

DIGITAL SELF-REFERRAL FOR HEARING CARE: UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE’S NEEDS AND PREFERENCES

Background

People who try to get help with their hearing often struggle with confusing referral processes, limited appointments, and rigid options for accessing support. One potential solution is to offer digital self-referral.

In England, many areas already offer self-referral pathways to audiology. RNID wanted to understand people’s need and preferences when using this type of service.

Method

RNID sent a short online survey to people who had completed the RNID Hearing Check between February and May 2026. We asked for views on:

- People’s readiness to seek support
- What would make a digital self-referral service usable and acceptable
- When and why non-digital options are needed

Profile of Respondents

A total of 365 people completed the survey. Respondents are predominately older adults, with 90% aged 55 years or older. Respondents also access the internet frequently, with 96% reporting they access the internet daily. Around half of respondents (42%) have had an in-person hearing test, whereas 58% had not.

Results

People’s readiness to seek support

Most survey respondents (88%) say they would feel ready to act and book an appointment if they noticed changes in their hearing in the future. Most survey respondents (66%) would also rely on noticeable changes in their hearing as a prompt to seek support from a healthcare professional.

If in the future you noticed changes in your hearing, what would be the main thing that would prompt you to seek support from a healthcare professional?

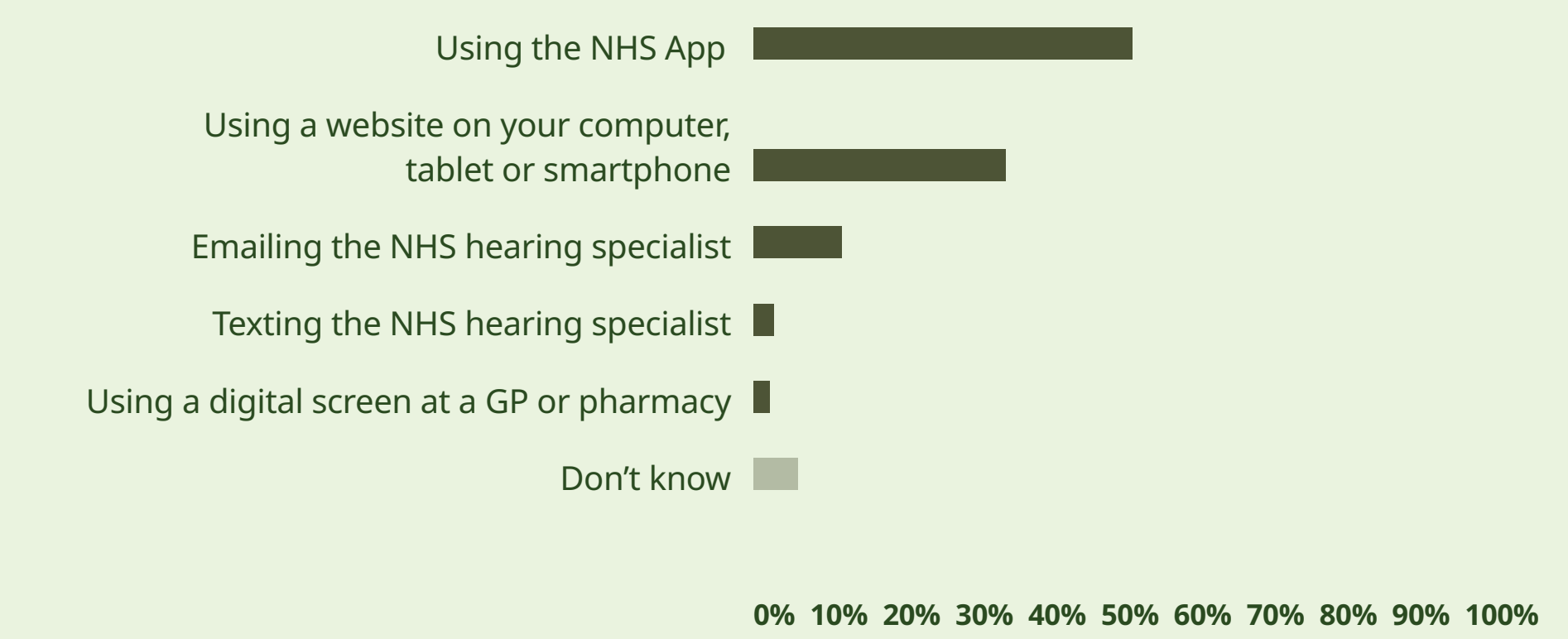


What would make a digital self-referral service usable and acceptable

Most survey respondents are open (87%) to using a digital self-referral service to get support from an NHS hearing specialist.

For starting the referral process, the most popular option is to use the NHS App (51%). The second most popular option is using a website on a computer, tablet or smartphone (28%).

Preferred method to start a digital self-referral

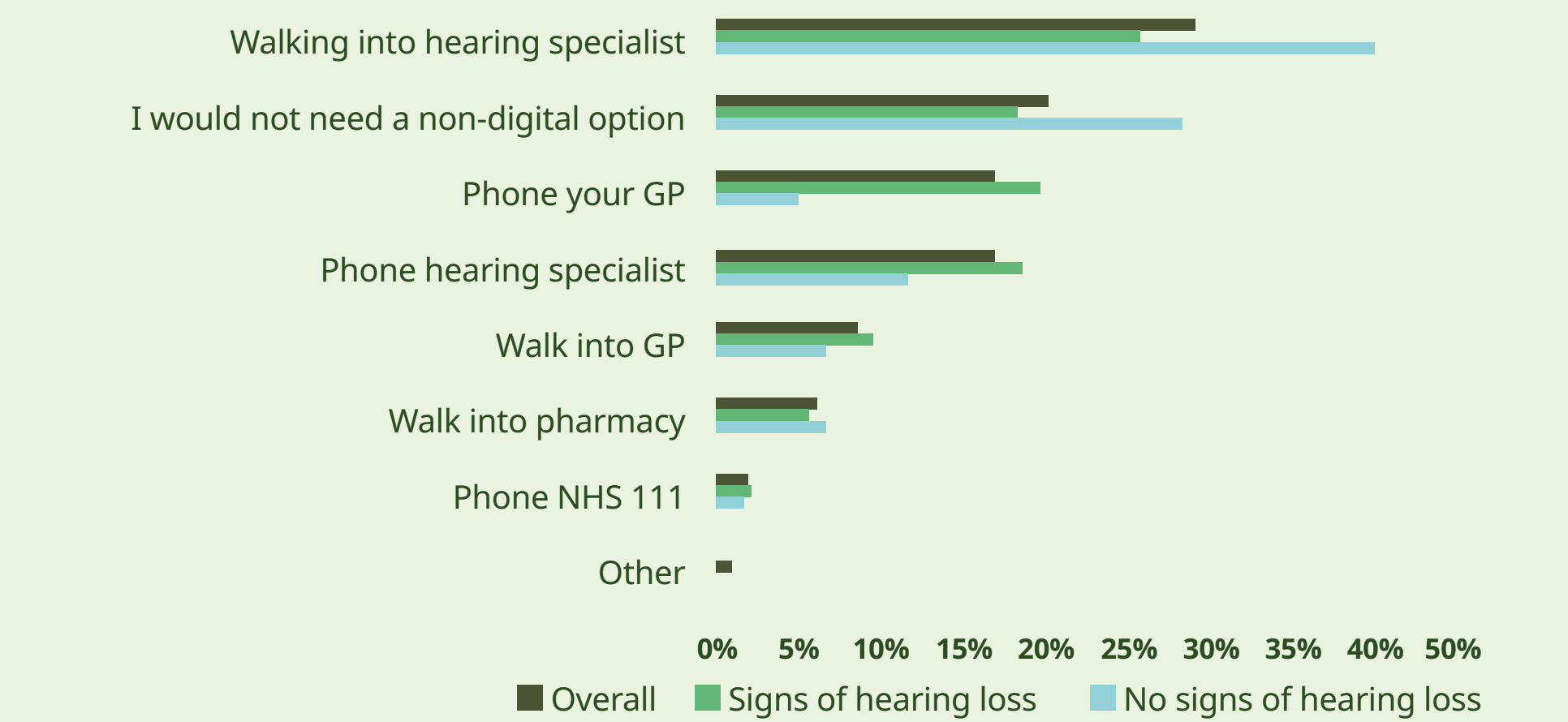


When and why non-digital options are needed

Most respondents say nothing would make it difficult to use a digital self-referral service (80%).

Among respondents who expressed a preference for a non-digital option, walking into a hearing specialist clinic is the most popular option (29%).

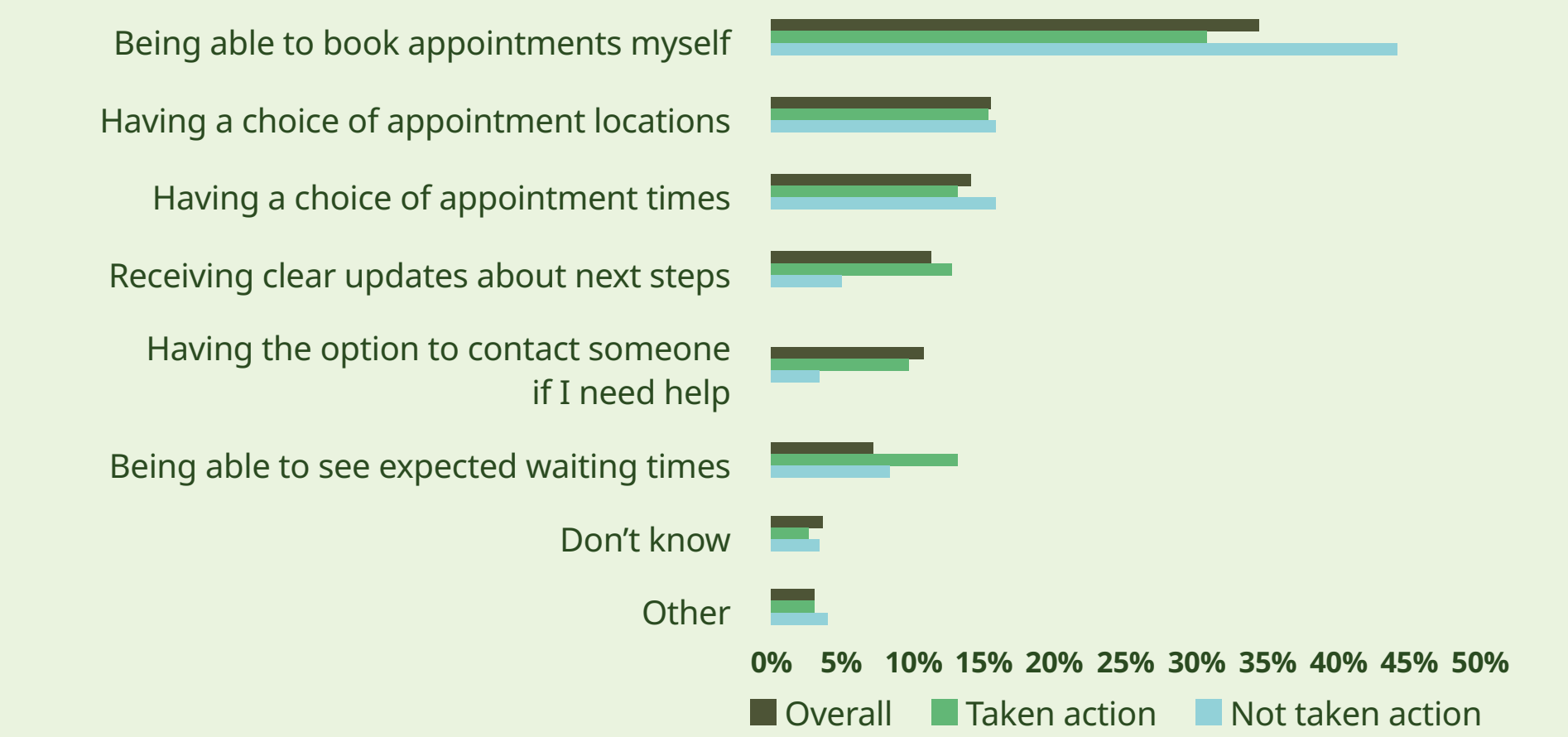
Which of the following would be most important to you when using a digital self-referral service for hearing support?



The most frequently chosen requirement for a digital self-referral service was clear explanation of their results and next steps (80%), followed by reassurance that they are using the right service for their needs (44%).

The preferred feature among respondents is the ability to book appointments themselves (34%). There is also demand for having a choice of appointment locations (15%) and choice of appointment times (14%).

Which of the following would be most important to you when using a digital self-referral service for hearing support?



Key findings

- For older adults who are digitally engaged, there is very high appetite for digital self-referral services for hearing health.
- Integrating services into existing trusted digital channels could reduce barriers in help-seeking.
- People want more choice over when, where, and how they access appointments.
- There is an opportunity to support people at the point they are ready to act by making it easy to book an appointment.
- People still value the flexibility of drop-in services

Limitations

- Respondents are likely to be more comfortable using digital tools than the wider population, which may influence their views on digital services.
- People who completed the survey may also be more engaged with their hearing health than people who did not engage with the survey. Therefore, the non-response bias may show a stronger interest in hearing health.
- While the number of responses enables analysis of overall trends, the findings cannot be generalised to the wider population.

Next steps

- The findings show the need for:
- Digital self-referral to audiology that integrates with the NHS App or trusted websites
 - Developing features that give people more choice in accessing appointments and reassurance they are using the right service
 - Further research into how best to support people who need more time and information before seeking advice from a healthcare professional

