

How is covid-19 impacting on people's access to and experience of health and social care services in Sheffield?

These emerging issues are based on feedback that we have received from individuals, as well as issues that have been brought to us via voluntary and community sector partners. This briefing is intended to be a snapshot of what we are hearing about; we hope that it is of use to services, and commissioners of services, in indicating potential areas of focus.

Background: [Please see here for previous weekly summaries](#)

Key issues from the week commencing 27/04/2020

- **Recovery services/substance misuse services** - many people are understanding of the disruption to services and are accessing telephone support or alternative community support. However, for some this disruption has set their recovery back.
- **Bereavement services** – a small bereavement support charity told us they've seen a huge increase in referrals leading to overwhelmed capacity. People are experiencing bereavement in a new way, impacted by social distancing, and this is causing additional challenges. We have also heard particular issues around bereavement in relation to the refugee/asylum seeker community, where many have had to grieve the loss of loved ones from a distance.
- **Dementia** - lack of respite care (day centres and sitting services are closed, and many families feel their relative is at risk of covid-19 in care home respite) is leading to increased stress amongst family carers. People also have concerns that the local authority will reduce their homecare support.
- **Autistic spectrum conditions/learning disabilities** - some concerns around people with Autism having infrequent contact from services, and telephone support not always being suitable. We have heard concerns for the safety of some people with Learning Disabilities who have capacity but do not fully understand the issues around coronavirus, who are choosing to go out into the community more often than government guidance states.
- **Mental health crisis care:**
 - People have said they need more support than usual right now. People have also reported a lack of clear information about what they can expect when accessing crisis care right now.
 - Section 136 suite for under 18s is closed – police were told to take patients to A&E or an out of city service instead. It's unclear whether this has been amended in light of the pandemic and what the current situation is for under 18s who find themselves in this position.
 - One person with severe depression told us their appointment with the Specialist Psychotherapy Service was cancelled. They were offered no other support and told to ring the out of hours team if they reached crisis point, but they do not feel able to do this.
- **Mental health – other concerns:**
 - Worries about lack of social support (family/friends, support groups) becoming more detrimental the longer that lockdown continues. Digital options aren't suitable for all, either because people do not feel comfortable using them, or lack the money/skills to access IT.
 - People are struggling with uncertainty about what will happen to their care. This is compounded by a lack of clear information from staff and services about what they can expect.
 - Redeployment and/or sickness means more people are being treated by unfamiliar staff. We have heard particular concerns about the redeployment of IAPT staff.
 - Issues with telephone appointments – sometimes these are late or missed entirely. Waiting for calls can make some people feel anxious. Calls come through on private numbers which causes issues for some, and people cannot check answerphone messages if they have no credit, meaning they do not know which service has phoned.

- **Consistency of advice for the 'extremely vulnerable':**
 - We are still hearing confusion in relation to shielding advice. People have reported that application of the 'shielding letters' seems inconsistent, with many people expecting a letter but not receiving one, and some being surprised to find their doctor considers them vulnerable. We have also heard that spinal units have sent letters to patients inconsistently.
 - Inconsistent distribution of shielding letters has wide implications for people – have all those at high risk been told to shield? It also impacts the support offer they can receive, e.g. emergency food parcels, priority grocery shopping.
 - People have asked questions about how their information is being shared (for example, the shielding list is being shared with supermarkets) and what this means for their privacy.
 - We have continued to hear from people who found the wording of the advice distressing – particularly being told they are 'extremely vulnerable'.
 - We have heard that conversations about Advance Care Planning are still being raised with patients in inappropriate or distressing ways.
 - For people who are vulnerable and need further support (e.g. groceries, medication collection, emotional support), there is some inconsistency in where they are signposted to. We have spoken to council staff and social workers who were unsure of the city's support offer – i.e. the Council helpline, voluntary sector community hubs, and the NHS volunteer scheme. Consistent messaging (both public-facing and within services) would help to streamline the signposting/referral process.
- **Food poverty** – concerns have been raised by the voluntary sector that increasing numbers of families are needing to access food banks.
- **Care homes** - some care homes are not supporting people to connect with the world e.g. no mobile phones or video call possibilities and staff having limited time/resources to support. People in care homes are unable to speak to their advocates.
- **Care packages** – people's care packages are being reduced as the access to the community element is being taken out. However, this reduction seems to have not properly taken alternatives into account to support people with socialising, shopping, exercise etc.
- **Remote working** – people are reporting slower response times from health and social care professionals.