

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield – key issues from  
December 2020 and January 2021

**What are we hearing?**

Over this period, we heard about an even wider range of health and social care services than normal. It includes some very positive experiences of Covid-19 vaccines and some mental health services. However, we have also heard concerns about a lack of communication from services, as well as additional feedback on ongoing topics like access to dentistry, and the issues facing Deaf people in the city.

**Covid-19 vaccines**

We are starting to hear from people about getting a Covid-19 vaccine. Most of the stories we've heard (around 10 of 15) were extremely positive, with people sharing that vaccination centres were efficient and organised.

Where we have heard about problems, they relate to access, rather than experience of having the jab itself. One older person told us she couldn't travel to the vaccination site, and hadn't been offered an appointment closer to home. Another person thought they had missed a call from their GP inviting them for a vaccine, but now couldn't get in touch to follow up.

A voluntary sector partner spoke to us about access for carers - unpaid carers are now a priority group for vaccines, and people are advised to check they are registered as a carer with their GP. This has reportedly been more difficult for parent carers; some GP practices are not making the distinction between parenting and the additional caring responsibilities of people whose children have a disability.



*“The whole operation gave the impression of being extremely well organised.”*



**Adult Social Care**

We heard from two users of Adult Social Care. One person felt that their needs weren't being fully understood – they also felt they were chastised for making a complaint when a support worker stopped contact through lockdown. Another person spoke to us about her husband – he lives in a care home, but neither of them felt they understood or were included in the decisions about his care.



**GPs**

We have heard more than a dozen positive experiences about GPs – with people praising the efforts their doctors have made to see them throughout the pandemic. Where people have problems, these often revolve around getting through to the GP to make an appointment – people often wait on the phone for a long time, or can't get past an automated message.

*“I have been ringing for 6 days have not been able to get through”*

## People who are Deaf or hard of hearing

We've heard about a range of issues affecting people who are Deaf or hard of hearing. One person who told us they rely on lip-reading visited their optician, but couldn't communicate with them. The optician would not remove their face covering or work to find an alternative way of communicating. This is in contrast to care they had received outside of Sheffield, where a medical professional had made good use of whiteboards and computers to help them.

Another person had a telephone appointment with IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) – when they missed the call, they were not offered an alternative type of appointment to better suit their needs.

We have also heard that it can be difficult to find a PA (Personal Assistant) for people who use BSL (British Sign Language) but also have care needs.



*“IAPT called him for his appointment, but he missed this call due to his difficulties hearing.”*

## Annual Health Checks

A person with a Learning Disability told us about their Annual Health Checks. They said it was important to have a regular GP who knows them well, and that they have time to go through everything. This year, because of Covid-19, they have been sent an Easy Read form to fill in instead of having a face to face appointment. They were glad the Checks hadn't been forgotten, but were worried that they wouldn't be able to fill in the form properly alone.



## Mental Health services

We have heard about a range of mental health services through December and January. Positive experiences include one person's praise of their inpatient care, another person's supportive GP, and someone else who had received excellent crisis care from the Single Point of Access (SPA) team.

Less positive experiences include one person who felt they were falling through the gap between low level intervention and crisis support. Another person told us they were worried that they wouldn't be included in decisions about their care. We have also heard the story of someone's journey through multiple mental health services, and their frustration that they had to tell their story over and over.

*“A lady I had been speaking to at the Single Point of Access [...] saved my life”*



*“It was the last appointment of the day and we felt rushed, as well as disrespected and uncomfortable.”*



In November we published our latest report 'The Mental Health Journey', which shares people's journeys across a range of mental health services and explores the support they received. We are beginning to have conversations with local service commissioners about ensuring that these experiences are heard. Read the report [here](#).

## Communication from services

Some issues we heard about related to a lack of communication from services.

5 people said it has been hard to communicate with their GP – for instance one person had a medication review moved, but then couldn't contact their GP to tell them their medication might run out before the new review date. Another person said their GP is not communicating well with the Alcohol Service to coordinate their care plan.

Communication issues were raised about other services too – one person said they are finding it hard to communicate with Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust; they told us they're not receiving communication about the progress of their complaint, or their request to see their medical records. This is delaying an application for their benefits.

*"The practice should [...] keep the patient informed [...] Tried ringing the practice on numerous occasions but unable to get through."*



## Dentists

Dentistry has become an increasingly mixed picture across the city; some practices can offer routine care while others are only accepting urgent cases.

9 people spoke to us about dentistry in this period. Some people told us they were not triaged when they phoned a dentist, while others have been told that they needed to be 'registered' with the practice in order to receive NHS care. This has caused confusion about what people can access.

We are also hearing from an increasing number of people that were offered prompt private treatment, but may have to wait a long time for NHS care – sometimes up to 18-24 months.

*"Contacted several dentists who have all said that she must be registered with them as an NHS patient to be seen."*



 We have produced a briefing about local dentistry for one of Sheffield City Council's Scrutiny committees, so they can reflect on and discuss the issues we've been hearing. Read the briefing [here](#).

## Maternity services

We spoke to two people who shared concerns that Jessops was taking a more restrictive approach to visiting than maternity services in other areas. Locally, this made people worry that their partners may not be able to attend appointments with them, despite the national guidance changing to allow this.

