

Understanding the impact of the Coronavirus outbreak on young adults in Enfield

April - June 2020

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Executive summary

During lockdown, we engaged with young adults (aged 15-25) in Enfield to understand how the Coronavirus outbreak has been impacting them. Young adults shared their experiences with us through completing our online survey.

This report outlines the main findings from our research and our recommendations concerning next steps.

Given that local service providers are planning how to best provide support as we enter the “recovery period,” post the peak of the Coronavirus outbreak, this report provides timely feedback. There are a number of points to consider in order to support young adults’ health and emotional well-being. This includes issues for consideration by educational establishments preparing for a full September intake, and any anticipated mock examinations this winter/spring.

- The young adults we surveyed reported that the main impact of the Coronavirus pandemic was on their mental health (1 in 3 young adults we heard from).
- Having to self-teach and impose self-discipline in a context with little or no routine, as well as a lack of clarity around the changes in schools and exams, have had a strong impact on young adults’ mental health.
- Other issues raised included:
 - isolation (15%),
 - fear of getting Coronavirus (12%)
 - uncertainty around school and university (10%)
 - lack of motivation and routine (8%)
- On a positive note, 81% of the young adults we heard from said they were finding the information they needed. However, 3 in 10 young adults said that they found information difficult to access, a lot of it being considered ‘confusing’.
- 79% of the young adults surveyed also said they were finding the support they need. For the remainder, they wanted more support regarding school (33%) and mental health (33%).
- Over 1 in 3 young adults surveyed (35%) had existing long-term physical/mental health conditions. Of those, 63% expressed their access to care was being affected.

The main issues raised were the absence of face to face appointments, both for counselling and general health and social care (36%) and a negative impact on their mental health due to the situation (18%). Longer waiting times for appointments were also mentioned (9%) as well as worries regarding collection of medicine once they had run out (9%).

Given those with existing conditions expressed concerns about accessing the care support they needed in a timely manner, it is imperative that primary care and specialist services are quickly able to work through the back-log of outstanding appointments and continue to support those young adults most vulnerable, during the Recovery Phase and beyond.

It has proven difficult to engage with a younger audience, especially during this period. This, however, should only encourage us to conduct further research regarding some of the key issues raised in this report, such as support for mental health and school, as well as the provision of clearer information. In addition, responses from a larger cohort should be collected, representing a wide cross-section of young adults across our community.

From our findings, we recommend commissioners across the Local Authority, as well as the Enfield Directorate of the North Central London Clinical Commissioning Group:

- Conduct more detailed research to understand the needs of young people including virtual support
- Ensure that information and advice provided for young people around the Coronavirus pandemic is clear and accessible
- Work through the backlog of appointments and offer face to face sessions, in addition to virtual ones, where possible
- Explore community and peer support options, to lessen the dependency upon specialist resources
- Continue working with schools¹ and colleges, promoting their involvement in understanding and supporting young adults' mental health, particularly for those who have underlying disabilities or mental health conditions, so that a part of the curriculum can be flexibly focused around emotional health and wellbeing, where appropriate

¹ As our [previous research](#) has demonstrated, schools are one of the main places young adults wish to get information and support from. In distressing times such as these, we recommend the support provided, as they reopen, be reinforced and adapted to the current situation.

Introduction

Healthwatch Enfield is an independent, statutory organisation that exists to inform and signpost, listen to local people's views on health and social care and make sure their voice is heard by those in charge of delivering health and social care services in Enfield.

In light of the current circumstances, we wanted to know

- which issues are most affecting young adults (aged 15-25)
- how young adults' experience of accessing health and social care has been impacted by the Coronavirus outbreak, and
- what information we can provide to help young adults through this time

This document aims to summarise the findings from the 43 completed surveys.

NOTE: Due to the voluntary nature of individuals' participation in the survey, a standard set of data was developed but a complete set was not collected for each individual. Therefore, the sample size varies depending on information provided. Not all data will tally due to rounding. Please note that percentages used throughout this report have been weighted for the number of responses per question. Quotes captured in this report are reported as originally written.

Findings

What issues are affecting young adults most during the Coronavirus outbreak?

1. Mental health (33%)
2. Isolation (15%)
3. Fear of getting Coronavirus (12%)

Other concerns raised include:

- uncertainty around school examinations, as well as applications for college or university (10%)
- changes in routine and environment (8%)
- struggling with less exercise (8%)
- fear of gaining weight (6%)
- the uncertainty that has come hand in hand with the coronavirus outbreak regarding processes for accessing care (6%)

"Not being able to access medical care/appointments when needed due to the increase in demand which is understandable. It took me a lot longer to get a sexual health check-up than normal which did affect my mental health as it was something I was finding really stressful"

“Having more anxiety and stress due to preparing for university exams during this time.”

“Stress about school/ applying for uni”

“My mental health has been really up and down, feeling really alone and vulnerable and not having any motivation or ability to get better due to the isolation. Don't want to be constantly bothering friends with my mental state”

Access to information

On a positive note, 35 of the 43 young adults we heard from (81%) said they were finding the information they needed. Of those who said they weren't, more information on school (30%), sexual health (10%), how to work from home (10%), how to manage stress (10%) and how to get financial aid (10%) was requested.

3 in 10 young adults we surveyed said that they found information difficult to access, a lot of it being considered 'confusing'.

“However some sources can be a bit overwhelming so I try to keep it to minimal sources.

Also some information is not easily accessible, in my case when I was trying to get an appointment at the sexual health clinic I was turned away twice, once because I was unaware that that certain day was only for under 18s then the second time because they had over booked, when I was at the clinic I was given a timetable of when I could go which was extremely helpful but I didn't not find that information online”

“What is going to happen to year 12, when we can go back to school etc.”

“It's not very clear to young people and we are unsure about certain examinations”

Access to support

34 of the 43 young adults surveyed (79%) also said they were finding the support they need. For those not finding all the support they needed, a need for more support regarding school (33%) and mental health (33%) was expressed.

22% said they were not sure what extra support they could get, and 11% wanted more information for those with Autism...

“Mental health support by the NHS seems to have 'paused'”

“By school etc as a year 12 we've been dumped to teach ourselves school work”

It is encouraging to see that a majority of those surveyed expressed finding the information and support they needed during this period, but we must bear in mind that those whose voice is rarely heard and who are more difficult to reach might not have the same access to information and support.

Given a third of respondents confirmed they felt their mental health was being affected, it is important we widen our reach to ensure that we are aware of the gaps that might exist, specific to certain groups of young adults.

Online resources

We asked young adults what online resources were helping them cope during the Coronavirus outbreak:

- News websites (17%)
- Social Media (14%)
- YouTube (14%)
- BBC (11%)
- NHS website (9%)
- Mental health websites (6%)
- CDC website (3%)
- Zoom for communicating with friends and family (6%)
- Healthwatch website (3%)
- School work (3%)
- Music & gaming (3%)
- Free home workouts (3%)

News websites and social media are used as resources for facts and updates, social media is also relied upon to maintain communication with friends and family while they are unable to see them physically.

"If I need information about COVID I access the NHS website. Or online resources is social media for quick updates on the issue."

"Instagram as a lot of people I know are always posting positive, supportive things which is nice to read and feel a sense of togetherness."

"story sharing - hearing you are not alone in your feelings"

"Zoom has been really useful to still keep in touch with friends and family."

"Nothing really, going on Facebook and seeing people out and ignoring rules or seeing loads of reports of more people dying is really depressing"

Delayed access to care for those with pre-existing conditions

15 of the 43 young adults surveyed (35%) have existing long-term physical/mental health conditions. Of those, 63% expressed that their access to care was being affected.

The main issues that were raised were the absence of face to face appointments, both for counselling and general health and social care (36%) and a negative impact on their mental health due to the situation (18%). Longer waiting times for appointments were also mentioned (9%) as well as worries regarding collection of medicine once they had run out (9%).

"It's difficult for mental health conditions to be dealt with by the GP as they are reluctant to have face to face appointments so there are only very brief phone consultations which I do not find helpful at all"

"They've offered virtual appointments but this is often not good enough because I would miss out on vital tests. I would rather wait until after pandemic to have a proper appointment"

"Longer waiting time for therapy"

"I finished my counselling a month before this started as I found a way for managing my mental health by working, getting out and being sociable and seeing friends, and not being around family too much. But that's all out the window now"

Conclusions and recommendations

This insight on how the Coronavirus outbreak is affecting young adults in Enfield shows, first and foremost, a strong impact on their mental health. It is important to pursue this evidence-based research and continue our effort to capture the experience of those who are most invisible in the borough.

Having to self-teach and impose self-discipline in a context with little or no routine, as well as a lack of clarity around the changes in schools, has had a strong impact on young adults' mental health.

In addition, those with existing conditions expressed concerns about accessing the care support they needed in a timely manner. It is imperative that primary care and specialist services are quickly able to work through the back-log of outstanding appointments and continue to support those most vulnerable during the Recovery Phase and beyond.

Therefore, we recommend commissioners across the Local Authority, as well as the Enfield Directorate of the North Central London Clinical Commissioning Group:

- Conduct more detailed research to understand the needs of young people including virtual support
- Ensure that information and advice provided for young people around the Coronavirus pandemic is clear and accessible
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- Explore community and peer support options, to lessen the dependency upon specialist resources

- Continue working with schools² and colleges, promoting their involvement in understanding and supporting young adults' mental health, particularly for those who already have underlying disabilities or mental health conditions, so that a part of the curriculum can be flexibly focused around emotional health and wellbeing where appropriate

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Demographics of survey respondents

Postcode	
Prefer not to state	26%
EN1	28%
EN2	23%
EN3	7%
EN8	2%
N9	7%
N18	2%
N21	2%
E17	2%
Total	100%

Age	
Prefer not to state	2%
15	5%
16	5%
17	49%
18	7%
19	5%
20	7%
21	2%
22	14%
23	5%
24	0%
25	0%
Total	100%

Gender	
Male	21%
Female	77%
Prefer not to state	2%
Total	100%

Carer	
Yes	2%
No	98%
Total	100%

Ethnicity	
Asian/Asian British	2%
Indian	5%
Black/Black British	12%
<i>African</i>	2%
White and Black Caribbean	5%
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern	35%
Irish/British	2%
Irish	2%
Anyother white background	21%
<i>Other</i>	14%
Prefer not to state	2%
Total	100%

Sexual orientation	
Heterosexual	70%
Pansexual	5%
Bisexual	2%
Prefer not to state	23%
Total	100%

Disability	
Yes	16%
No	81%
Prefer not to state	2%
Total	100%

Religion	
Christian	28%
Hindu	5%
Muslim	14%
No religion	21%
Other	2%
Prefer not to state	30%
Total	100%

This report can be made available in alternative formats, such as easy read or large print, and may be available in alternative languages, upon request.

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