

How is covid-19 impacting on people's access to and experience of health and social care services in Sheffield?

These emerging issues are based on feedback that we have received from individuals, as well as issues that have been brought to us via voluntary and community sector partners. This briefing is intended to be a snapshot of what we are hearing about; we hope that it is of use to services, and commissioners of services, in indicating potential areas of focus.

Background: [See previous briefings here](#)

Key issues from 13th– 30th July 2020:

- **New regulations around face coverings** - since new rules were announced regarding mandatory face coverings in shops, we have received a large number of enquiries about them. We also supported the development of [face covering exemption cards](#) for use in public settings. Concerns around face coverings were varied:
 - Most enquiries were from people who have a disability or health condition which means they find it extremely difficult to wear a face covering, such as Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD).
 - We spoke to several people who did not have access to their own computer or printer to print an exemption card, and were unable to get one from their GP.
 - We heard from one young black man who told us he felt unsafe covering his face in shops, due to the suspicion he already faces from staff.
 - We heard concerns from one member of the public about misuse of face covering exemption cards. He was worried that efforts to tackle the misuse of the cards would make it even more difficult for people like him who have real difficulties wearing a face covering.
- **Digital exclusion** – we know that digital exclusion has been an issue throughout the pandemic, with people who don't have access to the internet finding it hard to seek information or access services. We have also heard about people who usually do use the internet, who are being impacted by a lack of access to computers. Libraries and other public spaces which offer internet access are closed, and a local voluntary sector organisation told us about internet problems in local residential homes which meant residents could not get online to contact family.
- **People paying for support they haven't been able to access** – we shared on [15th May](#) that people in receipt of direct payments are paying for the care they usually receive, even though their actual support may have reduced. We have continued to hear about this from people who access this care, and from voluntary sector organisations who've told us about this happening to their clients. We know that Sheffield City Council has implemented this policy to ensure the continued availability of services after restrictions ease, however some people in receipt of care do not feel this has been explained clearly to them.
- **Day services for people with a learning disability** – some day services are now reopening, but voluntary sector organisations have told us that blanket choices are being made for people about whether they can start accessing these again. They would like to see people being supported to make informed decisions about when and how to access these services, as well as supporting services to open safely.

- **Mental Health services:**
 - Inpatient mental health services – advocates for people in inpatient settings have told us that some wards only have one phone. This makes it difficult for people to contact their relatives or advocates, especially when visiting in person is not allowed. Sometimes the phone can go missing for a while, which increases difficulties.
 - Community Mental Health teams – people are finding it hard to contact their Care Coordinator because many staff are working from home. This was a more significant problem at the start of lockdown, but some people are still struggling with communication.
 - People under a Community Treatment Order - some advocates have told us about difficulties with Hospital Manager’s Hearings, where the advocates are not always told about the meetings ahead of time. Other advocates have been told they cannot join their client because they can’t do 3-way calls. This means some clients are alone for the meetings, and may misremember or not fully understand what happened. Previous measures in place to combat this (a schedule of the hearings being provided to advocates) seem to have stopped.