

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield – key issues from April 2021

What are we hearing?

In April we heard a varied picture of people's experiences across the city. We heard largely positive feedback about the Covid-19 vaccination rollout, and fewer issues were shared about access to dentistry than in previous months, but we also saw very varied experiences of accessing support from GPs. We heard some cross-cutting issues about people's confidence or ability to make formal complaints (at GP practices and in Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services), and some family carers told us they didn't feel included in decisions about their relative's care.

Covid-19 vaccination

We continue to hear from people about the rollout of Covid-19 vaccinations across the city. This month we heard about 10 positive experiences, with Manor Park Medical Centre being especially highlighted by patients who received their vaccine there. People shared that the system was well organised and quick, with friendly staff.

"I received all the information I needed and it was all over in less than two minutes"

The 2 issues we heard about this month came from family carers – one person's relative was in a high risk category but wasn't offered a vaccine as part of that priority group. She unfortunately contracted Covid-19 and was very unwell. Another person's relative received a first dose of the vaccine, but the date was recorded incorrectly, meaning that they were struggling to access the second dose within the recommended 12 week time period.



Children and Young People's mental health

This month we've heard from the parents/carers of 3 young people who accessed CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) and were unhappy with the experience. One parent told us they were unhappy with the treatment their child received, but when they spoke to the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS), they didn't feel they got a supportive response. They now don't have the confidence to make a formal complaint.

Another person said their child had received a diagnosis from CAMHS and medication had been advised. However, they have since been unable to get an appointment to discuss this and start the treatment – they are finding this delay difficult as they also had to wait a long time for their initial assessment.



"They are feeling very frustrated [...] and haven't been given a reason as to why it's taking so long"

Accessing a dentist

Most months, difficulties accessing NHS dentistry for urgent needs is one of the topics we receive the most enquiries about. However, we heard from fewer people about this in April.

One person did contact us to say that their treatment was cancelled part way through in March 2020, and was subsequently delayed for over a year. They have still yet to receive treatment, and have been told they will have to pay for the course of treatment again. Another person told us they have contacted multiple dentists to receive help after severe dental issues ended in hospitalisation. They are still in pain but were not offered an appointment, with dental practices saying that they're not accepting new NHS patients.

We also heard about 2 patients who have been treated at the Charles Clifford Dental Hospital recently, and they shared very positive experiences of effective treatment and caring staff.

We continue to engage with commissioners for dentistry in the region to raise individual issues and emerging concerns directly.



"The pain is keeping me awake at night"

GPs

We've heard around 20 stories of people accessing – or trying to access – GP services this month. 5 people said that despite phoning multiple times and spending a long time on hold, they were unable to get through to make an appointment. We gave advice to 2 individuals who needed help understanding the process of registering with a GP, and one person who was struggling to register near their home, and couldn't travel far due to multiple complex health needs.

Where people have received treatment from their GP practice, we've heard mixed experiences. 2 people told us their GP was always very supportive, and had been working especially hard to keep up that level of care during Covid-19. 3 others, however, told us they didn't feel supported by their GP when they went to them with various health concerns. 2 people said that support varies even within the same practice. These individuals were concerned that they don't experience good continuity of care between different doctors.

Some people choose to make a complaint when they don't feel that a GP practice has provided adequate care. One person who made a complaint said that they hadn't received a response, and they don't trust the practice to handle the complaint properly. Another person had made a complaint previously, and said that practice staff had threatened to take them off their patient list if they made another.

"I've been trying so long I'm actually worried my condition is getting worse"



"I will hear different things from each of them when going in for the same problem"



People living in residential care settings

We've heard about 3 care homes across Sheffield this month. One person (the relative of a resident) said that communication throughout the pandemic has been poor, with no regular updates and unclear information about visiting. They told us that they had wanted to explore the Essential Family Care Giver role to help them support their relative, but had found it difficult to get information from the care home about whether this was possible.



Another person raised concerns that a care home seemed understaffed and not properly equipped to care for their relative, who has complex needs. They told us they were struggling to be involved in their care, despite understanding the person's needs well.

"contradictory and unclear information on the website in relation to visiting"

One of our voluntary sector partners told us about a third care home – they shared that staff don't always communicate well with residents or their families, which has led to a lot of confusion, especially around visiting guidelines. They also reported that some of the residents' needs don't seem to be fully understood by staff.

Sheffield City Council has updated their guidance about [visiting care homes during Covid-19](#). This information may help you to have a conversation about your particular circumstances with your relative's care home.

Including family carers in decisions about treatment

We know that family carers have a huge wealth of knowledge about those they care for, and can provide valuable insight to help health and social care professionals. This month we have heard 3 stories of family carers not being involved in discussions about the care of their relative, including the story from the relative of a care home resident described above. Another person told us that they weren't involved in decisions about their relative in hospital, despite having power of attorney for them, and they were discharged into a care home without their knowledge. Finally, the family carer of someone with a complex history of mental health problems said they were not involved in discussions about their relative's care, despite having helped them through similar circumstances previously.



"decided to move him back to their family home, without consulting [the family member]"

Positive experiences in hospital

We have heard from 7 people this month who had to spend time in hospital for a range of reasons – going to A&E, having an MRI scan, or spending a longer period of time on a ward. Apart from one difficult experience with hospital discharge described above, all of these people shared very positive stories of high quality treatment. They also highlighted that friendly and caring staff were key to feeling comfortable while in hospital.



“I was only in bed for a minute when I was offered a cup of tea [...] You all deserve medals”

Mental health services

We’ve heard stories from 2 people who say that mental health treatment had been difficult to access during the pandemic. One person said that they previously had a good relationship with mental health services, but over the last year they’ve had little contact – their care coordinator missed appointments, and they were promised call backs that never happened. They said that this had damaged their trust in the service. Another person said they had to constantly repeat information they’ve told to other doctors, nurses, and social workers, which meant they didn’t have time in appointments to cover the things they really wanted to talk about.



“I’ve always had a good relationship with mental health services but I’ve lost that”

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

Online: healthwatchsheffield.co.uk

Phone: 0114 253 6688

Email: info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk

Text: 0741 524 9657

