

Covid-19 Insight Report

4-17 May 2020

At a glance

We have...

- Continued to update our advice and information pages on our website.
- Shared examples of local good practice with other Healthwatch teams.
- Identified that some people are finding it difficult to access information about looking after their mental health and wellbeing, advice for family carers, and information for people who employ their own personal assistants or care workers.
- Identified that some people would like more easy read information.
- Heard that people have been able to get medication and get support to collect prescriptions.
- Heard that people are seeking mental health support from family and friends and mental health services, but some people have been unable to access it.
- Seen that local voluntary groups are providing a range of services and this has been useful and appreciated by people.

Background

The way health and social care services operate has been affected by coronavirus (COVID-19) with non-urgent treatment postponed, face-to-face appointments reduced and homes and services limiting public access.

For Healthwatch Wiltshire, the outbreak has also resulted in changes to our work, with much of our planned public engagement and visits to services paused and a greater focus on providing advice to the public and supporting the local response to Covid-19.

However, this does not mean that the work of Healthwatch to understand the experiences of the public has stopped. With a fast-moving response to Covid-19, real-time intelligence for services about the issues the public are facing is valuable. It is also important that health and social care services understand the impact these changes are having more broadly – especially when they concern people's safety or will have implications once services begin the return to normal.



Where is our insight coming from?

At present, our opportunity to directly engage with Wiltshire residents is limited to social media, our website feedback and responding to calls and emails via our Helpdesk Hub Team.

We've therefore asked our volunteers who are spread across the county to share any feedback they hear locally with us. We have also asked local community and voluntary organisations including local Covid-19 response groups to be our eyes and ears so we can understand the experiences of those they support.

We have also now launched an online survey asking people to share their experiences of health and care during this period. This survey went live on 28 April and has been shared widely with voluntary and community groups and organisations.

Specifically, we're asking people to share what is working well and where there are gaps within the provision and delivery of health and social care services.

This report is a collation of all of these sources of insight.

Advice and information

Since the coronavirus outbreak, we have had a greater focus on our information and signposting service, to help people get the information they need from a trusted source.

We have updated our dedicated coronavirus advice and information pages to make them easier to navigate and find the information that you are looking for. These pages include all the latest national and local information plus information about local support and community groups and a bereavement support page. We also have created specific pages in response to what we have heard from local people and groups, and nationally including:

- Creating a coronavirus landing page to make our website easier to navigate.
- Information to explain the difference between social distancing, self-isolation and shielding.
- A dedicated page explaining the changes to local maternity services during the outbreak and where parents-to-be can get support.
- A dedicated page explaining the care you can expect to receive if you have cancer.

Our coronavirus advice and information pages have had **233** views. We have also been more active on social media, sharing information and asking for feedback on health and care services and these posts have reached **17,363** people.

In our survey, we asked people how easy they had found it find, understand and keep up to date with information around coronavirus. A higher proportion of survey respondents said that this was difficult compared to those who completed our survey two weeks ago. For example, 30% of our respondents said they had found it difficult to keep up to date with changes in information, compared to 8% in the previous two weeks.

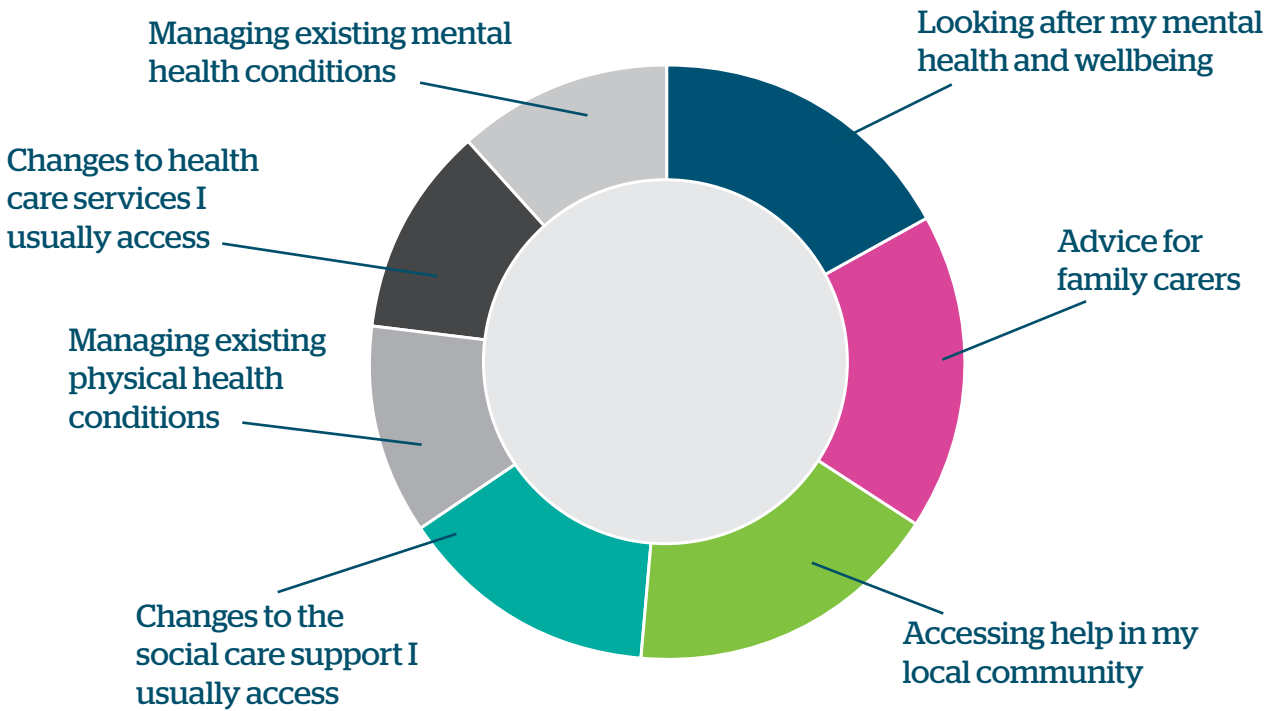
They found this information online through national and local websites and social media. 76% of respondents said they had used national internet sites to find information, via the national internet sites, 53% had used local websites and 73% news, newspapers and radio.

Wiltshire Centre for Independent Living, the Wiltshire Council Wellbeing Hub and a call from Wiltshire Services Users Network (WSUN) were mentioned as useful local sources of information.

We asked people what topics they had found it difficult find advice and information about. 25% of respondents told us that they had all the information they needed. Mental health and changes to services were the topics most frequently mentioned.

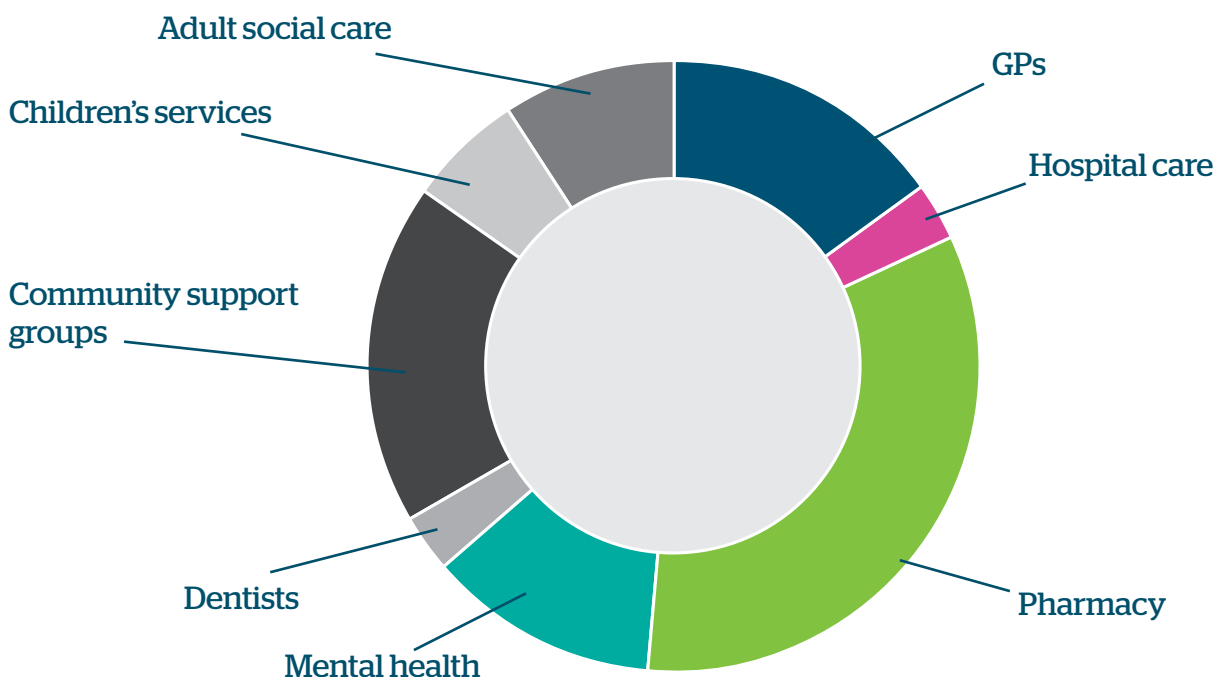
Six people told us that they, or the person they cared for had additional communication needs, and four of these told us that they had been unable to find information in the format they needed. A need for easy read information and visual aids was identified.

What topics are people finding it difficult to find information about?



What are we hearing?

Between 4 and 17 May, we have received 33 comments about how health and care has been impacted by coronavirus.



Adult social care

We have received comments from family members of residents in care home. Some family members talked of their worries for their loved ones in care homes where some residents may have Covid-19. We were told that relatives were able to keep in touch with people by phone.

We received comments from adults who organise their own care through direct payments who highlighted a some of the difficulties they were facing.

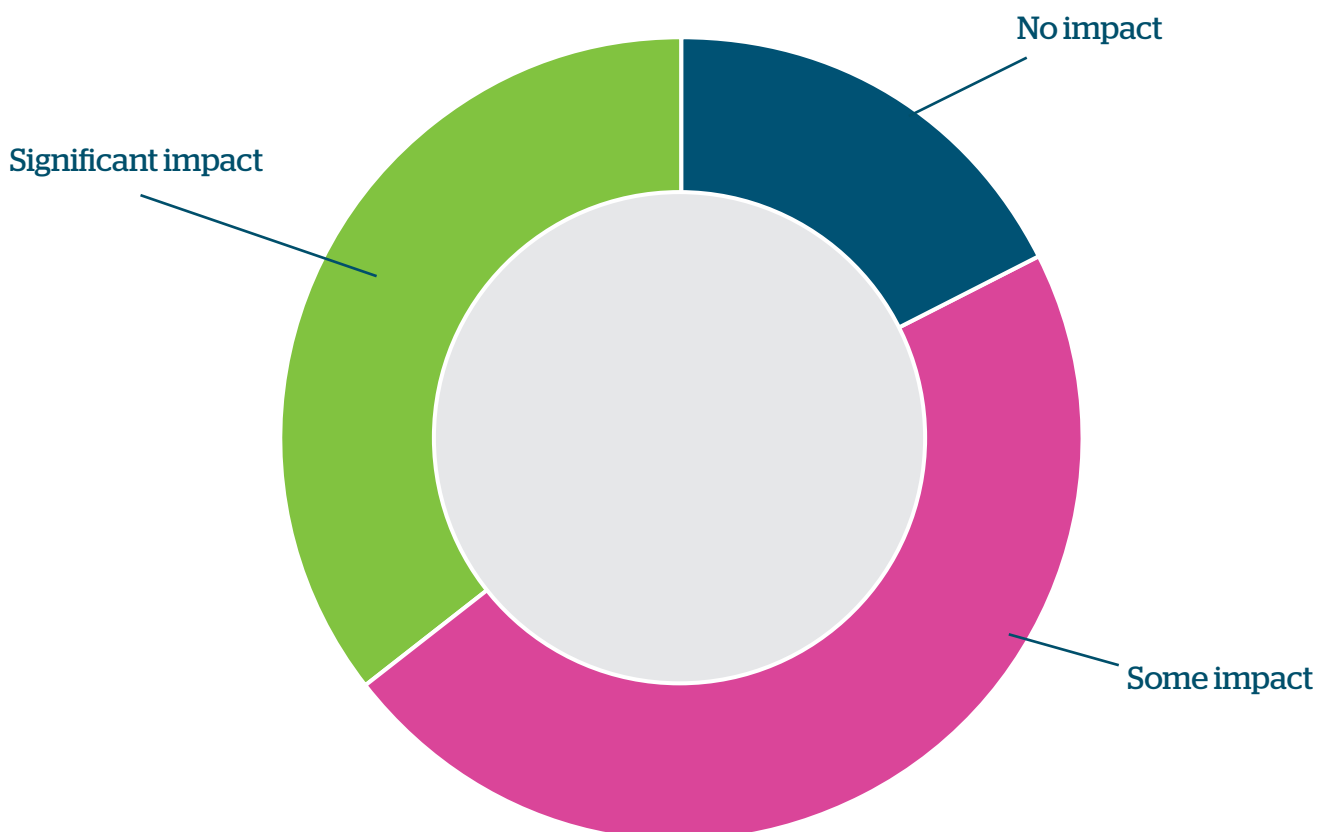
Direct payment users who employ their own PA/carers were pretty much ignored/forgotten about at the start. Information is now there but incomplete. Lack of support with PPE – masks, aprons, gloves and hand sanitiser sourcing and funding... prices hugely increased and more needed than normal. Lack of proactive support, eg some councils allowed all direct payment users to use account for PPE or checked on their 'clients'.

My mother is in a specialist dementia care home currently surrounded by residents with suspected Covid. I am trying every day to distract myself from worry, nausea and a feeling of helplessness.

Mental health

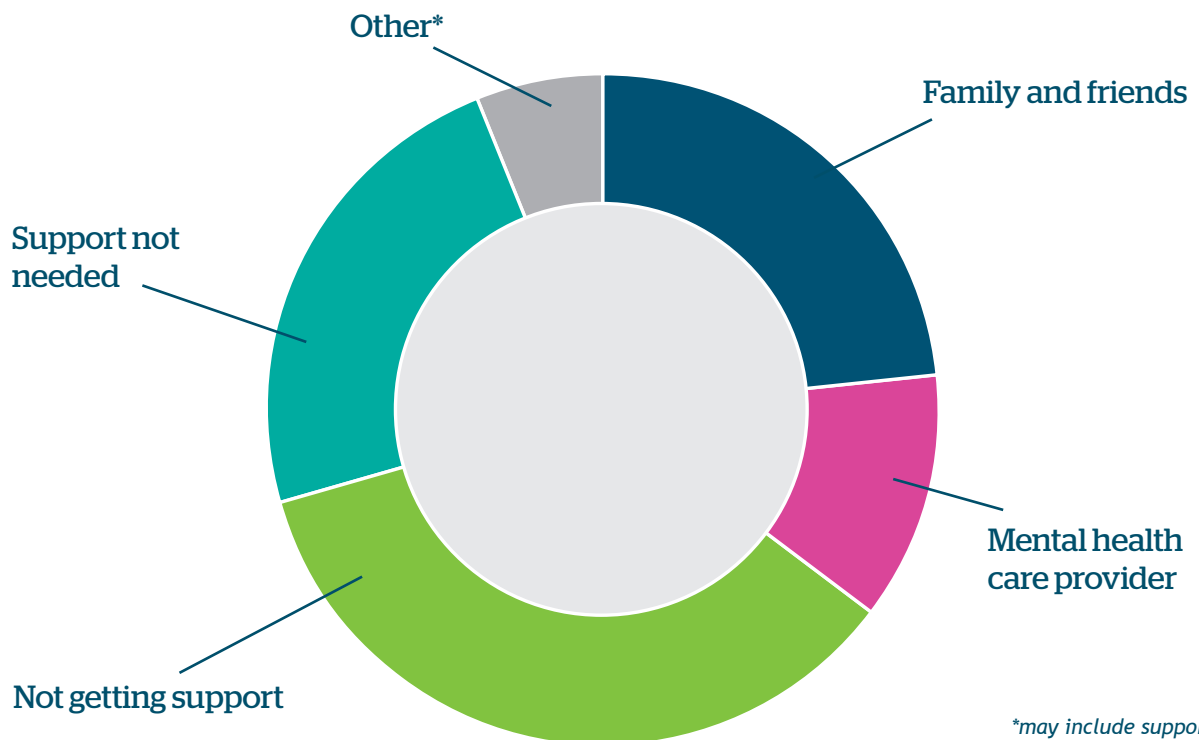
Most people we spoke to told us that the pandemic had an impact on their mental health and wellbeing:

What impact is the pandemic having on people's mental health?



People told us that they were getting support from friends and family or a mental health provider. However, 35% of our respondents said that they had not been able to access support.

Where are people getting mental health support?



I have two children whom both have an EHCP [Education, Health and Care Plan]. I have had no support from my local authority during this worrying time. My husband lives separately and has had no support either, he also needs support for autism.

Due to closures of almost everything, my autistic daughter's mental health has plummeted. Her routine worked hard for 18 months to establish and help keep her relatively on an even keel has stopped dead, which she is unable to cope with and as a result, self-harming, attacking staff and myself. My concern for her has also had a major impact on my own long-term depression and wellbeing. Can't get consultation with psychiatrist or consultant neuropsychiatrist to discuss worsening epilepsy. Just feel abandoned!

Some people told us things that they had been doing that had helped their well-being:

Online tuition courses have been very helpful and absorbing (art, exercise). Also technology apps (WhatsApp Zoom) have allowed me to contact groups I was in contact with before – poetry, choir, art.

Our actions

- Created a dedicated advice and information page on our website about looking after your wellbeing during the lockdown and where to find mental health support.

GPs

Several people have shared their experience of using GP services. They told us that they were able to access GP services although there had been changes to the services offered. 67% said that the communication about changes to healthcare had been excellent or good and 33% said that it had been fair.

We have had updates on internet, text but I do think letters will have been needed for some patients.

People told us that they had been offered phone or video consultations, the feedback about these was generally positive, although some people found the systems confusing.

Help in postponing and rearranging necessary blood test. Aligning prescriptions so that all could be collected at one time. Delivering prescriptions on one occasion. Ready response to requests.

Face to face swapped to phone before official start of lockdown by our request with no fuss. Usually impossible and my husband has had to go to my appointment without me previously to get help. I hope the option of phone appointments with named doctors continues.

GP appointment, the process was confusing as we could see GP but they couldn't see us. After researching it after the appointment it seems you can't talk on your phone and have video appointment at the same time!

Excellent, prompt video calls when necessary.

Carers

We heard of the impact on carers where they had cancelled or reduced care at home. This was associated with carers who employed their own carers or personal assistants, either self-funded or via a direct payment. We also heard from carers who appreciated Wiltshire Council's letter of thanks to unpaid carers.

Without information at the start it was safest to cancel as many shifts as we could manage putting workload onto my husband and many times going without, eg meals, shower etc... but as an employer with the information not there at the start I had a duty to keep carers safe... but also to keep us safe as we self-isolated.

Sadly my health deteriorated then my husband's until we couldn't manage... but now we have better info (although still incomplete) I have my carers back again and am stabilising.

It was pleasing to receive Wiltshire Council's Open Letter to Unpaid Carers in Wiltshire.

Dentists

We have heard that dental treatment has been postponed and people are having difficulties finding out how to access emergency treatment.

My dental nurse told me that there are emergency dental triages centres, but not the location. Can you enlighten me please?

Our actions

- The person was signposted to the correct information.

Pharmacies

All our respondents said that they had been able to access the medication they required. The majority (67%) said they found this easy, and two people said it was difficult. Support from local community groups was mentioned and had worked well for people. One person mentioned difficulties obtaining over the counter medications whilst shielding.

Routine meds are requested on Dr website, chemist then brings them up. It's taking a bit longer as to be expected but we just order at the first date rather than last minute to give plenty of time.

It's been harder with over the counter as my carers would often pick something up but they come here freshly showered/clean clothes without going in shop first as risk reduction. If they pick up with their shop we have been stuck with limits on quantity, eg two boxes of Lemsip for me means they couldn't buy paracetamol.

Excellent, quick service.

Cohens, Trowbridge – this team are brilliant and really look after us... before and during this crazy time.

No change to my normal process, requested repeat prescription from my doctors and it was available to collect two days later. No extended timeline.

Hospital care

We have only received one piece of feedback about hospital care over the past two weeks. This was from someone who had a phone or video consultation for an outpatient appointment for audiology, and that the issue remained.

Audiology RUH, did not resolve the issue and have been told I must wait.

Voluntary and community support organisations

We heard from people who had used local voluntary organisations and community groups. All those who mentioned these groups said that they had found them useful.

We heard about a range of services being provided by these groups including support with wellbeing including peer support, advice and information, befriending and check-up calls, collecting prescriptions and delivering medication and shopping. The benefits of some of the volunteering and support provided to isolated people was mentioned and it was suggested that it would be of value to carry this on after the pandemic.

Good advice and signposting.

I contacted Devizes Covid-19 Support for help collecting my prescription. They had registered me and delivered my medication promptly and efficiently. The following week I received a call from them to check that I was OK and asked if I needed anything else. They offered to go and get my shopping from Marks and Spencer which I prefer. I thought this was an excellent service. I hope that some of these services continue after all this, especially using volunteers to keep in touch with isolated people.

I'm impressed with the range of help available.

How this insight will be used

We recognise that all health and care services are under pressure at this time and have had to adapt their ways of working. We will share this report with the local NHS, council and providers to help them identify where things are working well and services are adapting to meet people's needs, and to help them identify any gaps.

For help, advice and information

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