

Experiences of health and social care in Sheffield

Key insights from April- May 2026

Between April – May 2026, we gathered insights from 208 people using health and social care services across Sheffield. People shared a mix of experiences, with many positive examples of care, alongside some less positive accounts. Insights have been shared relating to a wide range of services including GP practices and hospital care. We have also heard experiences related to mental health support, social care and NHS 111.

GP services

Between April and May, 82 people shared their experiences of more than 30 GP practices across the city. 38 people (46%) provided positive feedback about their GP surgery. Of these, 25 people specifically reported receiving good-quality care, while 10 people highlighted timely access to appointments.

The majority of less positive feedback focussed on the quality of care and treatment received, as well as difficulties accessing GP appointments which included challenges getting through to practices by telephone and long waiting times to see a clinician.

We also heard that some patients experienced difficulties obtaining referrals for specialist care or were not always informed about the full range of referral options available. An example of this was highlighted during a visit to a local Pain Group. People spoke positively about the group, they enjoyed the practical experience and found it fun. However, several people told us they were not aware of the Pain Clinic and would have welcomed information from their GP about the service as a potential referral option.

Group members also shared concerns about physiotherapy services, accessed either through their GP practice or Sheffield Teaching Hospitals. Some felt that the quality of support had declined over time. It was reported appointments often focused on being given exercises to complete at home, which were not always explained clearly. They felt without sufficient guidance or additional support, the exercises were not very effective.

“I have been really well looked after by my GP and everything is really good.”

“I got a doctor’s appointment straight away.”



“It’s disappointing to feel like our doctors no longer care for us.”

“I have had to push for every referral I have had.”



Hospital Care



A total of 57 patients, family members, and carers shared their experiences of hospital care. Of these, 46% (26 people) spoke positively about the good quality care and treatment they received from a range of services, including Jessops, Charles Clifford, Chesterman, Long Covid Hub, Pain Clinic, Colposcopy and Colonoscopy. Positive feedback was also shared about a patient bleeper system offered at appointments with the hearing department. This allowed patients to wait in a quiet area or go outside for fresh air, while being alerted when it was time for their appointment.

“Staff were brilliant, they knew what they was talking about and put me at ease.”

Most of the less positive feedback related to concerns about the quality of care received, and long waiting times for urgent care, outpatient appointments, and surgery. We also heard requests for greater clarity about how decisions are made regarding patient prioritisation, including how clinical staff assess urgency when triaging cases and allocating appointments.

“Waiting 2 years for (...) after cancer still no date for surgery it’s absolutely devastating.”

Patients also reported long waits in other areas of the hospital. We heard concerns about lengthy delays when collecting medication from the pharmacy at the Hallamshire. Patients also described difficulties contacting the Patient Booking Hub to confirm, cancel, or rearrange appointments, with some reporting waits of up to 50 minutes.

“The hospital pharmacy at the Hallamshire, it takes ages to get your medication.”

Feedback was shared about the quality of patient correspondence, particularly the layout and formatting of letters. Concerns were raised about the templates currently in use, which were described as poorly designed and difficult to read on mobile devices. Specific issues included font choice, the use of symbols, boxed sections, and dark background colours. It was suggested that the hospital review its current letter templates to ensure they are clear, user-friendly, and accessible for patients.

“As well as lacking the right information, the layout of letters is simply poor.”

We received feedback relating to identification badges, staff currently wear either yellow or blue badges. We heard some patients found the yellow badges easier to read because of their bright background and the larger, clearer font used for displaying staff names.

“The yellow badges are much easier to see and read.”

Patients shared concerns about access to hearing aid batteries. Some people are only given one pack at a time, which typically last around a week. We heard that reordering batteries can be difficult, as it can

sometimes take a long time to get through on the phone. Patients can then collect batteries from the hospital, but we heard this can be costly, particularly for patients who use public transport or use taxis due to health conditions. Batteries can also be sent by post, but we heard deliveries can sometimes take up to two weeks, leaving them without replacement batteries in the meantime.



Lack of support for sex addiction

Concerns were raised about the lack of NHS support for people experiencing sex addiction. Some individuals reported that after seeking help from their GP, they were not given any available support options. Others felt unable to seek support due to fears of stigma or concerns that details of their addiction would be recorded in their medical notes. People described feeling isolated and wanted the NHS to play a greater role in raising awareness, reducing stigma, and providing clearer referral pathways, support and resources.



“Appalling standard of service from carers who quite frankly couldn't care less.”

Adults and children's social care support

Seven pieces of feedback were received relating to social care support, with six raising concerns. Most related to the quality of care provided to individuals or their relatives by home carers. Some reported that different home carers frequently attended, meaning they had to repeatedly explain their care needs and preferences. Another person said that their home care package was not meeting their needs despite having raised the issue with social care before. We also heard of a positive example, where social care services had provided valuable support to a disabled child, successfully meeting the family's needs.



NHS 111

Eight people shared feedback about NHS 111, with seven raising concerns about the service. Most of the issues related to poor communication and a lack of empathy from staff, as well as inaccurate advice given around accessing care. We also heard reports of long waits for call-backs, with some people saying they did not receive a return call as expected and had to contact the service again.

“They tell me to call a certain dentist. When I do the dentist tells me they can't help me.”

Gender Identity Clinic

We received feedback about waiting times for the Gender Identity Clinic, with people expressing frustration about both the length of the wait and the lack of clear, up-to-date communication. The [clinic website](#) states it was last updated on 7th April 2025, and “as of November 2025, the average wait time is 280 weeks.” We heard this caused confusion and reduced confidence in the accuracy of the information provided. People were also concerned by the statement on the website advising individuals not to contact the clinic for further information about waiting times, as no additional updates could be given beyond what was published online. This left some people feeling unable to access reassurance or clarity about their place on the waiting list or likely timescales for support.



Mental Health Support

23 people shared positive feedback about the support they had received from Community Mental Health Teams, Crisis Teams, Talking Therapies, and Primary Care Mental Health Teams. We heard several positive examples of care and support, including good experiences at the Community Mental Health Team Tabernacle drop in group. People reported enjoying the opportunity to meet new people, build connections, and develop new friendships.

“I’d like to say Tabernacle is a welcoming little hub, where I feel equal and cared for. The people are very friendly and I try and come regularly.”

We also heard from other people who shared less positive experiences. Views were shared about the initial tick box forms or questionnaires used by some services, and how they can sometimes restrict how well people are able to share their personal experiences or how they were feeling. As a result, people described not meeting specific criteria access some services, sometimes leaving them unsure where to go or who to contact next.



Concerns were raised that some people experienced difficulties engaging with mental health services because of a lack of clear information about what to expect about the process. This uncertainty left some individuals unsure about how services worked and what support was available to them.

Some people felt they needed to be at crisis point before they would be referred by a practitioner for mental health support or be experiencing significant distress to be accepted through self-referral for Talking Therapies.

Some people described CBT as being more of a 'tick box' exercise with limited opportunity to engage with personal history and experiences. Additionally, people raised concerns about the level of empathy they had experienced from some mental health practitioners.

"2 times we were turned away because we did not have panic attacks yet or thoughts about negative things."

NHS Dentistry

During this period, 15 people shared feedback related to NHS dentistry. Of these, eight people shared positive sentiments about their dentist and the care and treatments they had received.

A further three people shared negative experiences, relating to the quality of treatment experienced and cancelled appointments. Four people reported difficulties in being able to find an NHS dentist.

We regularly contact dentists across Sheffield to get an accurate picture of which practices are accepting new NHS patients so we can signpost people to them. After we called round in May, we discovered just three practices across the city were able to offer appointments to new adult NHS patients which was a significant decrease compared to our previous call rounds.



"Have never been able to register with an NHS dentist and given up trying multiple times. "



Impact from our last briefing (Feb- March 2026)

South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (SYICB), Sheffield Teaching Hospitals (STH) and Sheffield Health Partnership University have responded to our [last briefing](#) outlining how they plan to address areas for improvement.

Response from South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (SYICB)

AI telephone systems –We have recently heard from a small, but increasing, number of patients who are struggling with new AI GP Receptionist tools that some GP Practices have chosen to implement. Equally, there are some practices who appear to have taken a different approach to implementation, which has been better received by their patients. It has been really important for us to receive this feedback, as we are now

working with partners, including Healthwatch, and looking at providing some advice and guidance to GP practices who have implemented this, or are considering implementing it, about how to involve their patients and some best practice implementation ideas.

Hopefully when we roll out our advice and guidance, we will see improvements in those practices who have already implemented the system in a way that doesn't work particularly well for patients.

Response from Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

Long waiting times to access care: Work is ongoing across services to reduce waiting times, with gradual improvements being seen; services are being reminded to provide clear contact points and maintain regular communication with patients while they are waiting.

Emergency Department (ED) experience during long waits: Food provision is in place for patients admitted in ED (including hot meals after 12 hours), with additional snacks available; work is underway to improve access to food for those in the waiting room, including a proposed information leaflet signposting to locations where food can be accessed and discussions with catering about healthier and overnight options. Mobile phone charging solutions are limited by staffing resource.

Car parking and transport challenges: Although capacity remains constrained, revised parking tariffs have improved space availability and remain broadly comparable with other hospitals; support options such as non-emergency transport and concessions are promoted, and a new Environment and Access Group is being established to involve patients in shaping improvements to access, safety and the physical environment.

Lack of Easy Read information: Responsibility for identifying accessibility needs sits with Patient Information Leads for each area, supported by central guidance, training and the Patient and Staff Information Team. Processes are in place to request and produce Easy Read materials, and all available Easy Read patient information leaflets are available to access on the STH website (<https://www.sth.nhs.uk/patients-visitor-information/patient-information-leaflets/view-all-easy-read/>).

There is some information available on Mencap's website: How to get information you can understand from health and social services:

<https://www.mencap.org.uk/easyread/accessible-information-standard-ais>

Barriers for visually impaired (VI) patients: STH has been building and strengthening their links with Sheffield Royal Society for the Blind (SRSB) over the past few years, and have commissioned staff awareness training which is delivered by SRSB and being run for the third year for Sheffield Teaching Hospital (STH) staff and volunteers. The new patient portal being rolled out across the Trust is Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) compliant to provide an accessible digital option for patients with VI. Additional practical support is planned through the rollout of Vision Impairment toolboxes on wards.

Travel cost barriers to accessing care: Information about the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme is available and signposted on the STH website, including how to claim reimbursement: <https://www.sth.nhs.uk/patients-visitor-information/coming-in-for-an-appointment/>

Appointment reminders: SMS reminders are the default for outpatient appointments and are associated with improved attendance, though some disruption has occurred during the transition to the new Electronic Patient Record (EPR). Work is ongoing to improve reliability and ensure patients are contacted through their preferred communication channels.

Response from Sheffield Health University Partnership

Thank you for sharing this briefing and for continuing to gather and highlight the experiences of people using health and social care services across the Sheffield. We have welcomed the opportunity to reflect on this feedback and use it to inform improvements to our services.

It is encouraging to see that the majority of feedback shared about Sheffield Health Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust services was positive, with people highlighting good quality care and treatment received across a range of services including Beech, Stanage Ward, the Decisions Unit, Eastglade and Northlands. We are pleased that patients felt supported by our teams, and we will ensure this positive feedback is shared with staff across these services, in order that staff benefit from knowing what is working well for the communities they serve.

We also recognise the feedback from people who reported difficulties when trying to access the right mental health support. Access to timely and appropriate support remains a key priority for the Trust, and we continue to work closely with system partners across Sheffield to improve pathways and transform in order to ensure people are directed to the right service at the right time to receive the right support. It may also be helpful to clarify that Sheffield Health Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust does

not provide ADHD assessments for people under the age of 18, as these are provided through children and young people's services in Sheffield. We continue to be grateful to everyone who has taken the time to share their experiences through Healthwatch. Service user, family and carer feedback plays an important role in helping us understand what is working well and where we need to channel our focus to continue in improving mental health services for the people of Sheffield.

This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared with us through our outreach and engagement work. You can read more findings from our visits to local groups in our [Community Insights blogs](#)
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

Online: healthwatchsheffield.co.uk

Phone: 0114 253 6688

Email: info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk

Text: 07415 249657

