



# Covid-19 briefing 3

Responses to the local Healthwatch Covid-19 survey  
Feedback collected 2 July to 1 August 2020

**healthwatch**  
Cambridgeshire

**healthwatch**  
Peterborough

## Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic has meant many changes to health and care services across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough as hospitals and local authorities respond to the situation. Our survey briefings are already being used to help reshape our local health and care system in the aftermath of Covid-19.

Part of our role at Healthwatch, as a statutory body, is to safeguard the rights and wellbeing of people who use health and social care services.

So we invited people across our area to complete a survey to find out the impact of service changes on their health and care.

We asked them about:

- ⇒ health and care services they had experienced
- ⇒ information they needed to stay safe and well
- ⇒ help and support they had received

We also invited messages for local NHS and care staff and other key-workers.

This third briefing covers the period 2 July to 1 August when we received 213 completed responses.

We will be publishing a full and final report in the early autumn analysing all the responses received.

## What will happen to our findings?

Our survey results are being shared with local service providers and planners to help them to continue to deliver good quality care across our area.

The reports will also go to Healthwatch England to help inform the national response to the pandemic.



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## Briefing 3 - Key messages

1. Many messages of thanks and support for NHS staff, care and other key workers continue to pour in from people across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. Also highlighted are concerns for the health, wellbeing, and safety of staff. Other people asked questions about the reopening of services and concerns about how things will look in the future.
2. There is a mixed picture for those who need health services.
  - ⇒ Where people were able to use a service, three quarters of them said their experience was good or excellent.
  - ⇒ Where healthcare had changed, communication about the changes ranged widely from very poor through to excellent.
3. Users of maternity services have seen many changes to their care due to Covid-19. New mothers and mums-to-be have had to attend appointments alone. Some have shared experiences of feeling isolated during their pregnancies and after birth - affecting their physical and mental health.
4. People are concerned that many services have not yet opened, and delays will affect the progress of their illness and prognosis. There are also concerns that there are adequate safety measures in hospitals and at GP premises.
5. People are having difficulties accessing dental care for both routine care and treatment for dental problems.
6. A third of people put off seeking help for their health - for minor problems and potentially serious conditions.
7. There has been continued support for those shielding or isolating with help coming from family, friends, covid hubs and community groups. People have found ways to cope and adapt to the changes.
8. Four out of five people said their mental health or wellbeing had been affected in some way. Half of all respondents told us they had not needed to find support, while two thirds of the remaining turned to family and friends.
9. Over a quarter of people who needed help for their mental health or wellbeing had not been able to access services.
10. Echoing the findings of our last briefing, people have found it harder to keep up to date with the changes to information and advice around how to keep safe.

## What local people told us

### People at greater risk and shielding

We heard from 138 people who considered themselves, or someone they cared for, to be at risk of serious illness from Covid-19. Reasons included having a long-term condition, being over 70 or being pregnant. People found ways to adapt their lives during the pandemic. These are some of the things they told us:

**‘Having had a baby during Covid-19 lockdown, it was hard as almost daily in the last month of my pregnancy things were changing which made this a very scary and anxious time (previously was not anxious) as we were having to try to search for any information which was not always easy to find.’**

**‘Cambs County Council very good and contacted me by phone when they said they would. Helpful. The emergency food parcels were useful.’**

Nearly four in ten (38%) people at greater risk had been advised to shield. The impact for some people who have been shielding has caused difficulties whereas others have managed well. These are some of the things they told us:

**‘Very difficult to find out information about levels of shielding, got the most information from UK-based facebook groups for people with same medical issue. It seems government shielding letters are very hit and miss.’**

### Getting help and support

The people who consider themselves or someone they care for to be at greater risk of Covid-19 told us more about their experiences of getting help.

Of these, one in five told us they asked for support from the countywide or district hub. Just over a third had countywide or district hub support, the remainder had help from local community groups or other organisations. Shopping, prescriptions, befriending and advice were needed most.

Of those people who had not asked for support from a hub, two thirds (66%) told us that they had managed with support from family, friends, and neighbours. Just over a third (34%) had used online shopping or dedicated supermarket times. These are some of the things people told us:

**‘My daughter was living in supported living but came home at the beginning of lockdown. We have not received any support during the four months that she has been at home.’**

**‘It was offered, thank you, but my son lives with me and I felt we could cope, which we have.’**

## Using health services

Just over two thirds of people needed help with a health problem. Four out of five (82%) people knew where to get help. This figure has slightly decreased across the three survey briefings.

Of those who used one or more services, seven out of ten used GP services, three out of ten went to hospital and two out of ten used urgent or emergency services. Across all services, nearly three quarters of people said their care was good or excellent.

‘One possibly cancerous issue was dealt with promptly by the Urgent Care Unit, the GP and Peterborough City Hospital and eventually turned out to be non-threatening.’

‘The changes to the health service because of Covid-19 helped when in need of scan etc because people were not going to the doctors it made it quicker and easier to get appointments’

People continue to share their concerns for their health because treatment and investigation for a condition has been delayed or cancelled.

‘Surgery for bowel cancer postponed.’

‘My autism diagnostic has been delayed and the waiting list was already over two years long before the pandemic. My anxiety and ability to leave the house have worsened.’

‘Struggling to get seen. Dentists in particular.’

Out of 143 people, over two thirds (69%) said healthcare had changed for them or a person they care for due to the pandemic. Communication about the changes ranged fairly evenly from good to poor. Ratings of excellent or very poor were smaller in number but about equal to each other.

‘Reablement care excellent - communication poor about transfer.’

‘I was due a hip replacement and I have no idea when I’ll be able to have this.’

Consistent with our earlier briefings, nearly one in three people told us they had avoided getting help for a health problem because of Covid-19. Concerns included not wanting to overwhelm the NHS and anxiety about getting Covid.

‘Worried about possible recurrence of my upper GI Cancer but have decided the risk of recurrence is less than the risk of exposure and contracting the virus.’

Some people told us about their experiences of using services while pregnant or with a new baby. Services changed to cope with the pandemic and here are some of the things people told us:

‘Being pregnant during this time has been so sad and lonely...I have been into hospital recently due to lack of movement with baby and having to be in and do it all alone is petrifying.’

‘My partner has been unable to attend any antenatal appointments...I’ll also have to recover from my c section alone.’

‘Things have been different but I don’t feel the standard has dropped... also impressed that all of my midwife appointments went ahead in person.’

‘Lack of contact with health visitors has made me feel isolated and alone with my newborn.’

‘I had to have my six-week check up by phone at which point I explained that I needed my stitches checked as advised by a midwife at the 13-day check to be told to check these myself!?!’

16 people told us they or someone they care for has additional communication needs, such as a visual impairment or needing information in easy read. Two thirds told us they were able to find information in the format they needed. People who rely on lip reading or have hearing loss have had mixed experiences using services.

‘I have had terrible experiences with the GP due to speaking on the phone. I have a hearing impediment and wear two hearing aids and rely on lip reading. I had to put the phone down ...I was too distressed and couldn’t understand.’

‘The doctor I saw was very helpful and wrote down the most important things I needed to know as she was of course wearing a mask and I was not able to lip read.’

‘I got a swift appointment via a video call. As a hearing impaired person, I think this works better than face to face as the person is always looking at you.’

## Social care and support services

25 people said they received social care or support for themselves or someone they care for. Just under half of them were affected by changes in care they received.

11 people said their experience of changes to care and support was fair or better.

The communication around these changes was rated almost evenly from very poor to excellent.

These are some of the things people told us:

‘My daughter is still making a contribution to her care...even though she is not receiving any care.’

‘No visitors [to care home] since March; increased caution, wearing of PPE by staff, testing, staff/family unable to accompany my relative to hospital.’

‘Wheelchair services have been fantastic, especially the office girls and their manager.’

‘Communication between the social services and the people receiving care in their own home, needs to be addressed urgently.’

## Mental health and wellbeing

Four out of five people (80%) said their mental health or wellbeing had been affected by the pandemic with around one in seven (16%) saying the impact has been significant. One in five people said there had not been much of an impact.

‘My brother is becoming very stressed with the uncertainty of the future, and cannot really understand why I can't visit.’

‘Being lonely for interaction with colleagues and friends has been dreadfully difficult. My child has suffered extremely badly with depression, feeling alone.’

‘My mental health and wellbeing has suffered very badly and my on-going health conditions have got considerably worse due to no treatment.’

For some people, the lockdown has been a positive experience.

‘Basically happy and adjusted to lockdown quite well, due mainly because I do live a very solitary life anyway. Illuminate charity have been excellent.’

‘For me the lockdown also provided a wonderful escape, rather like the sabbatical I never had. I did not cry, I did not feel stressed.’

Half had not needed any support during this time whereas out of the half that had sought support, over seven out of ten (72%) people had been able to find some.

Just over one quarter (28%) of people said they were not able to access support. The main reasons given were that support services were not available, or they were waiting until the pandemic eases.

**‘My partner has been awaiting a new referral to PRISM [primary care mental health]. This hasn’t happened because of Covid.’**

**‘I have just got on with it in hopes lockdown will come to an end soon.’**

Family and friends provided support to two thirds (67%) of those seeking it, mental health care providers supported a quarter of people.

**‘Lack of support since Lifeworks closed, couldn’t be seen by GP and thus no referrals.’**

**‘I have had several telephone appointments with doctors...due to needing time off work and medication for anxiety.’**

Six out of ten people told us that they had not seen or been given information about mental health and wellbeing services currently available. Of those that had, social media was the most popular source. GP’s or health professional, TV or radio were the next highest.

## Who we heard from this time

As part of this project, we aim to listen to the experiences of a wide range of people from across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough. In particular, those who are most likely to be affected by Covid-19 and changes to services since the pandemic started. This data is from the people we heard from between 2 July to 1 August.

We heard from people from all over the county and of all ages with 19% under the age of 35. Nearly four in ten (38%) were aged 65-plus.

A higher number of responses came from Huntingdonshire and Cambridge City.

As in briefing 2, three quarters (75%) of our respondents were women.

4.7% of people identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Pansexual.

Most people who told us about their ethnicity identified as White British (85.5%). And just under one person in ten (8.7%) was from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.

Over half (52.6%) of people said they had a disability or long-term health condition.

Three in ten people (30.3%) said they had caring responsibilities.

## In their own words... people's messages to key workers

'All the midwifery staff I have had taking care of myself and my baby during Covid-19 have been amazing and are doing a great job in these trying times.'

'Saw at first hand the professionalism of reception staff at A and E. In the short time I waited three people abused staff.'

'District nurses have been wonderful - incredibly caring, as they always are but it's particularly appreciated at the moment.'

'Staff in the home brilliant at looking after resident, keeping us informed.'

'My local GP surgery staff have all worked so hard to adhere to socially distancing policies, while still providing a high level of friendly and attentive care - thank you.'

## Thank you

Thank you to everyone who has taken part in our survey. Thanks, too, to our local NHS and social care partners, voluntary organisations and community groups who have promoted the project and encouraged people to have their say.

Please continue to share your health and care experiences with us.

## Contact us

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