

## What helps children and young people to be healthy, happy and well?

### Voices of children and young people across the UK: spotlight analysis

#### Why?

RCPCH keeps children and young people at the centre by having a rights-based approach. Children and young people have the right to be involved in decisions that affect them (UNCRC Article 12)<sup>i</sup> and the right to have the best healthcare and health services, including input into medical training (UNCRC Article 24<sup>ii</sup> / General Comment 15<sup>iii</sup>). They also have the right to be involved via age and stage-appropriate means (UNCRC General Comments 12 & 25<sup>iv</sup>). To find out more about the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child, please read our submission to the Change NHS public conversation in 2024<sup>v</sup>.

The RCPCH&Us team have conducted several large consultations to **see what matters to children and young people, for improving their physical and mental health**. The aim was to ensure their voices were heard and made a difference to decision makers responsible for child health across the UK.

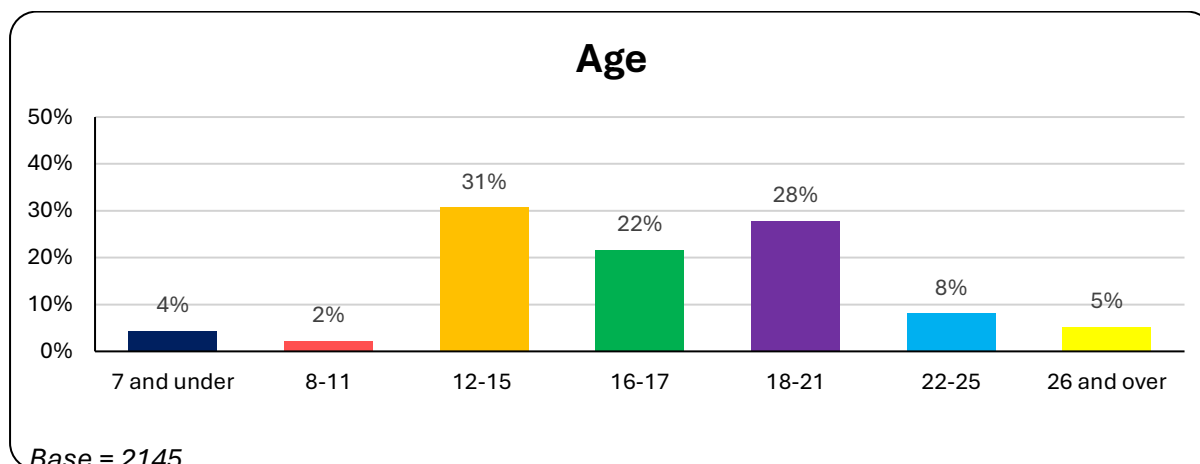
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#### How

We asked children and young people to tell us what mattered to them. We asked the following questions:

1. What ideas do you have for things that could be done to make the NHS better for children and young people?
2. How can the NHS help children and young people to be healthy, happy and well?
3. Would children and young people like to be involved in the training of healthcare workers? If so, how?
4. What specific training areas matter most to children and young people for their healthcare workers?

A total of **3085** children and young people shared the priorities that mattered to them, for improving children’s physical and mental health. Young people contributed from a range of regions across the UK and represent a range of age groups.



Most participants were female (56%) and from a White background (67%)

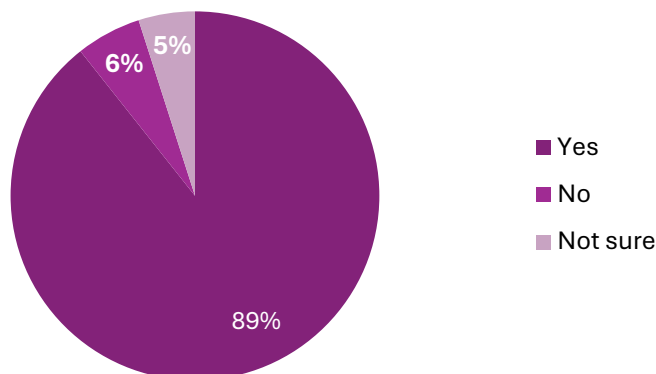
## Spotlight: Youth Voice and Rights

Most children and young people we spoke to **agreed that they should have the opportunity to share their views and ideas** on improving the NHS for young people and training the healthcare workers that support them.

### *Youth Voice in shaping the NHS*

Of the 2184 children and young people consulted, **89% answered “Yes”** when asked whether they felt that children and young people should have the chance to share their views and ideas on how to improve the NHS.

**Do you think that children and young people should have the chance to share their views and ideas on how to improve the NHS?**



Base = 2184

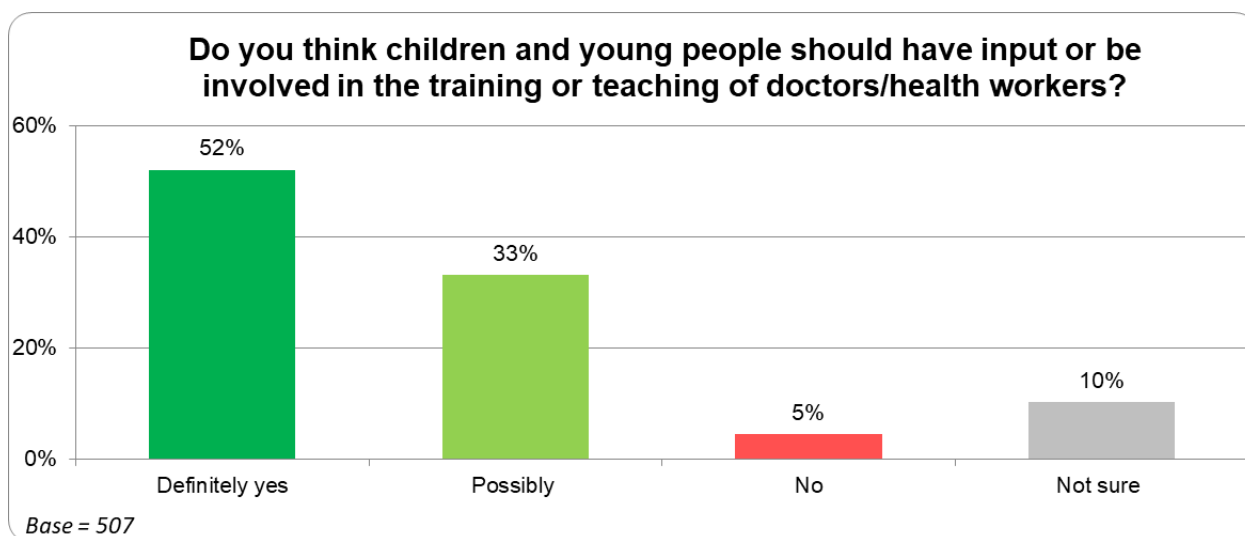
**Fig 1.** Percentage of children and young people who felt they should or shouldn't be involved in shaping the NHS

There were several reasons why some children and young people answered “no” that reflected previous experiences where they hadn't felt that their voice had been listened to, or considerations of the burden of responsibility and feeling that healthcare professionals should do more, rather than young people.

*“This is a tricky notion: Some children and young people know from previous experiences that the healthcare system is broken, and apathy has set in. So, what's the point? Will it help?”*

### **Youth Voice in NHS Healthcare Worker Training**

Of the 507 children and young people consulted, **85% answered “Definitely yes” or “Possibly”** when asked whether they felt that children and young people should have input or be involved in the training or teaching of doctors and health workers.



**Fig 2.** Percentage of children and young people who felt they should or shouldn't be involved in training doctors

They highlighted their willingness to support the training of doctors and healthcare workers:

*“First-hand personal stories mean so much more to people and help doctors and medical staff to understand and have empathy. Children and young people are our future and need to have opportunities to talk passionately about their views and beliefs on medical care. We need a medical system where we are all working together”.*

### **Youth Rights in Healthcare**

Children and young people felt it was important that they weren't overlooked in the training of doctors and healthcare workers, as something that directly affects them and the care they receive.

Of the 521 children and young people consulted as part of the Medical Training Review **95% said that healthcare workers should receive training in understanding children's rights in health.**

*“Understanding children's rights is important”*

## Three Key Priorities for Children and Young People's Health

Across both the Change NHS and Medical Training Review consultations, **three key priorities emerged for children and young people's health.** These priorities followed their healthcare journey, from **early intervention and prevention, to accessing services, and the support they experience when receiving care.**

### *Early Intervention and Prevention: Education and community support to promote healthy lifestyles and prevent health issues*

Many children and young people described the need for **more frequent and more informative, evidence-based education** on physical (i.e. healthy eating, exercise), mental (i.e. awareness, self-help) and sexual (i.e. contraception, consent) health to promote better overall wellness in children and young people. Some also felt that better education could be provided to children and young people to support them in managing their own health conditions, whilst on waiting lists for appointments. They thought that free education should be offered to children and young people in schools and youth groups, as well as to parents/carers.

*“Therefore, early intervention community care and preventing ill health are intertwined and must be viewed as such. They impact each other. Preventing ill health through education and support starts in the community it is too late by the time the patient reaches hospital admission.”*

Children and young people also advocated for more community-focused approaches, guided by the needs and experiences of children and young people.

*“Developing training and creating services that support health promotion and social prescribing. Bringing healthcare into the community. Make it fun and interesting for young people”*

Children and young people felt that support provided by the NHS should extend beyond clinical appointments and be better integrated into the community. This includes through schools (i.e. school nurses, mental

health support) and community health services. They felt that more funding should be given to developing access to healthcare workers that can interact with children and young people on a more regular basis (i.e. school nurse, community care specialists). Children and young people also highlighted the importance of peer support, and the benefits of being mentored or supported by other young people who have been through similar experiences to you.

*“Peer-to-peer mentoring. Someone who has been through the system and can help navigate some of the challenges facing children and young people - mental/physical health!”*

### **Accessing care: Improving access to support and reducing health inequalities**

One of the key priorities for children and young people were improvements to availability of support at the primary and secondary care level.

When asked what some of the most important things were to make the NHS even better for children and young people, most agreed that **equal access to good care** for all children and young people (95%) **and speeding up getting treatment** for seeing someone who can help (94%) was important.

*“Waiting times for appointments are for too long”*

There was a strong call to reduce the waiting times for appointment, particularly in the context of mental health care, where children young people felt that they had to wait until they were in crisis to be seen. 92% of young people felt that making health services easy to use and accessible was a high priority for improving the NHS.

*“Accessibility. This is a barrier when trying to access services. It has to be seen to be believed! And not all illnesses are visible!”*

*Providing care: Improved support and communication about children's health*

Children and young people we spoke to say a key priority for them was around supporting doctors and healthcare workers to **develop respect, empathy and the skills to create a safe environment and an inclusive culture of care.**

Many reflected experiences where they felt that their voices were not heard or believed when receiving care for their mental or physical health. Young people highlighted that they have the **right to be spoken to directly about their health concerns** (not just through parents/carers) and that clinicians should make an effort to provide information about conditions that is easier to understand, and less daunting and alienating (children and young people friendly!)

*“Doctors and health workers should be trained in listening without judgment, understanding how trauma or difficult life experiences affect young people, and being more aware of issues like bullying, online safety, and social media pressure. They should also learn how to spot early signs of mental health struggles and know how to support us in a calm, respectful way.”*

Children and young people also felt that more training could be provided to doctors around **supporting young people to navigate and understand the healthcare system.**

*“Explain processes of how to get the care needed and how it is decided who to allocate care to, especially within mental health services.”*

Young people also called for **better continuity of care** for those struggling with chronic illness or mental health problems. They requested the option to see the same clinician across multiple appointments who understands your background and healthcare journey.

**Further information about the different full reports can be found at  
[www.rcpch.ac.uk/voice-of-the-nation](http://www.rcpch.ac.uk/voice-of-the-nation)**

**To enquire about the full data packs, findings or formal response  
submitted to NHS England from RCPCH &Us, please contact  
[and\\_us@rcpch.ac.uk](mailto:and_us@rcpch.ac.uk)**

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<sup>i</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [cited 2025 May 19] Available from  
<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-rights-child>

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid

<sup>iii</sup> United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child: General Comments [cited 2025 May 19] Available  
from  
[https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&DocTypeID=11](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&DocTypeID=11)

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid

<sup>v</sup> NHS 10 Year Health Plan - RCPCH and RCPCH &Us organisational responses | RCPCH [Internet]. [cited  
2025 Mar 28]. Available from: <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/key-topics/nhs-ten-year-plan/organisational-responses#rcpch-us-response>