

Improving access to high blood pressure services

Community research was carried out with 16 Lambeth residents who identify as black or other ethnic minority background, to find out about their experience with blood pressure services.

To deliver this project, Comuzi, used its “radical insight” process which facilitates authentic engagement with participants, enabling them to share their stories and produce meaningful insights which can inform change.

Methodology

1. **Recruit** – engage with the community and invite participants for user centred design activities
2. **Frame** – define a refined area of focus based on the research brief
3. **Immerse** – research with the community and chosen experts. Conduct research activities
4. **Unify** – find patterns and areas of opportunity from research findings
5. **Navigate** – make a plan for how to bring our ideas to reality and fulfil the brief

Key research findings

Key findings from the research participants are summarised below:

Knowledge and awareness

- Participants had a lack of understanding about the causes of hypertension.
- Many reported that hypertension was discovered for the first time during unrelated appointments.
- There was a desire to see greater education and awareness initiatives in communities.

Lifestyle and management

- For many participants', family history influences attitudes towards, and management of, hypertension. For example, "it was actually my mom that influenced me to kind of create a timetable that incorporates exercise back again", another participant mentioned "I took it quite seriously because high blood pressure runs in the family"
- Participants are committed to improving physical activity, despite obstacles (such as the inability to access and afford memberships to sports facilities)
- Natural alternatives and cultural approaches, as an alternative to medication, to manage hypertension was mentioned by several participants
- Poverty has a significant impact on patients' lifestyle choices, for example their ability to afford healthier food or having the time/physical ability to get to GP appointments
- Participants mentioned that access and connection to green space is important in helping to reduce stress and manage hypertension

Empowerment and trust

- Participants felt that conversations with clinicians when they were diagnosed were challenging and they did not feel empowered – patients reported feeling empowered when conversations with clinicians are two-way
- There are negative perceptions and mistrust in healthcare systems, particularly in participants interviewed from black communities. Participants mentioned that "doctors don't listen", and they "gaslight you", as well as "not being believed by your doctor [about your symptoms]"

Communication and visibility

- Participants felt that preventative, health-focused communication from local authorities and the NHS is important, and that they don't feel hypertension is prioritised as much as other health campaigns such as flu
- Participants expressed the need for better advice around managing daily stress
- It was felt that there is low visibility/awareness of hypertension, compared to other health issues, which could be overcome by community events and greater online presence

Healthcare system challenges

- Participants feel GP appointments are rushed and there's a lack of respect, of the patients experience and feelings, in healthcare interactions.
- Contradictions were raised between healthcare knowledge and unhealthy behaviours – for example, participants are aware that a healthy diet is important to managing hypertension but still haven't made lifestyle changes to improve their diet
- Patients experience challenges in managing hypertension alongside other chronic conditions due to lack of capacity in the healthcare system. For example, appointment times, and the options available, such as medication, to manage multiple conditions

Key recommendations

Key recommendations from the research are summarised below:

Recommendation 1: To develop a targeted awareness campaign.

The research shows the need for a robust awareness campaign which educates and motivates individuals to actively participate in maintaining their heart health. It would need inform people about high blood pressure, its consequences, and the steps to manage it within black and ethnic minority communities in Lambeth.

Participants identified and prioritised their most preferred platforms and media channels to reach the local community meaningfully.

Recommendations for tactics and key messages:

- Create engaging and relatable content, promoted by trusted community leaders, and consider using YouTube and podcasts as part of a marketing mix
- Facilitate interactive workshops and health check-ups at local events to allow for face-to-face engagement and discussion
- Leverage local community groups to host Q&As, be ambassadors for their communities and help improve trust

- Messages should be centred around taking personal responsibility for the prevention and management of high blood pressure

Recommendation 2: Increase access to different ways of monitoring blood pressure.

- Participants want access to more tools and equipment to facilitate blood pressure measurement. They'd also like more education to help them understand what to do next once they have a high blood pressure reading

Recommendations to improve access and monitoring:

- Provide more access to blood pressure machines at low/no cost
- Develop a user-friendly app where people can record and track their blood pressure

Quotes from participants

“It was actually my mum that influenced me to kind of create a timetable that incorporates exercise back again. Because she said that she found that the exercised helped her with her stress, which helped her lower her blood pressure.”

“If you don't understand something, how can you be able to manage your own health and take care of your own body?”

“Either you just get medication, or you have some type of diet change there isn't a real discussion around it.”

“I was determined that I didn't want to be on meds for the rest of my life.”

“I don't know how people get it high blood pressure, but sometimes, I don't know if it could lead by stress, or I don't know how people get high blood pressure to be honest.”