

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

### What are we hearing?

In July we heard detailed experiences about 5 main areas of health and social care – GPs, mental health services, hospitals, adult social care, and dentistry. Some people raised issues we've been hearing for a while now – being unable to see a dentist, not being able to get through to their GP, or difficulties accessing mental health crisis care. Others told us about new issues or made practical suggestions on how services could improve for them, such as increased signage around A&E, or improving appointment reminder systems at GP practices.

### Mixed experiences at GP practices

This month we heard about the experiences of 31 people visiting at least 20 different GP practices. 11 people praised their GP – the most common themes were friendly staff, and professionals who had a good understanding of the individual and offered them personalised care.

9 people said that they weren't able to get an appointment when they needed one because they couldn't get through on the phone – we heard that patients were in a queue for a long time, sometimes up to an hour, and the line would sometimes drop before they were able to speak to anyone. One person said this led to them going without their medication for 3 weeks as they couldn't speak to a doctor for a repeat prescription. A number of people this month also reported that they didn't feel listened to by staff at their GP practice, and didn't feel supported in seeking treatment.

We also heard that telephone appointments are not suitable for everyone. One person said they couldn't access these because of hearing problems; they end up visiting A&E instead to see someone face to face. Someone else told us they couldn't build a trusted relationship with their GP over the phone, made more difficult because the GP hadn't introduced themselves. People also reported wanting more choice in having a telephone or face to face appointment.

*"They understand that you are a human and totally individual and do not package you up into a "one size fits all" scenario."*



#### **Some people made suggestions for how they thought GP services could improve:**

- Provide more resource for clinical staff to handle telephone enquiries – it was noted that GP receptionists seem increasingly expected to handle more complex medical situations than they were trained for, eg offering medical advice, discussing test results, or triaging patients
- Implement menopause groups to offer peer support in the same way practices do for certain health conditions eg diabetes
- Review appointment reminder systems – some people get a text several weeks before an appointment or not at all, and would appreciate one closer to the time. Others don't use a mobile phone, so an alternative such as a phone call or letter would be more appropriate

## Mental health services

In July we heard about the experiences of 9 individuals who had accessed mental health support under the Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust. These experiences were very mixed – like last month, we heard about some very positive experiences with some of the specialist services. One person completed a STEP programme for personality disorders and feel this really helped them understand their condition, while another person was well supported by the substance misuse service. One person said they had been admitted for treatment under the Mental Health Act and felt the support they were given really helped them to recover, and someone else felt that the Older Adult Mental Health Team had treated them with respect and care.

*“The staff were amazing. After assessment, they recommended the correct treatment [...] I felt a 1000 times better”*

Negative experiences were varied and covered different services offered by the Trust. One cross-cutting theme, however, is that people felt they weren’t given the level/intensity of support they needed. For example, someone who accessed the alcohol service was disappointed they couldn’t see anyone face to face and felt they would have benefitted from some regular check ins to support their general wellbeing. Someone else said they were offered 6 appointments with a care coordinator, but couldn’t get this extended even when they felt they needed further support.

*“Had a care coordinator for a maximum of 6 appointments [...] Now I’m left with no support”*



We heard some issues accessing crisis care – someone told us that they had tried to get support from the Out of Hours service but this wasn’t helpful and they didn’t feel confident reaching out if they reached crisis point again. We also heard that someone who was admitted to A&E following a suicide attempt was simply sent home with a leaflet, and did not receive any support or intervention.

*“sent home with a leaflet [...] told that my recovery was “up to me””*

We also heard about a difficult experience making a complaint, which has become a recurring theme over previous months. This person said it was very difficult to access any of their notes, and staff seemed unwilling to have conversations about issues. They felt the complaint was not handled well and the Trust didn’t adequately look into their original complaint or their outstanding concerns.



## Care in Hospital

We heard about 9 people’s experiences visiting a hospital for NHS care this month. 4 of these experiences were very positive, with people mentioning friendly nurses, effective treatment, and thorough consultations.

Where experiences were less positive, the reasons were more varied and included people not feeling listened to by doctors about what treatment options they would like. One person didn’t feel their relative was getting enough care in hospital – they reported that staff weren’t helping them to drink or change positions in bed regularly.



**We also heard suggestions to improve people's experiences in A&E:**

- Improve signage for people accessing A&E, particularly for pedestrian access
- Provide chairs for people who are waiting to speak to reception staff – some people are having to stand in a queue for a long while

**Adult Social Care**

We heard from three people this month who use adult social care services. Their experiences varied, but having clear information about what they could expect from their care was key to both positive and negative experiences.

We heard from a local voluntary sector partner about a care home where responsive managers and regular communication meant the experience of someone living there was positive. Another person we spoke to received care in their own home. They said it was generally good, but the rotas get changed last minute without them being consulted, which means they have different carers coming into their home than they expected.

One person, who was a tenant in a Sheffield City Council sheltered housing scheme, was told they would get a social worker and support plan, but haven't yet received one. They tried to raise this issue but communication broke down, leaving them feeling isolated.



*"Told they would have a support plan and have not been offered one since moving in months ago"*

**Difficulties accessing NHS Dentistry**

This month 6 people got in touch with us about accessing dental care. They all told us that despite phoning several dental practices, they were unable to get an NHS appointment.

One of the people we heard from was pregnant, and experiencing swollen and bleeding gums, but couldn't find a dentist who would see her. Another had cracked teeth, and the pain meant they couldn't sleep. They were only offered private care, but could not afford it. Another person, who has a HC3 Certificate for help with NHS costs, was also only offered private care, but can't afford it.



*"£200+ I don't even have that in my bank account right now"*

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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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