

How does it feel for me during Covid 19? - Weekly real-time report Week Commencing 14th September

Public Voices: the Summer Check In

In mid-August, we launched our “Summer Check In” to find out how people in Leeds were feeling about some of the key topics we have looked at over the past five months. We shared the findings in the [last Weekly Check In report](#). Here’s a quick summary of some of the key points from 134 responses:

- Over half of our respondents said the pandemic is still impacting on their **mental wellbeing** (most commonly reporting feelings of anxiety, isolation and despondency).
- Three-quarters of people reported having always been aware that their **GP practice** was open, while 58% were kept informed about changes in the way they would attend appointments.
- 58% of those who had had a health or care appointment by **phone or online** said it was a positive experience, while a further 30% had had a mix of good and bad experiences.
- 8 out of 10 people in Leeds felt **unsafe** from the virus when out and about at least some of the time. This was almost always due to other people, shops, cafes and so on breaking social distancing and hygiene guidelines. Nearly two-thirds of this group of people reported that this was having a negative impact on how fit and healthy they felt.

To read the survey results in detail, please click [here](#).

As part of the survey, we asked people if there was anything else they would like to tell us about their experiences of accessing health and care right now.

A few common themes emerged from their 67 responses.

Frustrations with a lack of access to care and treatment

Some people have been left frustrated and at times even angry at not having been able to access medical care over the lockdown. For example:

- “GP surgery receptionist says no referrals are being made at the moment. Not sure that GPs are doing anything or seeing patients. My husband desperately needs an orthopaedic referral as recommended by his physio last February. It hasn't happened and there seems to be no way forward. Health care appears to be DIY. His mobility is now very poor. Can you devise a way for patients to self refer to specialists please? I have been waiting for investigations since February and nothing has happened there either. Some days I feel so ill and there is nowhere to turn.”
- “It's so difficult even speaking to a doctor right now. I have fibromyalgia, hypermobility and chronic pain I feel total abandonment.”
- “You say doctors were always open but this was only for advice on Corona. I had a lump on my breast and was told they weren't seeing anyone. I had a bad chest

infection and was told I'd be ok as it was Corona even though i was struggling to breath and my chest was crackling every time i tried to breath.”

Concerns about health services coping with a “backlog” of patients

Respondents told us about worries that health services will be overloaded once they are able to return to normal, and that people who developed serious health problems over lockdown might have been missed. For example:

- “Feel that some of the lockdown measures when it comes to health care have been totally unnecessary and the long term effect will be felt for a long time. When you are caring for someone that has severe difficulties you need face to face help and consultation all we have had a phone calls. feel very unsupported and invisible.”
- “There seems to be a back log which is having an effect on services. My GP usually calls or text to inform me that I have a review or blood tests are due but they haven't as a result I missed one of my blood test and now my health is quite bad.”
- “Unfortunately I have a friend whose cancer treatment/scan was postponed. This does not make sense to me and could have been handled and prioritised differently by Government. Resources could have been better focused and serious ailments as well as Covid could have still been dealt with.”
- “Disappointed that vital services such as dermatology and mental health support were reduced, meaning people with conditions that would have previously been resolved quickly have been left untreated, and could have worsened.”
- “Feel NHS are a long way behind and are just building problems for future.”

Concerns for people who aren't online or adept at using technology

A number of respondents also said they were concerned about people who weren't able to access phone or online services, or told us about their personal fears around digital healthcare:

- “I can't help but feel for those people who for whatever reason cannot access technology. My Father has memory problems, he forgets to charge a phone etc. if he owns one, he just doesn't understand technology and at this stage of his life, probably never will!”
- “Whilst my experience of accessing doctors has been positive my elderly mother with a different doctors practice is the opposite. They set up a complex telephone system which even I find frustrating to navigate, when you get through (can take up to 30 mins) very rare a GP will see you, yet the nurses and practitioners are doing and taking bloods.”
- “Too scared to use the telephone or video calls so not been able to access GP or Counsellor. Planned operation been cancelled adding to my stress and anxiety and depression.”

Ongoing fears of COVID-19 in healthcare settings

A few people told us that they were still too worried about the risk of infection to attend healthcare settings:

- “I know I shouldn't, but I am currently putting off attending/making medical appointments because of my concerns with other people in attendance and waiting areas (not with the staff).”
- “I am lucky to be healthy but I would not feel comfortable accessing healthcare support right now.”
- “I have friends that are not accessing women's health services, like cervical screenings for example, sometimes because appointments have been cancelled but often because women don't have the confidence to go, as they feel unsafe”

Spotlight on people who have been shielding

22 of our respondents told us they had been shielding during lockdown. They were less likely than the non-shielding population to have always known their GP was open. While 81% of non-shielders (79 out of 97) consistently knew they could access their GP, only 59% of shielders were aware (13 out of 22).

9% of shielding people (2 out of 22) now feel safe from the virus when out in public, compared to 25% of non-shielding people (24 out of 97). Of the 20 shielding people who don't feel safe at least some of the time, 17 (85%) report that this has affected how fit and healthy they are. (The equivalent figure for non-shielding people is 57%, or 41 people.)

Spotlight on different experiences by age group

We spoke to:

- 25 people aged 34 and under (4 of whom have been shielding)
- 56 people aged 35 to 54 (10 of whom have been shielding)
- 36 people aged 55+ (8 of whom have been shielding)

Access to GPs: younger people are less likely to feel informed

Percentage of people who were unsure about whether their GP surgery was open or believed it was/is shut:

Age group	%
34 and under	28%
35-54	22%
55+	17%

Percentage of people who were kept informed about changes in the way they would see their GP:

Age group	%
34 and under	44%
35-54	57%
55+	72%

Getting health and care by phone and online: younger people don't necessarily have better experiences

Percentage of people who report a positive experience of digital and telephone health and care services:

Age group	%
34 and under	33%
35-54	68%
55+	64%

Percentage of people who report a mixture of good and bad experiences of digital and telephone services:

Age group	%
34 and under	58%
35-54	23%
55+	20%

Feeling safe from coronavirus: while younger people are more likely to say they feel safe, the majority still report concerns at least some of the time

Percentage of people who say they feel safe from the coronavirus in public places:

Age group	%
34 and under	32%
35-54	17%
55+	22%

Percentage of people who feel unsafe some or all of the time who report that this is having an effect on their fitness:

Age group	%
34 and under	47%
35-54	68%
55+	63%

Leeds Cruse Bereavement Care
Provides emotional support to anyone aged 18+ who has been affected by a bereavement

LCBC explains that it and its clients feel that we are still in the middle of the pandemic so, although some measures are being eased, the situation for some older people remains very difficult. Clients have been experiencing feelings of heightened anxiety, exacerbated by worry over employment, health and so on. Lockdown gave people more time to reflect and seemed to bring back experience of previous bereavements. Their usual coping mechanisms or distractions were not available. It is not felt that anxiety levels have subsided a great deal since lockdown was eased.

In general, LCBC's clients have been needing more support as their feelings have been more intense. Their grieving process has been made harder by not being able to be at their loved one's bedside and say goodbye, the lack of physical reassurance, restrictions on funerals and more.

LCBC was already providing telephone support when lockdown came into place so had prior experience, but it took time to get the whole team transferred. Some clients did not wish to start or continue

Leeds Bereavement Forum
Provides signposting for the public and professionals, as well as training and events which develop and improve bereavement services in the city.

LBF's service users who experienced a bereavement during lockdown very commonly report sadness at not having had the opportunity to say goodbye to their loved one as they would have wished (bearing in mind that Leeds and Bradford's initial restrictions on funerals were notably strict). Physical isolation from friends and family has also been difficult. While not having access to their usual distractions over lockdown has made some service users' bereavement more painful, for others it has given them time to process their feelings.

LBF's Death Cafés service has now gone virtual. Take-up has been good, and while the meetings have had a slightly less personal, conversational feel, moving them online has enabled some people to attend who otherwise would not have been able to. One or two regular service users have not been able to join due to difficulties with technology.

LBF anticipates offering a mixture of online and face-to-face training and support in future. Moving services online relieves the organisation of the need to

support in this way, and LCBC remains unable to provide face-to-face services. The organisation's online support is just getting started. There is concern about clients who cannot access either the phone or online support and may be isolated.

hire a venue, for example, but does mean that the highly interactive nature of their work will need to be tailored to the format.

LBF suspects that the need for peer support for people who experienced bereavement under lockdown will only grow over time.

Healthwatch Leeds Enquiry Line

Healthwatch Leeds has continued to hear from people whose health and care experiences have been affected by the pandemic, with a number of queries reflecting the themes coming out of our Summer Check In. Here are some of the things which people have told us:

- There is some uncertainty around guidance on face mask coverings in social settings, for example in cafés
- There are issues around accessing services (including third sector) online
- There are fears around existing medical conditions worsening due to pauses in treatment
- There have been mixed messages around how to pick up medication from GPs and pharmacies

We have also heard about how national issues around test shortages have affected people in the city. For instance, a relative of a Leeds care home resident shared with us that the home had been advised to use left-over substandard Randox COVID tests when it became clear no others would be supplied. This was despite the home having previously been informed [Randox tests should be avoided](#).

In the last three weeks, we have had 17 enquiries relating to people not being able to find an NHS dentist in Leeds.

How Does It Feel for Me?

We're looking for people with multiple health conditions who could help us improve health and care services by sharing their experiences by phone during lockdown.

Since last year, Healthwatch Leeds has been working with several partners on its "How Does It Feel for Me?" project, which closely follows the experiences of people in Leeds who have complex health needs and access multiple health and care services.

We're now looking for people with multiple health conditions and/or a family member who cares for them who would be willing to talk to us once a month over a 6-month period to record their story.

We want to hear about their monthly experiences of health and care services to help us understand their journey as a patient or carer.

During the current COVID-19 situation, we are open to talking to people in a number of different ways, however people feel comfortable (for example by recorded phone call, socially distanced filming or people videoing or audio recording video diaries). Once approved by the participant, the recorded updates and videos will be shared with staff across the health and care system and with health and care leaders to help them understand how they can make improvements.

We're particularly interested to hear the experiences of people from the following groups:

- People who have had their treatment paused or affected in another way during lockdown
- People who care for someone with multiple health conditions
- People with mental health problems or their relative/carer
- We're also particularly interested in hearing from men and people from BAME backgrounds.

To find more information about the project, watch the films we have made so far and register your interest, please visit [our website](#).

These reports are designed to support decision makers during this time. If you find them useful, we would love to hear from you! Please do drop us a line at info@healthwatchleeds.co.uk to tell us what you have found most useful.