



Healthwatch
Together

Blackburn with Darwen,
Blackpool, Cumbria and
Lancashire working
in partnership



How are you coping with the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic?

Summary report 3

Overview of version 3 of survey

July - August 2020



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About Healthwatch and Healthwatch Together

Healthwatch was established in April 2013 as part of the implementation of the Health and Care Act 2012.

Healthwatch England acts as the national consumer champion for all local Healthwatch organisations, enabling and supporting individual Healthwatch to bring important issues to the attention of decisions makers nationally.

A key role of each individual Healthwatch is to champion the views of people who use health and care services in their area, seeking to

ensure that people's experiences inform the improvement of services. Healthwatch are constantly listening, recording and reporting on the views of local people on a wide range of health and care issues, ensuring that people are able to express their views and have a voice in improving their local health and care services.

Healthwatch Together consists of Healthwatch Cumbria, Healthwatch Lancashire, Healthwatch Blackpool and Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen, working in collaboration together.



Healthwatch **Together**

Blackburn with Darwen,
Blackpool, Cumbria and
Lancashire working
in partnership



Rationale for research

This research project took place as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid-19) and the subsequent lockdown that took effect in England in March 2020. Healthwatch Together (HWT) quickly created a survey in response to the pandemic, with the aim of finding out how the people of Cumbria and Lancashire were coping during this difficult time.

The survey was developed as a 'temperature check' designed to find out how people were feeling and coping during the initial first weeks of this unprecedented pandemic.

We wanted to tell people's stories, their personal experiences.

The initial survey (v1) was launched on Survey Monkey on 23 March 2020 and ran until 26 April 2020.

A second version of the survey (v2) was launched on 27 April 2020 and ran until 19 June 2020.

A third version of the survey (v3) was launched on 16th June until the 14th August. This report is based on the findings of the v3 survey.

Findings from v1 of the survey

Report 1 (published by HWT in May 2020) provides full details of the demographics and an explanation of the issues raised by v1.

In brief, results of the v1 survey showed that most people across Cumbria and Lancashire were coping with the impact of the pandemic. However there were a minority who were really struggling and appeared to be disproportionately affected. This group included:

- + Those with mental health issues.
- + Those with pre-existing medical conditions.
- + Those with caring responsibilities (for children with learning disabilities and/ or elderly relatives).

Creating the questions for v2

Some of the original questions we developed were no longer relevant to the current stage of the pandemic. Other questions had provided us with such a wealth of data and feedback that we were able to move on to investigate the issues they raised.

Using the findings from v1 and working collaboratively with our partners in health and social care, we developed a new series of questions. These were designed to find more detailed information about the groups who are disproportionately affected, the financial implications of lockdown and the increase in the use of video/phone consultations replacing face to face appointments.

Working with Dr Lewis Turner of LGBT Lancashire, we updated some of our demographic questions to account for the range of diversity within the LGBTQ community and in order to identify particular issues affecting them.

Creating v3 of the survey

Full details of the findings of v1 and v2 are available in reports published on the Healthwatch Cumbria website.

For v3, in collaboration with our partners, we adapted the questions from v2.

- + We continued to ask about the effect of the pandemic on mental health and people's finances.
- + We asked about the impact on pre-existing medical conditions.
- + HW had been alerted to issues of people needing medical care but not seeking treatment. We asked about this and the reasons why people were doing this.
- + We asked about people's experience of contacting their GP.
- + Issues facing carers.
- + Whether people were anxious about the end of lockdown.
- + Any behavioural changes during lockdown.



Methodology & questions

Methodology

Anyone living in Cumbria or Lancashire was eligible to complete the survey online. A link to the survey was shared via Healthwatch websites, through social media and word of mouth and via a network of local contacts.

No personal data was collected, although respondents were given the option to leave their email addresses if they wanted us to contact them about a certain issue.

Respondents were assured of their anonymity, but were informed that we may use their (anonymous) quotes in our reports.

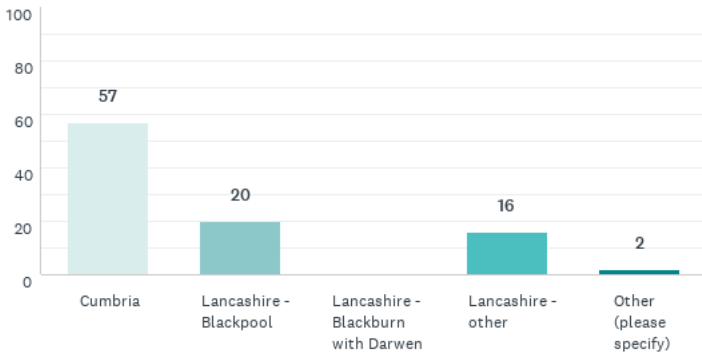
Questions

1. Where do you live?
2. How old are you?
3. Are you male (including trans man)/female (including trans woman)/other/prefer not to say?
4. Is your gender identity the same as on your original birth certificate?
5. How would you describe your sexual orientation?
6. What was your employment status before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?
7. Do you work in the health or social care sector?
8. Including yourself, how many adults (18+) live in your household?
9. How many children (0-17) live in your household?
10. What is your ethnicity?
11. How would you rate your mental health prior to the Coronavirus pandemic?
12. Have you been diagnosed with, or do you feel you suffer from any of the following?
13. What impact has the pandemic had on your mental health?
14. Have you been able to access support for your mental health?
15. What support have you accessed for your mental health?
16. Would you like to tell us more about this?
17. We would like to ask you about how the pandemic has affected your financial situation.
18. Please tick all that apply. Since the lockdown in March...
19. Do you have an existing medical condition, including pregnancy, that requires treatment or care (not related to Coronavirus)?
20. During lockdown, has your treatment or care for this condition...
21. During lockdown, did you experience a medical issue but decide not to contact your doctor/medical professional about it?
22. Was this issue...
23. What stopped you seeking help for this issue?
24. If you contacted your GP surgery during lockdown, how was the experience?
25. Could you tell us why you gave this rating, and how your experience could have been improved?
26. In future would you be happy to have more appointments: Please tick all that apply
27. Are you a carer for someone else (either paid or unpaid)? Please tick all that apply
28. What is the biggest issue that you face, as a carer right now?
29. Have you been advised to, or decided that you need to self-isolate or be shielded for health reasons?
30. Are you worried or anxious about coming out of lockdown?
31. If you answered 'yes' please tell us why.
32. Are there any activities that you started during lockdown that you plan to continue with?
33. Is there any behaviour you started or continued with in lockdown that you want to change?
34. Do you feel that lockdown restrictions have been lifted too early?
35. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

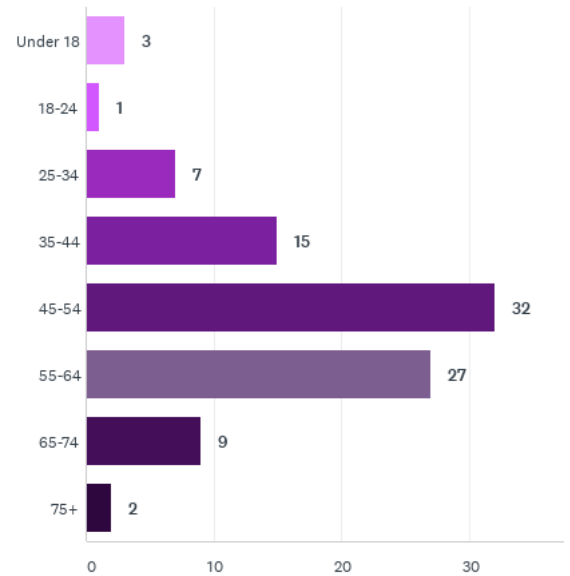
Demographics

96 people responded to this survey between 16nd June and 14th August 2020.

Q1 Where do you live?



Q2 How old are you?

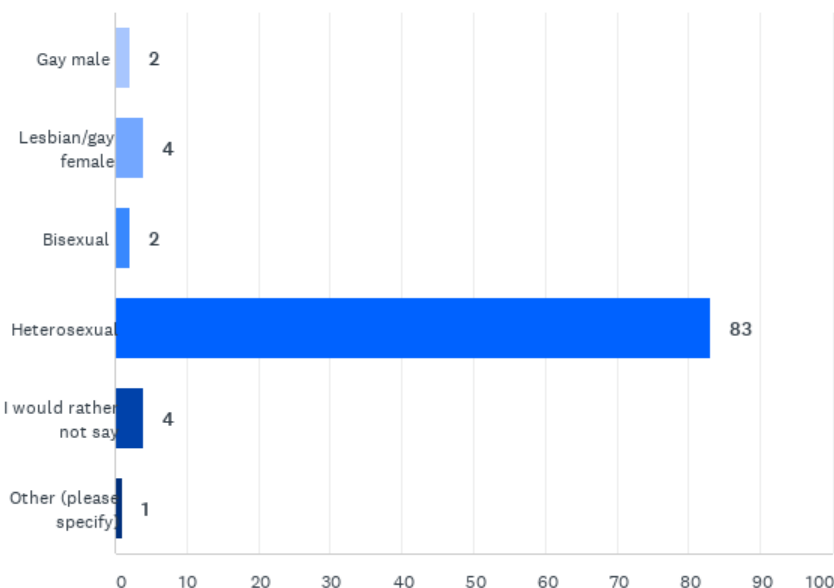


Gender identity

71% of respondents identified as female, 26% as male. 97% told us that their gender identity was the same as on their birth certificate.

Nobody identified as 'other' (including non-binary and trans). Two people said they would prefer not to say.

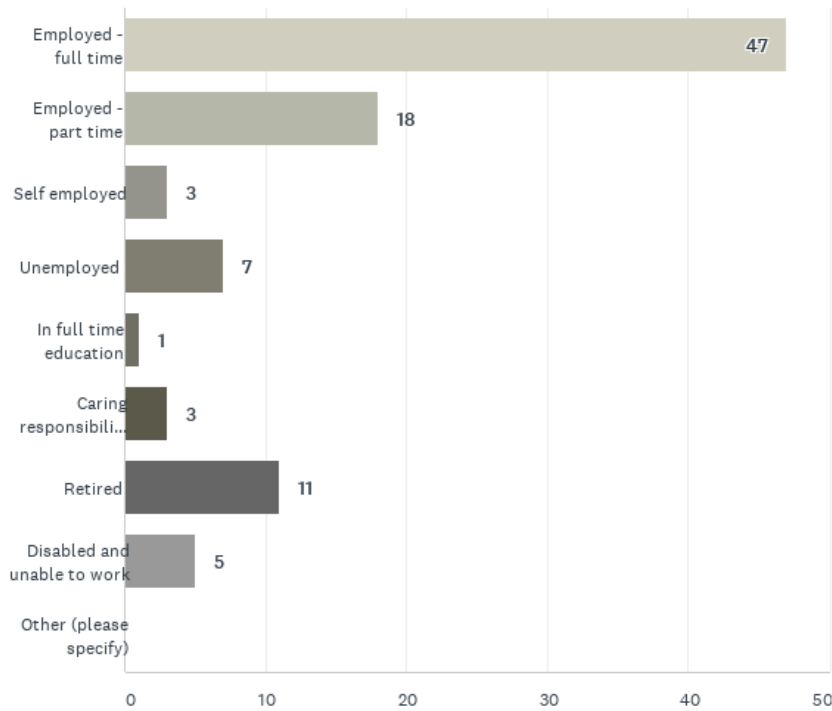
Q5 How would you describe your sexual orientation?





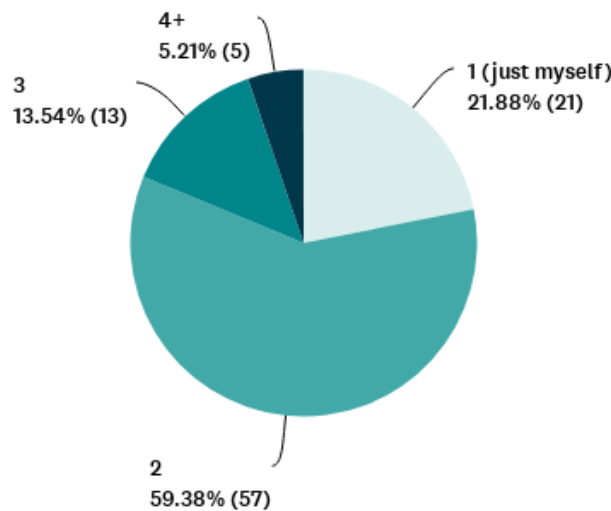
Demographics - continued

Q6 What was your employment status before the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?



Only six people answered the question - do you work in health or social care? One person worked in social care and one person worked in health care.

Q8 Including yourself, how many adults (over 18) live in your household?



64% of respondents live in household with no children, 20% live in a house with one child. 99% are of white British/white other ethnic origin.



The impact of the pandemic on mental health

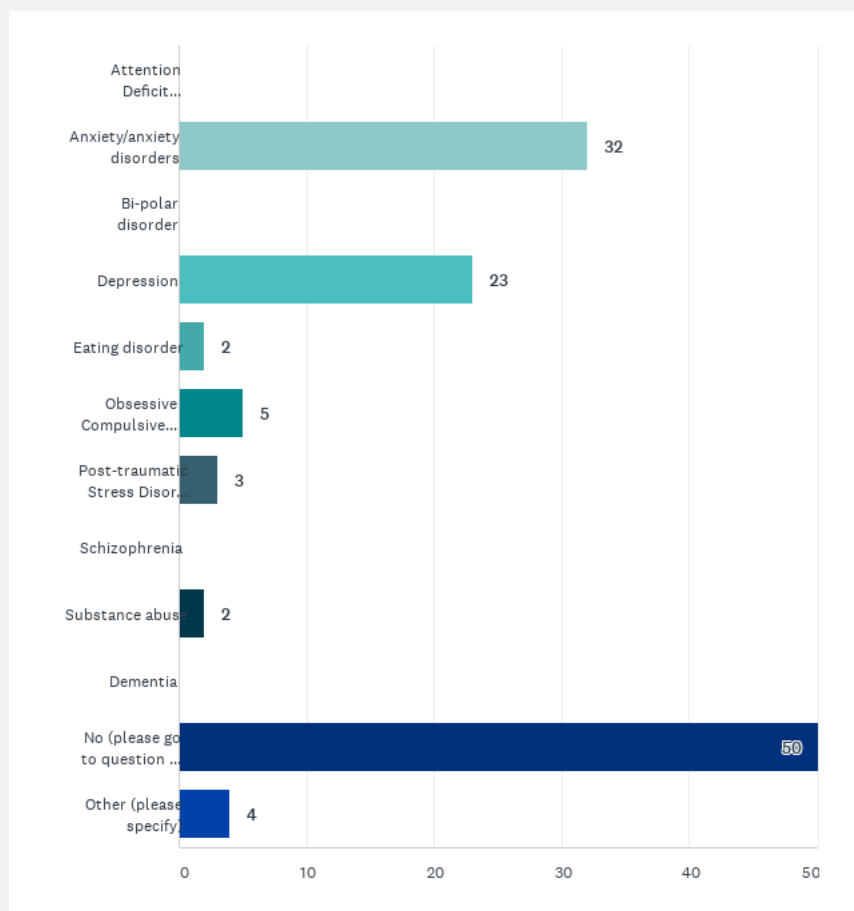
Concerns have been raised over the impact of the pandemic and lockdown on mental health in the UK media and this was supported by the findings from v1 and v2 of our survey.

To investigate these concerns HWT asked respondents to rate their mental health both before and during the pandemic. The rating scale went from very poor (0) to very good (100)

The average rating for mental health score prior to the pandemic was 65, which is fairly good.

But not as good as the average score given for responses to v2 of the survey which was 78.

Have you been diagnosed with, or do you feel you suffer from any of the following:



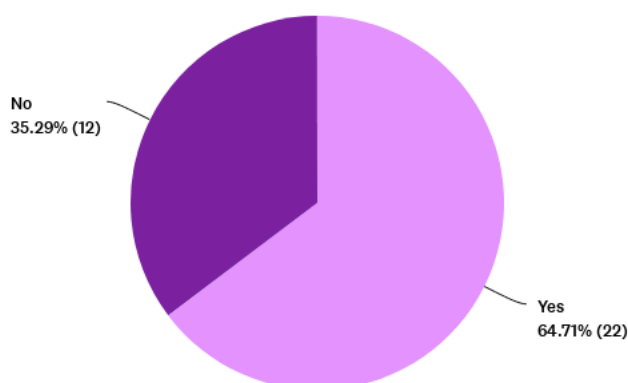
Respondents were also asked to give a score to show the impact that the pandemic has had on their mental health. The rating scale went from no impact at all (0) to it has had a huge impact (100).

The average rating people gave for the impact of the pandemic on their mental health was 57(compared to an average score of 37 for responses to v2).

Other category:

- Sleep Disorder
- Personality Disorder
- Stress
- Asperger's

Q14 Have you been able to access support for your mental health?Please skip this question if you do not normally access support for your mental health.





The impact of the pandemic on mental health - continued

What support have you accessed for your mental health?

Type of support	Number of respondents
Friends and family	31
Self-support	15
Support services (phone or online)	7
Other	4
Online counselling	4
None	19

Other:

- GP
- Counsellor
- Consultant

Respondents told us of a variety of ways that they have tried to manage their mental health:

“Unable to access any MH support due to difficulties using phone. Major crisis in May, approx 4 wks duration, only support was GP home visit to remove meds, & emotional support online by friends. It's been tough trying to exist.”

“My daughter is on the pathway to a potential adhd diagnosis as her behaviour was extremely challenging. All of the appointments stopped during to covid. Her behaviour has impacted hugely on the family and had been extremely difficult..”

“Transgender people need surgeries and medical support which they are currently not being provided with adequately. This affects their mental health which can not be supported properly by the normal channels of support available.”

“If I start talking, I'll start crying and never stop .”

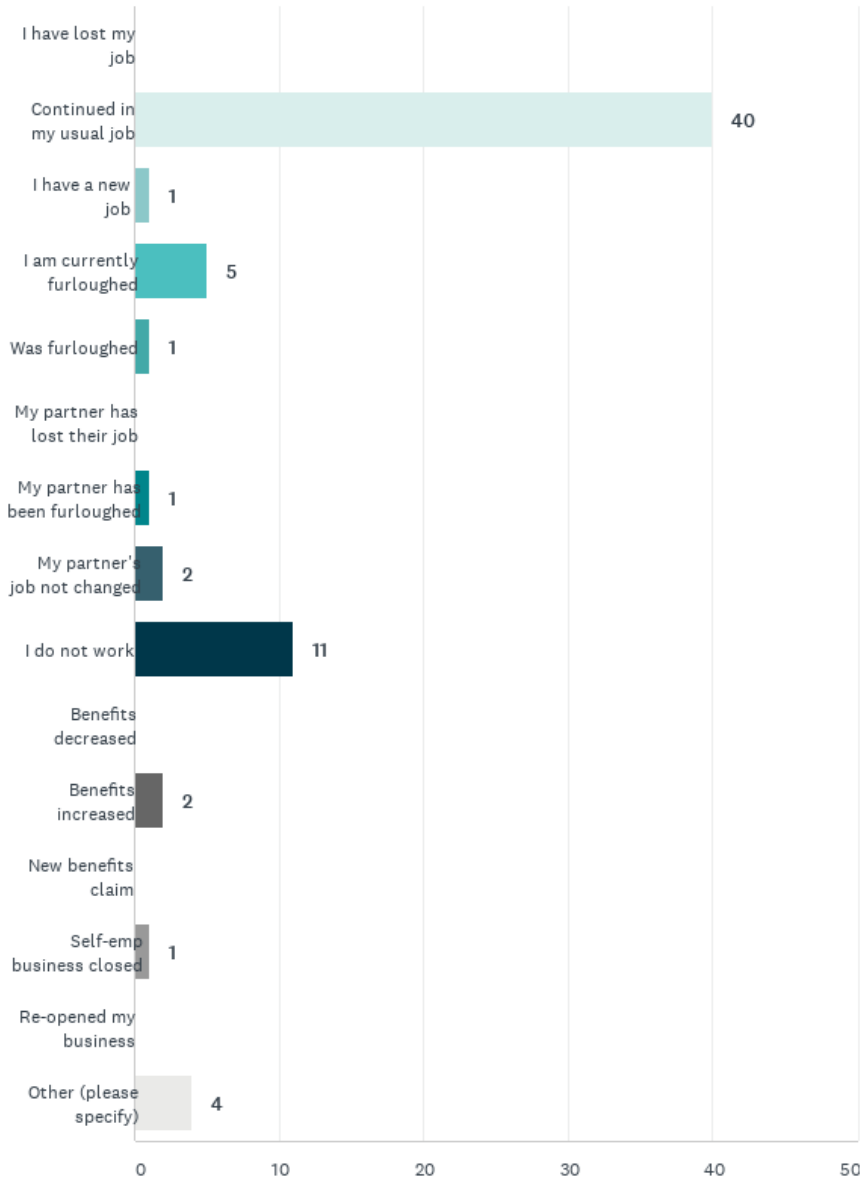
“Headspace website and connecting with friends regularly.”



The financial impact of the pandemic

59% of respondents have continued to work in their normal job during the pandemic.

Q17 We would like to ask you about how the pandemic has affected your financial situation. Please tick all that apply. Since the lockdown in March:





The financial impact of the pandemic – cont.

Since the lockdown started in March:	
I have struggled to pay my rent/mortgage	1
I have struggled to pay my credit cards/personal loans	2
I have struggled to pay my car loan/finance option	1
I have struggled to pay essential bills (such as Council Tax)	5
I have struggled to afford food	3
The pandemic has not affected me financially	60
I am financially better off	23

“Because I am on “old style” ESA benefit, i am not entitled to the additional £20/week paid by DWP to Uni Credit claimants. I am currently using savings to supplement my ESA (ie pay mortgage) but only got enough savings left for 6 months. I anticipate losing my house next year.”

“Not travelling for work and not shopping as much has enabled me to save some money every month.”

“Food costs have increased due to online shopping rather than shopping locally.”

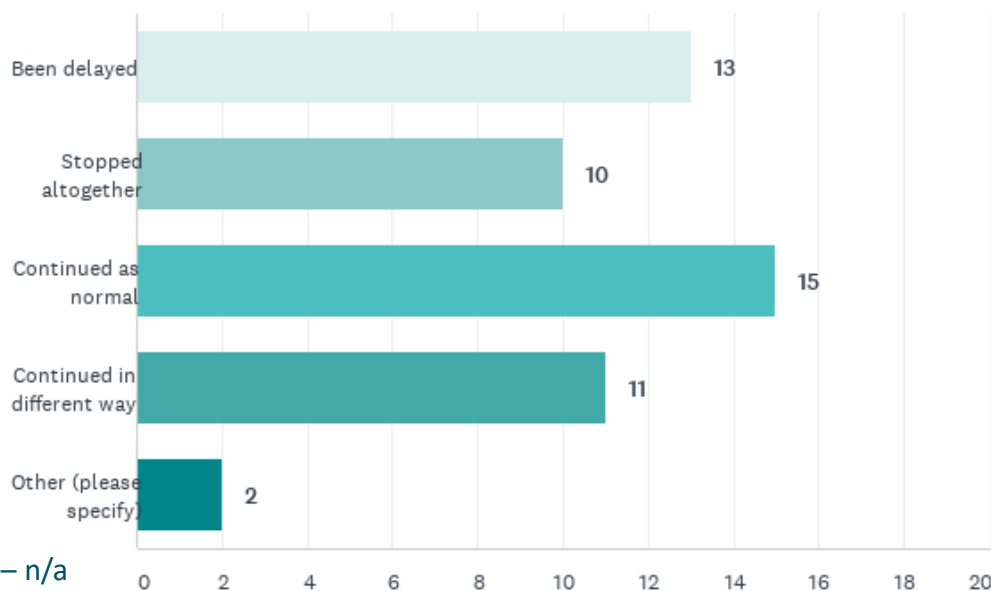
“I have been threatened with redundancy.”



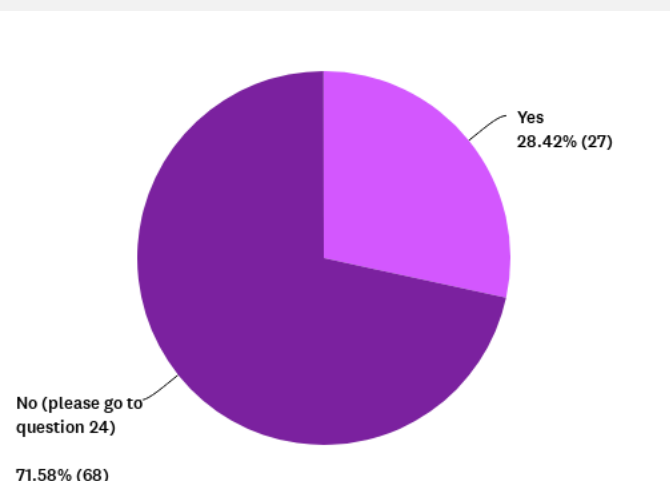
The impact of the pandemic on pre-existing medical conditions

In answer to the question, do you have a pre-existing medical condition (including pregnancy) not related to Coronavirus: 38 people (40% of respondents) said yes

Q20 During lockdown, has your treatment or care for this condition:



During lockdown did you experience a medical issue but decide not to contact your doctor/medical professional about it?



Was this issue?	No. of respondents
Related to your mental health	5
A physical injury (e.g. broken bone)	2
An illness (e.g. vomiting)	3
A long-term health issue (e.g. diabetes or asthma)	12
Related to treatment you were already receiving (e.g. chemotherapy)	2

Other:

- Dental (3 people)
- Transgender services
- Muscle/joint pain (2 people)
- Bereavement
- Specialist treatment
- Covid-19



What stopped you seeking help for your medical condition?

Nine people told us that they didn't want to bother the doctor or be a 'burden'.

"Didn't want to be a burden. Lots of people are in a worse situation, I have been anxious because of the pressure of the pandemic."

"Manageable at home (to an extent) and did not want to (a) trouble already pressurised NHS staff and (b) expose my child (who had the illness) to the hospital as an area of high infection."

Seven people said that they avoided seeking help as they were concerned about catching Coronavirus.

"Fear, doctors and hospitals being a hotspot."

For others (six people) the doctors/dentist was shut, or they were not seeing patients.

"Signs basically going over-the-top essentially saying stay away. "DO NOT COME IN" "SPEAK THROUGH THE WINDOW" "DO NOT PHONE US" "ONLY ONE PERSON AT ONCE". Usually written like that, in capital letters. Hardly welcoming."

"Dr closed no appointments. They were not willing to see people."

Four respondents said that they felt that their issue either wasn't too important or they were able to deal with it at home.

"I didn't consider it serious enough to burden very busy GP's."

"I knew that it wasn't important and can wait until things calm down."

Other reasons included having already spoken to a doctor over the phone and been reassured, being too anxious to see anyone and difficulty getting access to a GP.

"Anxiety about bothering doctor / anxiety about whether will be told to go away / tried ringing once was in a queue so hung up."

"Stranded in Cumbria through lockdown. GP is in another area. "



People's experience of contacting GP surgeries

If you contacted your GP surgery during lockdown, how was the experience?	Number of respondents
Very positive	12
Positive	13
Neutral	19
Negative	3
Very negative	2

51% said it was a positive experience, 39% said it was neutral and 10% told us their experience had been negative.

We asked people why they had given this rating. These are a selection of the responses:

"GP listened, took me seriously, asked how she could help, & arranged for another GP to make home visit, followed up by weekly contact, gave me email address as alternative to phone. She is compassionate & kind & that helps a lot."

"Find telephone and video consultations very efficient."

"My surgery has been brilliant. They have helped as much as they would have before just obviously slightly differently doing the consultation over the phone."

"My surgery is probably the most efficiently run practice in the locality and their response is at all times professional, courteous, timely, patient orientated and most importantly competent."

"I feel my doctor surgery isn't very trans orientated and feel they're not interested in trans issues at all regarding my depression they fob me off with antidepressants never offer any kind of counselling."

"I'm always on hold."

"Contact has been difficult with technical issues."

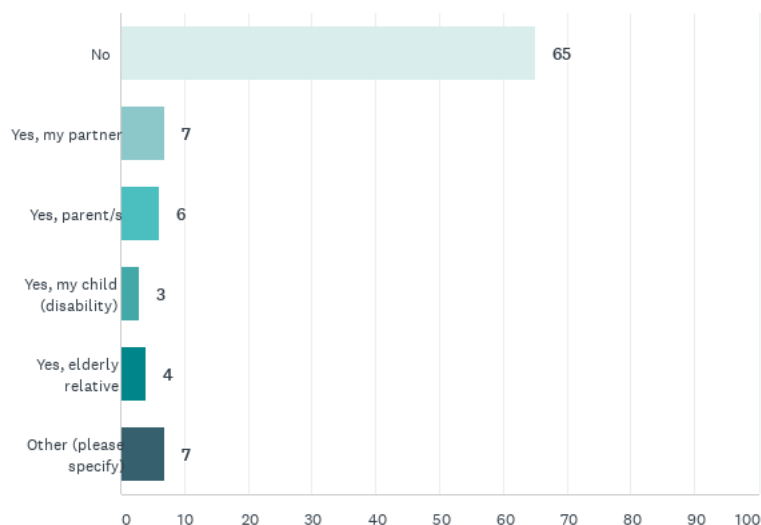
When we asked respondents how they would like future appointments to be conducted:

- 21 people said they would be happy to have a video consultation.
- 27 would be happy to have a phone consultation.
- 15 would prefer face to face appointments.
- 41 would like a combination of all three approaches.



The experience of being a carer during the pandemic

Q27 Are you a carer for someone else (either paid or unpaid)? Please tick all that apply



Other: paid carer, foster carer, carer for grandchildren, temporary carer for daughter and baby.

What is the biggest issue you face, as a carer right now?

"Having to still go to work."

"Foster children falling behind with their academic education."

"My husband's depression. He has been shielding as he has cancer, he has felt isolated from his children and grandchildren, worried about accessing health services, frustrated because he can't take his usual daily exercise and is dependant on others (me) for food, shopping, access to pharmacy services - things he would have been able to do without Covid 19."

"Lockdown, unable to visit due to restrictions in Care Home. Parents are there temporarily, one has Alzheimer's the other not and so are currently in a care home together to avoid separation during lockdown. Therefore paying care home fees £1,000 each a week while still paying rent and bills for own home until one can return home when lockdown finishes and visit to care home are reinstated again."

"My partner being shielded and her not being able to work which affects her mental health."

"Fitting in caring responsibilities with the increased demands at work- I work front line NHS."

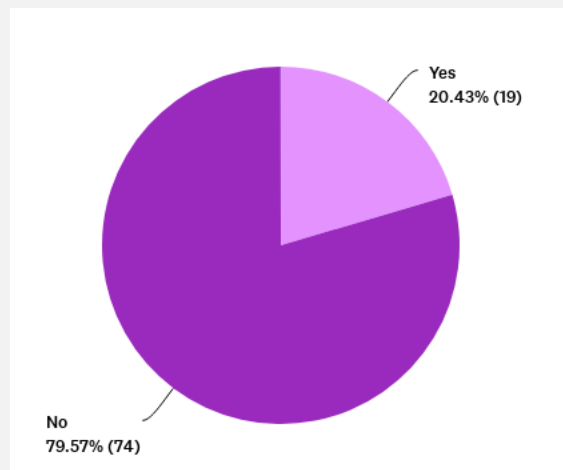
"Loneliness."

"Trying to explain the new world we are living in."

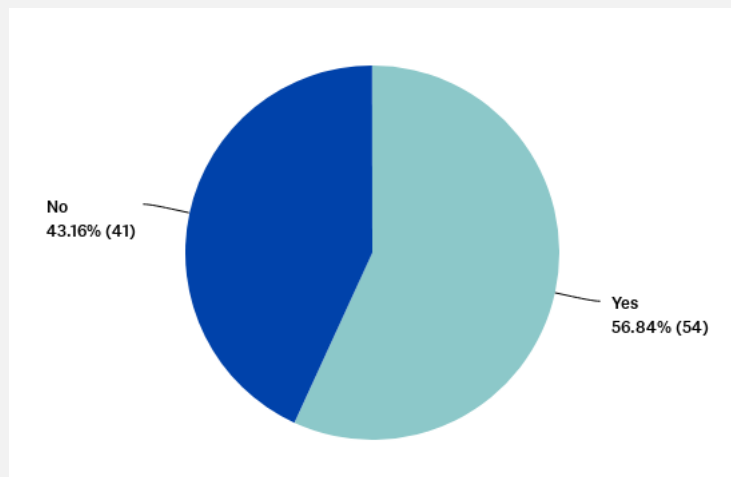


Self-isolating, shielding and coming out of lockdown

Have you been advised to, or decided that you need to self-isolate or be shielded for health reasons?



Are you worried or anxious about coming out of lockdown?



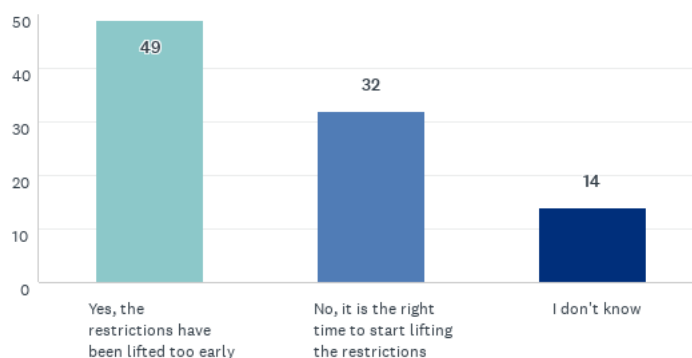
19 people told us their main concern was that other people were not adhering to social distancing or other protective measures.

"I think that some other people are not currently following social distancing guidance, and that this will get worse as things are eased to the point that they will forget that the virus has not gone away!"

Other worries included:

- A second wave of Coronavirus (8 people).
- Catching Coronavirus (7 people).
- Passing the virus on to others (4 people).
- Mixed messages/guidance from government (3 people).
- Life never being the same again (2 people).

Q34 Do you feel that lockdown restrictions have been lifted too early?

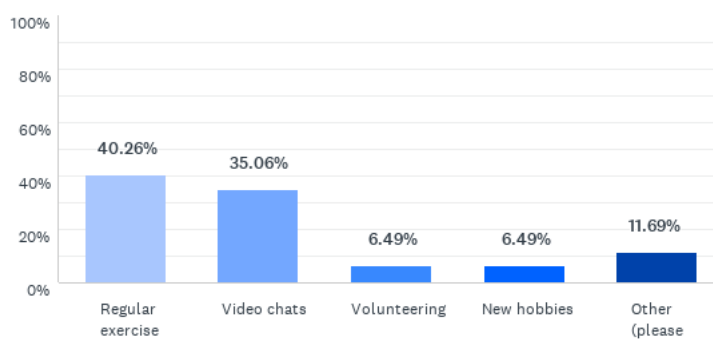




'Healthy & unhealthy habits'

We wanted to investigate whether people had started any new habits or activities during lockdown that they hoped to continue and conversely, if there were any habits or behaviours that they were hoping to stop or give up.

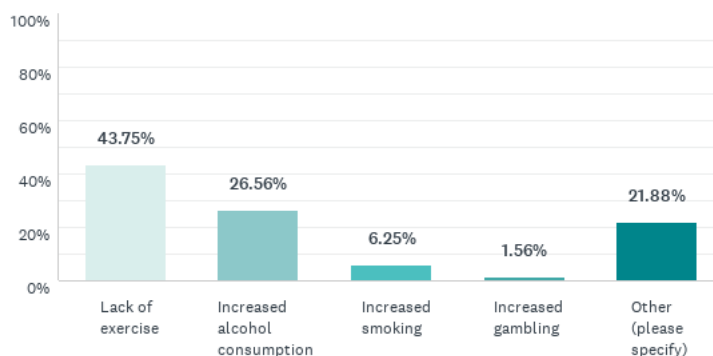
Q32 Are there any activities that you started during lockdown that you plan to continue with?
Please tick all that apply



Other:

Gardening, art and other creative activities, self-help, relaxation techniques and dieting.

Q33 Is there any behaviour you started or continued with in lockdown that you want to change?



Other:

“Smoking, poor diet & eating problems, agoraphobia, lack of daily routine, lack of social contact, procrastination.”

Eating too much, not eating enough, being reclusive.



Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

15 people left a comment in this section.

Struggling with:

- Loneliness.
- “Confusing” communication from central government.
- Understanding the unnecessary deaths in care homes.

“My pets & my garden & nature have got me through this year so far. I'm dreading the winter. I'm permanently lonely, even before COVID but its been worse in lockdown as I couldn't even have my usual weekly meal with friends which is the only regular social contact I normally have.”

“The way central government handled the pandemic from a policy and political point-of-view is embarrassing and awful.”

“Communication from the government has been appalling and very confusing.”

Practical difficulties:

- Getting food shopping.
- Receiving medical treatment.
- Restricted access to health and social care.
- Restrictions in care homes being lifted too soon.

“Please, please, please, resume health services ASAP. People will be dying of cancer right now. People like myself risk losing their jobs (and homes, cars, everything they have worked for all their lives) because a medical issue is not being treated and we won't be able to return to work after lockdown.”

“The government needs to be held to account for not protecting people in care homes at the start of the pandemic, and for delaying lockdown, which has caused the unnecessary deaths of thousands of people in this country, including Lancashire.”

Looking to the future:

“Overall, lockdown has been beneficial to me and those that I live with, but I would have liked to have had the opportunity to help others more than I have been able to.”

“Strengthening and empowering local health organisations and systems has proved far more capable, and I would like to see this raised in the long term. Devolution to NHS/LA bodies.”

“We need to tackle climate change to create safer spaces for all and build on the positives of lockdown that saw a reduction in pollution and an increase in people walking / bike riding.”



Demographics

60% of respondents to this survey were from Cumbria. This version received a better response rate from younger people, compared to previous versions, but 72% of respondents were still aged over 45. 71% were female, 86% heterosexual and 73% in some form of employment. 22% are the only adult in the household, 36% have at least one child living with them. Respondents were 99% white British or white other.

Mental Health

When we asked people to rate their mental health prior to the pandemic (on a scale of 0 = poor and 100 = very good) the average score was 65. This is a lower score than the average for respondents to v2 (which was 78). The people who responded to v3 had a higher incidence of mental health issues (47% for v3, compared to 32% of respondents to v2) so this could be a contributing factor to this lower mental health score. Respondents to this survey also felt that the pandemic had a bigger impact on their mental health, than respondents to our previous survey.

35% of people who normally accessed support for their mental health told us that they had been unable to do this during the pandemic. Most were currently relying on friends and family for support. This finding has remained consistent across all versions of the survey.

For those struggling to manage their own or someone else's mental health, the Coronavirus pandemic has made their situation more difficult. People told us about only being able to access GP support (rather than any specialist support) during a crisis, trying to cope with a child's challenging behaviour and a lack of any support for people with transgender issues.

Financial impact

59% had continued in their usual job, no-one had seen their benefits decrease, but two people had seen an increase. Although 71% said they had not been affected financially and 27% said they were now actually better off, six people told us that they had struggled to afford food and/or pay essential bills.

Pre-existing medical conditions

40% have a pre-existing medical condition. Out of these; 51% said treatment had continued, 25% had their treatment delayed and 20% said their treatment had stopped altogether.

27 people experienced a medical issue during the pandemic but did not seek professional help for it. The reasons they gave for not getting medical help included: being a burden, concern over catching the virus, the surgery was closed or they felt that their issue wasn't too important.

GP surgeries

When we asked about their experiences of contacting a GP surgery during lockdown, 51% said it was a positive experience, 39% said neutral and only 10% said it was a negative experience.



Summary – cont.

Carers

Just under a quarter of respondents have caring responsibilities for at least one other person. We asked them what was the biggest issue they currently face. The answers they gave show a wide variety of challenges facing carers, including trying to balance paid work with caring responsibilities and supporting other people's mental health.

Self-isolating and social distancing

A new series of questions were developed for v3 to reflect the current social situation, which included some about shielding/self-isolating and coming out of lockdown. 20% of respondents had been advised to shield. 57% told us they were worried or concerned about coming out of lockdown. Their main concern was other people not adhering to guidelines (such as maintaining social distancing), followed by worries about catching the virus.

Healthy and unhealthy habits

Other new questions enquired about habits started during lockdown. 40% of respondents said that they hope to continue with the regular exercise they have started, while 44% told us they hadn't done much exercise, but hoped to begin to tackle this. 35% want to continue with the video chats they started during lockdown. 27% want to decrease the amount of alcohol they have been consuming.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

In this comment section people told us about loneliness, confusing communication from government, unnecessary deaths in care homes, difficulties getting food shopping, medical treatment and problems with access to health and social care.



Conclusion

These experiences are an historical record of what life was like for people living in Cumbria and Lancashire during these unprecedented times – a piece of social history.

HWT would like to say thank you to all those people who took the time to complete our survey, to share their stories with us and to contribute to this valuable piece of social research.

New issues that have been identified in this report include people's concern over the lifting of lockdown restrictions and the impact this may have. It has also highlighted the number of people who are concerned over the lack of exercise and amount of alcohol they have consumed during the lockdown period. Mental health concerns continue to be a pressing problem for many people as does medical issues that are not being treated. Further research is currently being developed into areas highlighted through the HWT reports, more information will be available on the individual HW websites and on social media over the coming months.

As a Healthwatch it is important not just that we gather this data and record people's experiences and stories, but also that we do something with them. As one respondent pointed out, there *"...seems to be a lot of questionnaires about people's experiences and thoughts during these pandemics but no actions from it."*

We are working in together with the University of Cumbria to gather as much information as we can about people's lived experience during this time. As well as HWT producing a series of reports, we also share our findings with representatives from the local CCGs, County Councils and other relevant agencies and service providers. They are then able to use this feedback as we all move into the next stage of the pandemic and begin the easing of lockdown restrictions.



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