

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

### What are we hearing?

In June we heard very positive experiences of support from community organisations, as well as some specialist mental health services and hospital departments. However, elsewhere in mental health we heard about people who didn't feel listened to or supported, and in hospitals we heard of difficulties accessing interpreters, and unwelcoming staff. Other topics from June include Covid-19 vaccines, GPs, dentistry, and NHS 111.

### Treatment in hospital

We heard about 9 people's experiences of hospital services this month. 4 of these were very positive – including 2 people who had good experiences at the Hallamshire Hospital eye clinic.

We heard some difficulties around access to interpreters in hospital. One person told us a telephone interpreter was booked for their appointment, but it didn't work well as the connection wasn't good. We also heard of two instances where professional interpreters had not been booked. In one, the person wasn't allowed to bring a friend to interpret so they didn't fully understand what was happening. In the other, they were allowed to bring a relative, but the consultant didn't make sure they both understood – there was lots of medical jargon that the relative didn't fully understand and couldn't translate. None of these individuals were given information they could understand about what should happen next, or who they could contact with questions.

One person also told us that a staff member made them uncomfortable at an appointment at a clinic they regularly attend. In conversation, the nurse asked them a lot of intrusive questions about their background, not seeming to accept the answer that they were British. It wasn't clear why they were being asked this and they told us they felt it was racist.

*“Couldn't understand [the telephone interpreter], the line wasn't good”*



*“It felt like she was saying I didn't belong there”*

We have continued to champion the need for Accessible Information in healthcare settings. Following on from work with people who use British Sign Language (BSL), we have asked Sheffield Teaching Hospitals for an update on their plans to address issues with Accessible Information. You can read this [here](#).

### Covid-19 vaccine

Where people have had a Covid-19 vaccine, we continue to hear very positive experiences. People told us that signage and instructions were clear, staff were friendly, and the process was fast.

Some people, however, are finding it difficult to get clear information about the vaccine. Finding out how to get a jab was especially difficult for two people who weren't registered with a GP and didn't have an NHS number. Another person was struggling to get clear information about when to have their second dose, as they had their first while pregnant and their due date was near.



There was also some confusion about getting a second dose at a pop-up centre – someone was turned away as the centre said they weren't administering second doses at all, while someone else said that staff told them they had to wait at least 12 weeks since their first dose (guidance states that the second dose should be administered *within* 12 weeks).

### Access to dentistry

Two people told us they were struggling to see a dentist this month. One was the parent of a young child who couldn't even get on a waiting list for an NHS appointment – the child hadn't been to a dentist before, but there didn't seem to be any way to get an appointment, especially given they couldn't afford to pay privately. The other person had been trying to get treatment for a broken tooth for 4 months.

*"I must have phoned around 30 dentists this morning, nobody can even put us on a waiting list"*

### GP appointments

We heard about 27 people's experiences visiting a GP this month. 10 of these were positive, with people saying they managed to get an appointment quickly and praising friendly staff. Two people liked the telephone appointment system.

Getting an appointment was harder for some people – of 17 negative experiences we heard, most people said they found it nearly impossible to get an appointment. For some, this included when NHS 111 had told them they needed to make a GP appointment urgently. One person told us they had to go to the Walk-In Centre instead – they received good care there but said they really needed to see their GP for ongoing treatment.

*"Grateful for the thoroughness of the GPs and the quick availability"*



Other issues were varied – one person felt dismissed by their GP who didn't take their symptoms seriously, another said their medical records were lost by the practice which caused disruption to their medication, and someone else said that despite friendly staff, their tests and referrals were never followed up.

*"Frequently waiting for over 2 hours on hold"*

### NHS 111

People who had called NHS 111 were largely happy with their experiences of that service – although some had issues following the advice given due to difficulties accessing their GP. We did hear one story, however, where the person calling NHS 111 could not get through to speak to anyone. A message told them no one was available, and to log the issue online. Despite being told they would get a call-back



within 2 hours, they didn't hear from anyone until over 4 hours later. Because of the delay, they felt they had no choice but to take their child to A&E as they were very worried about them. A&E staff told them this was the right thing to do, but media messaging about going to A&E unnecessarily had made them feel conflicted.

## Community organisations

This month 5 people told us about the help they had received from community and voluntary sector organisations. 3 people said that Disability Sheffield had helped them throughout the pandemic, supporting them to access PPE. Another person said that peer support groups organised by Sheffield Mind had been moved online and had been very valuable to them. Someone else said that South Yorkshire Housing Association had supported them to find employment during the pandemic.

*"Really keen to help and provide a service that is really appreciated and valued through these difficult times"*

## Mental Health

We heard 7 detailed experiences about mental health services in June. Two of these were about specialist services – the Opiates Services and the Eating Disorder Service – and were extremely positive. Both individuals felt that long-term support from these services, and relationships with staff in them, had really supported their recovery.



We also heard about people's experiences with crisis care, and these were generally less positive. Two people who were admitted to A&E after suicide attempts said they could not get support from Sheffield Health and Social Care Trust when they tried. One person's referral kept being denied, while the other person's telephone appointment never came, and the promised call back from the Out of Hours team also didn't happen.

*"We have called the out of hours crisis team to be told they will ring back in the morning and there is no call-back"*

When people were not happy with their care, they struggled to be heard. One person said that their complaint had not been taken seriously and their request for their medical records was not completed. Another person felt they were being treated unfairly by their care coordinator, but didn't feel comfortable raising it through the routes available to them.



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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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to us...**