



COVID-19 Recovery. What local residents are telling us.



Context



Healthwatch England has asked all local Healthwatch to seek the views of their residents and service users on the impact of Covid-19. We want to hear how the pandemic has affected the way Greenwich residents are accessing and experiencing health and care services. We speak to local people about concerns, issues or barriers, and we collect examples of great practice and support.

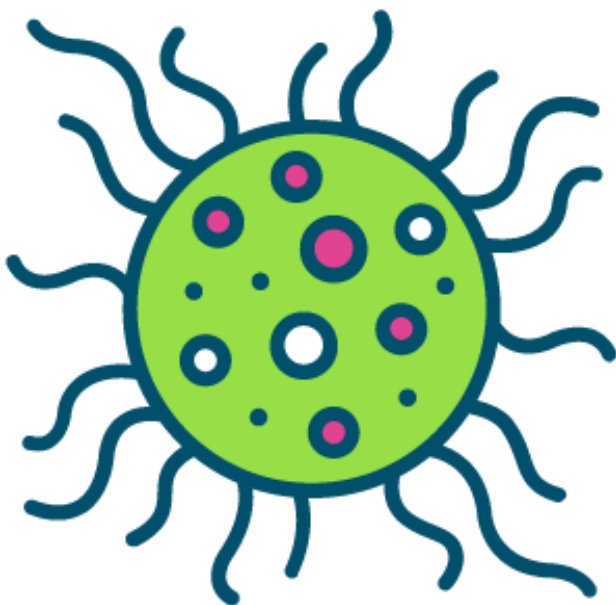
Who we spoke to

This feedback is based on experience shared by seven groups, their staff, volunteers, members, and service users, including:

- Mum's Aid
- South Greenwich Forum
- Ajoda Community Alliance
- Clockhouse Community Centre
- Middle Park Community Centre
- New Charlton Community Centre
- Woolwich Common Community Centre



Covid-19 vulnerability



Across all groups we spoke to, many have members at high risk from Covid-19, or members caring for those in vulnerable groups. This includes those aged 70+, those with existing health conditions, or pregnant mums. Many continue to self-isolate or minimise external contact. The cumulative effect of social isolation is increasingly negative. Many groups report concern for members and note a deterioration in both physical and mental health.





Support

All the groups we spoke to have adapted how they keep in contact with members. Many now use a combination of digital and non-digital methods, via email, phone and by distributing hardcopy newsletters by post. Some adapted their services, moving online ahead of lockdown, and now offer support using Zoom and private Facebook groups. As restrictions have eased, some groups are resuming a limited range of face-to-face activities. These include lunch clubs and exercise classes (maintaining social distancing measures).



Despite the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, many organisations continue to support their vulnerable or frail members with collecting and delivering prescriptions, delivering food packages and toiletries, and providing broader assistance in connecting people to local community services. The impact of job losses, restart of evictions, and the long-term effect of Covid-19 means that many groups expect an increase in need for support.



Covid-19 Information

There is considerable confusion over what is 'allowed' and what information organisations can share to protect their members. Social distancing messages and what services can and can't be accessed face-to-face feel counterintuitive:

"You can go to Primark, but you can't go to the children's centre."

While information from the Royal Borough is felt to be good, many suggest national messaging is inconsistent, adding to local confusion and reducing confidence in using services for those at highest risk. This is exacerbated for those who do not fluently speak or are not comfortable using English.



What's working

Many more residents (compared to pre-Covid-19) are accessing health services by telephone. Most report positive experiences and feel this is an improvement. Many welcome the opportunity to have a consultation over the phone. Some find it easier to speak to a doctor over the phone than face-to-face, feeling more relaxed and more likely to disclose fully.

Organisations that switched to delivering support and services online report that more members than expected quickly got to grips with the changes and the technology.



Access to digital devices and the internet



Access to digital devices and the ability to use digital technology varies. Each organisation has members who do not have access to the internet or broadband. Many of the organisations we spoke to have members who do not have any access to digital devices such as smartphones, laptops/tablets or computers. One group has been offered computer equipment for its members from a local charity, but this experience is not widespread.

Mum's Aid told us that many vulnerable women only have mobile phone contracts with restricted data. They rely on Wi-Fi access in café's and coffee shops across the borough, all of which closed during the lockdown. As a result, these women became increasingly isolated with little opportunity to access services digitally. Many of these places have now reopened but offer limited opening hours or seating spaces, making it difficult to access free Wi-Fi.



Using digital platforms to access health services

Many of the groups we spoke to have members who don't know how to or find it difficult to use online platforms, even if they have access to the hardware. They don't access health services digitally as they find it hard to do so and there is some confusion over which services are available:

"Access to GPs is a big issue. I think people think they can't get access to the GP. There are a lot of mixed messages out there."

Community centres help where they can, but residents not already in touch with community centres simply don't know where they can get this support or what training to get online is available. Generic training won't work for all. A tailored offer, considering language and cultural needs, delivered by trusted organisations, is needed for some.

As a result of the lack of familiarity with using digital platforms and devices, some groups we spoke to are concerned that members could be vulnerable to scammers.



Contact us

All our staff and volunteers are working from home. You can still contact us via phone: **07903 685 533**, by email 'info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk' or you can join our **weekly Zoom meetings** every Wednesday from 10am-11am and every Friday from 2pm-3pm. If you are interested in joining us, email info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk for the login and password to access the session.

