



# **Use of Near Me Groups Jan - Dec 2023**

Version 1.0  
March 2024



Digital Health  
& Care Scotland

# 1 Introduction

Near Me Groups was launched in January 2022 to provide a facility to offer group video consultations in an environment purpose built to support the needs of both providers and members of the public. It replaced legacy video conferencing platforms and Microsoft teams for patient / client facing group communication.

In addition to providing standard video calling functions such as group chat, breakout rooms and a lobby function, Near Me groups has been purpose built to meet information governance standards when communicating with patients and clients. Key features include:

- Call management functions to improve caller entry.
- The ability to select that only caller initials are shown, while full names are displayed to the provider.
- Chat function that does not retain data following the end of the call.

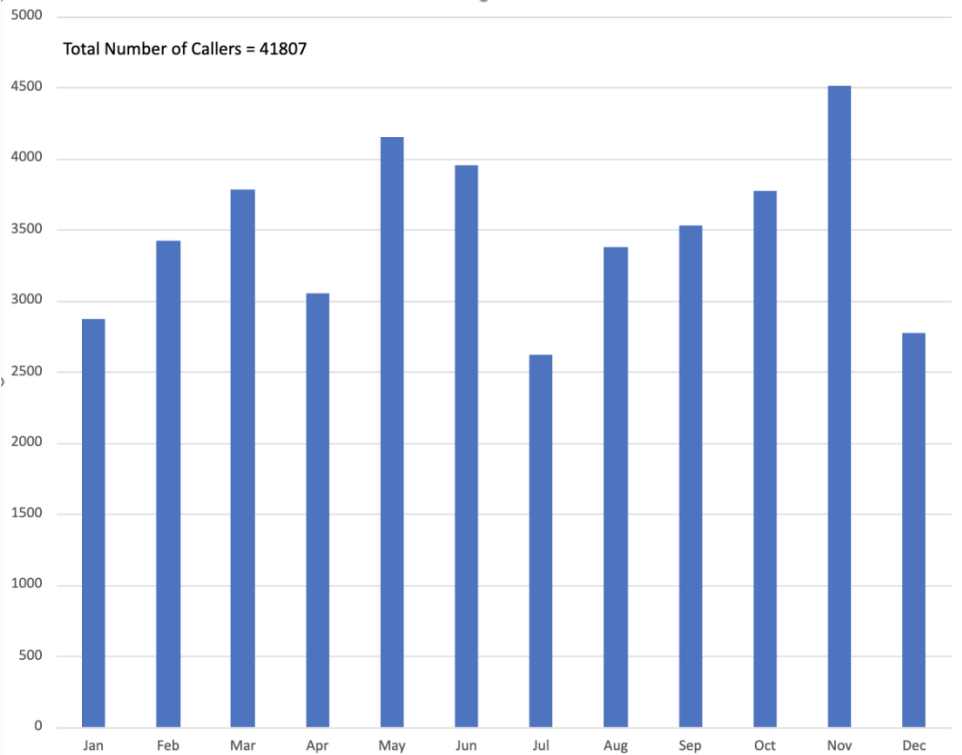
This report provides an overview of the use of Near Me Groups from January to December 2023.

For more information on Near Me Groups, please refer to this [leaflet](#) and [webpage](#)

# 2 Overall Usage

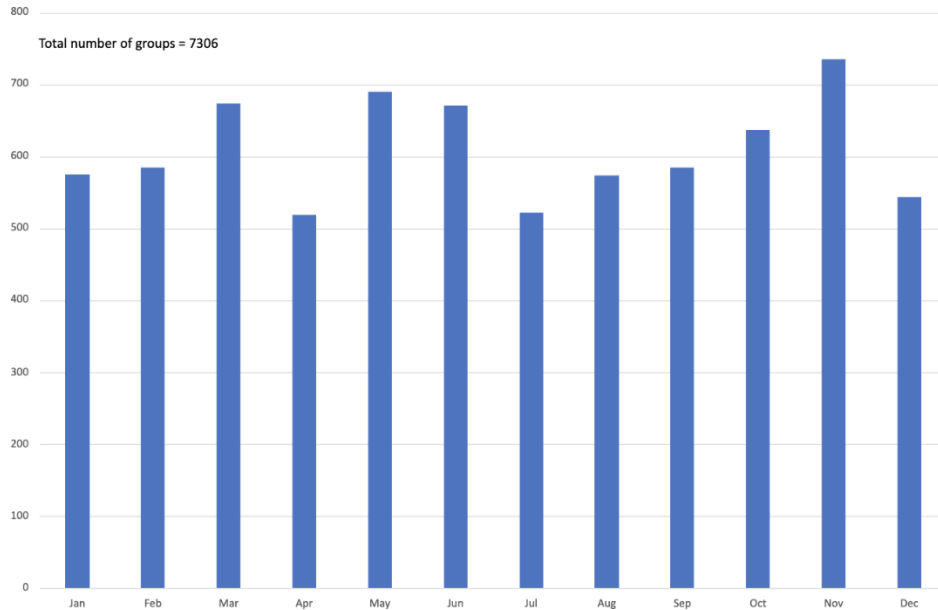
Figure 1 shows the number of callers attending a Near Me Group consultations. Figure 2 shows the total number of group sessions held. Use patterns are similar to one-to-one calls, with significant drops in activity during holiday periods. In total, 42k callers attended 7300 groups.

**Figure 1 Number of Callers joining Near Me Groups in 2023**



The average number of callers joining groups each month has increased from 1757 in 2022 to 3484 in 2023. This represents an increase of 34%.

**Figure 2 Number of Near Me Groups in 2023**



The average number of groups hosted each month has increased from 450 in 2022 to 609 in 2023. This represents an increase of 15%.

While groups sizes have increased significantly, the number of groups has seen a more modest increase. This may indicate increased confidence and skills in clinicians to host larger groups and increased acceptance and uptake by people joining groups.

## 2.1 Usage by Organisation

Table 1 shows the number of group callers by organisation, with Grampian, Lothian and Greater Glasgow & Clyde the heaviest users.

**Table 1 Number of callers by organisation**

Organisation	Total no. of Callers
NHS Grampian	10853
NHS Lothian	10000
NHS Greater Glasgow & Clyde	6292
NHS Lanarkshire	3520
NHS Fife	3153
NHS Highland	2193
3rd Sector	1586
NHS Dumfries & Galloway	1560
NHS Ayrshire & Arran	1487
NHS Tayside	391
NHS Forth Valley	348
NHS Golden Jubilee	181
Higher Education Institutes	95
State Hospital	61
NHS Shetland	35
NHS Orkney	28

Other	12
NHS Borders	12
NHS Western Isles	0

Though NHS Grampian is also a high user of Near Me 1:1 calls, NHS Lothian usage of 1:1 calls is below the national average. Specifically, the NHS Lothian Weight Management & Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Team report that patients have expressed a preference for in person appointments for initial or 1:1 consultations but this does not seem to have impacted Near Me attendance for group sessions.

### 3 Usage By Specialty

Table 2 lists the top ten specialties based on the number of callers.

**Table 2 Number of callers by Specialty**

Specialty	Total No. of Callers
Dietetics	11203
Community Mental Health	6954
Psychotherapy	5702
Child & Adolescent Mental Health	4174
Clinical Psychology	3752
Midwifery	3246
Chronic Pain	3045
Endocrinology & Diabetes	2826
General Surgery	1542
Integrated Care	1101

Within dietetics, diabetes education and weight management groups make up the largest groups.

Mental health specialty consists of groups supporting, mindfulness and neuropsychology treatment, Survive and Thrive trauma support and Step On Stress for example

Midwifery services are delivering online antenatal classes.

Other diverse services making good use of Near Me Groups are health visitors for Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) multi agency planning groups, Bi-polar Scotland support groups, Covid rehab support groups and surgery prehab/rehab groups.

#### Case Study 1

*Control IT Plus (CIP) is a lifestyle programme for people who have been diagnosed with, or are at risk of developing, Type 2 Diabetes. The programme aims to give people a better understanding of Type 2 Diabetes and help them to self-manage their condition as best as they can. More information can be found on the [Control IT Plus website](#).*

*In February 2023 the first CIP Groups were hosted on Near Me Groups by GGC following a transition from Microsoft Teams. Since then 2304 people have attended CIP groups in 2023.*

*Prior to online groups 16% of newly diagnosed patients engaged with Type 2 diabetes education services in GGC. Now approximately 25% of newly diagnosed type 2 diabetes patients engage with the online CIP programme.*

*GGC could not deliver education to the volume of patients currently participating using an “in-person” model. Previously all the clinicians would drive to a site, set up and attend for the whole three hour session. Now clinicians log in, do their slot and leave.*

*94% of patients attending CIP thought the resources were “just right”.*

*Patients said:*

*“The structure worked well, and the presentations being delivered over the Internet suited me better than attending an in-person meeting in the company of 20 other individuals.”*

## **Case Study 2**

[The NHS Lothian Weight Management & Type 2 Diabetes Prevention Team](#) run Tier 3 Dietetic intervention groups consisting of six sessions over 12 weeks. These groups are a core weight management intervention for the service.

*Both weight and attendance of patients is recorded.*

*Throughout 2023 the team ran a series of both in person and Near Me Tier 3 Intervention Groups to support people with their weight management. Below is a summary of their outcome data:*

### **Patient Outcomes**

	<i>In-Person Group</i>	<i>Near Me Group</i>
<i>Weight Loss Range</i>	<i>1.5kg – 3kg</i>	<i>3kg – 4.1kg</i>
<i>% of patients who met their weight loss target</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>60%</i>
<i>Average attendance</i>	<i>78%</i>	<i>79%</i>

*\* This is the difference between peoples start and end weights and represents the minimum and maximum amount of weight lost by group attendees.*

*In conclusion the Near Me group achieved at least comparable outcomes as the in-person groups and provided choice, improved accessibility for patients and reduced travel.*

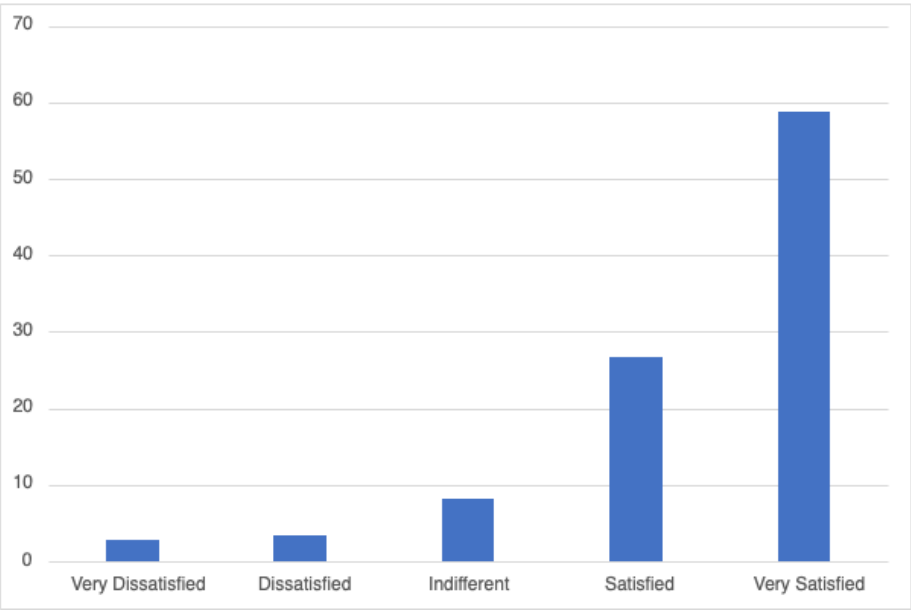
## **4 Caller Feedback**

Caller feedback is assessed via an end of call survey. Though organisations can opt to display their own survey, around 2000 responses were collected in 2023.

These have consistently shown high levels of satisfaction with 94% of respondents stating they would use Near Me Groups again and 86% of respondents stating they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the group video call Figure 3.

86% of callers were satisfied or very satisfied when asked “How easy was it to use group video calling?”

**Figure 3 Percentage of How happy were you with your group video call?**



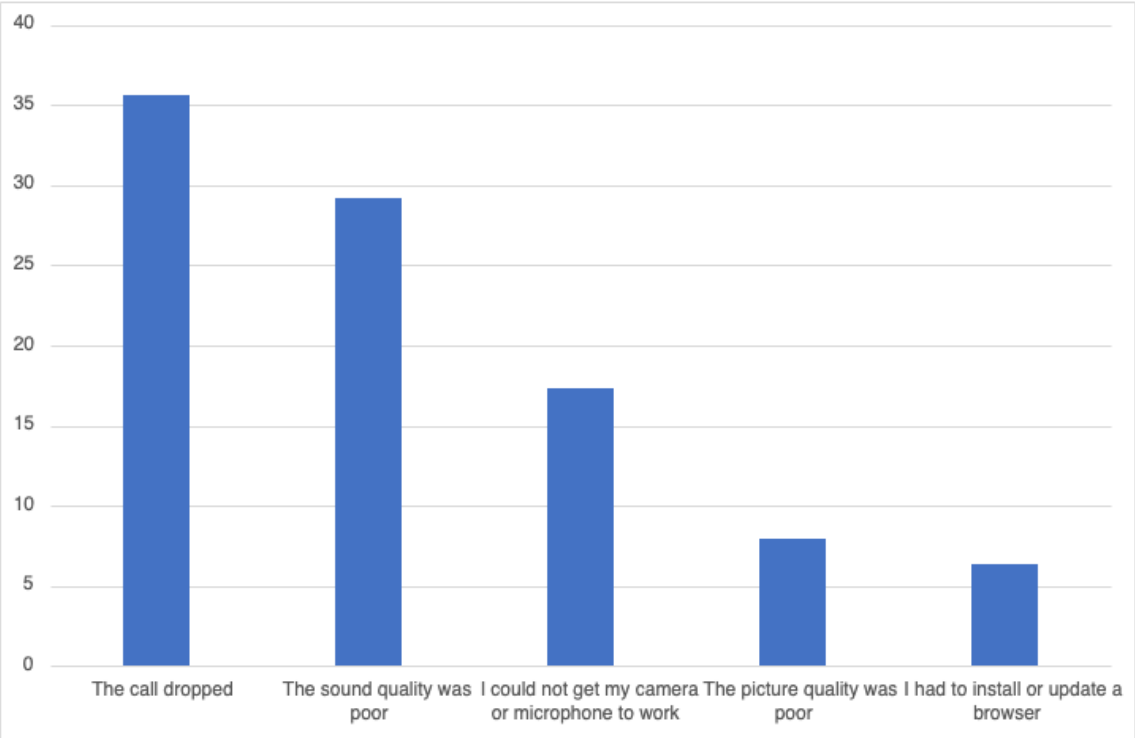
On average each caller saved a round trip of 36 miles. This represents 1.5 million miles of avoided travel in 2023.

**4.1 Technical Issues**

Callers reported a higher rate of technical issues, with 31% of respondents reporting an issue, compared to 19% for 1:1 consultations.

Figure 4 provides a breakdown of the issues reported. This shows a similar pattern to 1:1 calls, with the exception of a higher percentage of calls dropping. This may be due to a difference in the underlying video systems that support 1:1 and group calls.

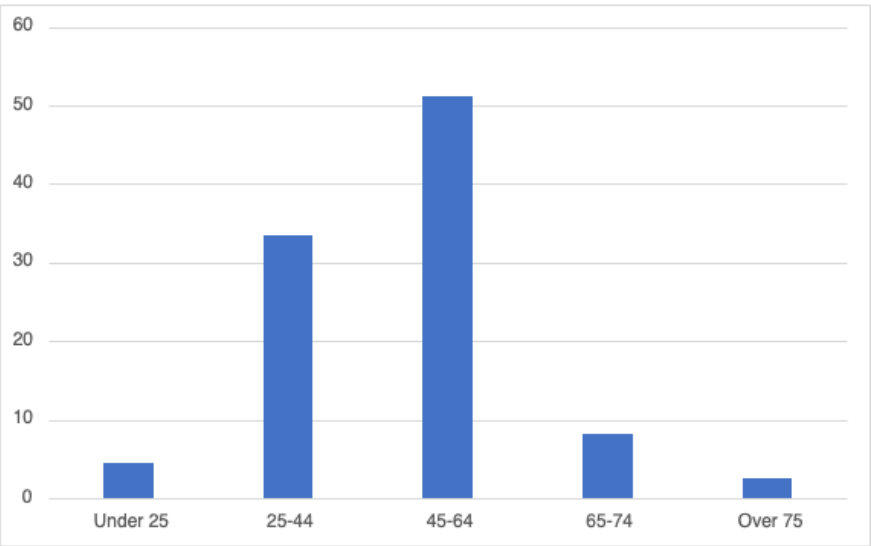
**Figure 4 Percentage of reported technical issues in Near Me Group Calls**



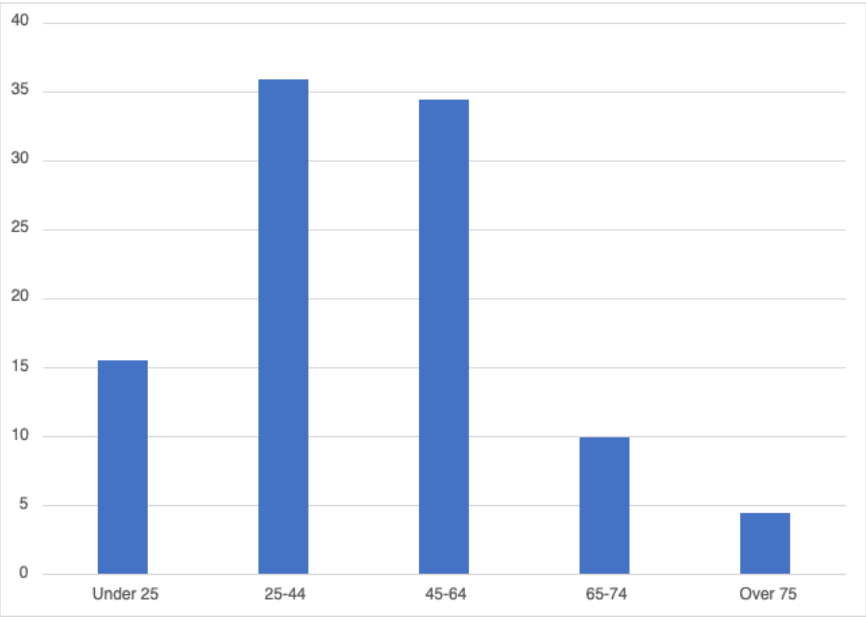
**4.2 Age Distribution**

Figures 5 and 6 show the age distribution of both group calls and those participating in 1:1 consultations.

**Figure 5 Ages Distribution of Near Me Group Callers**



**Figure 6 Age Distribution of Near Me 1:1 Callers**



Group callers have a higher proportion of 45-64 and 65-74. This reflects the age of people with diabetic related needs who make up a high proportion of group callers.

**4.3 Qualitative Caller Feedback**

"much easier than getting the ferry in the lashing rain. Thank you"

"much much easier than taking a ferry and a bus, which is very difficult with chronic pain and mobility issues"

"Thank you for having it online as this option made it possible to participate"

"With the extremely poor weather (windy and rainy all day long), it was so nice to have this session via online. If I had to travel, I wouldn't have attended as it would be unsafe to travel out in this weather"

"It was very informative and helpful. Not sure how far I would have had to travel to an in person group"

"I was worried about being seen or heard by other people but it has actually been nice to see and hear other's experiences and emotions on the video call and I feel more comfortable being in my own home"

**5 Provider Feedback**

A key feature of Near Me is the ability to provide callers with a simple web link that remains the same for all sessions. Providers have noted that this significantly reduced admin burden when arranging groups, with callers invited by text message, appointment letter or simply joining from a link on a website.

Providers also noted that Near Me groups required significantly less technical troubleshooting to enable people to join the call compared to Microsoft Teams. In addition, all providers have access to live technical support during work hours provided by the National VC Support Team.



## 5.1 Qualitative Provider feedback:



## 6 Discussion

Group sessions have been utilised successfully by the NHS for many years. The COVID pandemic and the need for social distancing provided a shift in the use of digital technologies to communicate with patients and callers. Though 1:1 consultations grew rapidly, due to the availability of a suitable platform and the need for social distancing, the lack of a suitable client facing solution for group consultations hindered uptake. Though some groups utilised traditional video conferencing systems or Microsoft Teams, neither platform provided an adequate solution.

Since the launch of Near Me Groups on the Attend Anywhere platform in early 2022, a steady increase in activity has been demonstrated with group consultations now accounting for around 10% of all callers.

While the number of groups sessions held in 2023 has increased by 15% over the previous year, the number of callers has increased by 34%. This increase in group size is likely due to increasing confidence for holding larger sessions.

Over half of all callers were associated with sessions in dietetics and mental health, with smaller number in midwifery, chronic pain and endocrinology (for the management of diabetes). These specialties generally have a long history of providing in-person group educational and peer support sessions, or group mental health therapy sessions. However, the transition to video groups is not universal, with around half of all callers attending services in NHS Grampian and NHS Lothian.

Though patient outcome measures are limited, where they have been collected, outcomes for Near Me Groups is as good as, if not better, than in-person sessions.

Feedback from service providers has been positive. They have reported that Near Me groups saves time and money, avoids travel, reduces the administrative burden of in-person events and allows for increased attendance from a wider geographic area. These efficiencies should be considered as part of Boards recovery plans.

Feedback from patients / callers has been good, with similarly high rates of satisfaction as 1:1 participants. An additional benefit highlighted has been the ease of attendance. Some users reported that they would have struggled to attend multiple sessions in-person. This may underpin limited evidence of a reduction in DNA (did not attend) rates for video groups compared to in-person groups.

Though it does not appear to have impacted caller satisfaction rates, the increased incidence of technical problems is a concern compared to 1:1 calls. This is currently being addressed by the vendor. The underlying video technology used for group consultations is scheduled to be replaced by Autumn 2024 to bring it into line with the new 1:1 caller experience, due to be released in Spring 2024.

## **7 Recommendations**

While the use of Near Me Groups has grown rapidly since its introduction, there remains significant scope to extend its use to other Health Boards, clinical specialties and services. This has the potential to improve clinical outcomes, reduce variation, increase efficiency, reduce costs and improve access to services.

Recommendations are:

- Services are asked to consider implementing Near Me Groups as a replacement for in-person groups where appropriate. This could be part of a blended approach.
- Services are asked to consider how Group Consultations can be extended to new services areas to improve access and reduce waiting times.
- Consistently offer Near Me groups as an option for people to reduce travel for both staff and callers – reducing travel spend, time and carbon footprint.
- Continue to support the develop of “cross border” groups within Mental Health.
- Continue to promote the use of Near Me Groups as part of the NHS Recovery agenda.
- Identify and address the barriers that may exist in services that prevent them from offering Near Me Groups.