

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

**What are we hearing?**

This month we continue to hear some recurring themes – that people are struggling to make appointments at their GP, cannot access a dentist, or are finding it difficult to get the right mental health support for them. We also heard some practical areas for improvement in Sheffield’s hospitals, and some cross-cutting issues about access to information about health and social care.

**Getting support from a GP**

In August we heard 28 experiences about 14 different GP practices. 16 stories were positive – with people sharing that their care was efficient and supportive. These experiences included one person who said that their GP had repeatedly fought for their family to get the right support, and three people who said they were able to get quick and convenient same-day appointments.

Some people had a very different experience – the most common negative experience related to being unable to get through to their GP on the phone and not being able to make an appointment.

We continue to hear mixed perspectives on telephone appointments. One person told us they want a face to face option, as they can’t build a relationship with their doctor over the phone. Someone else told us they prefer telephone appointments as it offers them privacy, and they don’t have to travel to the practice.

Last month we heard concerns that GP receptionists were having to have medical conversations with patients above their training level. This month we also heard concerns that triage conversations were having to be carried out by receptionists rather than doctors – this didn’t feel appropriate to one patient.

*“Doctor was very understanding and supportive to me”*

*“I am working and cannot spend 30 minutes every day calling again and again”*

*“It’s left to the receptionist & I, both non medics, to decide how urgent or not my symptoms are”*

**Hospital – care, practicalities, and communication**

We heard around 12 experiences this month of visiting hospitals in Sheffield. Where people made positive comments, these mostly related to the quality of care they received – that surgeons or consultants delivered a good standard of treatment. People also reported that staff were friendly and supportive.

Where people shared less positive comments, these were largely about other factors that impacted on their stay. For instance, someone found it hard to access a lift when



they needed one, and we also heard that signage around the hospitals was not good. We heard that A&E does not have enough seats for everyone, and that when appointments in clinics run late, patients are left in the waiting room unsure what is happening. People would like reassurance that they are still going to be seen.

*“Long queue outside, no seats for those that may need them”*

Other areas of concern came from relatives of people who had been in hospital – 2 people said the hospital had not communicated with relatives well, giving incorrect information, or not giving updates which meant family had to repeatedly chase the hospital for news. This included one instance where someone with lasting power of attorney for their relative in hospital was not told about their diagnosis or treatment.

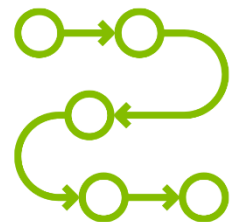
## **Mental health – getting the right support**

We heard from two people this month who felt let down by their service provider. Both felt they didn't get enough support from the services – one felt they were forgotten and left without care once their 6 allotted appointments were over, which left them struggling even more with their mental health. The other person didn't feel that staff at the substance misuse service were supportive enough, or were listening to them about their own preferences for care.

*“Care coordinator was only given me for 6 appointments [...] I'm left with no support from the staff, no skills to help me, no therapy and left really struggling.”*

We also heard from some people who had ideas for how mental health services could improve. One person said they benefited from the support of the Crisis Team, but that the service would be better if they stuck to pre-arranged call times; they said it can be distressing to wait for a call which doesn't come until later in the day.

Another person completed an online IAPT course, but felt it wasn't right for them – it was online with little opportunity for engagement, and they were on the call with around 20 strangers. They would prefer something individual, but will have to go back to their GP to try to access this – the system is not streamlined enough to allow them to transition to alternative support more easily.



## **Adult Social Care**

We heard positive feedback about a local care home, with a relative saying they provided good care, and that they'd had good communication with staff. They suggested one area of improvement – increasing relatives' ability to communicate directly with residents over the phone or through other means.



## Dentistry – difficulty accessing care

The number of enquiries we hear about dentistry is beginning to increase again. In August 7 people contacted us who were unable to get a dentist appointment.

Some of these were non-urgent issues (such as wanting a dental check up) and we were able to inform them about current policies - dental practices are still operating at lower capacity and prioritising urgent cases. We did hear several more concerning issues – such as one person who couldn't access dental advice or treatment for a painful toothache and someone else who was struggling to eat because of denture issues and can't access care for this.

*“I am willing to travel as far as needed as I am getting quite desperate at this point”*

Dental commissioners looked into some of the issues we raised this month and spoke to individual practices to ensure correct procedures were being followed. Unfortunately, even where procedures are being followed, reduced operating capacity means some people are not able to access care. Healthwatch England is continuing to raise this at a national level.

## Access to information across the health & care system

We heard some stories this month about access to information, which relate to a wide range of services and organisations. We heard from one person that it is difficult to get access to information if you cannot read – there are very few other options available, especially now most services are operating online instead of face to face. We also heard that someone is unable to find clarity on what care they can access due to their immigration status – they said this information is not easily available. People trying to access dental care are also finding it difficult to work out what care they should be able to get – online information has not made this clear to them.



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](https://healthwatchsheffield.co.uk)

Phone: 0114 253 6688

Email: [info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatchsheffield.co.uk)

Text: 0741 524 9657

