

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield – Key issues from November 2021

What are we hearing?

This month, we heard 109 pieces of feedback from people in Sheffield about their health and social care. We've heard lots of mixed feedback about GPs, hospital and community mental health services. There has been lots of positive feedback about the flu clinics and Covid booster clinics. However, we're still hearing from people who can't get dentist appointments.

Flu clinic and Covid Boosters

We heard lots of positive feedback about getting a flu jab in November, and getting the Covid booster. People reported that they were in and out of their appointment really quickly. They felt that these services were really efficient and well organised. For the Covid booster appointments, reminders were sent out, and there was praise for having the essential information written in over 30 languages.

"Liked the fact that I have received both a letter and text offering the vaccination."

GPs

This month, we heard feedback about 25 different GP surgeries. Much of this feedback was really positive, with people praising their GPs for giving them professional, organised, person centred care. People have reported that doctors and nurses take their time with appointments, and that in these appointments, patients do not feel rushed. A couple of people who needed to be referred to other services said that this was done quickly, and they were put at ease.

"The whole team work together to provide a caring and reassuring service despite time and resource pressures."

Appointment booking at GPs

Whilst people appreciated getting good care from the doctors at their GP, some people were not as happy with the appointment booking systems.

Several pieces of feedback noted that it can be difficult to get an appointment. People have reported that they have to wait on the phone from 40 minutes to an hour to speak to reception, and even when they get through, they are not guaranteed an appointment. One person said that the service from the doctor was really good, however it took them sending a complaints email to the practice to get an appointment.

"It's so frustrating. I feel that I'm spiralling because I can't get an appointment."

Communication issues at GP

People have spoken about not being able to access appointments due to communication issues with reception staff. It has been reported that reception



staff have given patients the wrong information about accessing appointments, or reception have not communicated with medical staff about patient's arrival for appointments, meaning the patients have to wait longer than usual to get treatment. Furthermore, a couple of people have reported that reception staff could be more understanding of patients who are concerned or worried about something.

Pharmacy and GP communication

A few people have told us that there have been miscommunications between GP staff and pharmacies, meaning patients' prescriptions aren't delivered to the pharmacy on time, and consequently, patients end up going without medication. One person was told their prescription had been sent to the pharmacy, when it had not been. Another said that their GP practice "sits on the orders for 10 days".



Hospital Care

We've heard a lot of positive feedback about hospitals in Sheffield. People felt that the appointment booking process was simple, and instructions were clear on how to drop off relatives at the hospital, who had mobility impairments. We've heard about inpatient experiences being really smooth, giving the patient confidence, and that atmosphere was friendly.

One issue raised was about outpatient appointment reminders. One person said that they only received telephone calls to remind them about appointments, and they felt that staff weren't trained to support deaf patients. They felt that the hospital should send an email or text for appointment reminders instead.

"At every stage leading upto the operation I was kept fully informed and treated with the greatest of respect."

Emergency Services

We received mixed feedback about the emergency services in Sheffield. One person said that there were long waiting times, but felt this was to be expected. Despite being a busy department, they felt that staff were all kind and comforting. Another person said they felt that Covid regulations about having to wait alone without a family member were not followed very vigorously, as some people were allowed relatives to wait with them, while others were not. Someone else felt that staff in A&E treated them differently because they were homeless, and they felt judged by staff.



Getting the right mental health support

We've also heard mixed feedback about specialist community mental health services. One service user said their therapist is helping them to rebuild their life after years of them not getting the right care.

"finally helped me to rebuild my life and give it back to its rightful owner"

Another patient felt that their community mental health service didn't provide patient centred care, and didn't do the necessary checks to make sure the patient was receiving the right care.

A couple of people told us that the pathway to getting mental health diagnosis was not clear for different mental health conditions. Because they haven't been able to get the correct diagnosis, they have not been able to get the treatment or support they need.



Dentists

This month, we heard from 12 people who couldn't get an NHS dentist appointment for routine care. One person was trying to get a dentist appointment for their family, including a young child. Another was pregnant, and was concerned that they wouldn't be able to get the free dental care they were entitled to because they couldn't get an appointment. Someone else was meant to have treatment at the Charles Clifford dental hospital, however the hospital hadn't contacted them for several months. When the patient chased this up, the hospital couldn't give them treatment at a time suitable to the patient, so the patient had to go back to their regular dentist without treatment.



In December our national body Healthwatch England publishing a briefing about the crisis in NHS dental provision. We are joining them to call on the government and NHS England to speed up dental contract reform and provide meaningful, sustained funding to tackle the underlying problems of access and affordability. Read more about this [on our website](#).

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 by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion, who we've partnered with to provide a feedback-sharing platform

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

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