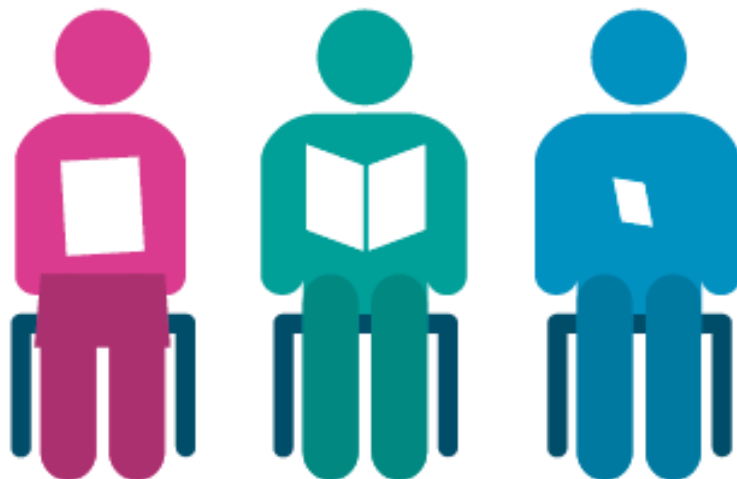


**Awareness of Mental Health Needs  
Amongst Health and Social Care  
Providers in Telford and Wrekin**



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## **About Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin**

Healthwatch Telford & Wrekin is an independent champion for local people who use health and social care services and we are supported by Healthwatch England in exercising our statutory powers to empower people to have their voice heard about the delivery of those services. We listen to what people like about services and what could be improved. We then share those views with those who have the power to make change happen. We also help people to find the information they need about services in Telford & Wrekin.

### **Our Mission**

*“To make health and social care services better for the people of Telford & Wrekin“*

### **Our Aims**

- Enable people to easily access the right services through effective signposting, information and advice.
- Influence and help shape the planning and delivery of health and social care through using intelligence and insights from people’s experiences.
- Be a local watchdog challenging local services and decisions to ensure the public voice has been heard and taken to account.
- To be able to achieve our mission and our aims it is vitally important that people speak to us about the issues that matter most to them. Speaking to us about your experiences of any NHS or social care service will help make them better for you, your friends and your family.

## **1. Executive Summary**

Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin are invested in ensuring that people from all areas of our community can access and use their local health and social care services. This study addresses how local health and social care services provide for those with mental health needs. It explores whether there is additional support that may help services in improving the experiences of local people by asking about current provision and gaps that they have identified. It also asks how aware providers are of mental health services here in Telford and Wrekin to better understand what information needs are not being addressed.

The respondents were mainly from the primary care sector with a notable absence of involvement from hospital, opticians, pharmacies and care services. Despite this it raised some concerns surrounding the interoperability and integration of services in Telford and Wrekin and emphasised that all services are utilised by those with mental health needs. Awareness of mental health support services was variable and whilst most felt that they were educated and supported in helping people with mental health needs there were some who felt that there are organisational gaps that need to be addressed.

However, of most concern were the gaps identified by providers and their users in the delivery of safe and accessible services for people with mental health needs. Children and young people, people on the autistic spectrum and those who are deaf or hard of hearing were identified as people in our community whose mental health needs are not being met. Long waiting times and disruption to services challenge not only local providers in supporting those with mental health needs but also those who use these services. The delivery of services and appropriateness of prescriptions were also considered to be a significant concern and will need further review.

## **2. Recommendations**

1. There are various types of training available for those working in health and social care that can help support them in helping and caring for those with mental health needs. We recommend that providers across all areas, from opticians to pharmacies, are encouraged to access mental health training for their staff.
2. Awareness of mental health services in Telford and Wrekin was low amongst some health and social care providers. In delivering a resilient community strategy we would encourage Telford and Wrekin Council and CCG to prioritise raising awareness and developing information points for not only clinician-facing but also patient-facing mental health services.
3. Mental health service provision for all areas of our community must be addressed more closely by commissioners, particularly with regards the concerns raised around prescribing. We recommend that they work more closely with local health and social care services, particularly pharmacies, to ensure that the service provided is one that is fit for purpose.
4. Mental health services and community services in both the public and private sector appear to have difficulty communicating and working together. As part of the prevention agenda we recommend that strategies and processes are put in place to support these organisations in delivering holistic and joined up services. For instance, events that encourage networking and collaboration might encourage more organisations to see how they can support each other in providing for the population of Telford and Wrekin.

### **3. Introduction**

People living with mental health needs can be supported in their wellbeing through positive interactions with those around them. This can help them to find work, maintain relationships and feel socially included in their communities. Accessing health and social care services can be a challenge for anyone - just think how many people don't like to visit a dentist! For those with mental health needs it can be intimidating and they often require additional support to ensure that their experience is positive. Recognising that all areas of our community access health and social care, this study aims to address how providers are helping to support users with mental health needs.

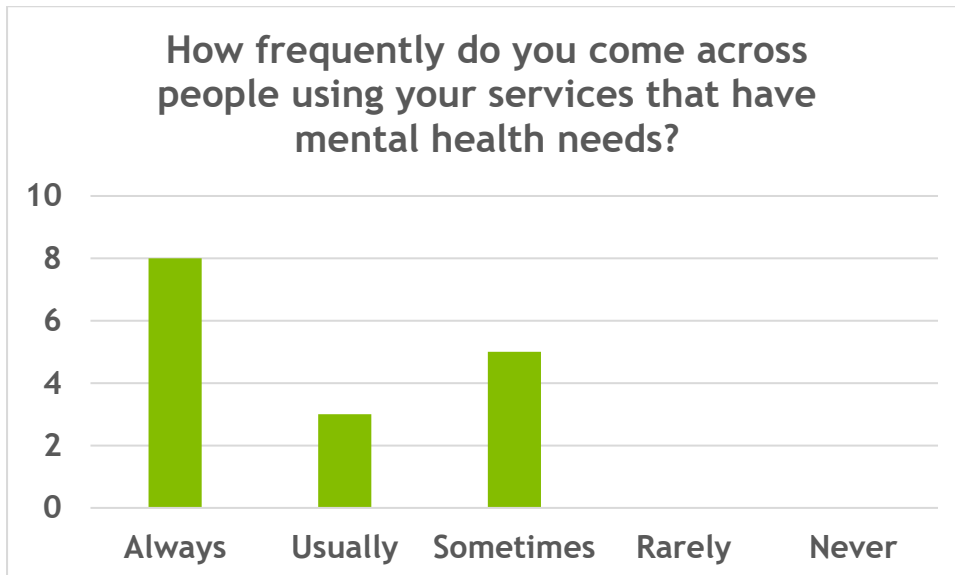
## 4. Findings

### 1.1 Participants

Participants ranged from private practitioners to those working in primary care. However, of the 16 who completed the survey none were involved in hospital care, opticians, pharmacies or dentists. The responses came from managerial, operational, clinical and strategic level staff. Providers throughout Telford and Wrekin were invited to complete the survey via email and during events.

The type of responses enabled us to explore the responses of the 6 primary care services to see what might support them in providing care to those with mental health needs.

### 1.2 Do providers see people with mental health needs?

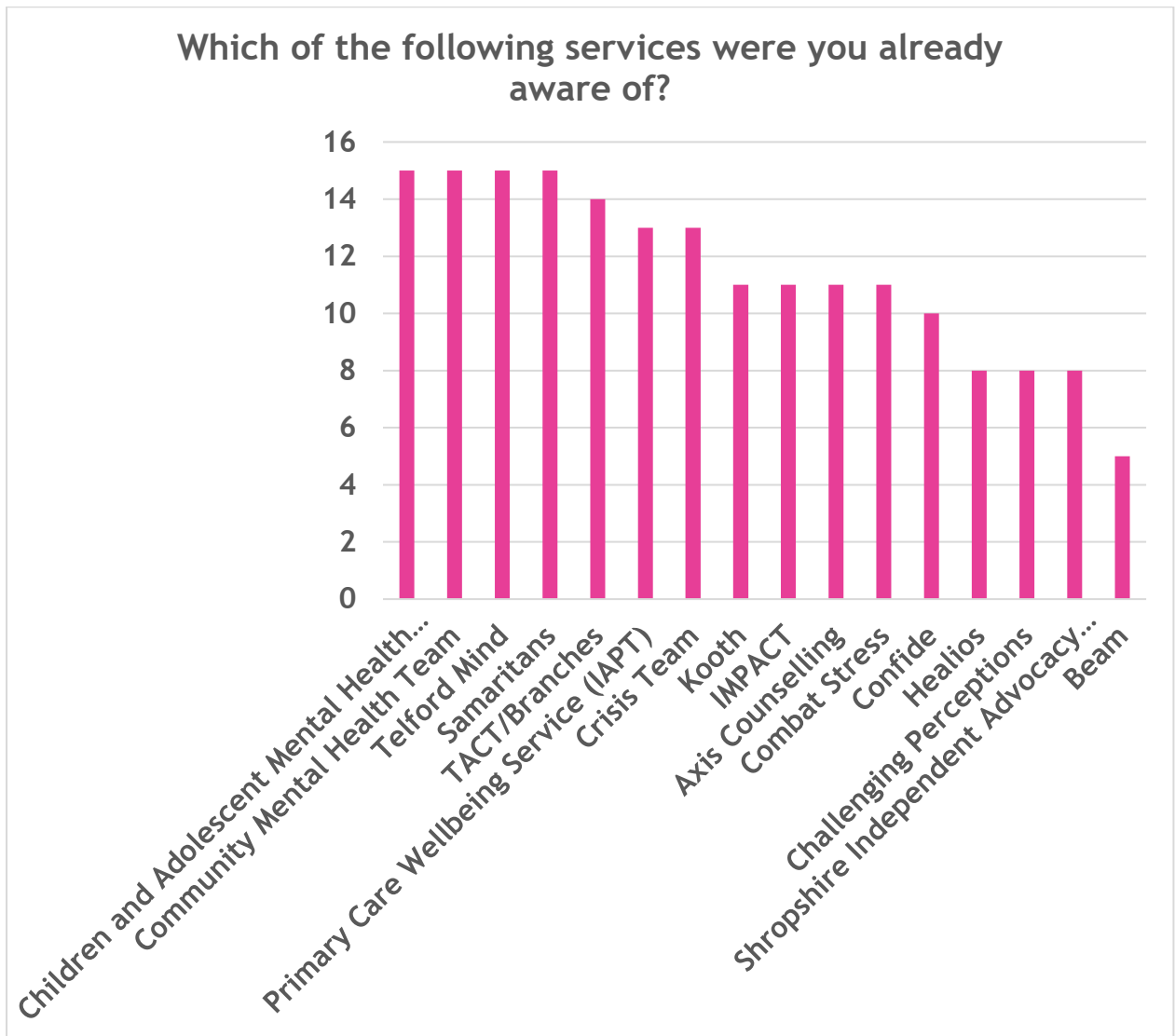


All respondents identified that the services they provide are used by people with mental health needs.

#### Primary Care Insights

Half of the primary care respondents indicated that they always had users of their service who had mental health needs whilst the other half noted that it was usually or sometimes.

1.3 Are providers aware of local mental health services?



Most services were known by at least some of the respondents. However, some drop-in and advocacy services were relatively unknown.

Primary Care Insights

Primary care respondents were more aware of local mental health services, although Beam, Challenging Perceptions and SIAS were less known. This is similar to all respondents.



#### 1.4 Staff in health and social care services feel supported in providing for those with mental health needs

All but one of the respondents indicated that they knew who to turn to for support in helping people with mental health needs. 62.5% of respondents felt that they were supported in caring and providing for those with mental health needs. 12.5% of respondents indicated that they did not. A further 25% provided other responses, sharing their feelings about being supported in caring and providing for those with mental health needs. Half were clear that they did not feel supported as organisations such as the Community Mental Health Trust were not communicating well. The other half felt that at times they felt unable to get support for their users that was appropriate - one as referrals were not being dealt with and the other as they found it difficult to get support in a timely manner for those who were not in crisis.

#### 1.5 Have you received training in helping to support people with mental health needs?

75% had received training, many whilst in medical school or through academic pursuits. Several had been given training in mental health first aid, a course that aims to give people the tools to support each other. Finally, many also referred to talks and updates.

#### 1.6 Seeing the Gaps

Providers were asked about gaps that they or their users had identified in supporting those with mental health needs here in Telford and Wrekin. Answers were given through comments and these have been analysed thematically to identify six areas that providers and users have identified.

##### Accessibility and Availability

The accessibility of services, particularly for younger people, was of particular concern amongst respondents and their users. They felt that there were "massive gaps for young people" with some identifying "children between 13 and 18" and others noting that services such as "BEAM, Kooth, etc are all aimed at 11+". Both people on the autistic spectrum and those who are deaf or hard of hearing are also identified as areas of the community with difficulties in accessing current provision of mental healthcare in Telford and Wrekin. There is also limited

"*awareness of support locally*" for people with mental health needs. Within primary care "*the timing and availability of help*" was important - accessing care, support and advice "*when [a] patient isn't in crisis but you are worried*".

#### Waiting Times

The waiting times worry several of the providers. There are "*long waiting times between initial referrals to SSSFT and commencement of treatment*". Finally, there is a financial concern for their users who "*are desperate and having to go to private therapists (i.e. me) to get help for their children because waiting lists are too long or their child is not severe enough.*" This means that "*they are concerned about the funding and financial fees for a private service which can solve the issue*".

#### Lack of Resources

One respondent felt that current provision "*seems to be poorly geared to vulnerable people suffering with mental health issues*". Even though "*getting through the door is the hardest thing for someone to do*" there is "*insufficient facilities to go into client's homes*". There is a "*lack of support for making and keeping appointments*" leading to the "*discharging from services when the poor sufferer doesn't manage to attend or even know about their appointment*".

#### Prescriptions

Primary care respondents were concerned about prescribing, which raises significant concerns. One felt there was a gap in "*The safety and communication re medication prescribing... the lack of safety in prescribing process*" whilst another addressed the "*Confusion over who is responsible for prescriptions*". One felt that a gap was "*the whole issue around prescribing antipsychotics*". Whilst these comments are broad they do highlight that providers are concerned about mental health prescribing.

#### Delivery of Services

The provision itself is questioned and problems identified that include "the lack or delay of clinic letters" and a need for more joined up working - "*appropriate requests for shared care prescribing, ensuring appropriate screening and monitoring are done first and secondary care taking responsibility for this and*

*for the test results etc.". There was also concern that services would no longer be provided due to cuts - "funding gone for forward mission [Telford Mind mentoring service] - is there much in T&W to replace it?"*

#### Involvement and Information

Providers do not feel supported and they report that their users are "not feeling in control of their treatment and just feeling like a number on the board". The "changing staff" compounds their "confusion over the role of the person they are seeing". Finally, the service providers note that users struggle as they "*are too old for some services that we [are] supposed to use but too young for the services we want*".

## **5. Discussion**

All respondents identified that the services they provide are used by people with mental health needs. Over a third of patients with mental health needs are reluctant to disclose this to their GPs (Cohen, Winstanley, & Greene, 2016<sup>1</sup>), suggesting that there may be users of health and social care who do not share this information. Being familiar with people who have mental health needs can help reduce stigma and discrimination as it helps to challenge the stereotypes that people have. Understanding one's users is important and by addressing their mental health needs it can support them to safely disclose those needs.

If someone is aware of a service, they are more likely to know how to signpost those they meet who could benefit from it. Most services were known by at least some of the respondents. However, some drop-in and advocacy services were relatively unknown. These may not advertise to providers as they are user-facing but with the need to move towards community provision it is important that providers are aware of services that can support and empower their patients in managing their own healthcare needs.

Many of the respondents reported feeling supported in helping those with mental health needs. However, some felt that certain organisations and types of services did not provide them with enough support or fit their needs. The need for services to work together, particularly in supporting the local population in accessing and using health and social care, is an important concern. Whilst these findings suggest that some health and social care services are addressing the needs of their staff not all types of services responded to our survey.

The majority of the respondents had received training in supporting people with mental health needs. As the respondents were mainly working in the healthcare sector, specifically primary and mental health services, this would be expected. Training can help people feel more confident in treating people with mental health needs and should be encouraged amongst those working with people in health and social care. Recent research from Bupa has suggested that many do not seek help for mental health concerns because they are unable to identify

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<sup>1</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/occmmed/article-abstract/66/5/383/1752536>

symptoms<sup>2</sup>. Health and social care staff are in an important position to be able to help support their local population to better understand, and potentially prevent the worsening of, mental health conditions.

Finally, the gaps identified in provision are concerning. Services aimed at children and young people were singled out by many of the respondents as problematic. Services for people on the autistic spectrum and those who are deaf or hard of hearing were also identified. Our 2018 “How accessible do people who are deaf and hard of hearing find health and social care services in Telford and Wrekin?” survey found that an equal number of participants reported mental health services to be accessible as inaccessible.

For those unable to access the services that they need, particularly when considering the long waiting times addressed, the financial strain of seeking alternatives in the private sector can be considerable. Considering the prevention agenda in Telford and Wrekin it is interesting to note that many of the providers felt that those being failed were often individuals who had not yet reached a crisis.

Respondents felt that the changes occurring in mental health provision here in Telford and Wrekin is not only challenging for them but can be confusing and potentially distressing for people with mental health needs. They call for adjustments to be made and information shared in a way that suits users. Enabling individuals to access services and appointments through incremental changes to how they are delivered can help across all areas of health and social care in potentially reducing the number of unattended appointments.

Most concerning of all is the discussion around prescriptions and service delivery - it appears that it is unfit for purpose. The confusion surrounding prescriptions and the call for appropriate monitoring suggests that these are areas with significant gaps that must be addressed to ensure the safety of all patients and individuals with mental health needs.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://newsroom.bupa.com/mental-health-misconceptions-causing-1-in-4-to-delay-seeking-help/>

## **6. Conclusion**

Providers of health and social care generally feel supported and informed in providing for their users who have mental health needs. However, many addressed the need for better communication and involvement from external mental health organisations. Although this survey was only able to capture a small number of services, in particular primary care, the concerns that were raised regarding mental health prescribing indicates an area that will need further research and review. Ways to raise awareness of patient-facing mental health services amongst providers could help to move towards more community-based support, especially for those who are not yet at a crisis point.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank all our respondents for completing our survey. We would also like to thank the groups and individuals who contributed to the survey, providing their experience and advice.



## Get in Touch

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