

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield

Key issues from March 2022

In March 2022 we received 96 pieces of feedback about health and social care services in Sheffield. This month we have had some prominent, reoccurring themes such as people experiencing difficulty getting through to their GP on the phone, mixed experiences about hospital provision as well as feedback around NHS mental health and autism services. We have also received feedback from members of the homeless community.

GPs

In March we heard 66 pieces of feedback relating to 24 different GP practices. Just under half of the people we heard from gave positive feedback about the care that they had received commenting that they had received good treatment and felt pleased that they were registered with a good surgery. Some of those people also reported that they could access appointments when needed.

“Friendly,
extremely helpful
and polite
completely
professional.
Fantastic surgery”

The majority of feedback we received expressed concerns about trying to get through to their GP on the phone which was a continuation of existing themes we had heard from previous months. People reported that they had really struggled to get through and make an appointment. A lot of people stated that they had been held in a queue with many people in front of them, some reported due to them working full time they were unable to wait so they just gave up. Others said that they had to call first thing for an appointment which was too restrictive if working or had other commitments. Another factor raised was GP’s not calling at the specific set time given for the telephone appointment meaning that calls were often missed. Some people reported they had resorted to paying for private treatment as they couldn’t be seen in time. One service user reported the waiting time to see their GP was four weeks.

“I had to wait
with 56 people in
front of me when
calling my GP
when my
husband was
very ill”

“It’s difficult to get
through and to
be honest I’ve
given up. I know
I’m ill, don’t know
where to go for
help”

Another individual reported they had been assessed as needing a face to face appointment however due to their disability struggled to access the practice. They were told that a GP home visit was not possible, because they were not classed as being 'housebound'.

Hospitals

In March we heard from 19 people's experiences of hospital. We heard that the patient grounds transport at the Northern General Hospital had been taken out of operation due to breaking down and the hospital was waiting for a new vehicle to arrive. One person reported that when taking their relative for regular appointments they couldn't find a parking space close to the entrance. As the relative struggled with mobility they were reliant upon the bus service - although they had applied for blue badge renewal they were told that this could take up to 13 weeks to come through.

We also heard about the long waiting times individuals had experienced for test results to come through to GPs and communication errors in the process. One reported that they had real difficulty trying to obtain their results. They spoke with various staff members and sent emails but in the end had to contact PALS to help them to obtain the results.

Two people also reported that they wanted support to make a complaint as they had experienced long waiting times for much needed operations and as a result of not having the surgery it was significantly impacting their day to day lives.

We heard from an individual who was deaf, about their experiences of some unplanned hospital admissions. Through four inpatient stays they were not provided with a BSL interpreter, despite needing one. They received treatment without being given information in a way that they were able to understand.

We heard from a number of people who were positive about their stay in hospital, describing staff as being caring, helpful and friendly.



Dentists

This month the theme continued around people who were struggling to access NHS dentistry. Most people we heard from were in some level of pain, but had been told that their case wasn't urgent enough to receive immediate treatment. One person tried to seek support from a dental practice but told us that their numerous calls to try and obtain treatment were left unanswered.

An individual reported their relative had been removed from the dental practice without them knowing due to not responding to a letter the practice had sent out in time. They explained to the practice the relative's first language was not English so relied upon their family to translate correspondence for them however they were still removed.

We continue to raise issues accessing dentistry at a regional level, and continue to support Healthwatch England's national campaign to #fixNHSdentistry. We believe that contract reform and meaningful, sustained funding is urgently required to get people the care they need.

Mental Health Services

We have had some feedback from people experiencing delays when accessing NHS mental health services. One person reported "I left a voicemail on their answer machine. I received a call-back upon someone retrieving this message and was informed that someone would call me back later that same day, I received no call-back."

We heard from another individual who felt that when they were explaining their trauma and pain it seemed that the staff were 'not listening and had uncaring ears'.

Some people have told us that they have lost trust when complaining about a mental health service and felt as though they were not being taken seriously. Others felt as though their treatment would be impacted as a result of making a complaint.



"I complained about pain but had to wait weeks to be seen".

"My husband called on Monday morning as I had been suffering all weekend with panic attacks and depression. This 'service' eventually called back on Thursday"

Autism Services

We heard from an individual who was late returning their assessment form which was the last stage in the long process to confirm an autism diagnosis. They rang and appealed for them not to be dismissed as an instant discharge required re-referral and another 2-3 year wait to get to the same stage. They were rejected and were told they had to start the process again.



One individual felt as though since their diagnosis they haven't received the individual support needed. "Support from my employer, the NHS and community services never works out and I feel unseen, unheard and misunderstood. It has reached a point where almost all attempts to communicate trigger a kind of trauma response in me and I have to give up trying".

Feedback from Sheffield's Homeless Community

We spoke to individuals who praised the community nurses who provide care and treatment to the homeless community on a regular basis.



One individual raised concerns about a recent visit to A&E. They said that they felt as though they were being judged and were not well cared for whilst there. When they were discharged from hospital they had no funds for transport to get home and had no one that they could contact to help them. They stated that they had to walk a very long distance to get back to base, they were not in the best of health at the time and due to mobility issues experienced a lot of pain when walking. They told us that the long distance they had to walk significantly impacted their health.



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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