‘there is not enough support for unpaid carers’ (49%), followed by ‘social care is not affordable to those who need it’ (38%) and ‘health and social care services do not work well together’ (34%).

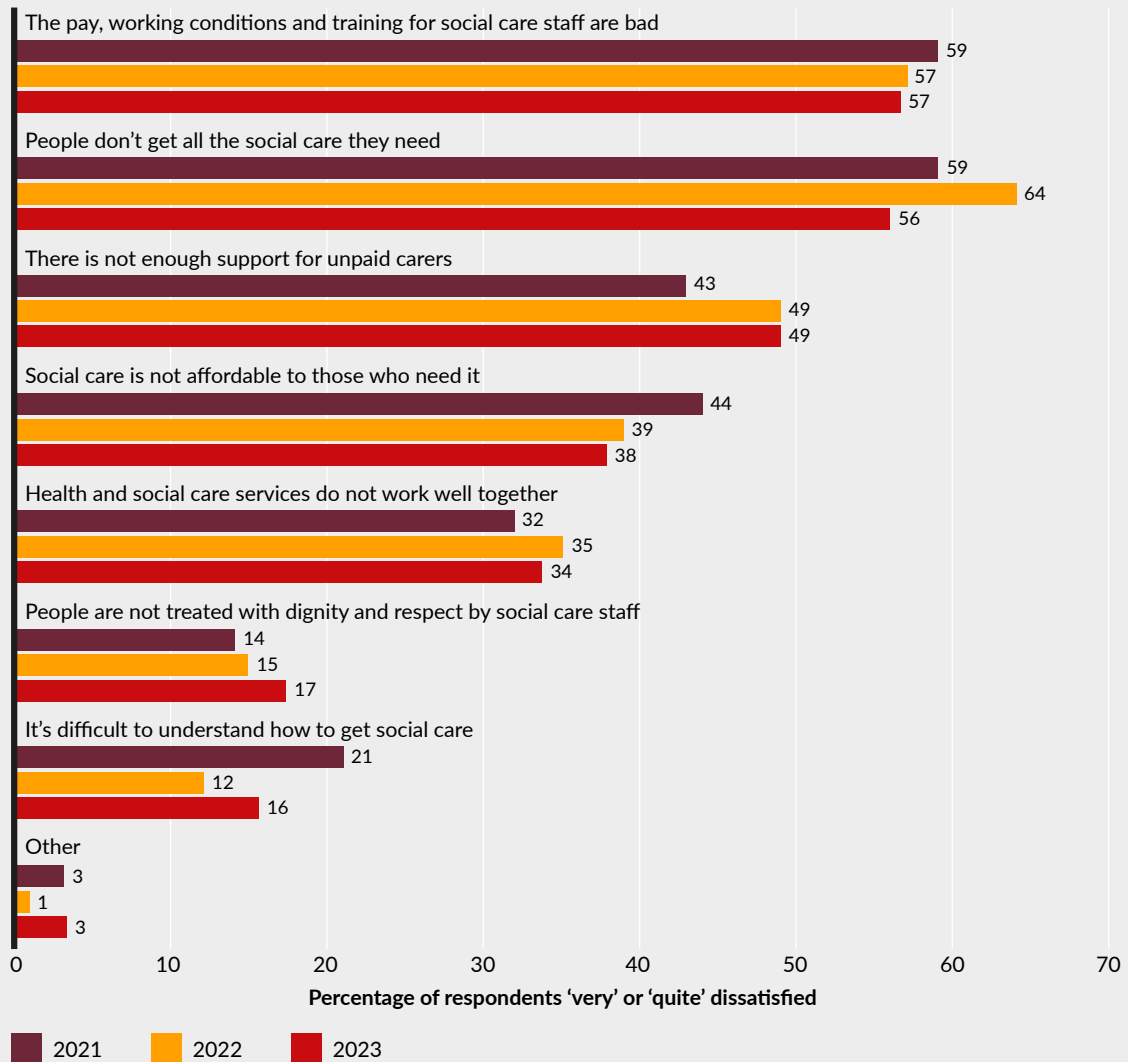
² While this result is statistically significant, it should be treated with caution. The sample size is small and unlikely to be representative. See methodology for further details.



Figure 11 Reasons for dissatisfaction with social care, 2021–23



Question asked: 'You said you are dissatisfied with social care. Why do you say that? You can choose up to three options.'



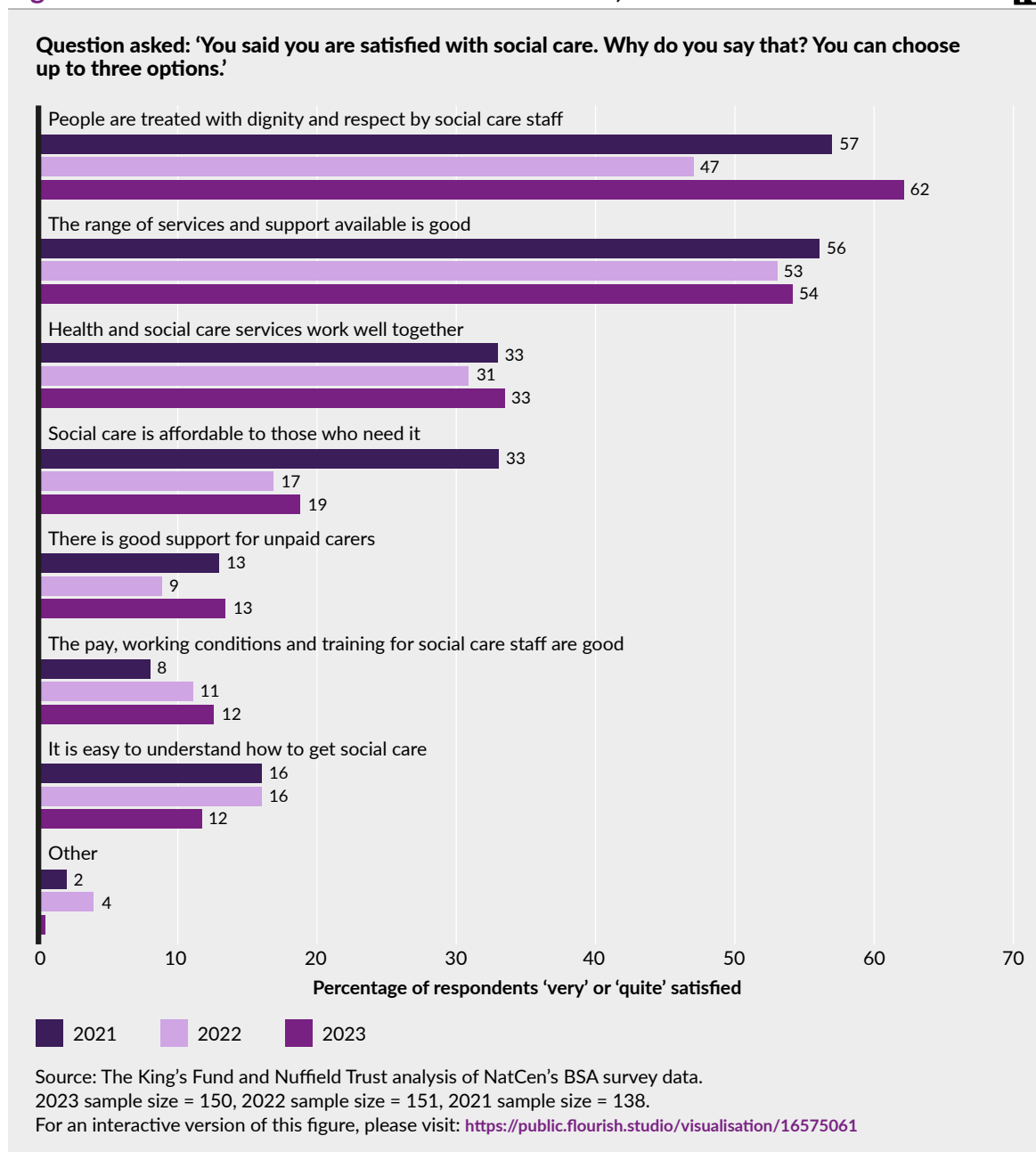
Source: The King's Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of NatCen's BSA survey data. 2023 sample size = 661, 2022 sample size = 616, 2021 sample size = 547.

For an interactive version of this figure, please visit: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16576675>



Of those respondents who said they were satisfied with social care services, the most common reason given was ‘people are treated with dignity and respect by social care staff’ (62%), followed by ‘the range of services and support available is good’ (54%) and ‘health and social care services work well together’ (33%). The next most common reason was ‘social care is affordable to those who need it’ (19%).

Figure 12 Reasons for satisfaction with social care, 2021-23





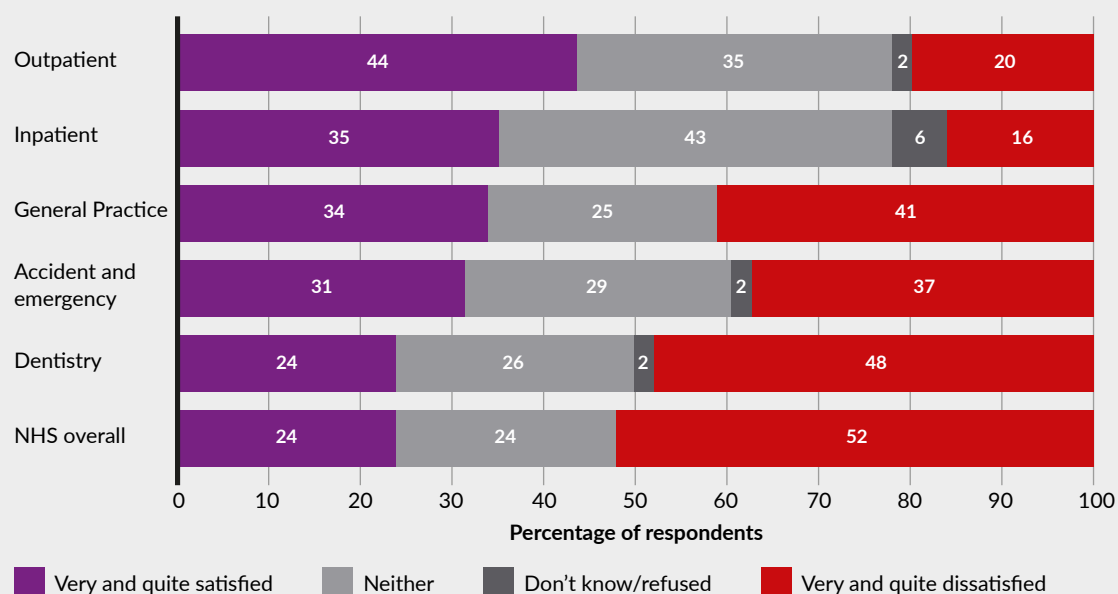
3 How satisfied is the British public with different NHS services?

In addition to asking about overall satisfaction with the NHS and social care, the BSA survey asks a smaller sample of 1,206 respondents how satisfied or dissatisfied they are with different NHS services: general practice, NHS dentistry, inpatient, outpatient, and A&E services (see Figure 13 for summary of results).

Figure 13 Summary of satisfaction with NHS services in 2023



Question asked: 'From your own experience, or from what you have heard, please say how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the way in which each of these parts of the National Health Service runs nowadays. Local doctors or GPs; National Health Service dentists; being in hospital as an inpatient; attending hospital as an outpatient; accident and emergency departments?'



Source: The King's Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of NatCen's BSA survey data.

Sample size is 1,206 for individual NHS services and 3,374 for NHS overall.

For an interactive version of this figure, please visit: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16579419>

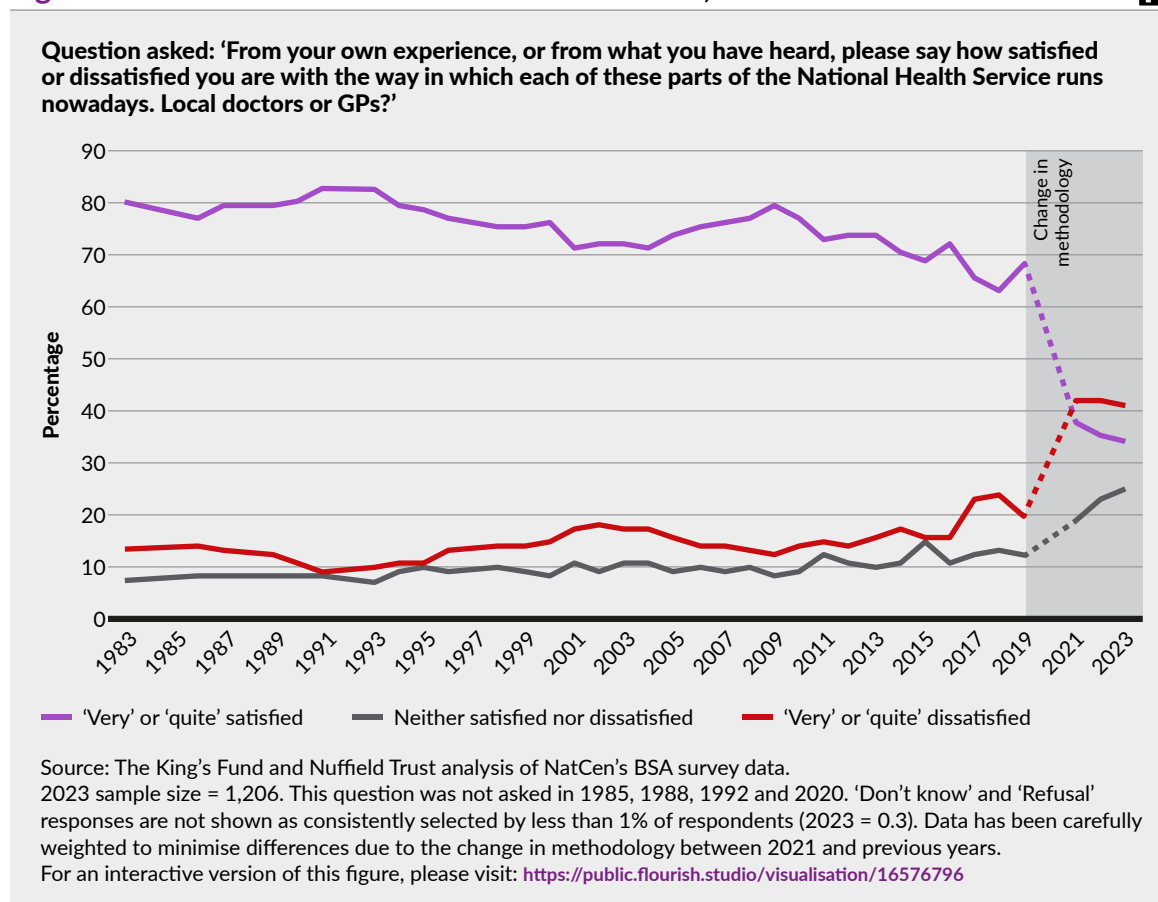


The 2021 survey saw unprecedented falls in satisfaction across all the individual services asked about. Satisfaction with all services continued to fall to record lows in 2022, albeit not as sharply as the falls seen in 2021. The 2022 survey also saw record high levels of dissatisfaction for general practice (42%), NHS dentistry (42%) and A&E services (40%). Satisfaction with individual services in 2023 remains at record low levels.

General practice

In 2023, satisfaction with GP services continued to fall. 34% of respondents said they were satisfied with GP services compared with 35% in 2022 (though this was not a statistically significant change). This is the lowest level of satisfaction recorded since the survey began in 1983 (see Figure 14). While 27% of respondents

Figure 14 Public satisfaction with NHS GP services, 1983–2023





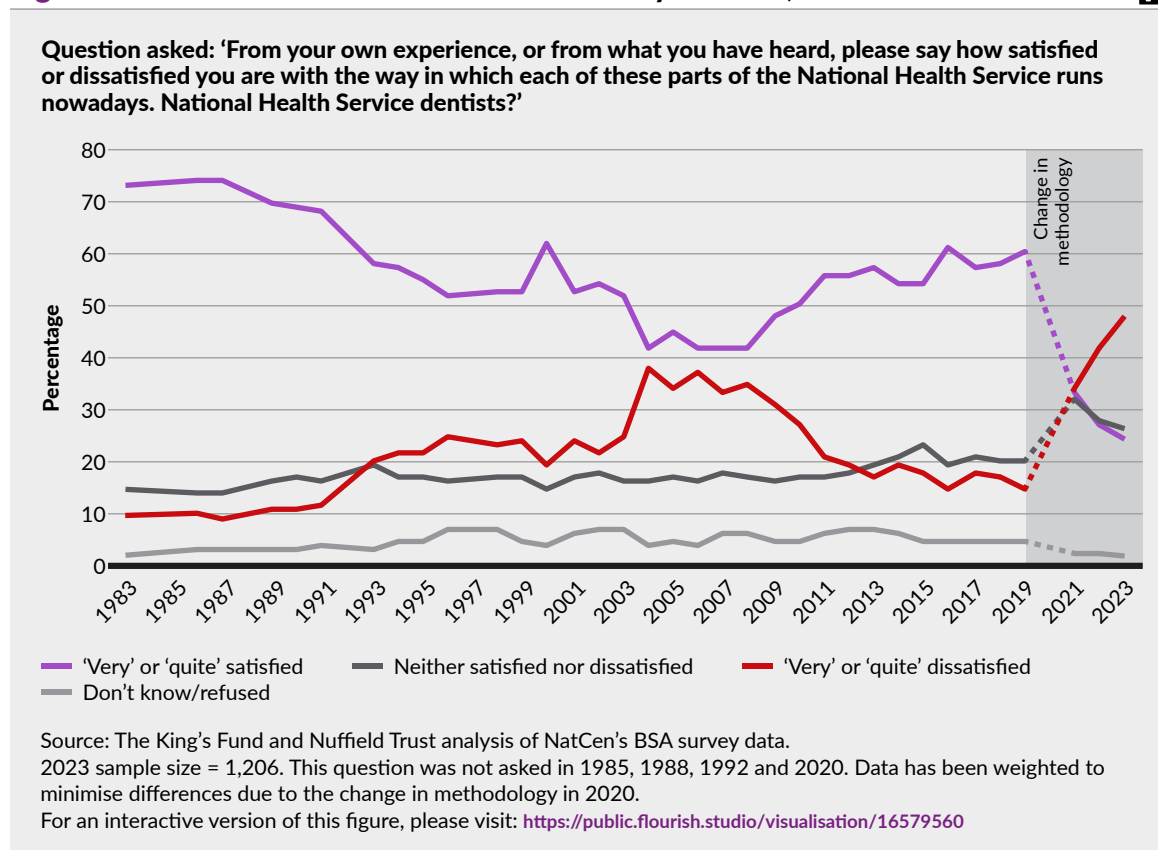
were 'quite' satisfied, only 8% were 'very' satisfied. Until 2018, general practice had been the highest-rated NHS service since the survey began in 1983.

The 2023 survey results also show that dissatisfaction with general practice decreased by 1 percentage point, with 41% of respondents 'very' or 'quite' dissatisfied in 2023 compared with 42% in 2022. The falls in both satisfaction and dissatisfaction can be explained by the small increase in respondents who said they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' with GP services (from 23% in 2022 to 25% in 2023).

Dentistry

In 2023, a record low of 24% of respondents were 'very or 'quite' satisfied with NHS dentistry services (6% 'very' and 19% 'quite' satisfied). The percentage of respondents 'very' or 'quite' satisfied with NHS dentistry increased from 42% in 2004 to 60% in 2019, but the past three years have seen a sharp reversal of this trend (see Figure 15).

Figure 15 Public satisfaction with NHS dentistry services, 1983–2023



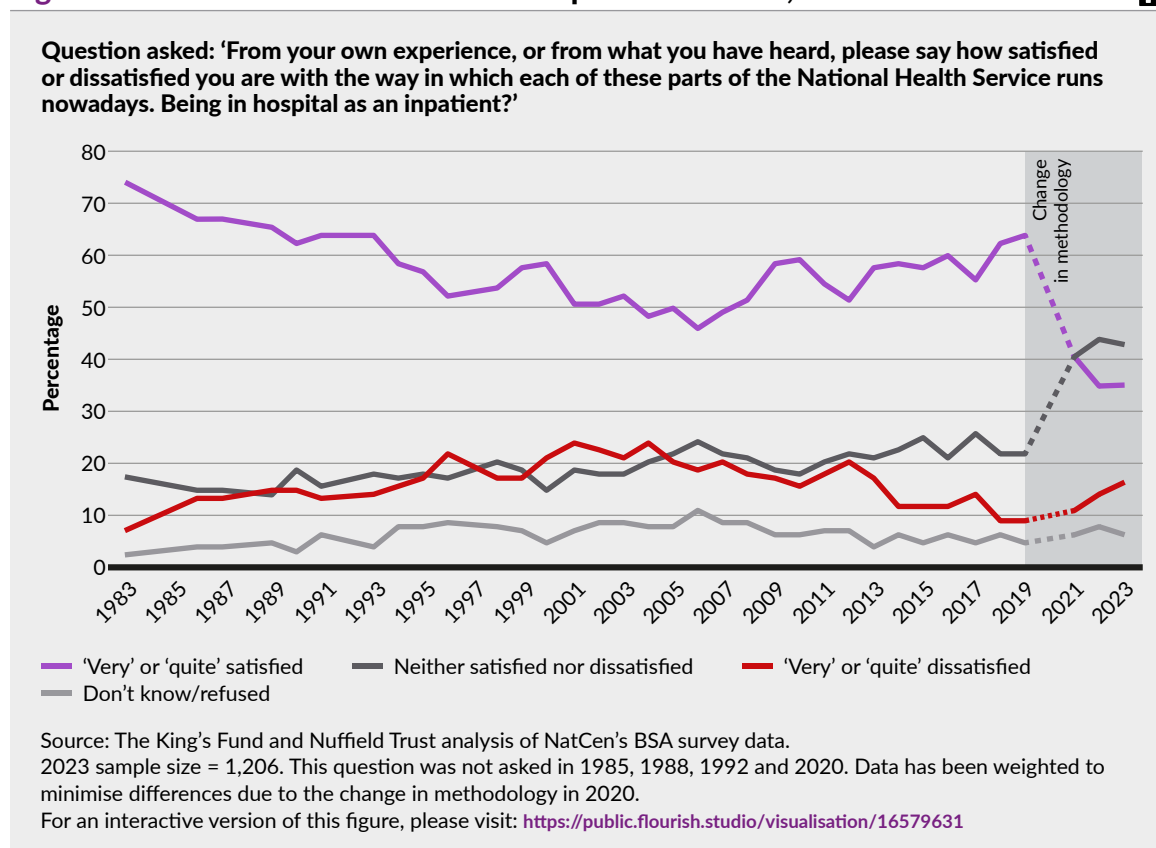


In the 2023 survey, dissatisfaction rose to a record high, with 48% of respondents ‘very’ or ‘quite’ dissatisfied, a 6 percentage point increase in dissatisfaction compared with 2022. This rise was not statistically significant, but it was the largest increase in dissatisfaction between 2022 and 2023 out of all the services asked about. 28% of respondents said they were ‘very’ dissatisfied with NHS dentistry, more than any other NHS service.

Inpatient and outpatient services

In 2023, the percentage of respondents satisfied with inpatient services was at 35% (the same as in 2022). This is the joint lowest level of satisfaction with inpatient services in the history of the survey (see Figure 16). 16% of respondents reported being dissatisfied with inpatient care in 2023 (5% ‘very’ and 11% ‘quite’ dissatisfied), the highest level since 2013.

Figure 16 Public satisfaction with NHS inpatient services, 1983–2023

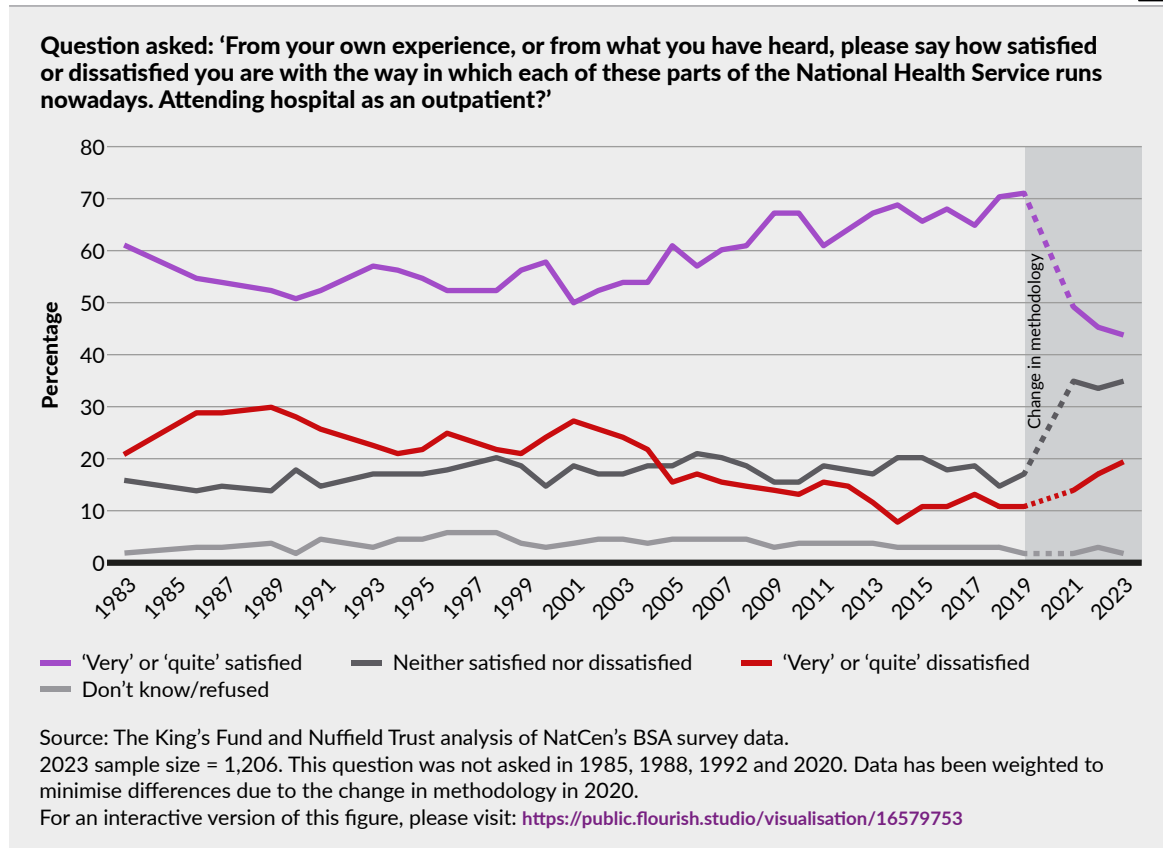




Satisfaction with outpatient services fell by 1 percentage point to a new low in 2023, with 44% of respondents saying they were ‘very’ or ‘quite’ satisfied (9% and 35% respectively). Dissatisfaction with outpatient services increased to the highest level since 2004 (with 5% of respondents ‘very’ and 15% ‘quite’ dissatisfied).

From 2018 onwards, outpatient services have had the highest level of satisfaction of any NHS service. In 2023, there was a 9 percentage point difference in satisfaction between outpatient services (see Figure 17) and the next highest-rated service, inpatient services (see Figure 16 on page 31).

Figure 17 Public satisfaction with NHS outpatient services, 1983–2023



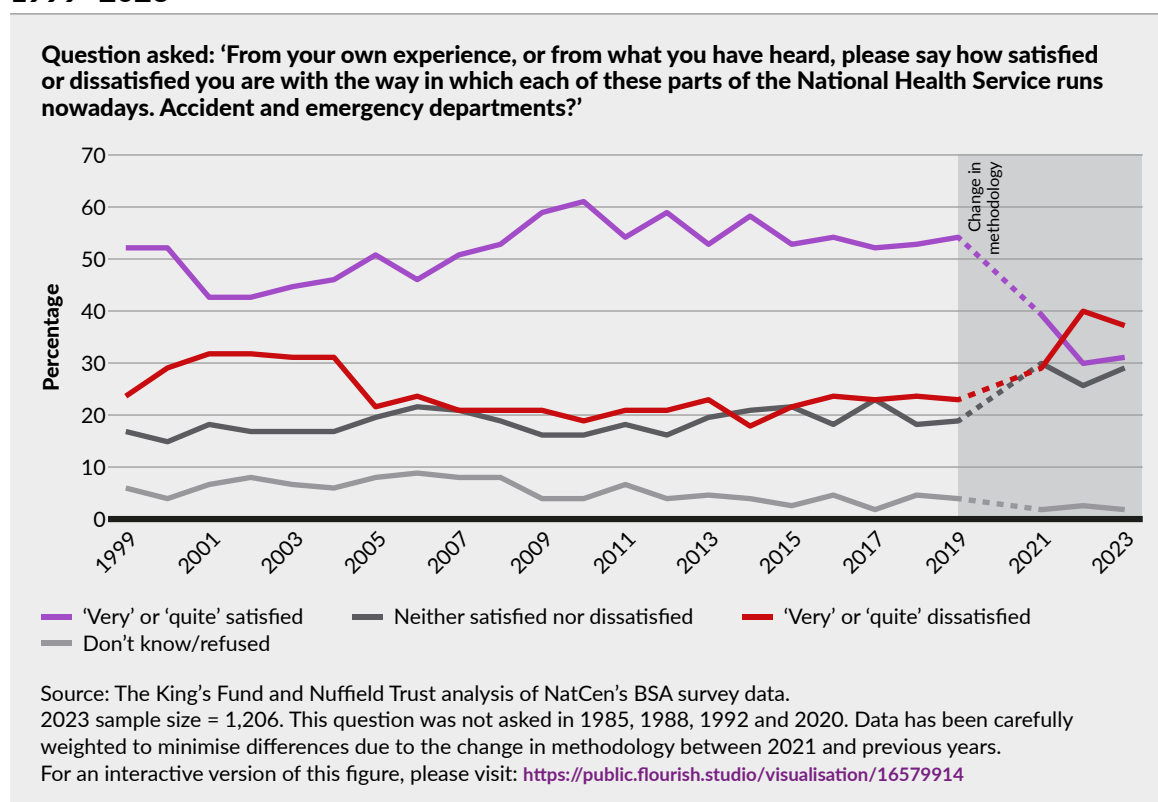


Accident and emergency

As shown in Figure 18, there was a small increase in satisfaction with A&E services in 2023 (not statistically significant), with 31% of respondents saying that they were ‘very’ (7%) or ‘quite’ (25%) satisfied. This represents a 1 percentage point increase compared with 2022. Accident and emergency was the only service to see an increase in satisfaction in 2023.

37% of respondents reported being dissatisfied with A&E services in 2023 (14% ‘very’ and 23% ‘quite’ dissatisfied), a drop of 3 percentage points since 2022 (not statistically significant). However, this is still the second highest level of dissatisfaction in a single year since the question on A&E services was first asked in 1999.

Figure 18 Public satisfaction with NHS accident and emergency services, 1999–2023





4 Does contact with a service make people more or less satisfied?

Why does the BSA ask about contact with health and care services?

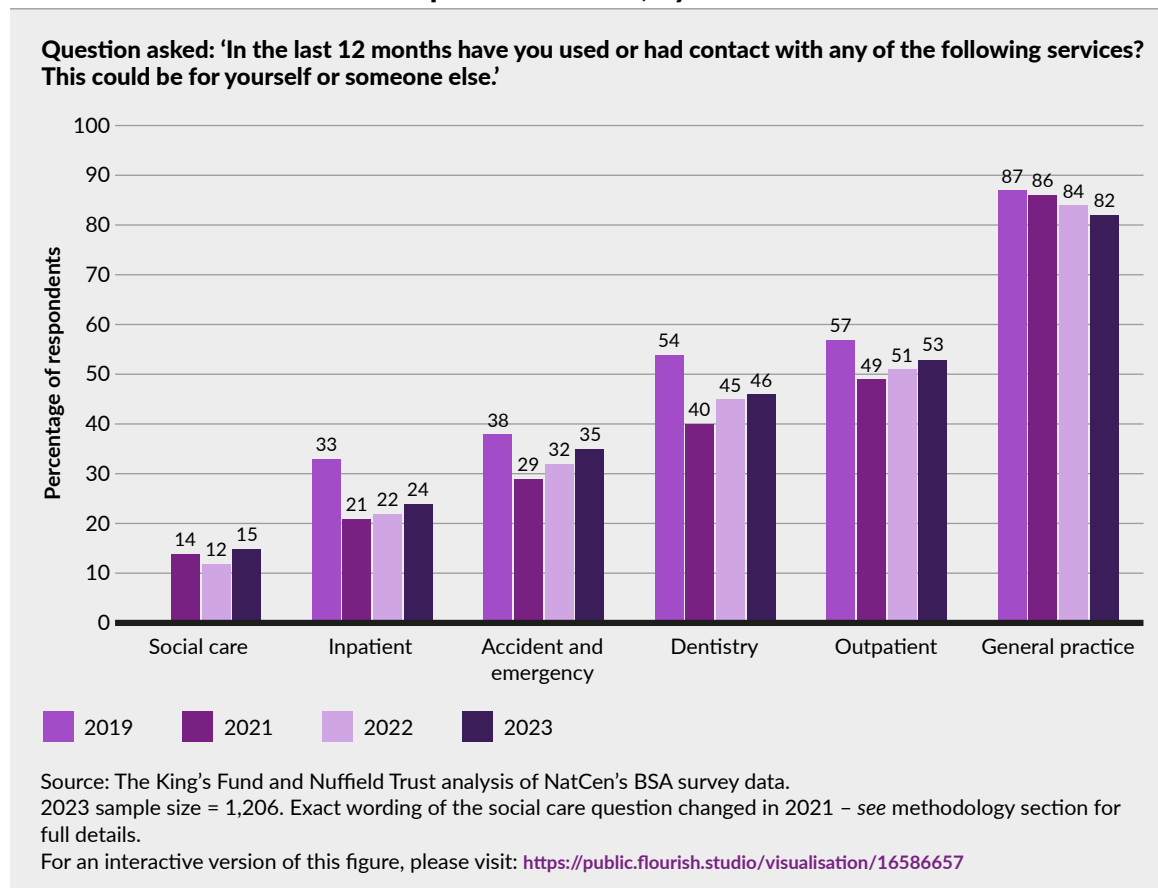
The BSA survey measures and tracks changes in public attitudes to health and care services. It is not a survey of people's experiences of specific services – other surveys fulfil this role (eg, see [NHS England undated](#)).

However, respondents who have had contact with a service will be taking their experience into account. Those who have not had contact with services are likely to base more of their views on what they have heard elsewhere, either through the media or via friends and family. Equally, whether a respondent was able to access a service will influence their attitude towards that service.

Therefore, since 2019 the BSA survey has asked the public whether they have used or had contact with various health and care services in the previous 12 months, either for themselves or for someone else. This allows comparisons between the attitudes of respondents who have had contact with a service and the attitudes of respondents who have not (see Figure 19 on page 35).



Figure 19 Percentage of respondents who have used or had contact with health and care services in the past 12 months, by service **K**

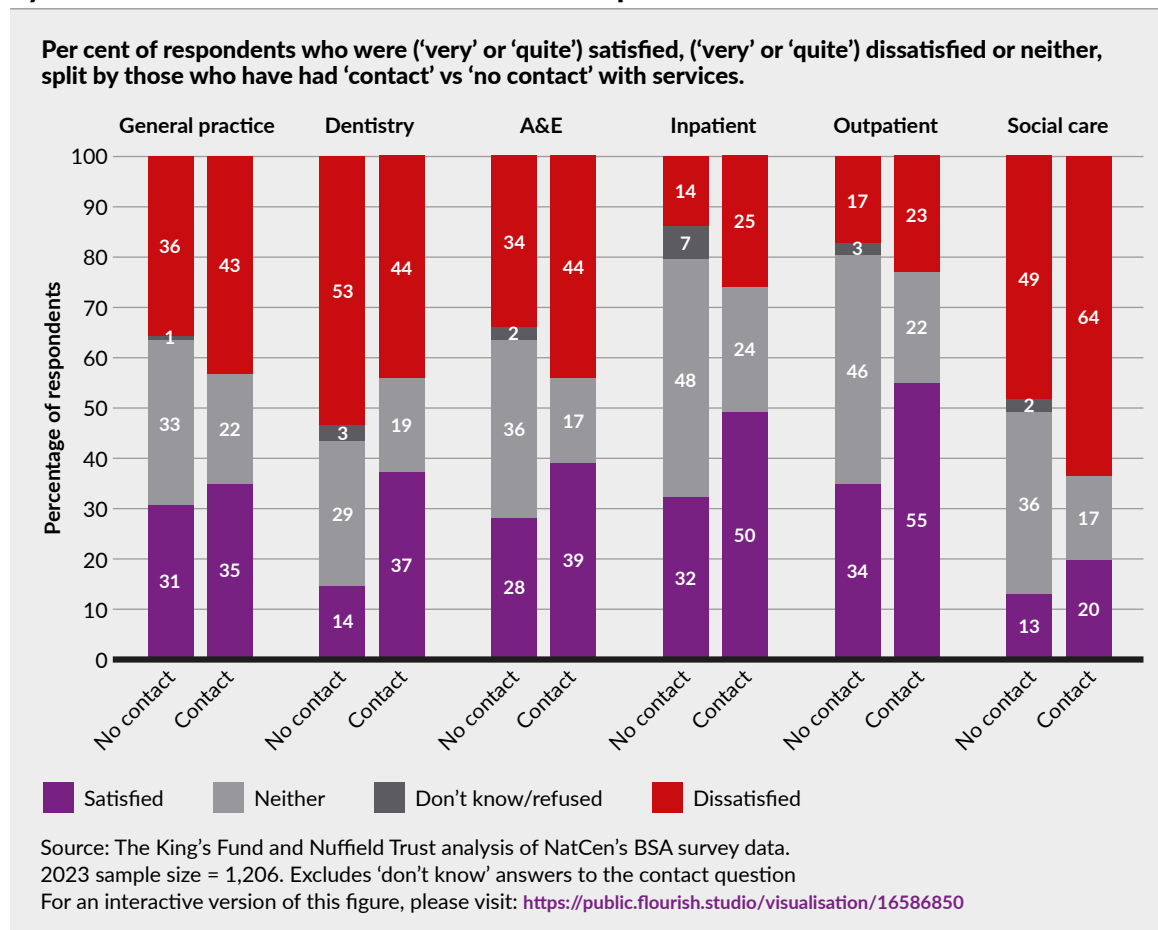


How does recent contact affect satisfaction with services?

Here we analyse results from the BSA survey to describe the relationship between having contact with a service and how satisfied or dissatisfied people are with that service.

Overall, respondents who had used or had contact with a service were, unsurprisingly, more likely to have an opinion about it than those who had not used the service: for all services, respondents who had had contact with a service were less likely to answer 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' compared with those who had not had contact. Whether having contact increased levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction more, though, varies by service (see Figure 20 on page 36).

Figure 20 Difference in dis/satisfaction with NHS and social care services, by recent use or contact with services in the past 12 months



General practice

In 2023, 82% of respondents had used or had contact with general practice in the previous 12 months – a decrease from 87% in 2019, before the pandemic. The level of satisfaction among respondents who had had contact with general practice has halved in recent years. In 2019, 70% of those who had used or had contact with general practice said they were satisfied compared with just 35% in 2023. 43% of respondents who had had contact with general practice said they were dissatisfied. Those who had not had contact with NHS GPs reported lower levels of satisfaction (31%) and dissatisfaction (36%) and were more likely to answer 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (33%).



Dentistry

Contact with NHS dentistry services fell between 2019 and 2021 (from 54% to 40%) as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the number of people reporting contact with NHS dentistry has since increased to 46% in 2023, it is still lower than before the pandemic.

53% of respondents who had not had contact with NHS dentistry said they were dissatisfied with the service compared with 44% of respondents who had had contact. Out of all the services asked about, NHS dentistry was the only service where dissatisfaction was higher in those who had not had contact. This may point to specific issues around the public being unable to access NHS dentistry services and being dissatisfied as a result. Satisfaction was significantly higher among respondents who had had contact (37%) with NHS dentistry compared with those who had not had contact (14%).

Accident and emergency

In 2023, 35% of respondents said they had had contact with A&E services. This is just slightly lower than the 38% who said they had had contact with A&E services in 2019, before the pandemic.

Levels of satisfaction among respondents who had had contact with A&E services have fallen in recent years. In 2019, 56% of those who had used or had contact with A&E services said they were satisfied compared with 36% in 2022 and 39% in 2023. Satisfaction among respondents who had not had contact was 28%.

44% of respondents who said they had had contact with A&E services in 2023 were dissatisfied – 10 percentage points higher than those who had not had contact (34%).

Inpatient and outpatient services

In 2023, 24% of respondents had had contact with NHS inpatient services and 53% of respondents had had contact with NHS outpatient services. Respondents who had used or had contact with these services were more likely to be satisfied with those services than those who had not: 50% of those who had had contact with inpatient services were satisfied compared with 32% of those who had not,



and 55% of people who had had contact with outpatient services were satisfied compared with 34% of those who had not. These are the highest levels of satisfaction recorded for respondents who had contact with any of the services asked about in the survey.

Respondents who had not had contact with NHS inpatient or outpatient services were more likely to answer 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' than for other services. 48% of respondents who had not had contact with inpatient services chose this response, as did 46% of people who had not had contact with outpatient services.

Social care

Only 15% of respondents had used or had contact with social care services in the past 12 months. Out of any of the services asked about, social care had the lowest level of satisfaction for both respondents who had had contact and those who had not had contact. 20% of respondents who had had contact with social care services were satisfied and only 13% of those who had not had contact were satisfied.

There was a very high level of dissatisfaction (64%) among respondents who had had contact with social care services. This was the highest level of dissatisfaction reported for those who had used or had contact with any of the services asked about in the survey. The level of dissatisfaction among those who had not had contact with social care services was also relatively high at 49%.

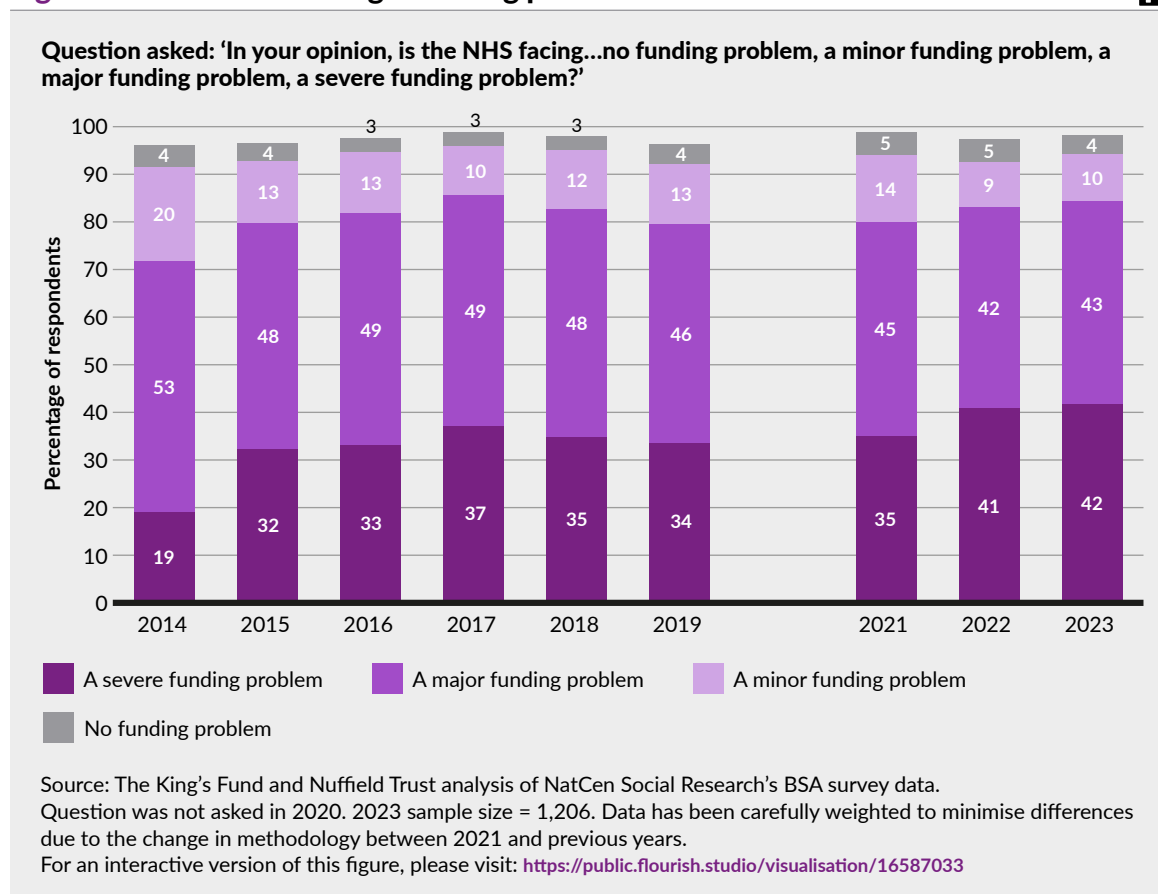


5 Attitudes to NHS spending and sources of funding

Since 2014 the BSA survey has asked about the public’s views on NHS funding. Respondents were asked whether the NHS was facing a funding problem and, if so, whether it was ‘minor’, ‘major’ or ‘severe’ (see Figure 21).

In 2023, 84% of respondents answered that the NHS faced a ‘major’ or ‘severe’ funding problem compared with 83% in 2022; the change is not significant year on year. In 2014, when the question was first asked, this figure was 72%. In 2015,

Figure 21 Is the NHS facing a funding problem?





the figure went up to 80% and since then the responses to this question have been relatively consistent, with between 80% and 86% of respondents saying that the NHS faces a ‘major’ or ‘severe’ funding problem each year.

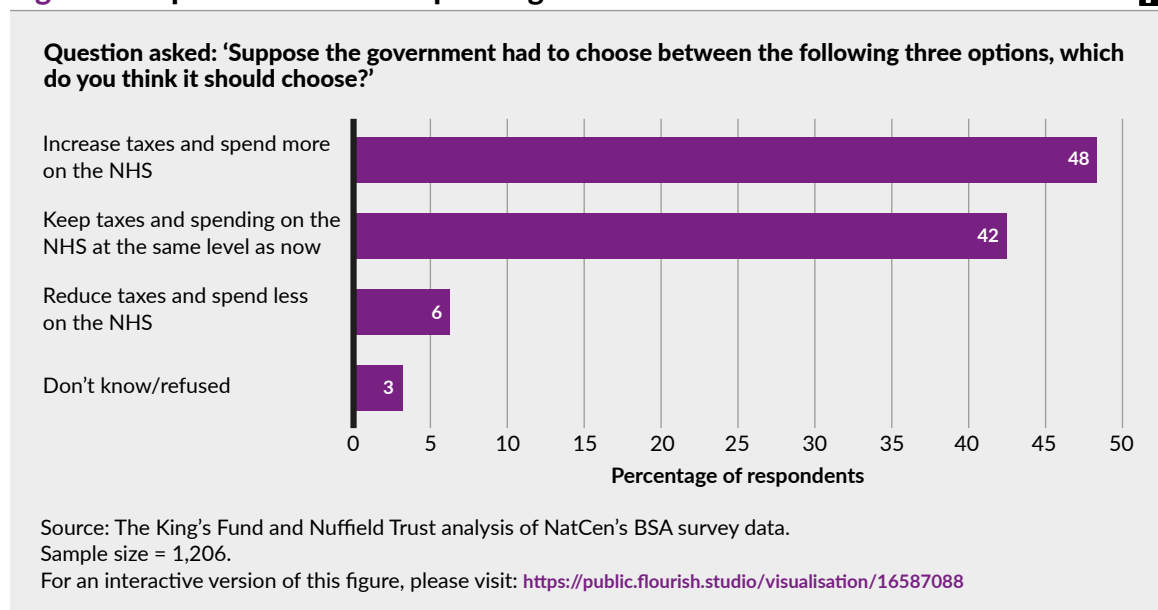
There is no statistically significant difference between respondents aged under 65 (85%) and over 65 (82%) saying that the NHS was facing a ‘major’ or ‘severe’ funding problem. However, there is a statistically significant difference between Labour supporters (92%) and Conservative supporters (74%).

Those in the highest monthly household income quartile were more likely to say the NHS was a facing a ‘major’ or ‘severe’ funding problem. 92% of those in the highest monthly household income quartile gave this answer compared with the survey average of 84%, a statistically significant difference.

A new question was introduced in 2023. Respondents were asked the following, ‘Suppose the government had to choose between the following three options, which do you think it should choose?’ (see Figure 22):

- Reduce taxes and spend less on the NHS
- Keep taxes and spending on the NHS at the same level as now
- Increase taxes and spend more on the NHS.

Figure 22 Options for tax and spending on the NHS in 2023





Overall, 48% of respondents answered ‘increase taxes and spend more on the NHS’. 42% said ‘keep taxes and spending on the NHS at the same level as now’ while 6% chose ‘reduce taxes and spend less on the NHS’.

Labour supporters (58%) and Liberal Democrat supporters (64%) were both more likely to say ‘increase taxes and spend more on the NHS’ than Conservative supporters (37%). Respondents aged under 65 were less likely to answer ‘increase taxes and spend more on the NHS’ than those aged over 65 – 44% compared with 62% respectively. Those in the highest monthly household income quartile were more likely to choose this option than the lowest income groups. 62% of those in the highest monthly household income quartile chose ‘increase taxes and spend more on the NHS’ compared with the survey average of 48%.

Although this was a new question in 2023, a similarly worded question was asked in the 1999 British Social Attitudes survey. In that year, 67% of respondents said ‘spend more on the NHS even if this means an increase in taxes’, while 26% said ‘keep spending on the NHS at about the same levels as now’ and 1% answered ‘spend less on the NHS and reduce taxes’.



6 NHS priorities and principles

Priorities for the NHS

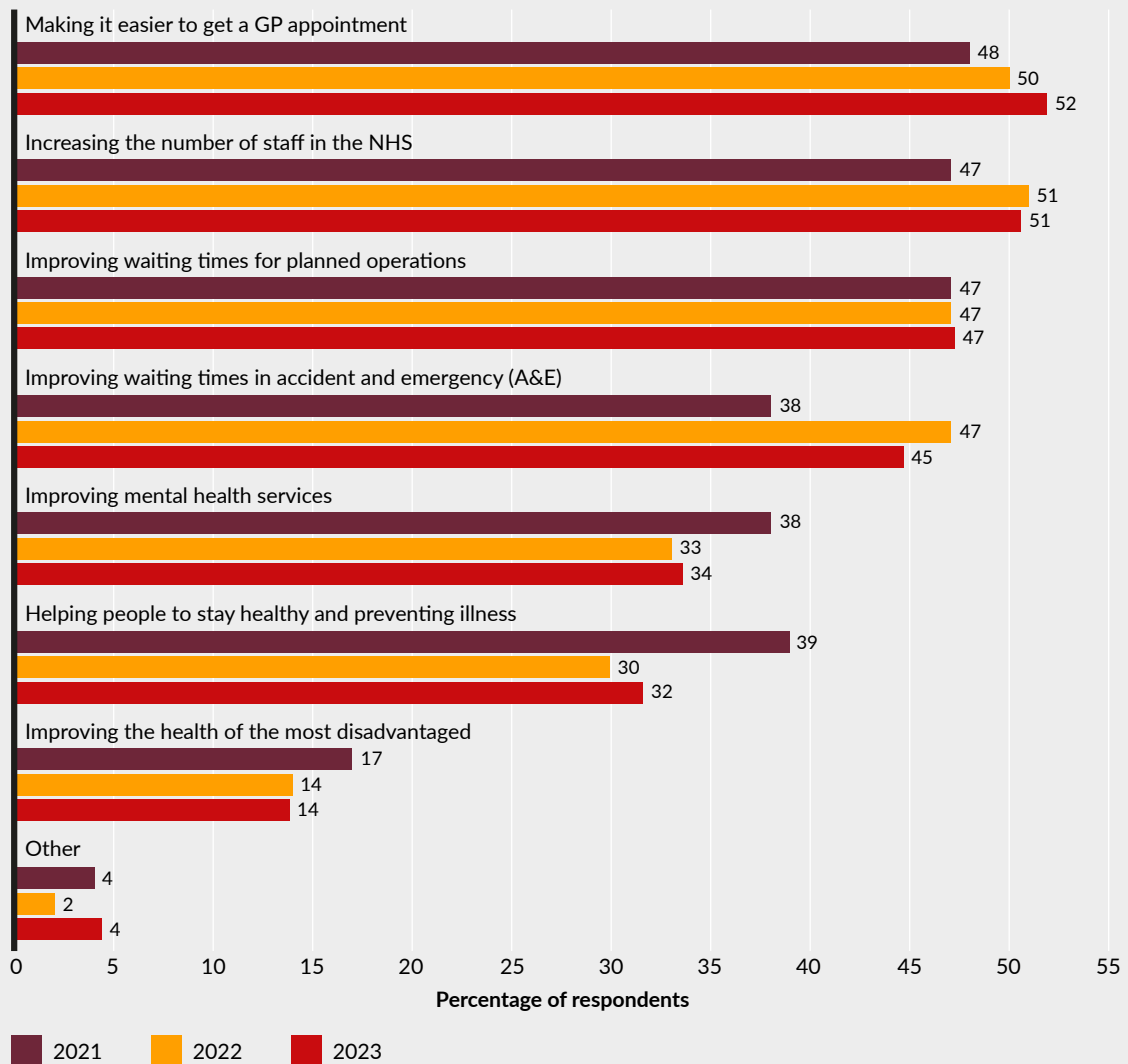
In a question asked since 2021, respondents were asked to choose what the most important priorities for the NHS should be. They were invited to choose up to three. In 2023, ‘making it easier to get a GP appointment’ and ‘increasing the number of staff in the NHS’ were the most commonly selected options (chosen by 52% and 51% of respondents respectively). ‘Improving waiting times for planned operations’ (47%) and ‘improving waiting times in A&E’ (45%) followed close behind. There were no significant changes year on year in the proportion choosing these options.

Some statistically significant differences exist between age groups in the priorities most likely to be chosen. As in previous years, those aged 18–64 were more likely to select ‘improving mental health services’ as a priority, with 37% choosing this as opposed to 24% of over-65s. Meanwhile, 60% of respondents aged 65 and above selected ‘improving waiting times for planned operations’ compared with 43% of those aged 18–64 (see Figure 23 on page 43).



Figure 23 What should be the most important priorities for the NHS? **K**

Question asked: 'Which of the following do you think should be the most important priorities for the NHS? Please select up to three.'



Source: The King's Fund and Nuffield Trust analysis of NatCen's BSA survey data. 2023 sample size = 1,206, 2022 sample size = 1,187, 2021 sample size = 1,039. For an interactive version of this figure, please visit: <https://public.flourish.studio/visualisation/16587211>

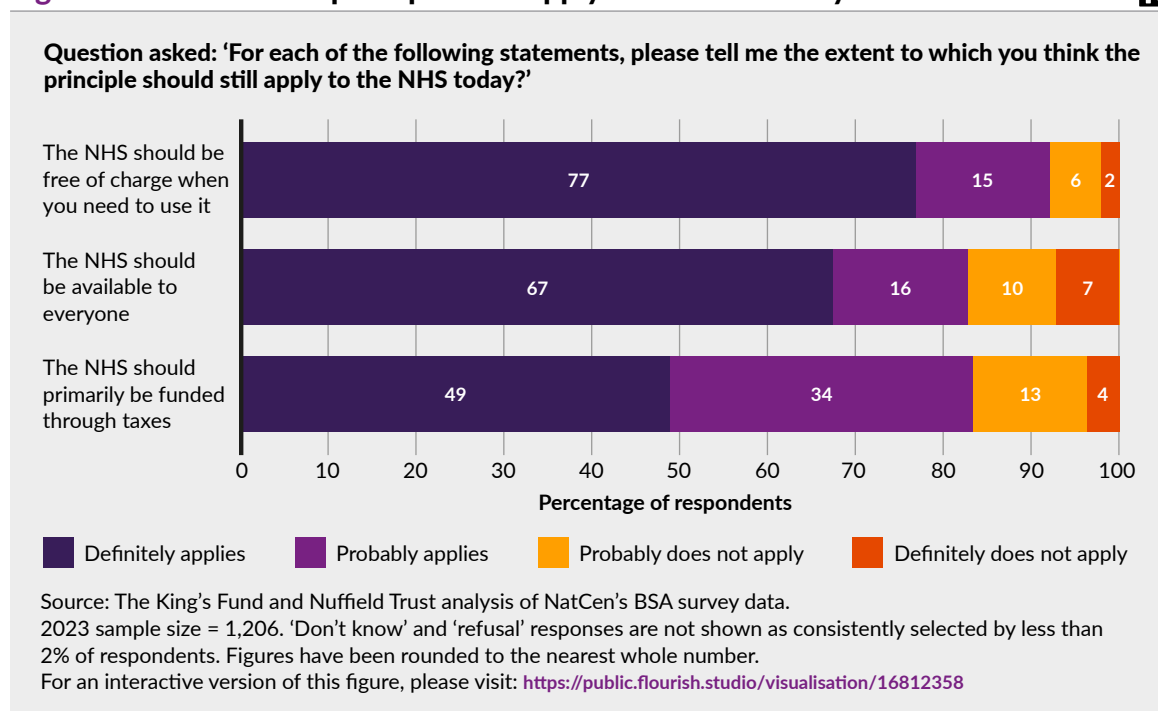


Do the British public agree with the principles of the NHS?

In questions first introduced in 2021, people were asked about the extent to which they thought the founding principles of the NHS should still apply today. These principles are:

- the NHS should be free of charge when you need to use it
- the NHS should be available to everyone
- the NHS should be primarily funded through taxes.

Figure 24 Should these principles still apply to the NHS today? **K**



Even as dissatisfaction with the way the NHS runs has risen sharply, there has been no significant change either in 2022 or in 2023 in the very high proportion of the public who continue to support all three principles.

In 2023, 91% believed that the NHS should 'definitely' or 'probably' be free of charge when needed, with 76% saying 'definitely' and 15% saying 'probably'. 82% said that it should 'definitely' or 'probably' be available to everyone, with 67% stating 'definitely'

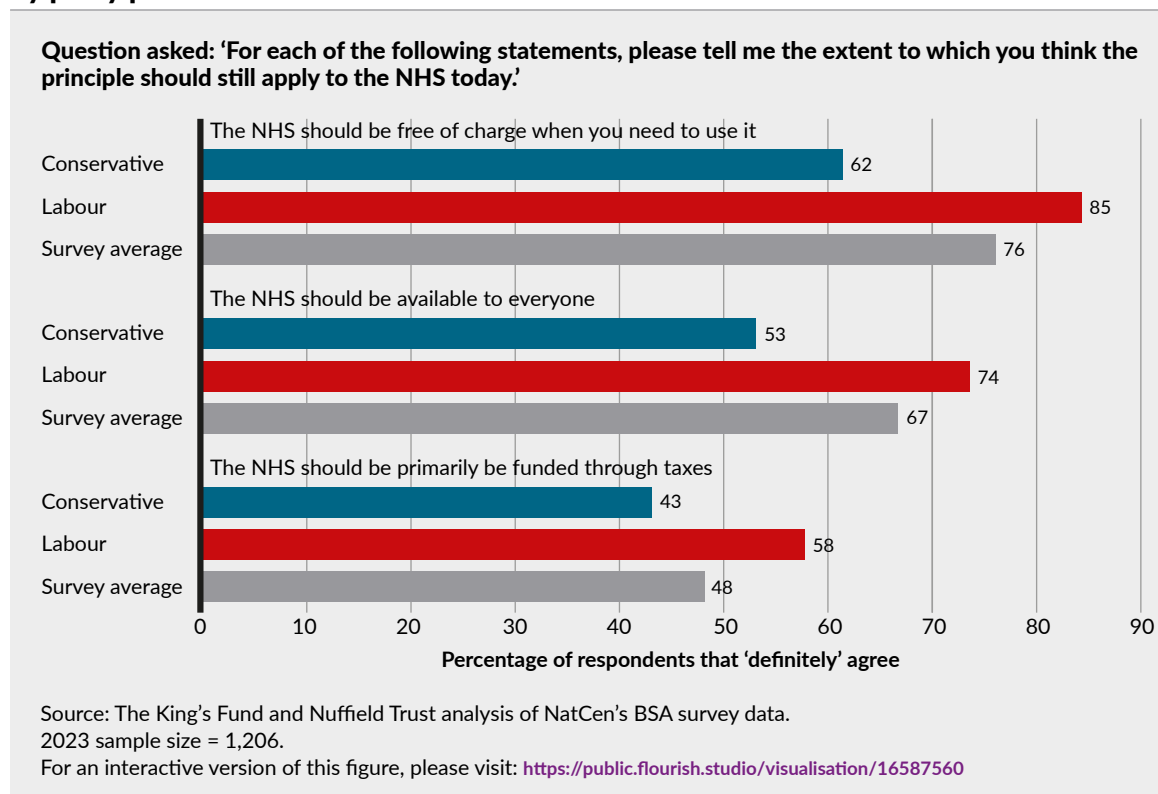


and 16% 'probably'. 82% answered that it should 'definitely' or 'probably' be funded through taxes, with 48% saying 'definitely' and 34% 'probably'.

17% believed that the principle of the NHS being available to everyone should 'probably' or 'definitely' not apply, and more than 16% felt the principle of tax funding should 'probably' or 'definitely' not apply. Only 8% believed that the principle of the NHS being free at the point of use should 'probably' or 'definitely' not apply.

Figure 25 shows that supporters of the Conservative party were significantly less likely than the population as a whole to say that they 'definitely' supported the principle of the NHS being free of charge, with 62% saying this compared with 76% overall. Supporters of the Labour party were more likely than the general population to say that this principle should 'definitely' apply (85%).

Figure 25 Respondents who thought each principle should 'definitely' apply by party political affiliation in 2023 **K**





Conservative supporters were also significantly less likely to ‘definitely’ support the principle of the NHS being available to everyone, 53% compared with 67% overall. However, a strong majority of Conservative supporters backed both principles.

Conservative supporters were not significantly different to the population as a whole in believing that the NHS should be funded primarily through taxes. However, Labour party supporters were significantly more likely to say that they ‘definitely’ support this, at 58% compared with 48% overall.



7 Conclusion

The latest set of results from the British Social Attitudes survey are bleak but should not be surprising. Overall satisfaction with the NHS has dropped to 24% in 2023. For the first time in the survey's history less than a quarter of people say they are satisfied with how the NHS runs nowadays while more than 1 in 2 people say they are dissatisfied. 2023 is the third year in a row that has seen a significant fall in overall satisfaction. Since 2020, satisfaction has fallen by 29 percentage points. This is unprecedented in a survey that has been asking the public their views on the NHS since 1983.

The results reflect yet another turbulent and difficult year for the NHS and for those that rely on its services. Satisfaction with every individual NHS service remains at historically low levels. For the NHS to work it needs a well-resourced and functioning social care system. The public is clear that is not what they are currently seeing. People are far less satisfied with social care than with any NHS service. Only 13% of people say they are satisfied with it.

Despite record lows in satisfaction, the public remains overwhelmingly behind the principles of the NHS. The last few years have seen large falls in satisfaction but support for the founding principles behind the NHS – free at the point of use, available to everyone, and primarily funded through taxes – has remained constant. Changing the model of the NHS is not something the public wants – they just want the model they have got to work. Also unchanged for several years now is the public's view that the NHS has a sizeable funding problem. A new question introduced this year sheds light on what the public thinks government should do about this.

Nearly 1 in 2 people (48%) supported the government increasing taxes and spending more on the NHS, while 42% supported keeping taxes and spending on the NHS at the same level. Only 6% said the government should reduce taxes and spend less on the NHS. Older people and those in higher income brackets were more likely to support increased taxes.



In an election year, with the NHS likely to be a key issue that will influence how people vote, the results outline the challenge for politicians looking to provide answers. The priorities for the public remain the same – and have done for some time now. People are clearly struggling to access the services they need, whether that’s GPs, hospitals or dentistry. The NHS is struggling to get the basics right at the moment.

In 2010, public satisfaction with the NHS was at 70%. As recently as 2020 it was 53%. The scale of the decline over the past few years has been precipitous. Public opinion on the NHS is now in uncharted territory and the size of the challenge in recovering it seems to be growing more difficult with each passing year.



Methodology

Sample and approach

From 1983 to 2019, NatCen selected addresses at random from the postcode address file (a list of all mail delivery points in Great Britain kept by the Royal Mail), and NatCen interviewers visited these addresses. After randomly selecting one adult at the address, the interviewer carried out an hour-long interview. The participant answered most questions by selecting an answer from a list on show cards.

With the need to move to remote completion of the questionnaire while social distancing measures for Covid-19 remained in place, in 2020 participants continued to be selected at random from the postcode address file as before but were then sent an invitation asking up to two adults to participate via an online survey or over the telephone if they preferred (or were unable to take part online). In 2021, 2022 and 2023 participants were again offered the option of taking part online or by telephone only. The fieldwork for the 2023 survey was conducted between 12 September and 31 October.

NatCen, the survey organiser, has made efforts to minimise the possible impact of the change in survey methodology. The data is weighted to correct for any unequal probabilities of selection, and for biases caused by non-response from different households selected for the survey. The weighted sample was calibrated to match the population in terms of age, sex, education, ethnicity and region. Additionally, the 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023 surveys were conducted on the same methodology and so are directly comparable and showed falls in overall satisfaction with the NHS. The falls in satisfaction with individual services are consistent with this overall fall in satisfaction. For these reasons, we feel confident in making comparisons in this report with earlier years of the BSA survey. As with any sample surveys, though, readers should exercise general caution when comparing results with earlier years.

The achieved sample size for the overall NHS satisfaction question and the social care satisfaction question was 3,374 in 2023. For questions about satisfaction with specific NHS services and priorities and principles, the sample size was 1,206.



Survey demographics

The BSA collects a number of demographic variables from respondents. Below are some definitions of these variables.

Monthly household income: respondents were asked to place themselves into banded income quartiles based on their average pre-tax monthly household income.

Ethnicity: respondents were asked to self-identify their ethnicity, which due to small sample sizes are then summarised into just four categories: White, Black, Asian, and mixed/other. The survey results are carefully weighted to be representative of the ethnic mix of the British public. Due to small sample sizes of some ethnic minority groups (eg, 68 Black respondents), caution should be taken when interpreting the statistical significance of results for this group. These samples are not necessarily representative of the relevant ethnic group.

Country: for the overall NHS and social care satisfaction questions, the 2023 sample sizes for the three nations were 2,891 in England, 309 in Scotland, and 113 in Wales. The survey results are carefully weighted to be representative of the British public. The results are not representative of England, Scotland and Wales individually.

Political affiliation: Respondents are asked to identify with a political party on one of three counts: if they consider themselves a supporter of a political party; if they see themselves as closer to one political party than another; or the party they are likely to support in the event of a general election.

Statistical significance

If a change or difference in attitudes is statistically significant, we can be 95% confident that the survey result reflects a real change or difference in public views rather than being down to chance.

Figure rounding

Text and data labels within the charts have been rounded to the nearest whole number.



Topics

The topics covered by the full BSA survey change from year to year, depending on the identities and interests of its funders. Some questions are asked every year, some are asked every couple of years and others are asked less frequently.

Funding

The full survey is funded by a range of charitable, academic and government sources that change from year to year. The survey is led by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). NatCen carries out research in the fields of social and public policy.

Questions

The exact wording of the social care satisfaction question has changed over the years. Questions asked were:

2021–23: ‘From your own experience, or from what you have heard, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with social care for people who cannot look after themselves because of illness, disability or old age?’

2012–19: ‘And how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with social care provided by local authorities for people who cannot look after themselves because of illness, disability or old age?’

Corresponding changes were made to the ‘contact with services’ question.



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Acknowledgements

Many thanks to colleagues at NatCen for their work on the survey and the data, particularly Natalie Maplethorpe and Helena Wilson. Also to Gemma Umali at The King's Fund for analysis of the media stories during the fieldwork period, and to Leonora Merry at the Nuffield Trust, Sally Warren and Andrew McCracken at The King's Fund who provided helpful comments on earlier drafts, and to Lisa Oxlade and colleagues at both organisations who helped with the editing, digital content and launch of this report. Most importantly, we would like to thank members of the British public for the time they took to complete the BSA survey and for providing us with this dataset.



Published by

The King's Fund
11-13 Cavendish Square
London W1G 0AN
Tel: 020 7307 2568

Email:

publications@kingsfund.org.uk

www.kingsfund.org.uk

© The King's Fund 2024

First published 2024
by The King's Fund

Charity registration number:
1126980

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A catalogue record for this
publication is available from
the British Library

Typeset by

Grasshopper Design Company,
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Nuffield Trust is an independent health think tank. We aim to improve the quality of health care in the UK by providing evidence-based research and policy analysis and informing and generating debate.

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