

# Croydon residents' experiences of eye care services

March 2025

# Contents

Contents.....	1
Executive Summary .....	2
Our findings.....	3
Recommendations .....	4
Background.....	5
Insights .....	7
Appendix.....	51

# Executive Summary

Healthwatch Croydon was commissioned to survey patients either currently waiting or with recent experience of waiting for specialist eye care in September 2024, to gather patients' experiences with eye care services in Croydon. This was contributing to a wider study by Healthwatch England working with nine other Healthwatch across England and the full report can be accessed here:

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2025-03-20/strain-sight-waiting-nhs-specialist-eye-care>

The survey aimed to understand their experiences in being referred to a specialist – at an optician, optometrist, or with their GP – as well as their experiences in waiting for eye care, and how their condition affected their daily lives. It also asked how well they trusted opticians with caring for their eye conditions, and how care could be improved in all areas. The survey reveals overall positive feedback for the Moorfields eye clinic at Croydon University Hospital, in which we surveyed the majority of the 30 responses. It showed a general trust in opticians to refer them to specialist services, but a mixed view of how trustworthy opticians were viewed in treating or monitoring an eye condition. Those who responded generally viewed accessing care from opticians or optometrists as fairly easy, and cost was generally not a barrier to receiving eye care. However, the greatest concern was over waiting times. Most of those we spoke to who were currently waiting for treatment had been waiting for at least a year, and a third of those waiting described experiencing “significant deterioration” in eyesight while waiting for treatment. Most had also not been offered extra support, such as mental health support, advice with day-to-day activities, information on waiting times, and details of who to contact if their condition changed.

# Our findings

**Positive experiences:** Most patients had positive experiences with specialist eye care services. **See pages 16–17 and 27–28.**

**Ease of access:** Most patients have not experienced great barriers in accessing opticians or optometrists. The cost of appointments influences where people go for eye tests, but cost is generally not a barrier to people receiving eye care. **See pages 13, 14 and 16.**

**Long waiting times:** Where patients were currently waiting for eye care or treatment, most had been waiting for more than a year. **See pages 19 and 26.**

**Eyesight deterioration:** A third of people currently waiting had experienced "considerable deterioration" in eyesight. **See page 20.**

**No extra support:** Most people currently waiting for treatment had not been offered extra support – such as mental health support, advice with day-to-day activities, waiting times, and contact details – while waiting when we surveyed them. **See page 25.**

**Trust in opticians:** Most people surveyed would trust an optician to refer them to NHS specialist care without having to see a GP first. About half of the people surveyed said they would trust an optician with treating or monitoring an eye condition. **See pages 37–38.**

**Lack of knowledge of the Croydon model of community services:** Croydon has been delivering a community service for over a decade, with a single point of access. The range of services provided was not clearly understood by respondents in this survey. **See page 15.**

# Recommendations

Based on the findings and analysis of this survey, Healthwatch Croydon suggests some recommendations which can help improve the overall patient experience with eye care services – including specialist eye care, opticians, and optometrists.

**Try to tackle waiting times:** Many currently waiting for services have experienced considerable deterioration in eyesight.

**Offer support for daily life:** Ensure staff are aware of any possible signposting to additional support that may help the patient in everyday life, as deterioration in vision may occur. Support includes mental health support, advice with day-to-day activities, waiting times, and details of who to contact if their condition changes.

**Improve quality of care prior to referral:** Ensure smoother referral process – around a quarter of people currently waiting said they had many appointments before being referred for specialist care. Ensure joined-up services, such as GPs noticing eye care condition and asking about eye health.

**Better communication of Croydon's established community service:** Croydon's community service should be better promoted as this may well solve many of the issues raised above, including the single point of access and ease of referral which can be done directly by the patient by visiting any high street optician. This could also include clear definitions of the different roles such as optometrist, ophthalmologist, ophthalmic nurse specialist, orthoptist and ophthalmic technician as this would help patients understand the full offer of services.

# Background

Healthwatch Croydon's eye care project was commissioned by the Research and Insight team at Healthwatch England, the national health and social care champion. Healthwatch England exists to make sure NHS leaders and other decision makers listen to the feedback of service users to improve standards health and social care.

In July 2024, Healthwatch England sought 10 local Healthwatch to apply for funding to research people's eye care experiences, particularly from people with experience waiting for secondary eye care. The brief involved capturing at least 20 responses from people either currently waiting for secondary eye care or with recent experience on a waiting list for eye care. At least 10 of the 20 responses needed to be from Black African, Black Caribbean, or South Asian backgrounds. This is because people from these groups are at a greater risk of developing some of the leading causes of sight loss, and are underrepresented in Healthwatch England's national data. Healthwatch Croydon team gained access to the waiting room of the Moorfields Eye Clinic within Croydon University Hospital, which is a hub of the Moorfields Eye Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in Croydon. We surveyed members of the public there between 3 and 25 September 2024. Some other responses were obtained by people filling out the survey online.

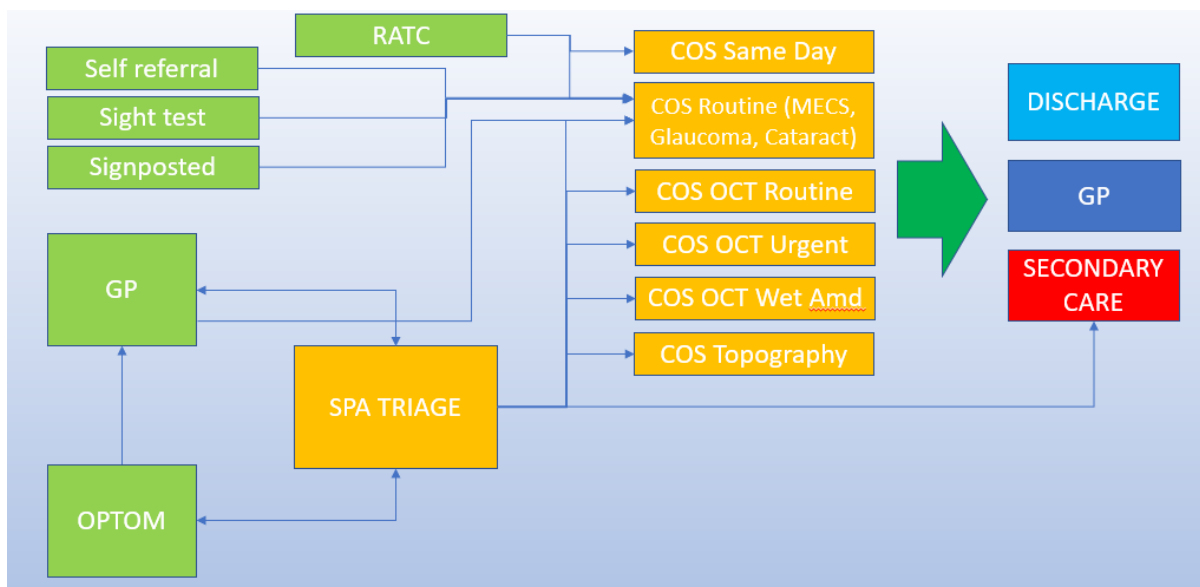
## **About eye care services**

There are three levels of services in Croydon; general ophthalmic services which are your high street opticians who provide eye tests and can prepare glasses; a community service and a hospital service. Residents can access the community or hospital service through a single point of access provider who is an accredited provider who can

assess and advise . Patients can be self-referred to this community service, or be referred by your GP, high street optician or another service such as urgent care.

Once referred, the community services can advise and refer you onto hospital services, or manage your eye issues directly. Indeed around 4 in 5 of eye care referrals are delivered withi community services and 1 in 5 at the hospital.

Croydon led the way in creating a community eye care service model which is now being rolled out across South West London and other parts of England. This reduces the number of patients needing to access eye services in hospital locations.



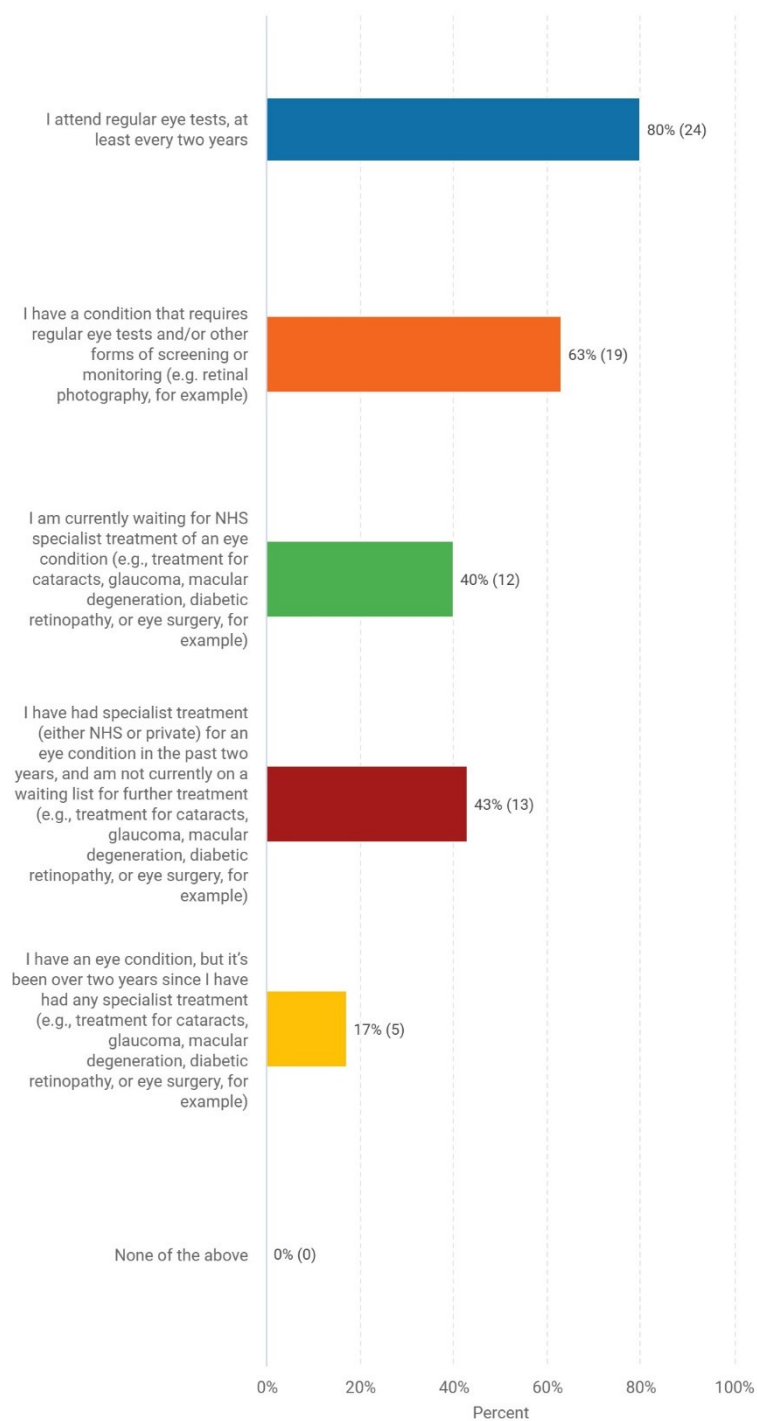
Terms: RATC- Referral and Treatment centre (urgent care), OPTOM- High street optometrist, SPA Triage- Single point of access; COS – Community Ophthalmic Service.

**Limitations:** The data is limited in that it was only conducted with Moorfields patients at Croydon University Hospital over dates in September 2024, and there were only 30 responses. The questions needed also to be consistent with the wider project across England and could not reflect local service offer. This survey did not hear from those using only community services or just using high street for biannual eye checks.

# Insights

## Part 1: Screening Question

1. Which of the following describes your situation? Please select all that apply:





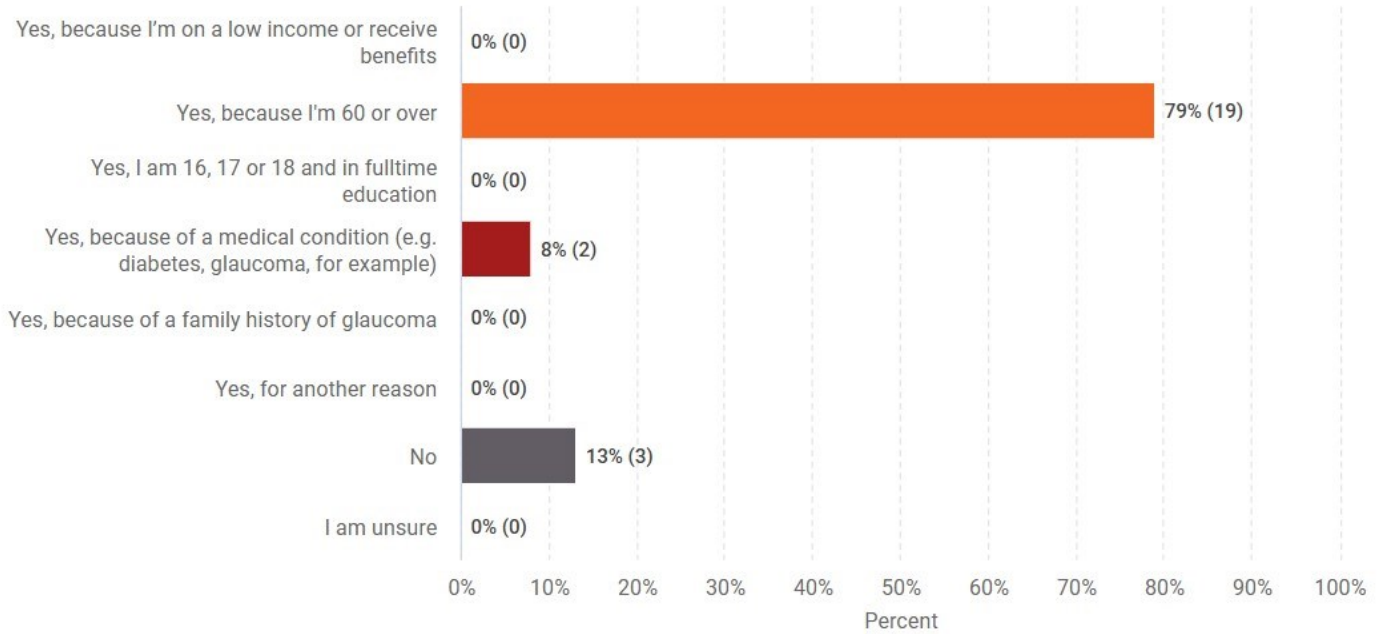
Most respondents (80%) said they attend regular eye tests, with 63% saying they have an eye condition that requires regular tests, screening, and/or monitoring. Some 40% said they were currently waiting for NHS specialist treatment for an eye condition, and just over 40% said they had undergone specialist treatment in the last two years.

## **Part 2: No recent eye care experiences**

- 2. You have indicated that you have not used eye care services in the last two years. Please select the reasons why from the list below – you can select more than one option:**

No answers were given to this question as all respondents had used eye care services in the last two years.

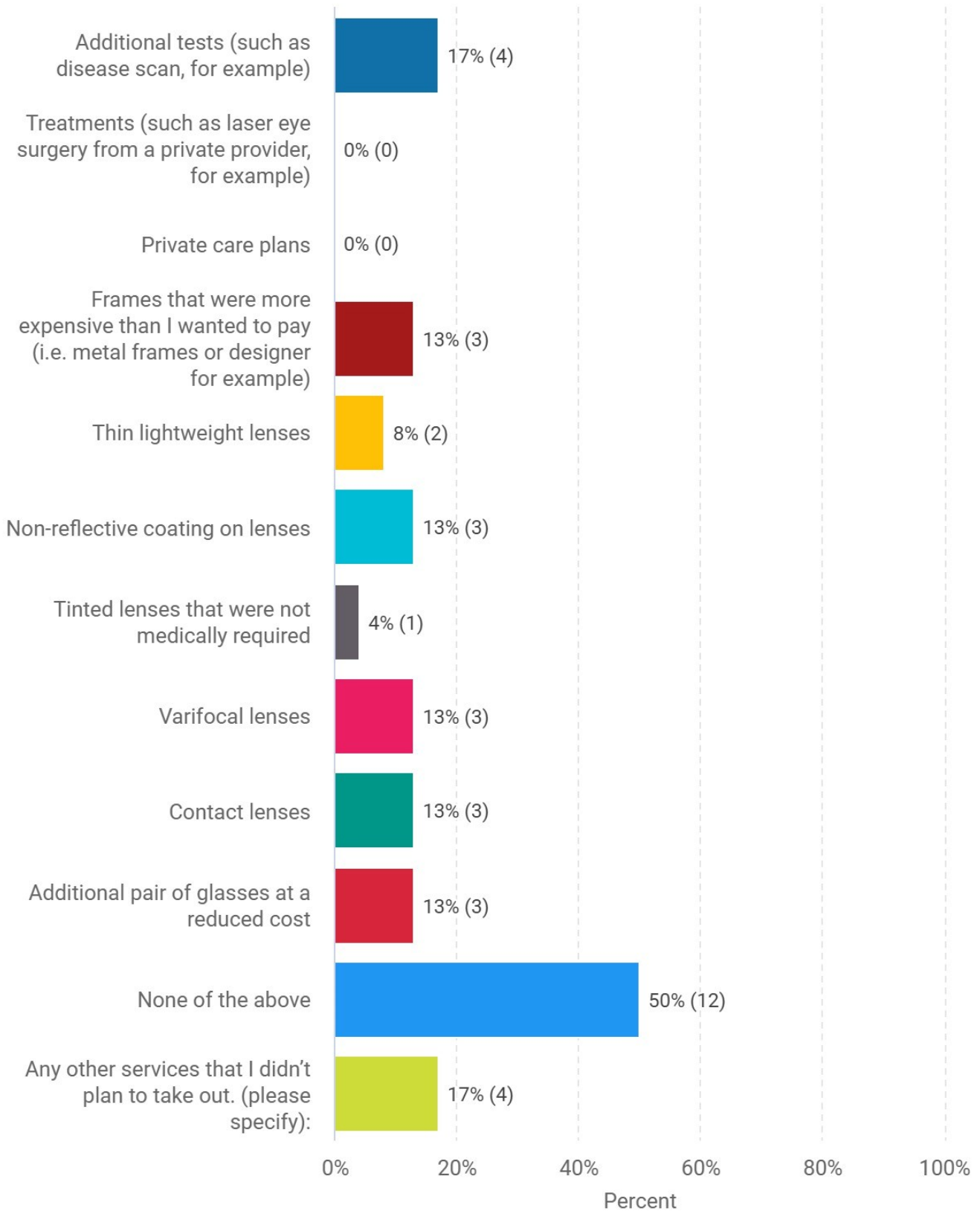
### 3. Are you currently eligible for free eye tests?



Most respondents to this question – 79% – said they were currently eligible for free eye tests as they were aged 60 or over. A further 8% said they were eligible for free eye tests due to a medical condition such as diabetes or glaucoma. Some 13% responded to say they are not currently eligible.

### Part 3: Using opticians

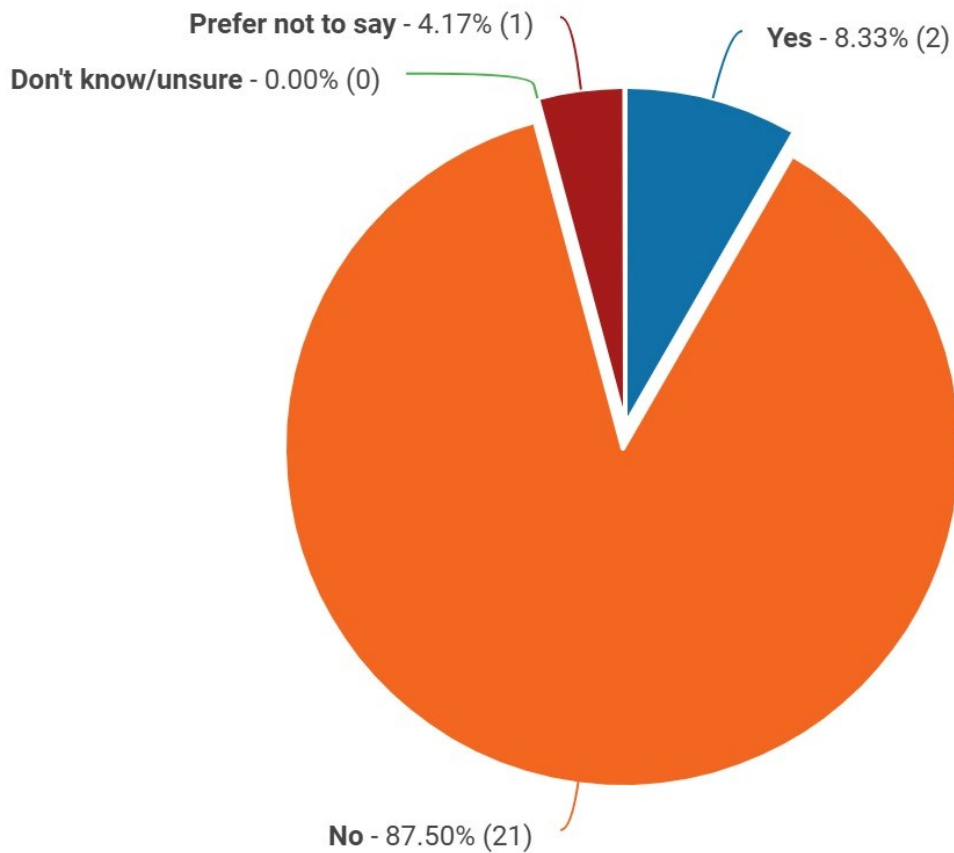
4. Thinking back to your most recent eye test, which of the following did a member of staff suggest at an additional cost? Please select all that apply:



Half of the respondents said that in their most recent eye test appointment, a member of staff did not suggest any further services at an additional cost. However, a great variety of services were suggested by members of staff, and respondents could select more than one answer – the most selected of these was additional tests such as a scan. Other popular answers included contact lenses, another pair of glasses at a reduced cost, varifocal lenses, non-reflective coating on lenses, or frames that were more expensive than what the patient was willing to pay.

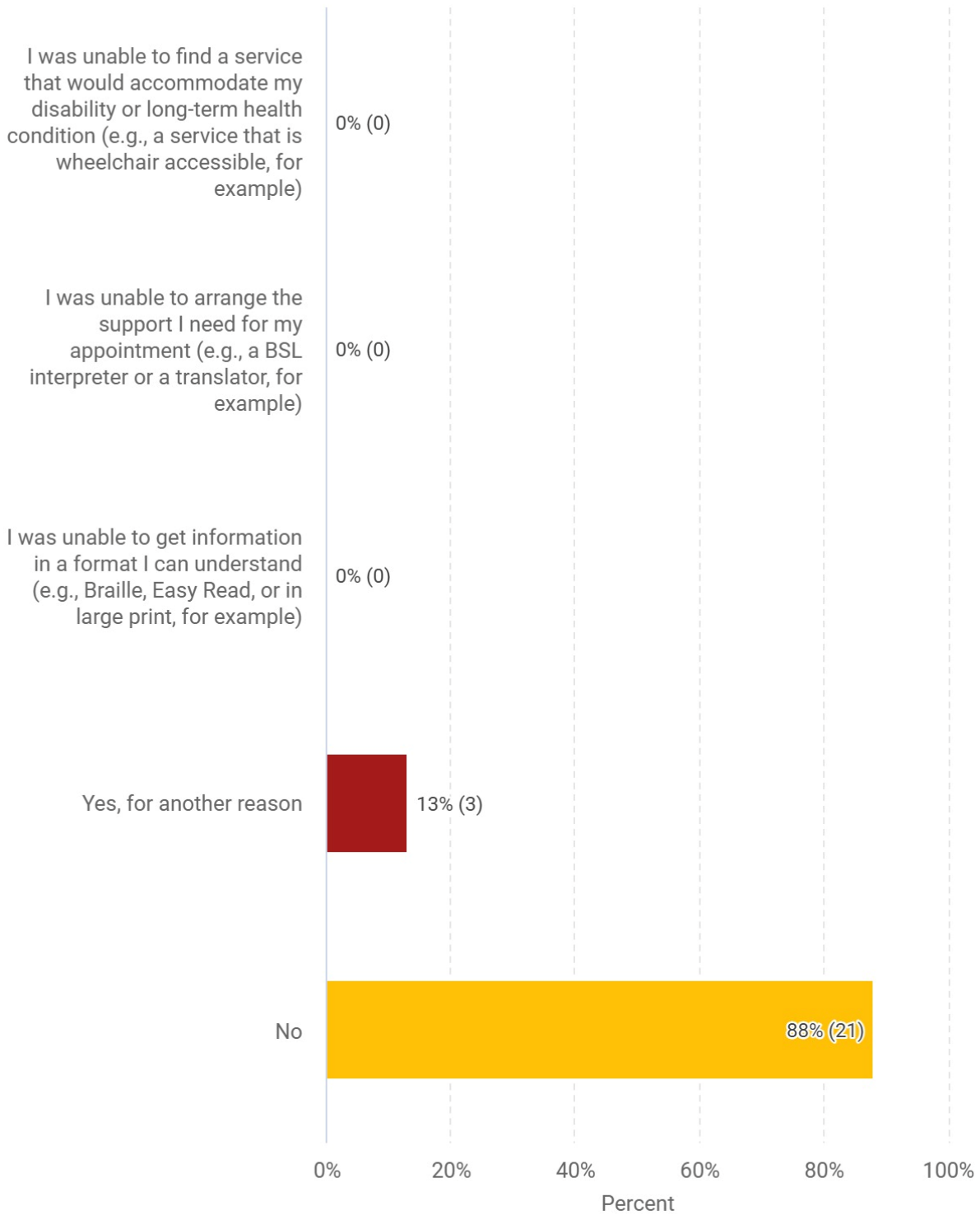
Four of the patients answered that they were suggested to pay for another service that they had not planned to take out. These included specifying particular extra tests or continuing with a prescription.

**5. In the last two years have you avoided getting eye care you need because of the cost?**



The vast majority of patients – almost 90% – responded that they have not avoided getting the eye care they needed because of the cost of care. Around 8% responded that they had avoided pursuing the eye care they needed due to cost, and around 4% responded that they preferred not to say.

**6. In the last 2 years, have you experienced any difficulties getting the eye care you need from an optician or optometrist? Please select all that apply:**



Most respondents – 88% – said that they had not experienced any difficulties in receiving the eye care they needed from an optician or optometrist. Interestingly, 13% said they had but it was not due to the reasons specified in the question. The patients we spoke to had not been unable to find a service that would accommodate their disability or health condition, have the specific support they needed, or were unable to receive information they needed in a format they required. One patient who responded ‘Other’ explained that they have been given the wrong prescription twice by the same optician; another patient said they have found it difficult to get an appointment due to pressure on the NHS.



## **7. Do you have any further comments about your experiences visiting an optician, getting your eyes tested or purchasing glasses/contact lenses?**

Most patients who chose to give further comments highlighted their positive experiences with opticians and eye tests. There were also comments made about the cost of smaller opticians compared with the larger brands, and the ease of attending appointments. One person responded to this to say that they did not use an optician but was instead seen by their GP.

### **Positive experiences with opticians**

“It was quite good.”

“No problems.”

“No it’s fine, and they do a special care plan (Rawlings Purley). I think it's useful, you get certain benefits for check-ups.”

“Impressed with the eye care I’ve been receiving.”

“Happy with the treatment.”

“Very good care.”

### **Ease of use / cost of appointments**

“I always went to Specsavers, I want to change to Boots as my dad used to go and they pick up things a bit.”

“I would like to stay with my local optician, but they are far more expensive than a big brand name like Specsavers. The queues are more difficult but it is cheaper.”

"I use Asda Wallington they are excellent/ cheapest glasses. I requested an eye exam from Supersavers due to floaters which I had not had before and was worried by. I was fast tracked to Rawlings in Purley, excellent service and quick."

### **Use of GP over opticians**

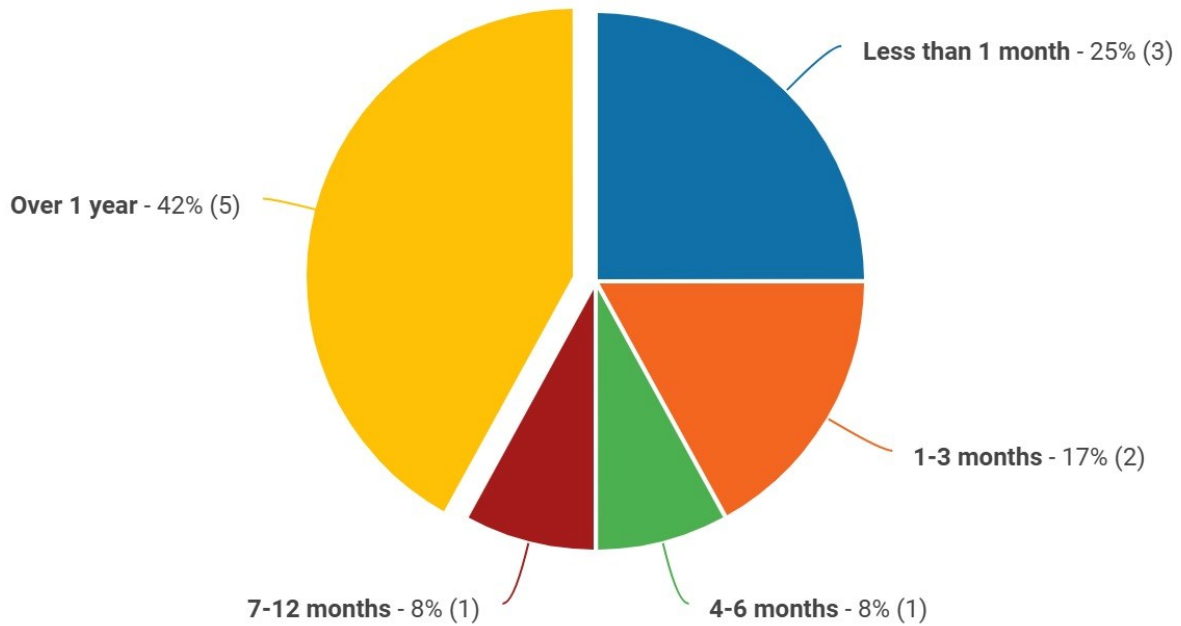
"I haven't been to an optician. Only went to my GP."

## **Part 4: Currently waiting for specialist eye care**

### **8. What specialist eye care or treatment are you currently waiting for?**

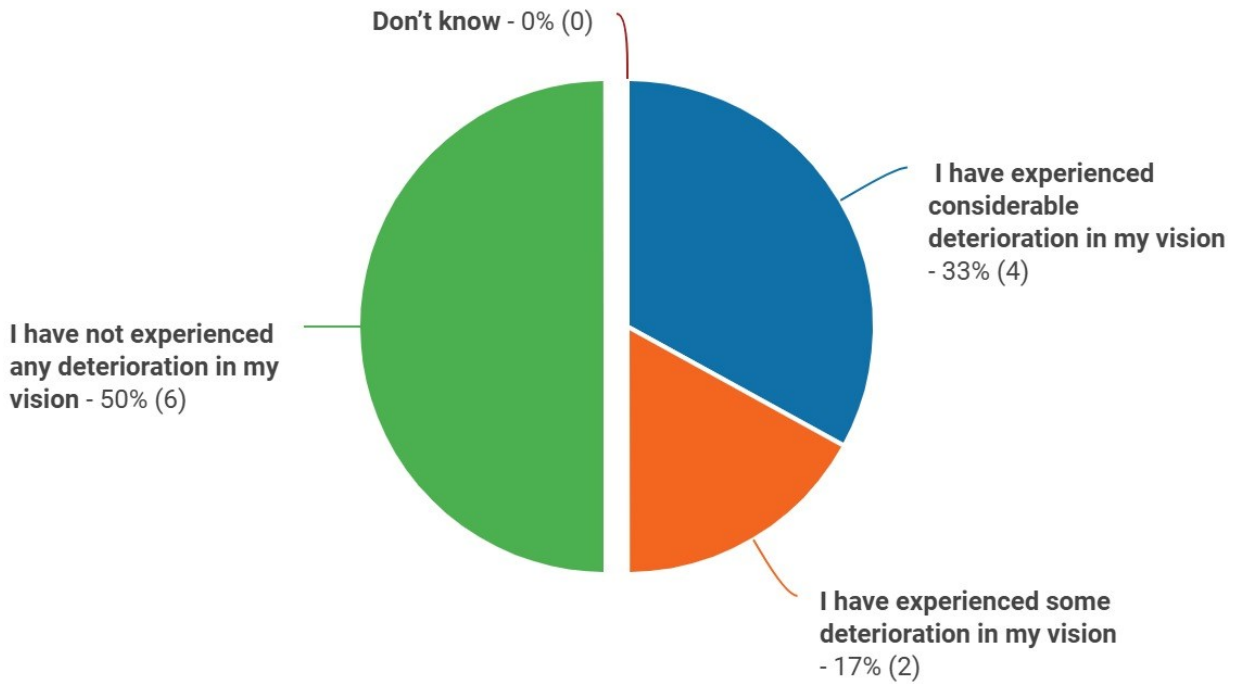
Of the 30 who completed the survey, 12 – 40% of respondents – were currently waiting for specialist eye care or treatments, and thus completed this section of the survey. Two respondents were waiting to hear back from a test or investigation – one was awaiting the results of an eye test, the other was being examined after they had developed a patch of blurred vision. Another two respondents were receiving treatments for macular degeneration, three for glaucoma, and three for cataracts. Another was waiting for eye injections, and another for treatment for retinal vein occlusion.

## 9. How long have you been on a waiting list for specialist eye care?



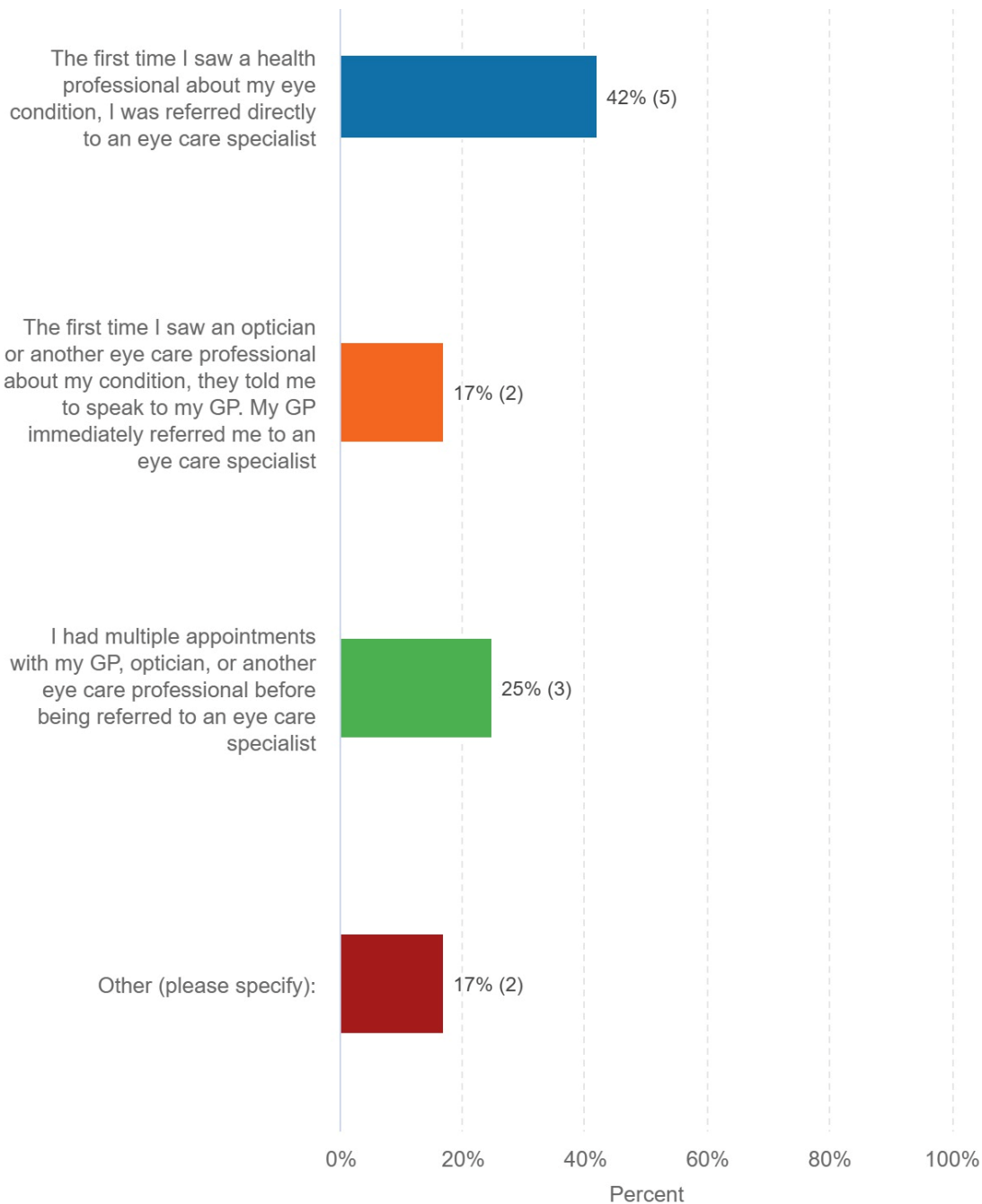
Half of those who were currently awaiting treatment had been waiting for at least seven months, and of these most had been waiting for more than a year. A quarter of those responding to this section had been on the waiting list for less than one month, 17% answered with one to three months, and 8% for four to six months.

## 10. Have you noticed any deterioration of your vision whilst waiting?



Half of those awaiting eye care or treatment had not experienced any deterioration in their eyesight, while 17% had experienced some. 33% of the respondents said they had experienced “considerable” deterioration in their vision whilst waiting for treatment.

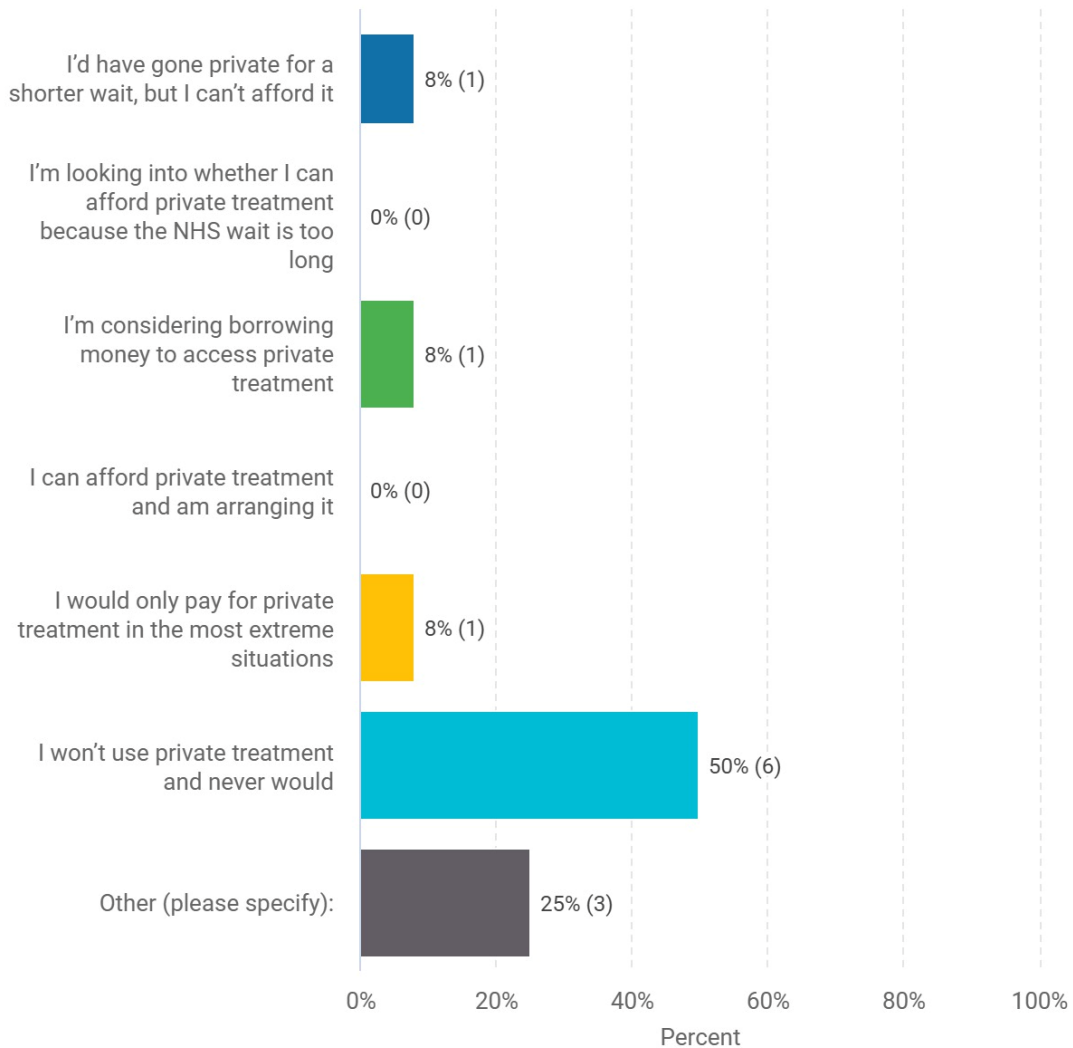
## 11. How many times did you see a GP, optician, or other eye care professional before you were referred to an eye care specialist about your condition?



More than half of those who responded to this question were referred to a specialist smoothly. Nearly half of those who responded to this question – 42% – said they were referred directly to an eye care specialist the first time they saw a health professional about their condition. A further 17% said they were told to speak to their GP by an optician or eye care professional, who

immediately referred them. However, 25% said they they had many appointments before referral. One respondent said they were due to see the opticians but did not get around to it, and another said they could not remember.

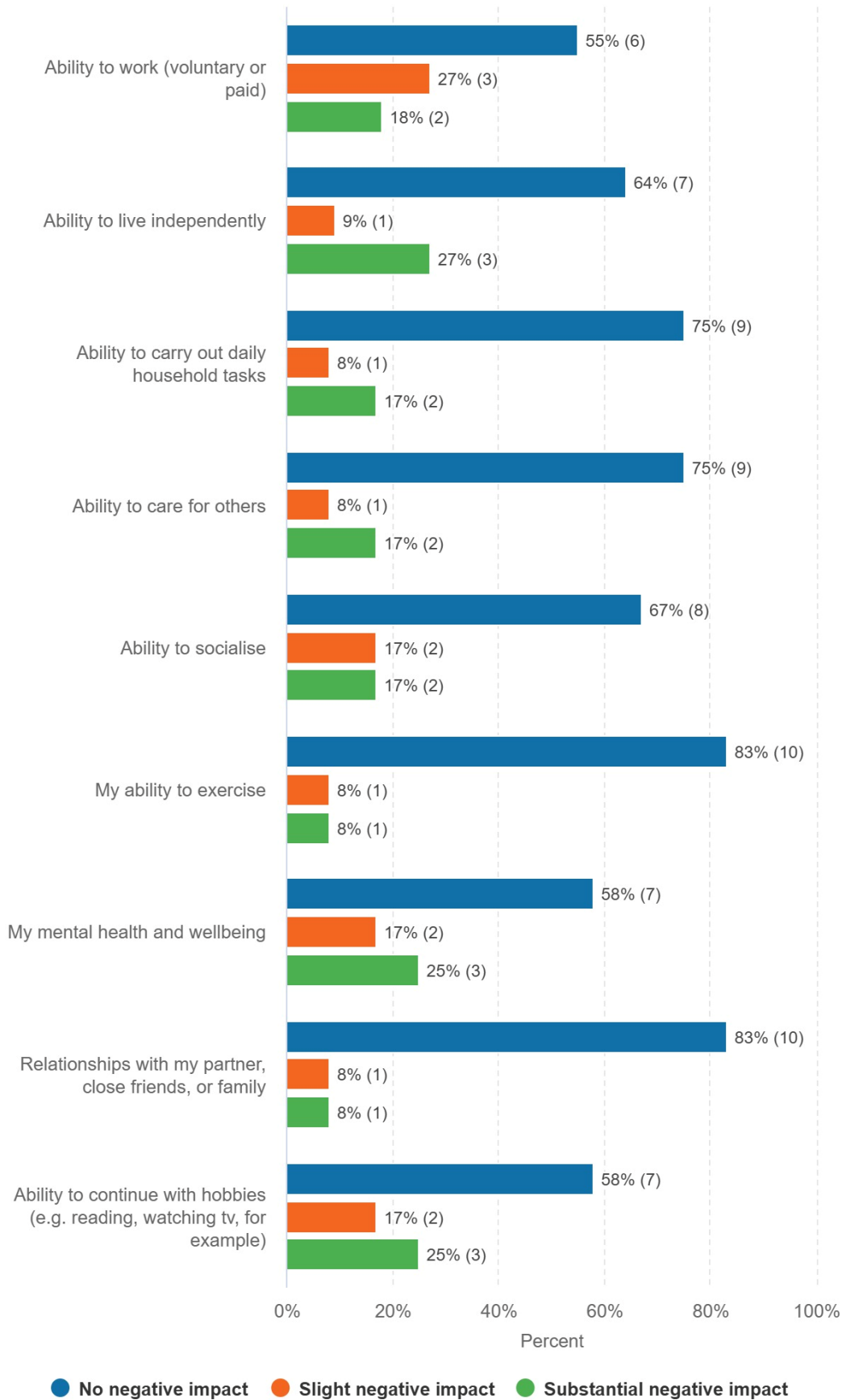
**12. We'd like to ask you about your willingness to access private treatment.  
Please select one of the statements from the following list that best applies to your situation:**



Half of those responding said they never would consider private treatment. One person responded that they would have accessed it if they could afford it, another said they were considering borrowing money to do so, and another said they would only pay for private treatment in extreme situations. Of the three who responded with Other, one said they would have gone private if they had to wait longer, another said they can afford it and are looking for a “second opinion”, and another responded that they would like to if they had the financial capacity.

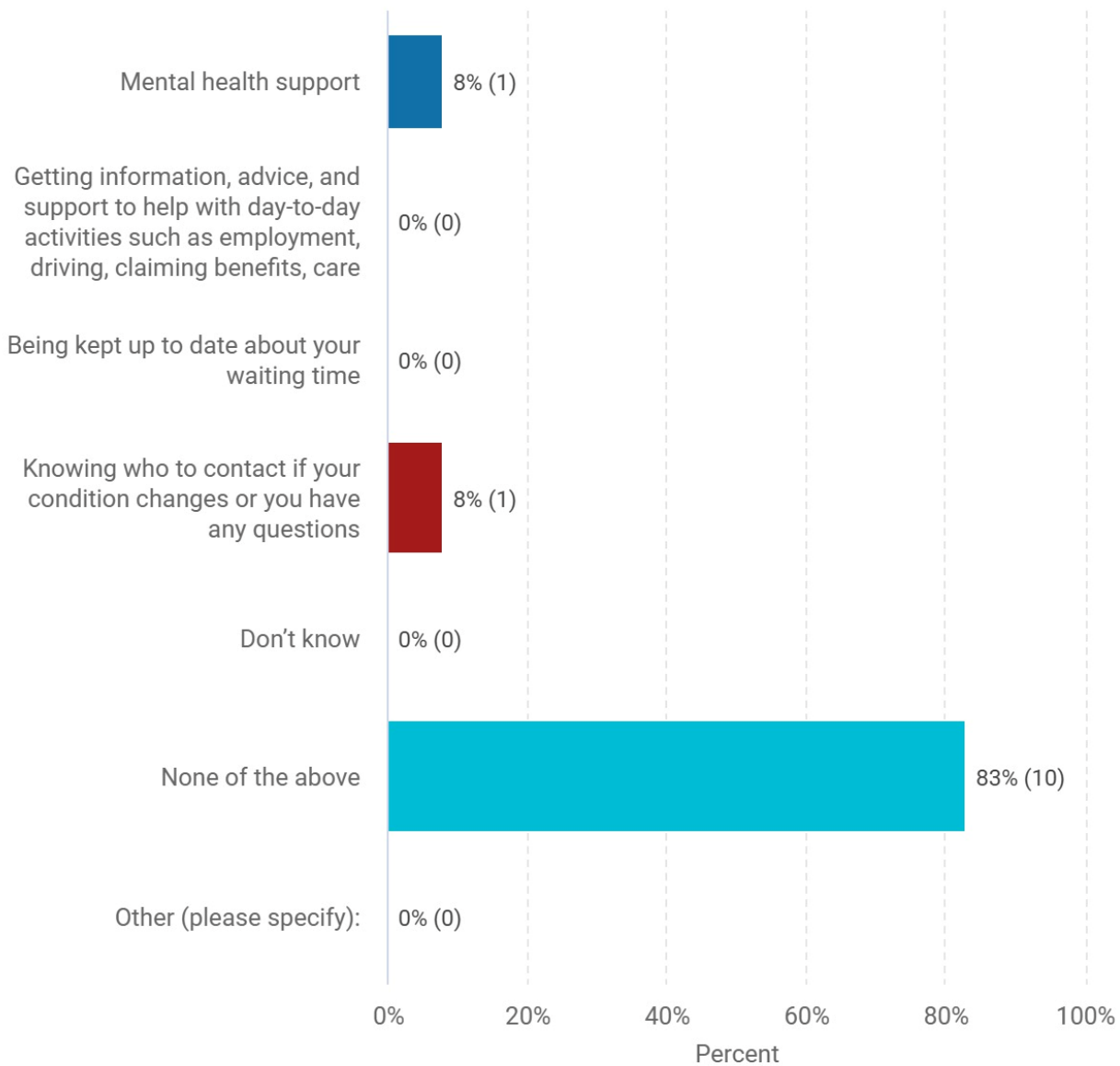


### 13. What extent has the wait for eye care or treatment negatively impacted the following areas of your life?



Most people who responded to this question said that waiting for eye care or treatment had had no negative impact on these areas of life. More than half – 55% – said that there had been no negative impact on their ability to work, 27% said that there had been a slight impact on this, and 18% said there had been substantial negative impact. The greatest areas that had seen a substantial impact included the patients' ability to live independently (at 27% of respondents), their ability to continue with hobbies (a quarter of respondents), and their mental health and wellbeing (a quarter of respondents). The areas least affected included relationships with close friends and family and ability to exercise (both 83%).

**14. Have you been offered any of the following types of support from the NHS whilst waiting for care or treatment for your eye condition? Please select all that apply:**



Most people – 83% – waiting for eye care or treatment responded that they were offered none of the support listed whilst waiting for care or treatment. One person said they had been offered mental health support, and another said they had been offered information on who to contact with questions or if their condition changes.

## **15. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your experience of waiting for eye care or treatment?**

Other than positive experiences noted by patients, the main concern raised was waiting times. Particularly in waiting for results or waiting to be seen:

### **Positive experiences**

"Very impressed with the eye care I have received."

"They are pretty good."

"They were very good."

### **Long waiting times / inconsistent care**

"Apart from not being Impressed today (Croydon Moorfields) been waiting an hour."

"The test results took forever it was a particular eye test, may you took the test that is when the condition started, results took 3 months, then another 8 weeks to talk about the results."

"It varies from excellent to not so good- it is not consistent. I would appreciate being able to ask questions and not have to wait 6 months to a year."

"No, only that it should have been a six-week recovery time for an operation, but it's been six months, not sure why it's taken so long, must have been down here six times, they are still trying to figure out how fix the eye condition."

## **Not being seen**

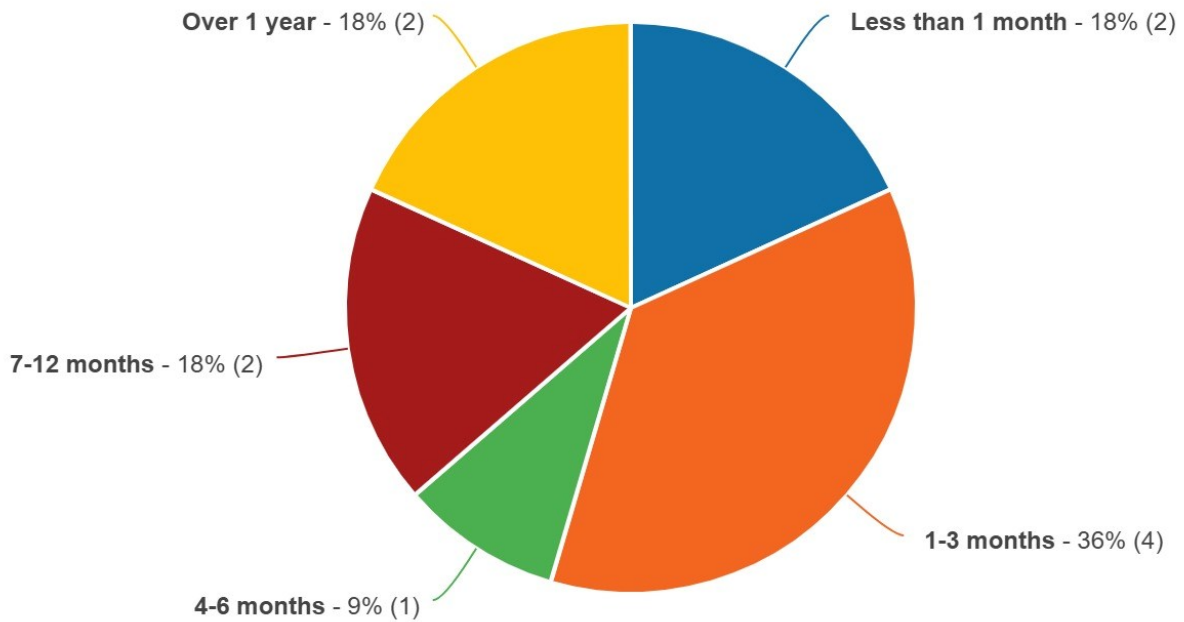
“One day I came in to Moorfields and they forgot about me. I was forgotten about.”

## **Part 5: Received specialist eye care in the past two years**

### **16. What specialist eye care or treatment are you currently waiting for?**

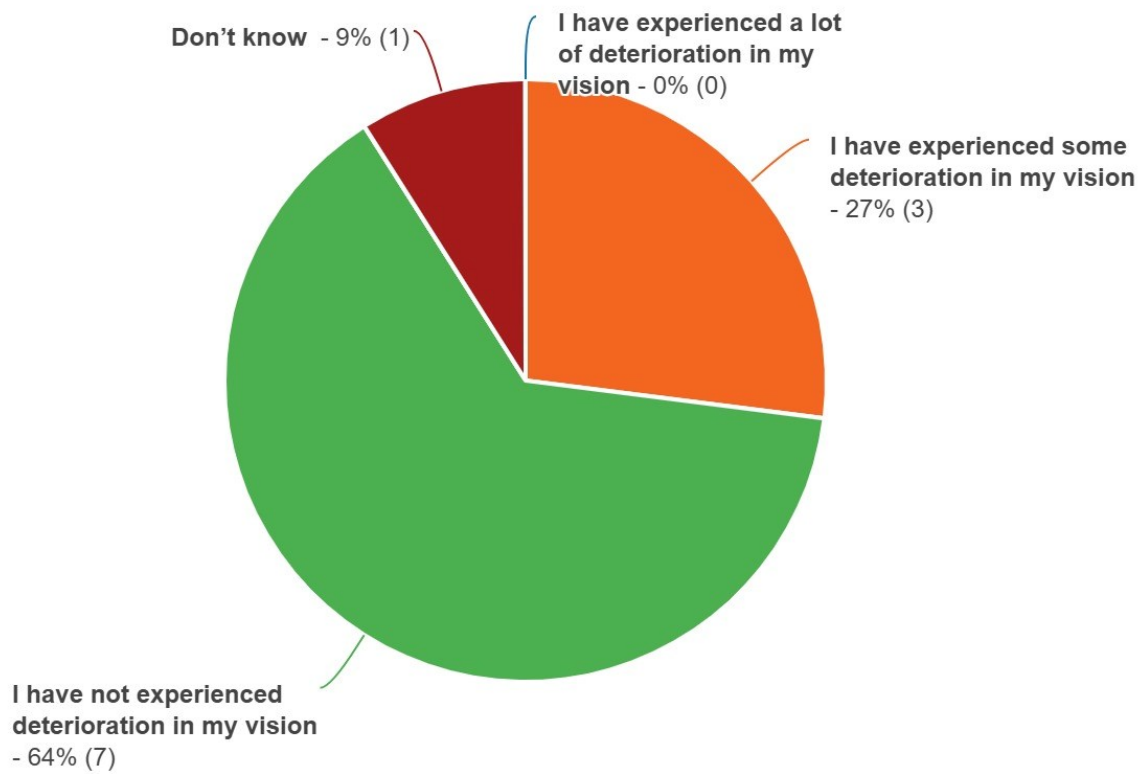
Ten of the 30 respondents completed this section, aimed at those who had experienced waiting for eye care or treatment in the last two years. Two said they had waited for glaucoma treatment, another two for cataract treatment, one for Fuchs' dystrophy, and others for eye implants or other eye treatments.

### 17. How long did you have to wait before receiving treatment from specialist eye care?



More than half of respondents – 54% – said they were waiting for three months or less before receiving specialist eye care, with most of these between one and three months. 18% said they were waiting between seven and 12 months, another 18% said more than one year.

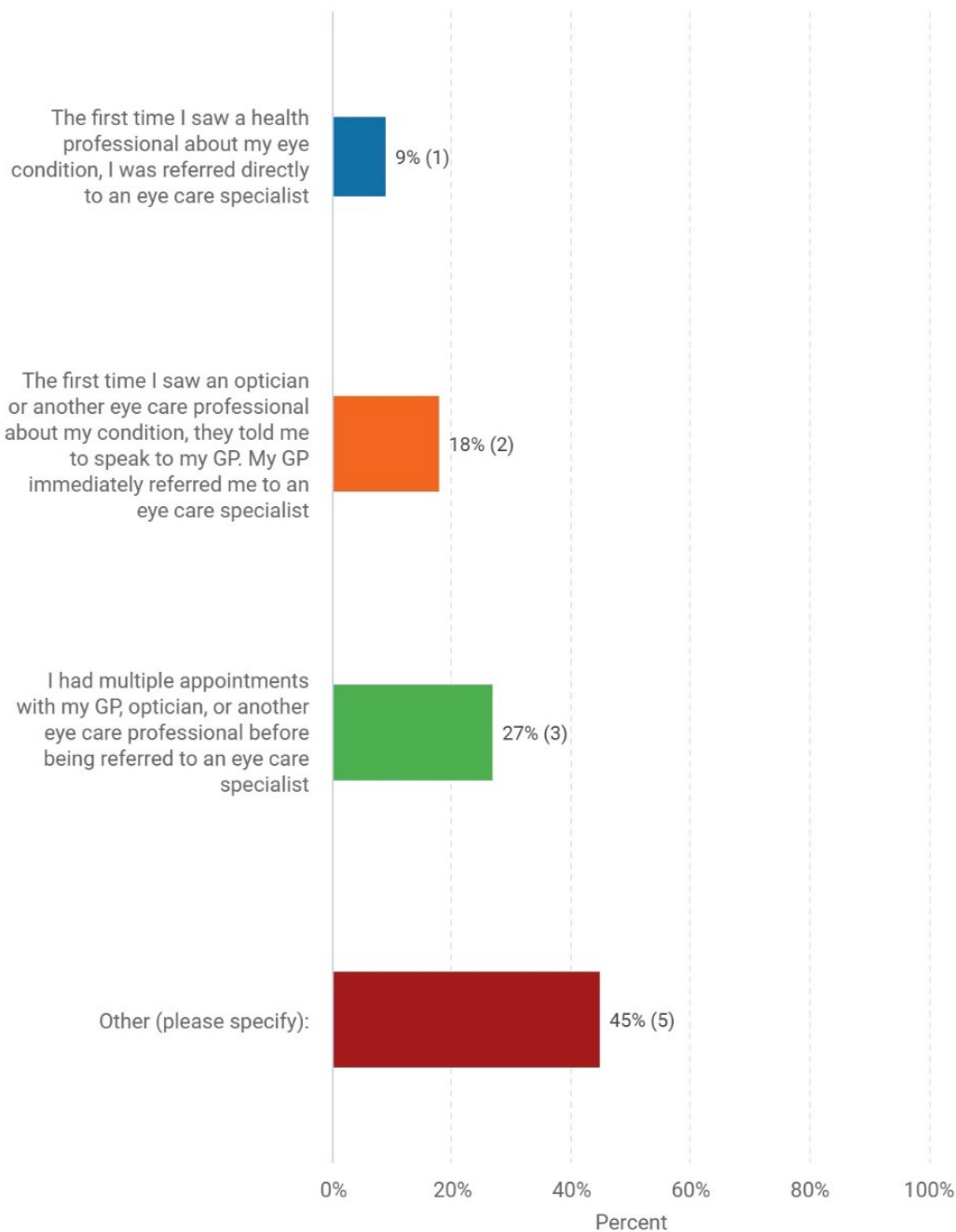
## 18. Did you experience any deterioration of your vision whilst waiting?



More than half of those who had been awaiting eye care or treatment in the last two years – 63% – had not experienced any deterioration in their vision, while 27% had experienced some. None of the respondents said they had experienced great deterioration, and one person responded that they did not know.



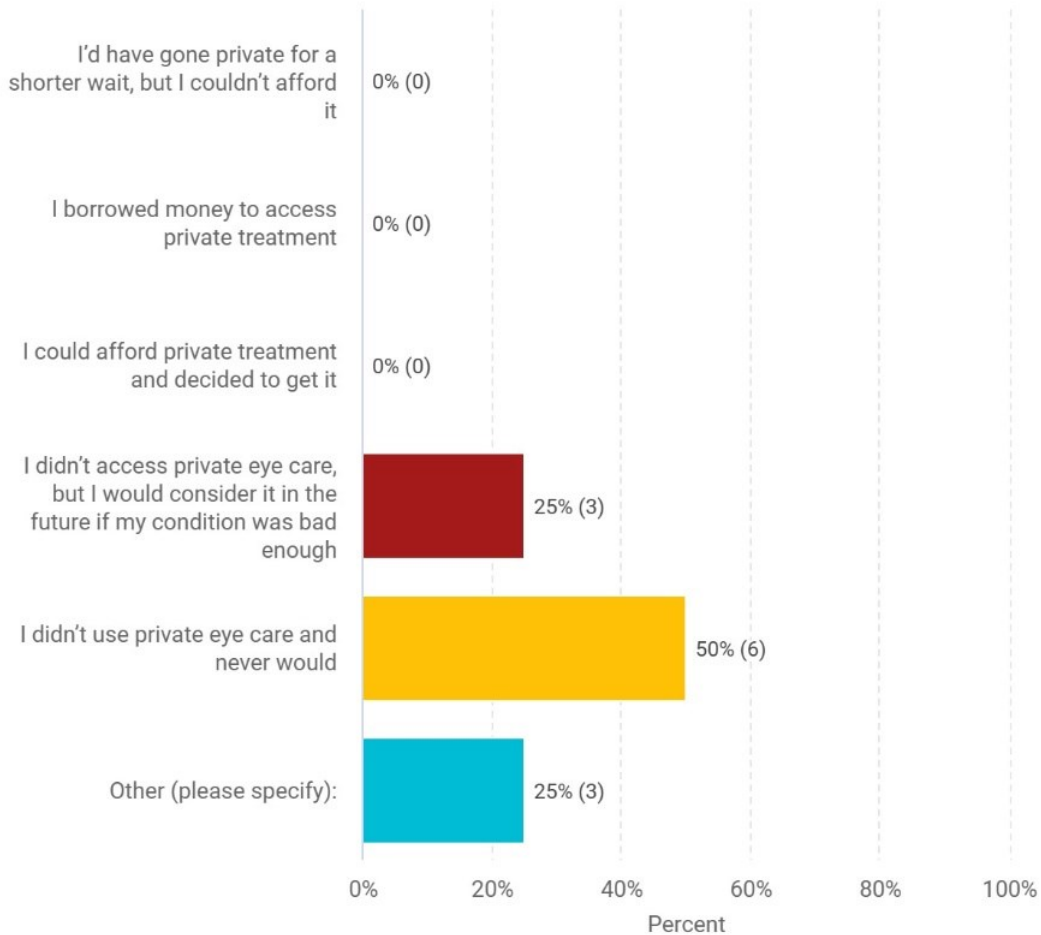
## 19. How many times did you see a GP, optician, or other eye care professional before you were referred to an eye care specialist about your condition?



Most people responded with Other to this question, with various experiences leading to a referral. One patient was referred from an endocrinologist, as their eye condition was linked to this, and another had been with the glaucoma clinic for some time now. Another had two appointments with a GP, and another went straight to a clinic as their GP was slow. Three people only had to see an optician

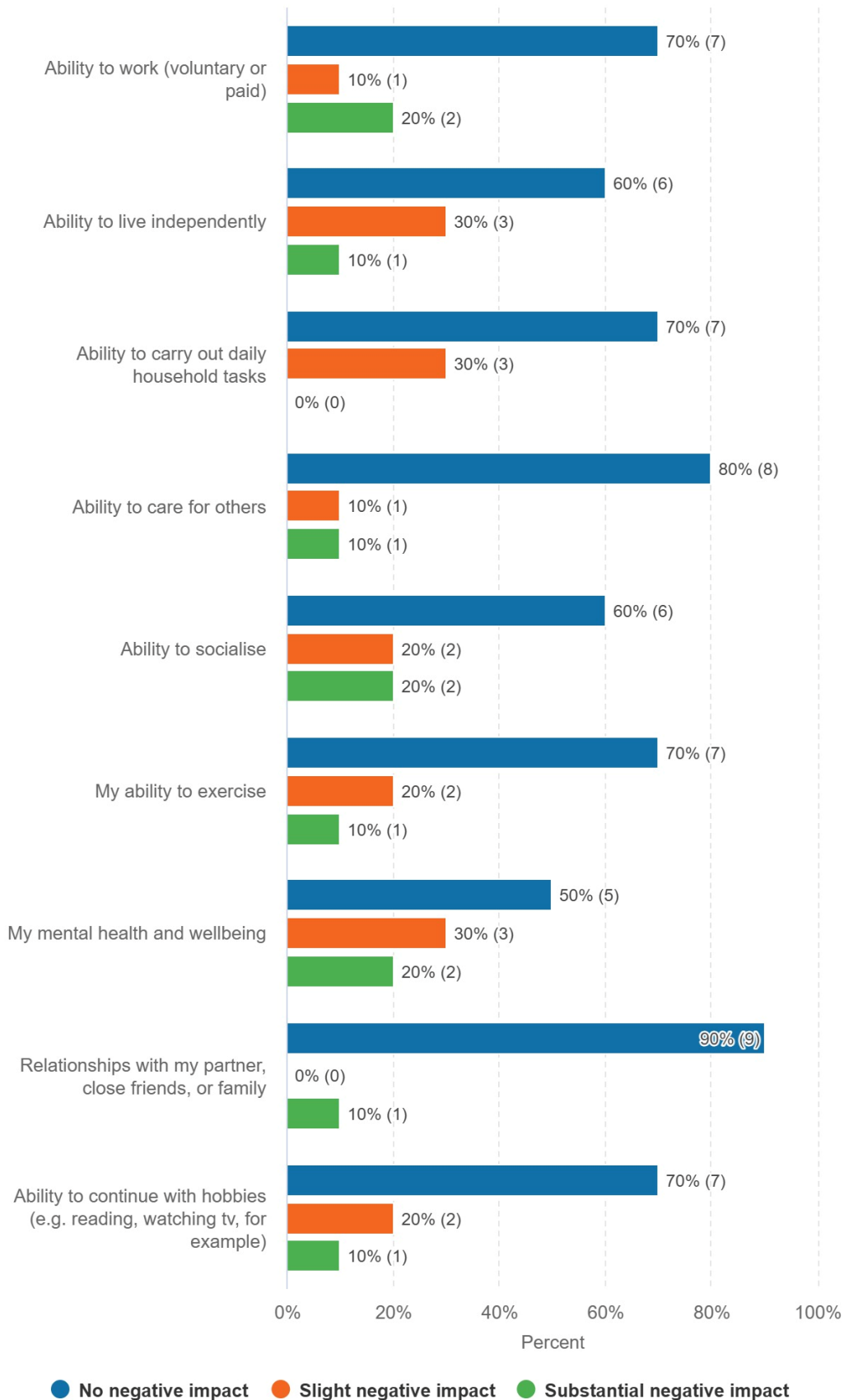
or eye care professional once, before immediately being referred or being advised to speak to their GP who referred them.

**20. We'd like to ask you whether you considered or used private eye care services while waiting for NHS eye care. Please select one of the statements from the following list that best applies to your situation:**



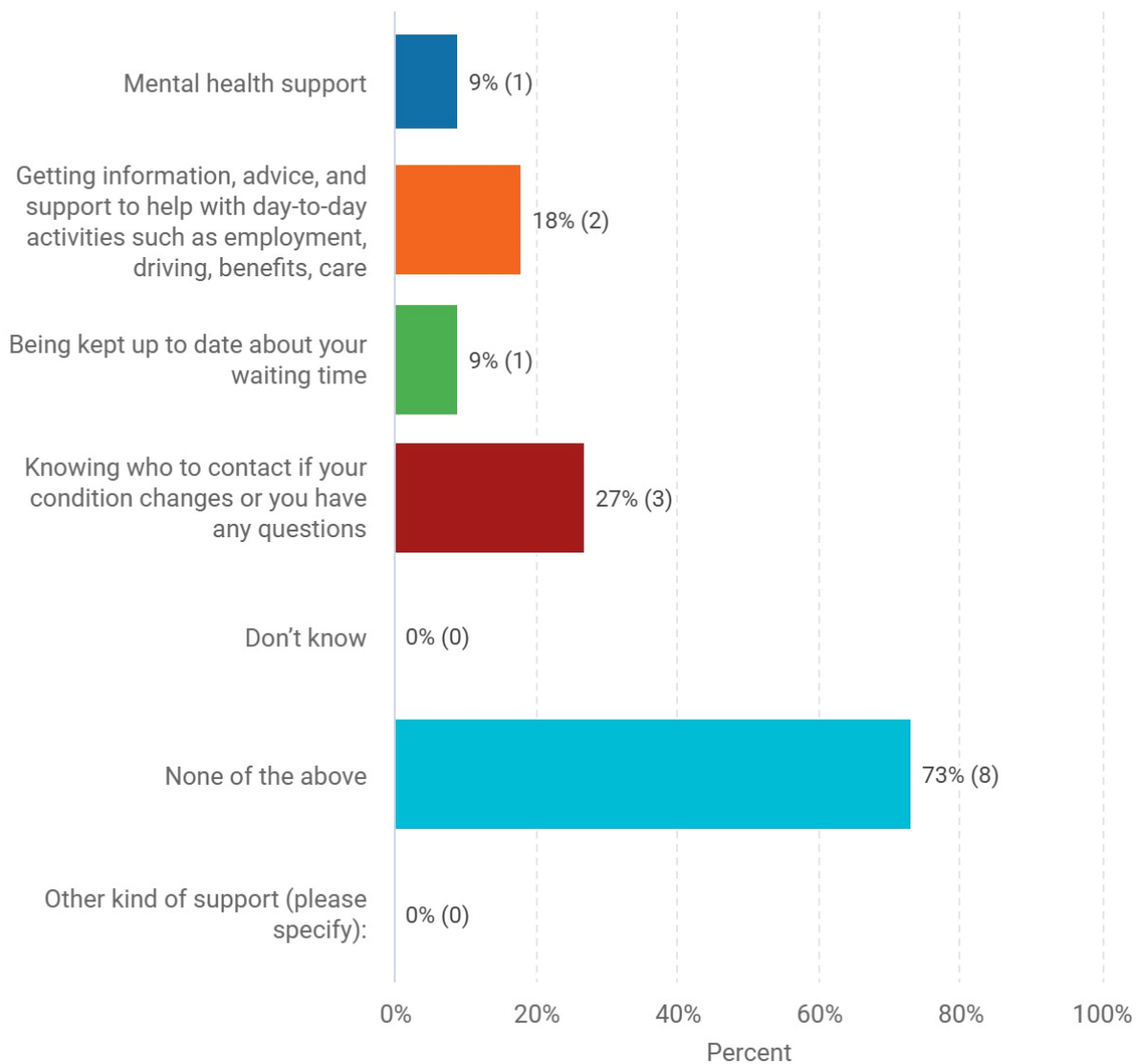
Half of those responding said they never would consider private treatment. A quarter who responded said they would consider it in the future if their condition was bad enough. Another quarter responded with Other, with one person saying they would have done if the waiting time was too long, but they were referred for surgery within six weeks. Another was on a private health insurance scheme.

## 21. To what extent has the wait for eye care or treatment negatively impacted the following areas of your life?



The most frequent answer to this question was that waiting for eye care or treatment had no negative impact on these different areas of life. Of the areas that had not been impacted, mental health and wellbeing affected 50% of responses and ability to socialise which affected 40%.

**22. Have you been offered any of the following types of support from the NHS whilst waiting for care or treatment for your eye condition? Please select all that apply:**



Most people – 73% – responded that they were offered none of the support listed whilst waiting for care or treatment. One person said they had been offered mental health support, and another said they had been offered to be kept update on their waiting time. Three people – 27% – said they had been offered information on who to contact with questions or if their condition changes, and 18% said they had been offered support and advise with day-to-day activities.

### **23. Is there anything else you'd like to tell us about your experience of waiting for eye care or treatment?**

Responses to this question were very mixed. Some respondents praised the eye care they had received, others criticised it. Another said they had not been given enough advice on whether to go ahead with an additional procedure:

#### **Positive experiences**

"Very impressed with the eye care I have received."

"No really, maybe because they did not want my sight to deteriorate, they saw me quickly and ongoing care has been really good."

#### **Poor experiences**

"Cataract service provided by Moorfields based at Croydon University Hospital. Administration about waiting time, purpose of a variety of pre-op clinics, was all very poor."

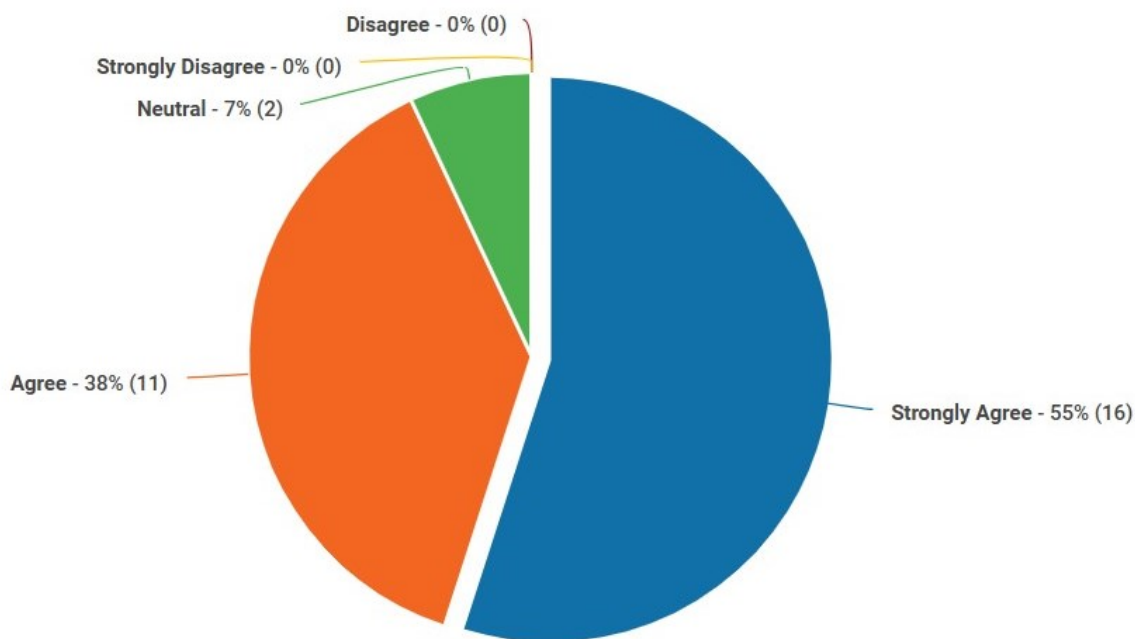
"It's the facilities that are not conducive for patient experiences."

#### **Need for more advice**

"A little more advice from professional on whether he should have an additional procedure due to the high risk (potential transplant) – quite a high potential risk of 20%."

## Part 6: Any other experiences

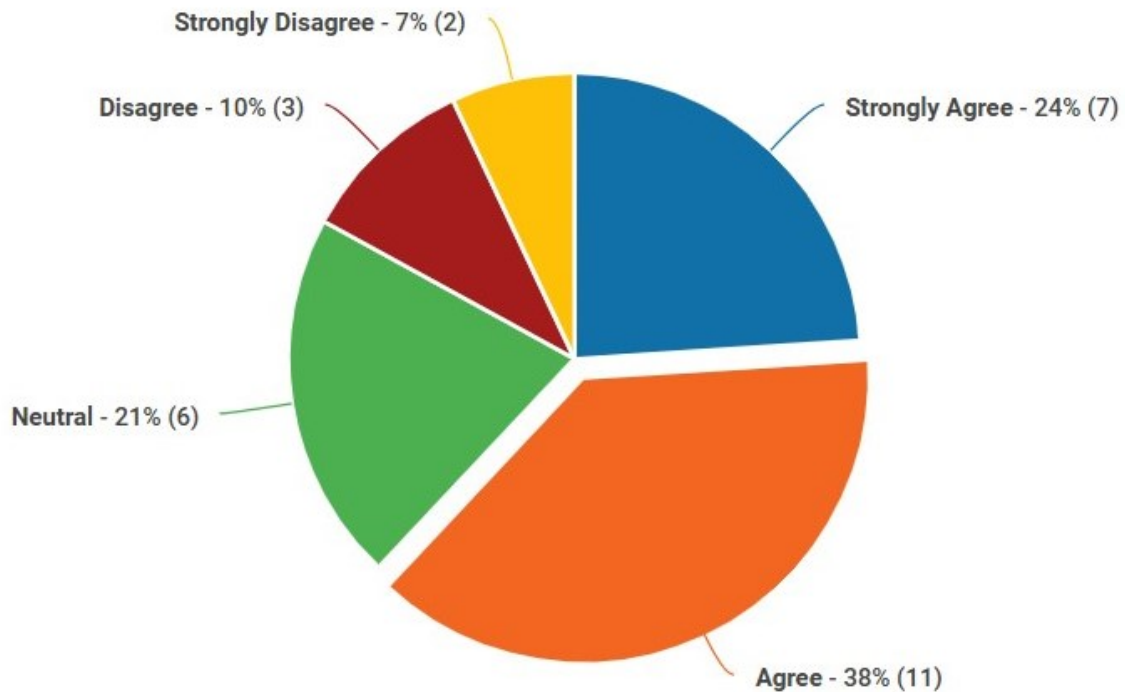
24. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I trust an optician to refer me directly to NHS specialist services or tests for any eye condition I might have, without having to see a GP first.'



This section was mandatory for all respondents. More than half of the 30 patients surveyed strongly. Agree that they would trust an optician to refer them to NHS specialists without having to see a GP first. A further 38% agreed. Two respondents remained neutral on the topic, but nobody disagreed.



**25. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'I would be comfortable going to qualified professionals working in a high-street opticians for the monitoring or treatment of an eye condition.'**



More than half respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that they would trust an optician with treating or monitoring an eye condition. Six people responded with a neutral response, while 17% responded either disagree or strongly disagree.

**26. Is there anything else you'd like to share about your eye care experiences?  
E.g., experiences of eye screening for things like glaucoma or retinopathy, any ongoing care you receive for an eye condition, or anything else we haven't mentioned.**

The vast majority of those who answered this question praised the work of Moorfields, saying that the ongoing care is "perfect", the doctors and nurses have been "great", even though sometimes waiting times are quite long. However, one person gave feedback on how there is not an integrated approach to eye care. The patient said services are not "joined up", with GPs not asking about eye care conditions.

**Positive experiences**

"I come into Moorfields regularly. It's been good."

"No not really, just the ongoing care is perfect."

"Moorfields eye clinic is good."

"I feel more comfortably coming to the clinic here, nothing else to share."

"It's very useful to have Moorfields here."

"The care he's received has been wonderful. Doctors and nurses have been great."

"Happy with treatment."

"Very good ongoing care."

"When this happened in 2021, I thought I was overwearing my contact lenses, but the opticians referred me to Moorfields and was seen an

hour later (Specsavers Croydon), that's when my opinion changed of the opticians, and generally the NHS and at Moorfields has been amazing.”

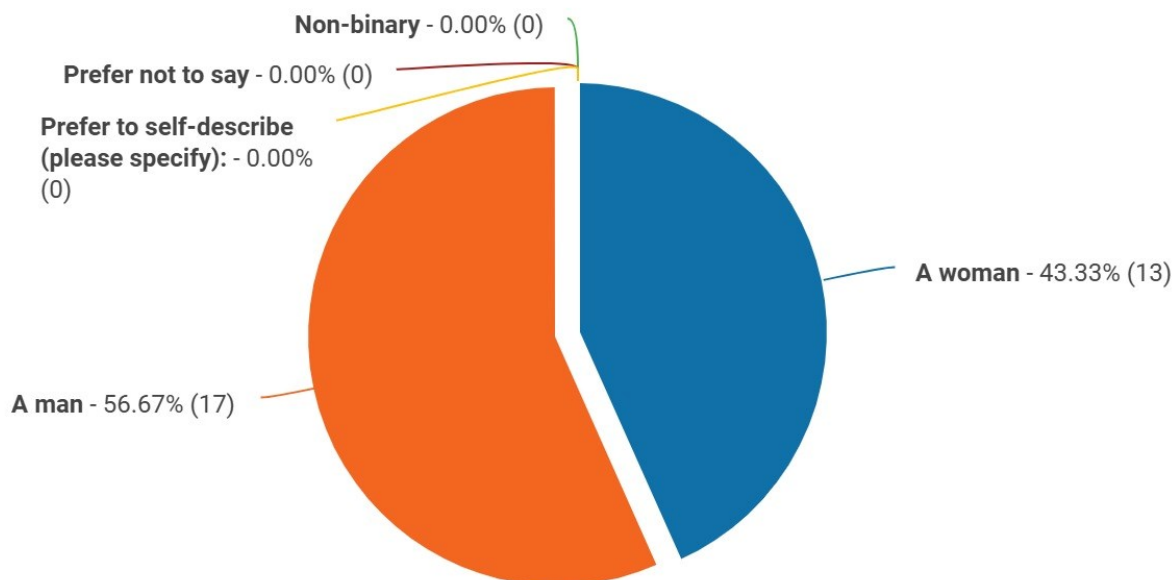
“Good job. I've been happy. Sometimes you have to wait a long time but I know they are busy.”

### **No communication between services**

“I have yearly retinopathic monitoring, and following cataract operations on both eyes, no need to attend every 2 years. Nevertheless, I consider that eye services are not 'joined up' and are inadequately integrated into my whole person care. For example, I have not been asked, nor talked about, my eyesight with my GP ever.”

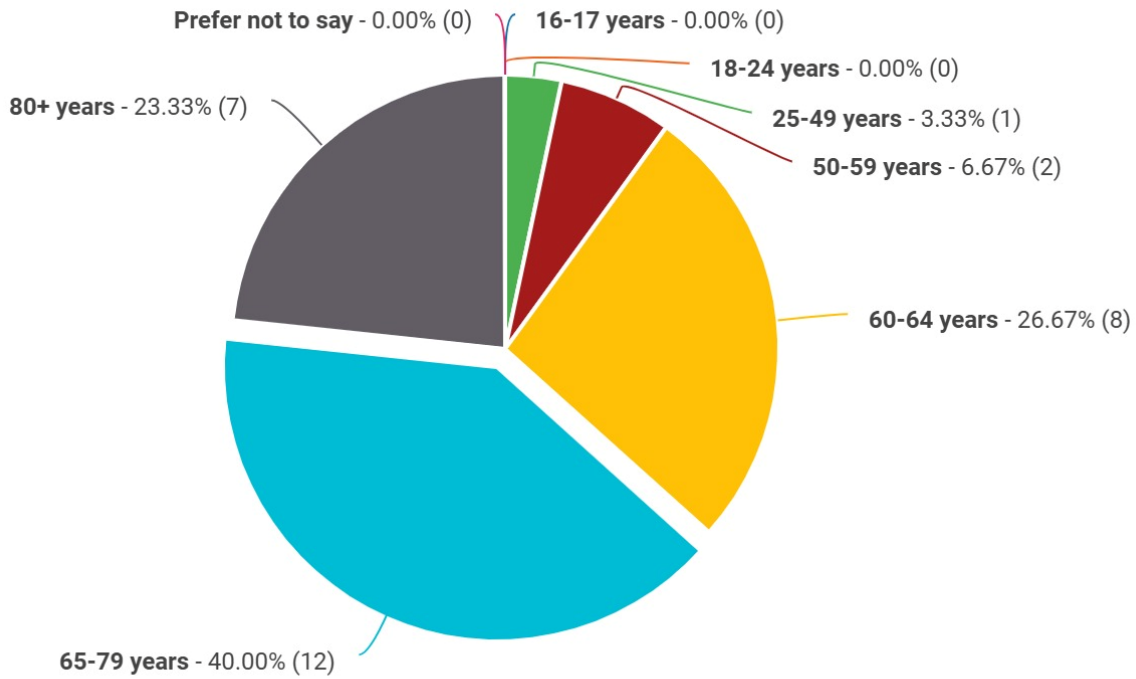
## Demographics

### 27. Are you:



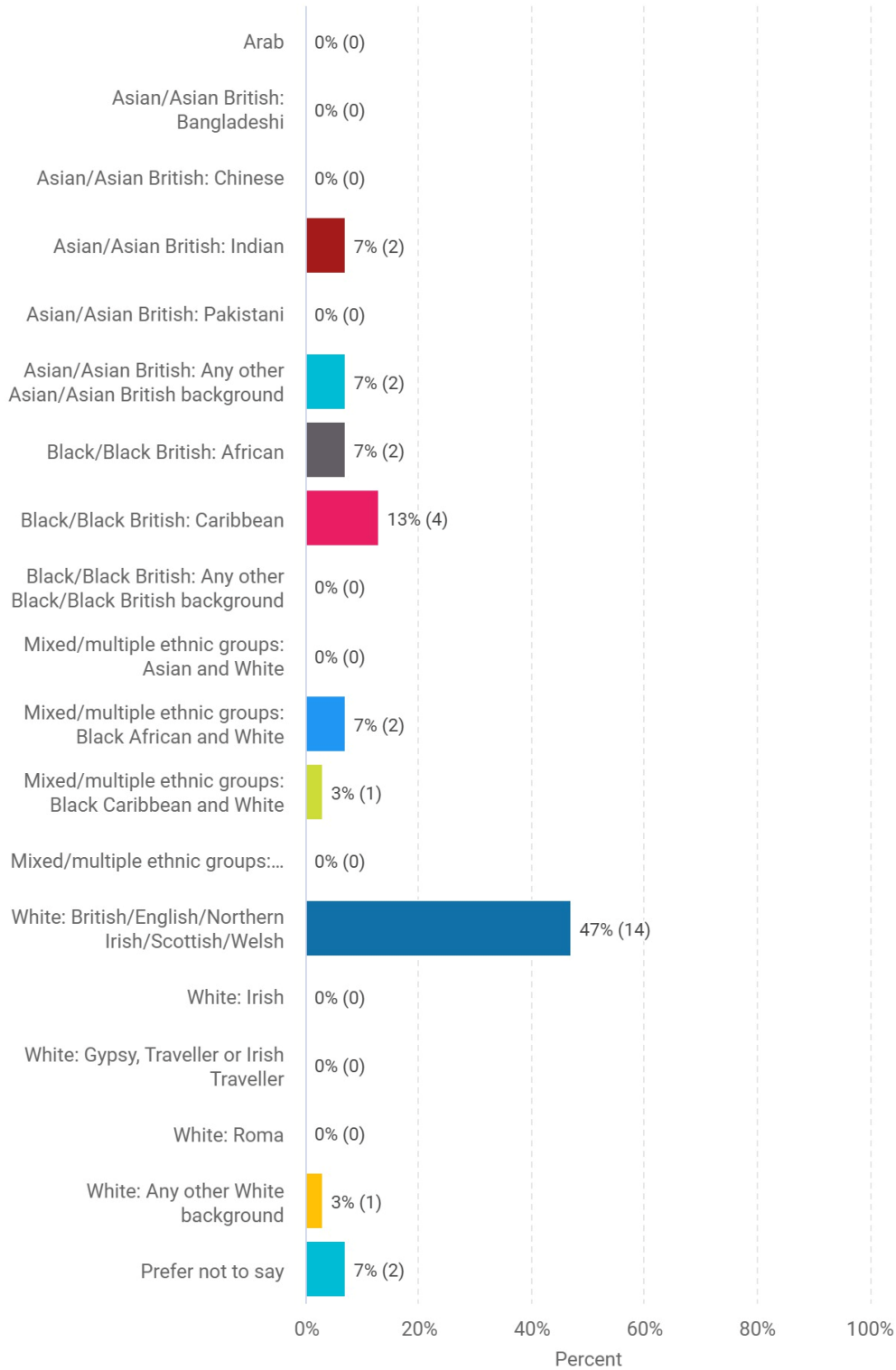
Slightly more men – 57% – were interviewed than women.

**28. Please tell us your age:**



Most respondents – 40% – were aged 65 to 79. The second largest age group was between 60 and 64, at 26%. The third largest group was over the age of 80, followed by 6% between 50 and 59, and 3% between 25 and 49.

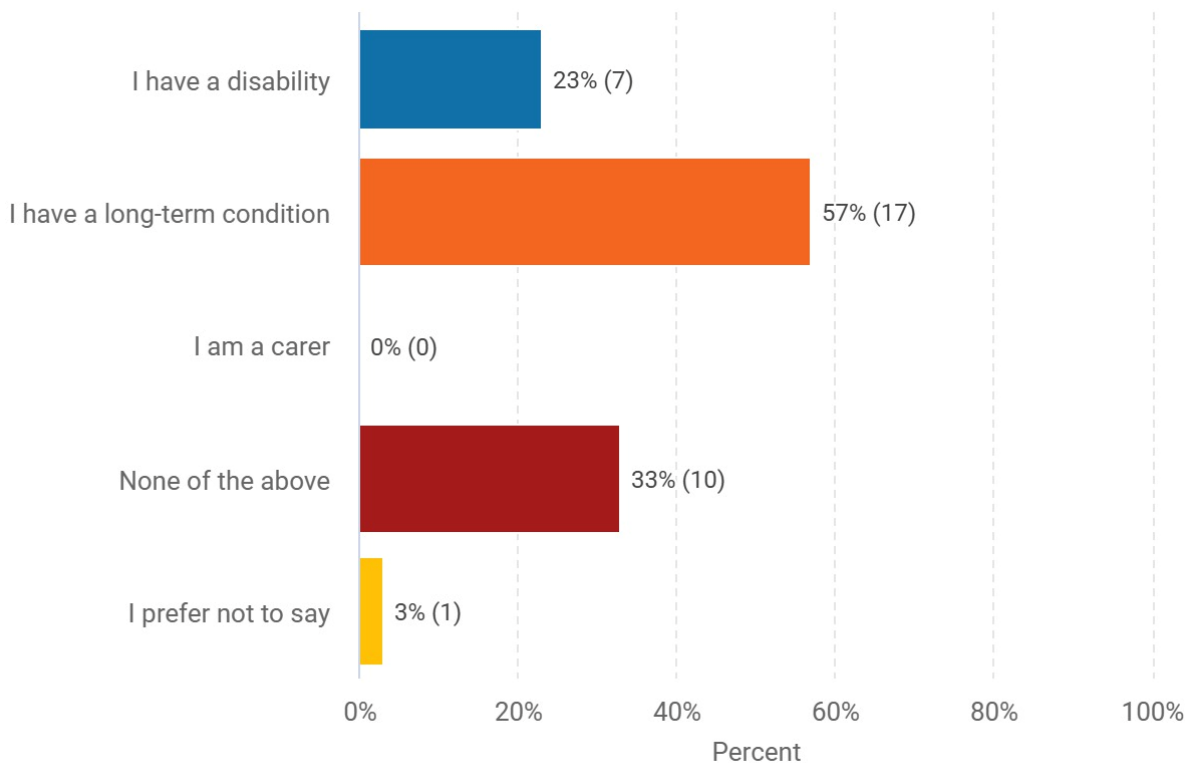
## 29. Please select your ethnicity:



Nearly half – 47% – of respondents described their ethnicity as White. The second largest group was Black/Black British: Caribbean at 13%. The two Asian/Asian British groups totalled 14%; 7% described themselves as Black/Black British:

African; and 7% Mixed/multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White. At least ten of the 20 responses needed to be from Black African, Black Caribbean, or South Asian backgrounds.

**30. Please select any of the following that apply to you:**



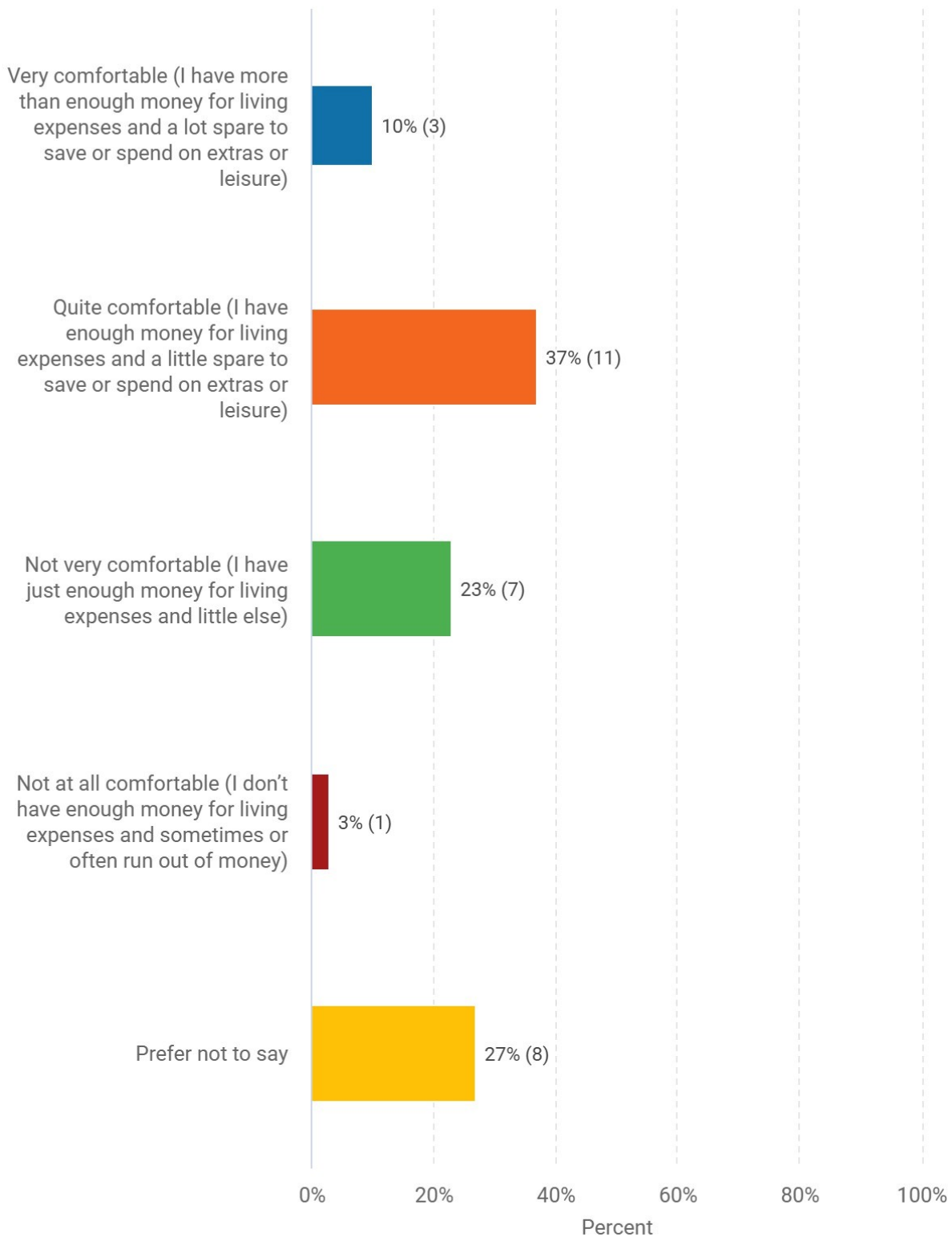
More than half – 57% - of respondents said they were living with a long-term health condition, and 23% said they had a disability. Some 33% responded that they had neither, and one person did not wish to answer.



### **31. Which area do you live in?**

Most people who chose to answer this question lived in Croydon, one was from Bromley, three from Surrey, and one from the city of London.

### 32. How would you describe your current financial situation?



This question received the most 'Prefer not to say' answers, with more than a quarter declining to share their financial situation. 10% said they were very comfortable, 37% said they were quite comfortable, 23% described themselves as

not very comfortable, and 3% not at all comfortable, with not enough for living expenses.

# Appendix

You can view a preview version of the survey at

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/preview/1QMNCI/4F87CC98C58F66BCB3AA9573FB40C4>



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X @HealthwatchCR0  
f [Facebook.com/HealthwatchCR0](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchCR0)