

## Access to health and social care services in Sheffield

### Key issues from July 2022

In July 2022 we received 91 pieces of feedback about health and social care services in Sheffield. We continued to hear about several themes we have reported on for some months now, linked to people experiencing difficulty accessing GP appointments, mental health support and NHS dentistry. We have also heard views on hospital care related to privacy, errors with department contact numbers and accessible information. In addition, we have received feedback in relation to difficulties when accessing Long Covid support.

#### GPs

In July 2022 we received 30 pieces of feedback relating to at least 14 different GP practices in Sheffield. A large proportion of feedback was positive with patients describing staff as being knowledgeable, understanding and efficient.

We still continue to hear of the many challenges patients are experiencing with their GP practice such as difficulties booking appointments, lengthy delays on the phone and long waiting times to be seen. Furthermore, we've heard a number of examples where appointments were booked in with the wrong practitioner.

#### Hospitals – issues with privacy, contact numbers and accessible information.

Largely, positive hospital feedback was provided with praise linked to satisfaction around patient care, quality of support provided and staff professionalism.

“From doctors, the practice secretary, to all the other medical and reception staff the service has been faultless”

“Waited 30 mins in queue, got to number 1 and then I was cut off! Not the first time this has happened!”



Concerns were shared about the locality of some hospital reception areas in relation to providing personal details. One patient stated “Everyone in the waiting area could hear my personal information such as name, address, telephone number etc. When I asked if there were any private areas available to share my details the receptionist told me that they had never had a problem before!”

“The kindness, professionalism and compassion shown by every member of staff was a credit to the NHS”.

Another patient reported they received a letter from audiology inviting them to book an appt, however upon calling the number on the letter they got through to an automated phone system which did not indicate it was linked to the NHS. The patient stated they found the system ‘difficult to understand and this stressed them out’. Healthwatch contacted the audiology department and it was confirmed the telephone number provided on the letter was incorrect. Concerns were also expressed in relation to the letter itself describing it as ‘very difficult to understand and it contained too much text and information’, they stated they would have preferred an easy read format to meet their individual needs.



## Mental Health Services

Prominent themes have continued around long waiting lists and delays accessing much needed mental health treatment and support. Feedback was provided around individuals being given incorrect waiting times for treatment and told us they felt ‘fobbed off’ when calling to ask for their position on the waiting list.

“I’ve tried to receive help for years which has been met with 1-2 year waiting lists which I have never heard back from”.

Some members of the public told us they had been trying to get through to appropriate teams via phone but had either been cut off during the process or had been put through to irrelevant switchboards.

One patient told us:

“Every time I call Early Intervention I get cut off when I am transferred by the receptionist. I understand that there are sometimes glitches with IT but this has been going on for months and still hasn’t been fixed.”



## Experiences of Accessing Support for Long Covid

We heard mixed reviews in relation to the referral process to the Long Covid Hub and heard about the way experiences varied across different GP's. One patient told us that their GP made a decision not to refer them to the Hub due to not having a confirmed Covid test, even though NICE guidelines are to refer based on symptoms (not test results). Some people were waiting a long time to access the Long Covid Hub, we were told by one person that it had taken them a year to get through the whole referral process to the point of having an appointment.



We also heard about barriers once the hub had contacted people – one person commented that they had received a letter inviting them to call to make an appointment but it took them 4 days and 15 calls at different times of the day to get through. The call was either not picked up or an automated message instructed them the call could not be completed; when they finally were able to connect, the clinic answer machine asked them to leave their contact details advising that the return call would be from an unrecognised number which some patients may be reluctant to answer. The Hub letter also contains instructions asking the patient to complete some forms before making an appointment – it was not clear how people could access support with this if they didn't read and write English, or were not able to fill in forms independently.



## Dentists

We still continue to hear from people struggling to access NHS dentistry. Unfortunately, waiting lists remain very long. We continue to advise people if they are experiencing pain, ask to be triaged by any local dentist or alternatively phone NHS 111. Charles Clifford Dental Hospital are also taking appointments for adult urgent care for those not currently registered with a dentist. Appointments at



Charles Clifford are carried out with dental students with supervision from a senior practitioner.

Recently NHS England have taken steps to ensure better dental support for people with complex problems and improve the information for those trying to find an NHS dentist.

### What action has been taken?

NHS England has announced several changes to the contract with dentists who provide NHS care, including:

- Increasing the payments for dentists when treating patients with complex needs, for example, people needing work done on three or more teeth.
- Requiring dental practices to regularly update the national directory on [www.nhs.net](http://www.nhs.net) to clarify if they are taking on NHS patients.
- Moving resources from dental practices that are underperforming.

Please visit the link below for more information.:

<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/response/2022-07-19/nhs-acts-your-feedback-improve-dental-care>

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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

“My daughter has autism and is struggling to access an NHS dentist. She has not been seen by a dentist since 2017 , I have rang a lot of places but they all have 2-3yr waiting lists.”

- 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](http://healthwatchsheffield.co.uk)

Phone: 0114 253 6688

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

Text: 07415 24965

