

**COVID-19: health and social care
experiences in Newcastle and Gateshead
Survey report July 2020**

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About Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle

Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle are two of 152 local Healthwatch organisations established throughout England on 1 April 2013 under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We are the independent voice and champion of users of a range of NHS services and social care for adults, children and young people. We have a dual role to champion the rights of users, and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

We collect feedback on services from people of all ages and communities. We do this through our network of voluntary and community sector organisations; during events, drop-in sessions and listening events at a range of venues across Gateshead and Newcastle; online through the feedback centre on our websites; via social media; and from callers to our information and signposting helplines. As part of the remit to gather views, we also have the power to ‘enter and view’ services and conduct announced and unannounced visits.

Healthwatch Gateshead and Healthwatch Newcastle are part of Tell Us North CIC (company no. 10394966).

Author: Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead

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1. Introduction

A priority at both Healthwatch Newcastle and Healthwatch Gateshead is to invite patient experiences and stories during the COVID-19 pandemic so that these can be used to inform how services change and adapt to patient needs and experiences during this unprecedented time.

We launched a survey on 21 May 2020 titled 'COVID-19: your experiences of health and social care'. We promoted this via our social media platforms, websites and newsletters. We also got in touch with other organisations seeking support to promote the survey including:

- Voluntary and community sector organisations
- Various stakeholders we have worked with
- GP practices
- Care homes

Our Champions (volunteers) also promoted the survey on our behalf.

The survey was online, but we also offered a call-back service for people who do not have internet access. We called them so they could complete the survey over the phone.

The survey is now closed and this is the final report summarising the findings. We are moving onto Healthwatch England's #BecauseWeAllCare campaign, where we will continue to gather feedback about health and social care services. We will be watching to see if the themes that emerged out of this work continue to do so via #BecauseWeAllCare.

To share your experiences as part of #BecauseWeAllCare please complete the survey at <https://tinyurl.com/because2020>



2. Findings for Newcastle and Gateshead

This report presents data gathered from 21 May to 31 July 2020.

We heard from 218 people in total: 40 from Newcastle, 58 from Gateshead and from 120 people who did not provide their postcode. Data from the people from an unknown location is detailed in section three. While we can't confirm their location, you can see in section three that all feedback on specific services is about either Newcastle or Gateshead services.

Question one – Newcastle

This graph shows that most people (31) found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to access information about how to keep themselves and others safe.



Question one – Gateshead

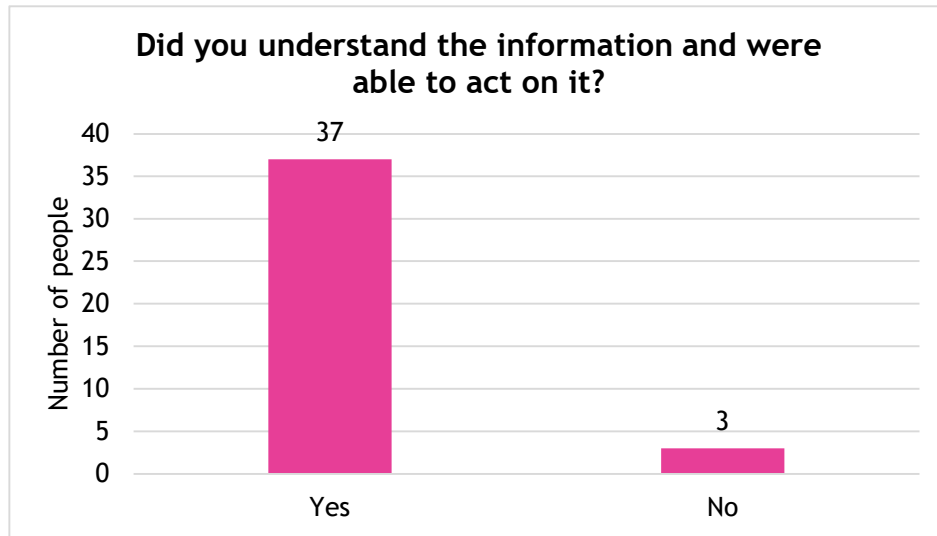
This graph shows that most people (52) found it 'very easy' or 'easy' to access information about how to keep themselves and others safe.



No respondents selected 'very difficult' when answering this question.

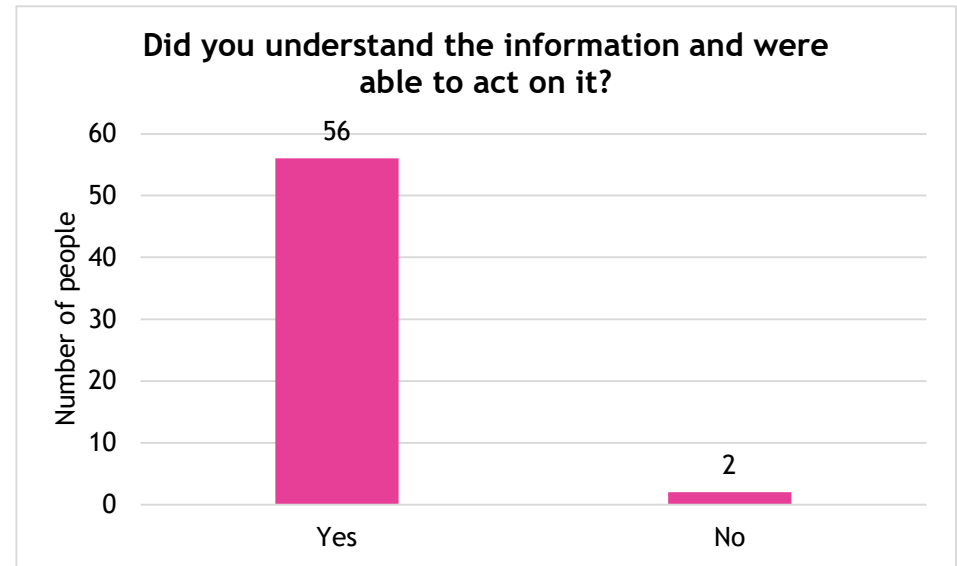
Question two – Newcastle

This graph shows that once people had accessed information, most were able to understand and act on it.



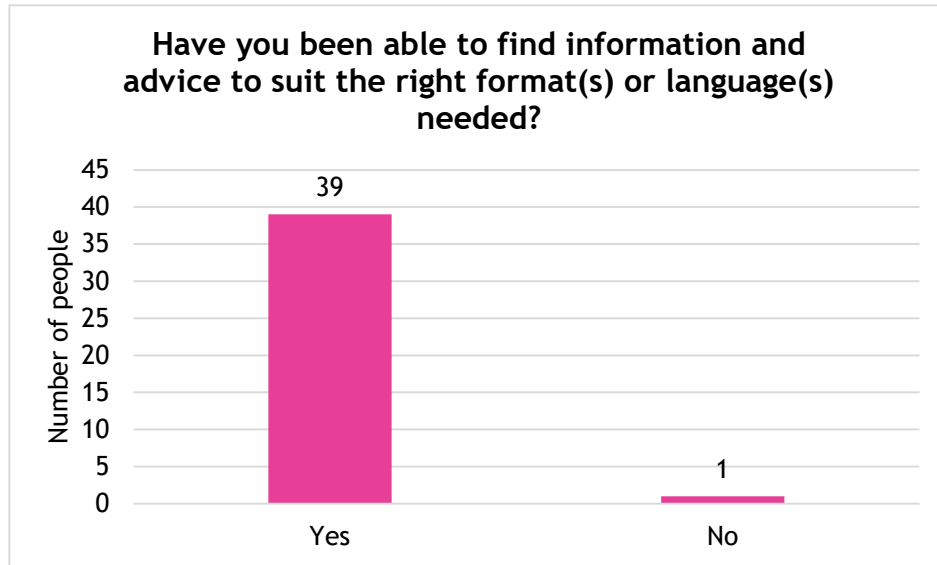
Question two – Gateshead

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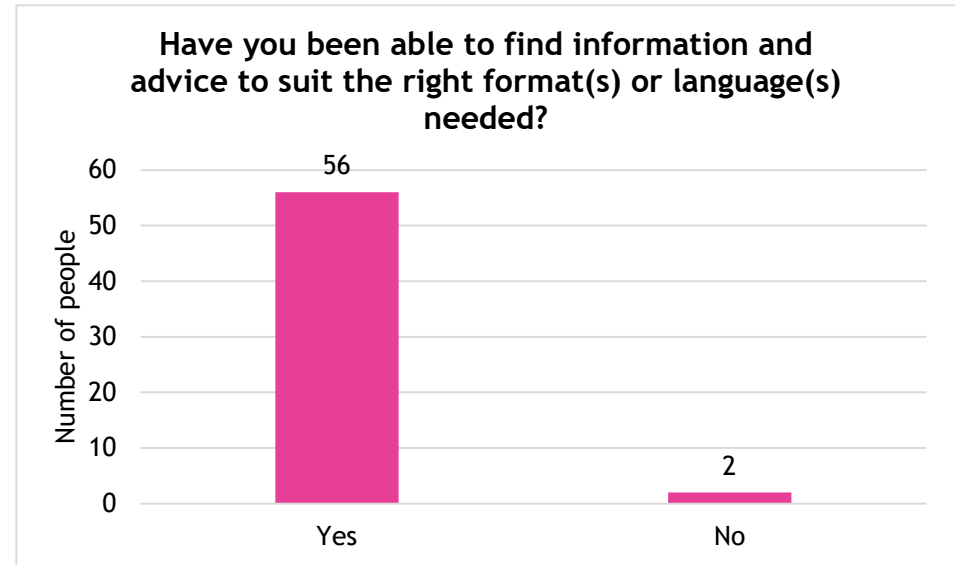
Question three – Newcastle

This graph shows that most people were able to access information in the format they required.



Question three – Gateshead

This graph shows that most people were able to access information in the format they required.



Question four – Newcastle

We asked the person who had answered ‘no’ to question three to tell us more about their information needs or the information needs of the person they care for. This person selected: I/they need information in braille, audio or large print format(s).

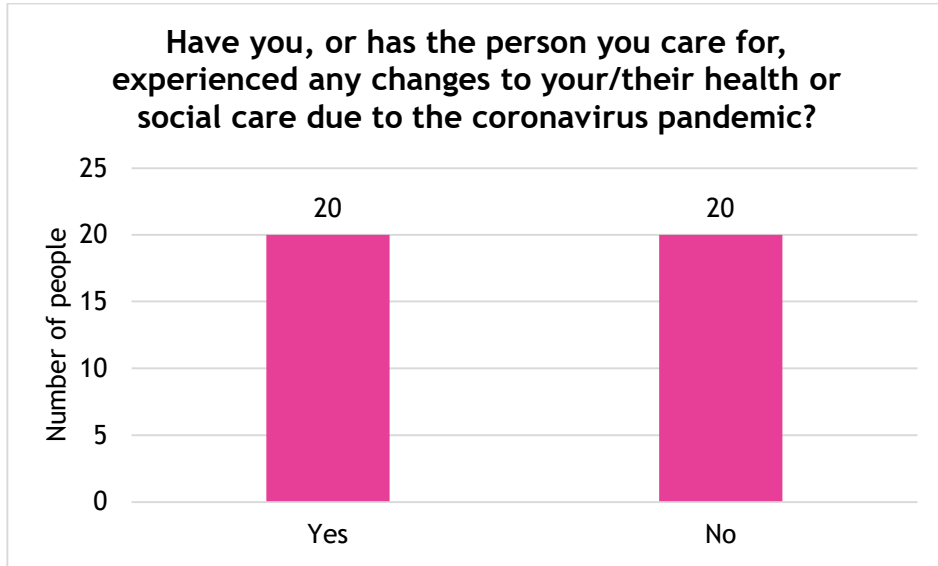


Question four – Gateshead

We asked the two people who had answered ‘no’ to question three to tell us more about their information needs or the information needs of the person they care for. The two people selected: I/they need Easy Read information.

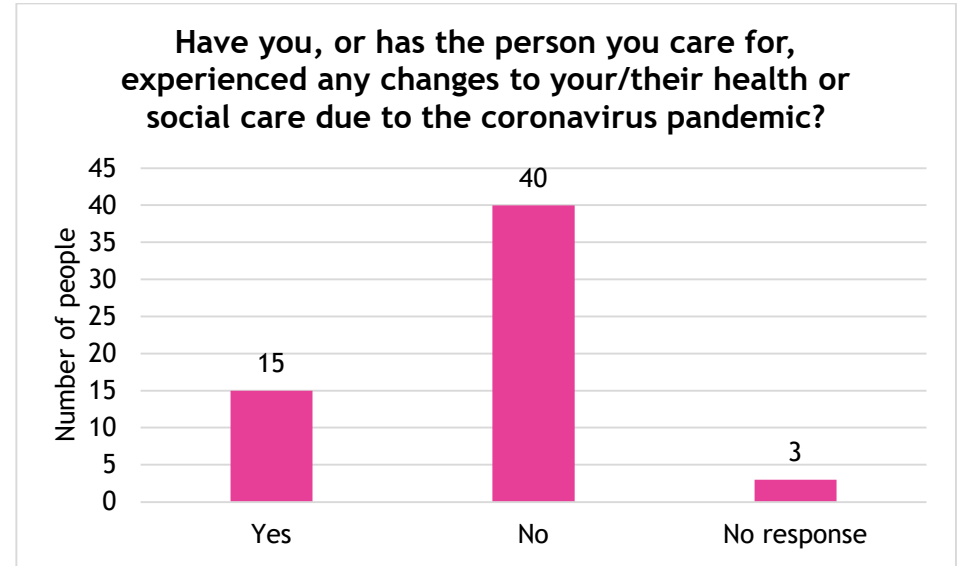
Question five - Newcastle

This graph shows that an equal number of people, or the people they care for, have or have not experienced any changes to their health or social care services due to the coronavirus pandemic.



Question five - Gateshead

This graph shows that most people (40), or the people they care for, have not experienced any changes to their health or social care services due to the coronavirus pandemic.



Questions six and seven – Newcastle

These questions asked people to name the health or social care service where they had experienced changes to their care and share their experiences. Seven people named a service and shared their experiences.

CRG Homecare Newcastle

“Received very detailed information and advice regularly from provider, local authority and CQC.”

Freeman Hospital

“Dialysis slots were dropped from three times per week to only two. Also, the times were changed from 12.30pm until 4.30pm to the new time of 6.15pm until 10.15pm. Not very happy with those new, later times.”

“Ongoing treatment cancelled from March until October 2020, causing me concern and stress. Following a telephone consultation, it was suggested that I should try additional medication which caused side effects.”

MS team

“Nothing has changed for me except all prescriptions at my surgery are now for one month only. This, of course, means more trips by me or a friend to pick up the medications.”

Newcastle Eye Centre at RVI

“Attended 24 March to see eye consultant following an operation for glaucoma in Jan and follow up treatment in Feb. Prior to this appointment I had been in bed with COVID-19 like symptoms. We were unsure as to whether to attend. We phoned the hospital a few days beforehand to clarify the situation. The receptionist was extremely helpful and patient in explaining things - very reassuring and calm, excellent telephone service. On appointment day, I was seen by the consultant who wore PPE. It was an odd experience; I had never seen the waiting room so empty! Got seen promptly and was very happy with the quality of care.”

Newburn Surgery

“I rang to order repeat prescriptions and was advised by the helpful receptionist to add a couple of items to the list that weren't always ones I ask for, i.e. my brown/blue inhalers, in case there was a shortage later.”

Thornfield Medical Centre

One person expressed concern about the advice her elderly mother was given by this practice to cut the toenails of her Type 1 diabetic husband herself. The person who expressed this concern felt this was inappropriate advice considering his health condition.

Other services in Newcastle

A further 15 people shared their experiences but did not name the service. Three mentioned their experiences of remote consultations with health services. Two of these experiences were positive and one was neutral:

“My 17-year-old son has also had a chest infection and has received excellent remote care from our GP.”

“I had a telephone appointment with outpatients for a continuing problem for which I’m awaiting surgery. As I’m asymptomatic I was happy to wait until the pandemic is over before being referred for an EUA. The appointment was followed up by a very detailed letter from the Registrar detailing our discussion. I was very impressed with her interpretation of our discussion where she set out in detail my concerns.”

Two people highlighted a deterioration in their health due to fewer healthcare interventions:

“Massive deterioration in personal long-term health conditions from lack of consultant input.”

“The GP hadn’t been in touch for eight weeks; she was shielding, and we saw her once a week because she was shielding. Secondary care told her and the GP that she had been on inappropriate drugs. She needed a call more regularly from the GP.”

The following views and experiences were also highlighted once:

- Deterioration of mental health conditions due to a reduction in support.
- Care staff being poorly equipped and trained to deal with the current situation and not being provided with adequate mental health support to ensure their wellbeing.
- Not being able to get a face-to-face appointment with a GP.
- Chemotherapy being suspended but it was handled very well and the patient was put at ease. Treatment has started again.
- Great service from NHS 111 and 999 for a shielding patient.
- Ear, nose and throat outpatient appointment cancellation.

Questions six and seven – Gateshead

These questions asked people to name the health or social care service where they had experienced changes to their care and share their experiences. Eighteen people named a service and some shared their experiences.

Adult Social Care - Gateshead Council

“Gateshead Council have been excellent in providing alternative options. We have used a direct payment to source one to one support due to day service closures.”

Chopwell Primary Healthcare Centre

“Repeat prescriptions delivered to door.”

“Very good.”

“I’ve had no trouble.”

This service was named five more times, but no review was given.

Audiology at Queen Elizabeth Hospital

“Requested hearing aid batteries – no problem, received quickly.”

Teams Medical Practice

“Find it hard to get information about my underlying condition and how it would affect my health at my age.”

“Really well thought out with social distancing finessed inside. All the staff polite and courteous given the restrictions imposed. Brilliant GP practice as always.”

“Good.”

“I had an ultrasound on my shoulder on the 8 June and within 24 hours my GP had contacted me, informed me about the results, gave advice and guidance on TIMS and how I can self-refer and find appropriate exercises and reassured me that she was available if my symptoms became worse or I am worried about anything.”

“Well organised and excellent care.”

This service was mentioned a further two times, but no review was given.

Other services in Gateshead

A further 21 people shared their experiences but did not name the service.

Four people simply highlighted changes they had observed, such as not being able to visit the day centre or do their normal exercise, not being able to see their GP, social distancing in pharmacies and changes to chemotherapy regimens. These respondents did not express dissatisfaction.

Three people highlighted difficulties in maintaining their health during lockdown. In two cases this was down to not being able to access a podiatrist, leading to discomfort, or a physiotherapist, leading to falls. In the final case, this person could not maintain their health due to not being able to go out.

Other topics highlighted twice were:

- Satisfaction with how services are managing (GPs, Freeman Hospital and ambulance services).
- Concerns about lack of access to opticians and dentistry.
- Appointment cancellations.

The following views and experiences were also highlighted once:

- Satisfaction with social distancing procedures at the Minor Injuries Unit.
- Satisfaction with the way a dental problem has been dealt with.
- Satisfaction with repeat prescription services provided by GP and pharmacy.
- Satisfaction with a GP virtual appointment for a skin issue.

Question eight – Newcastle

This question asked people to give us their contact details if they wanted to discuss their experiences with us in more detail. Only four people had completed this question.

We managed to get in touch with one person to gather further information. This person wanted to tell us that NHS 111 was excellent when she contacted them for non-COVID-19 related advice.

Another person said that they had nothing further to add to their survey response and the final two were uncontactable.

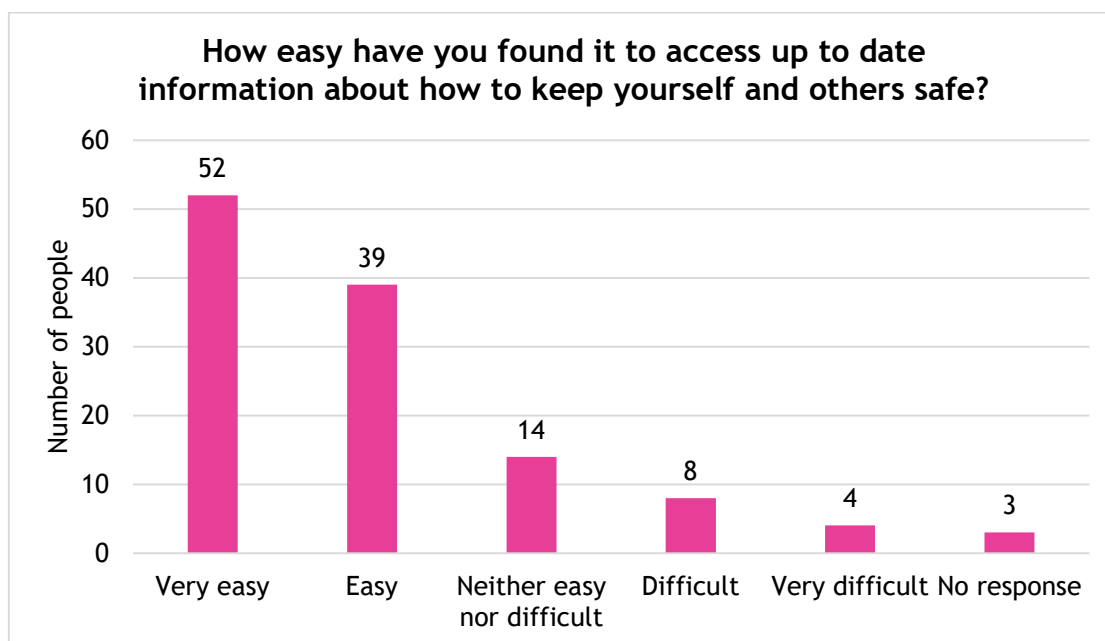
Question eight – Gateshead

This question asked people to give us their contact details if they wanted to discuss their experiences with us in more detail. Only four people had completed this question and none had anything further to add.

3. Findings – unknown location

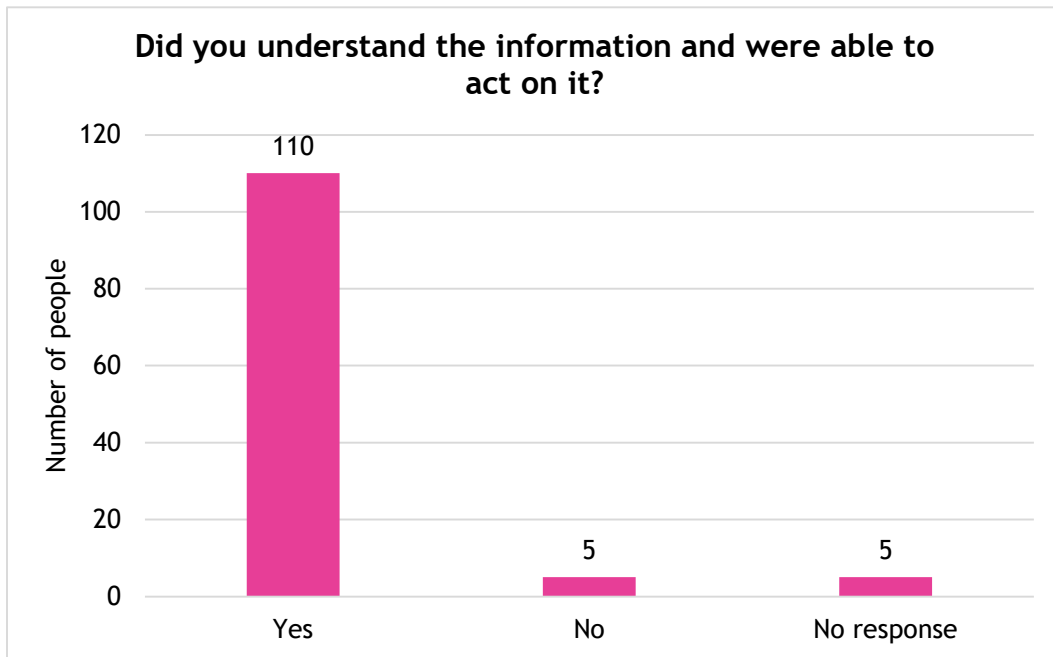
Question one

This graph shows that most people (91) found it ‘very easy’ or ‘easy’ to access information about how to keep themselves and others safe.



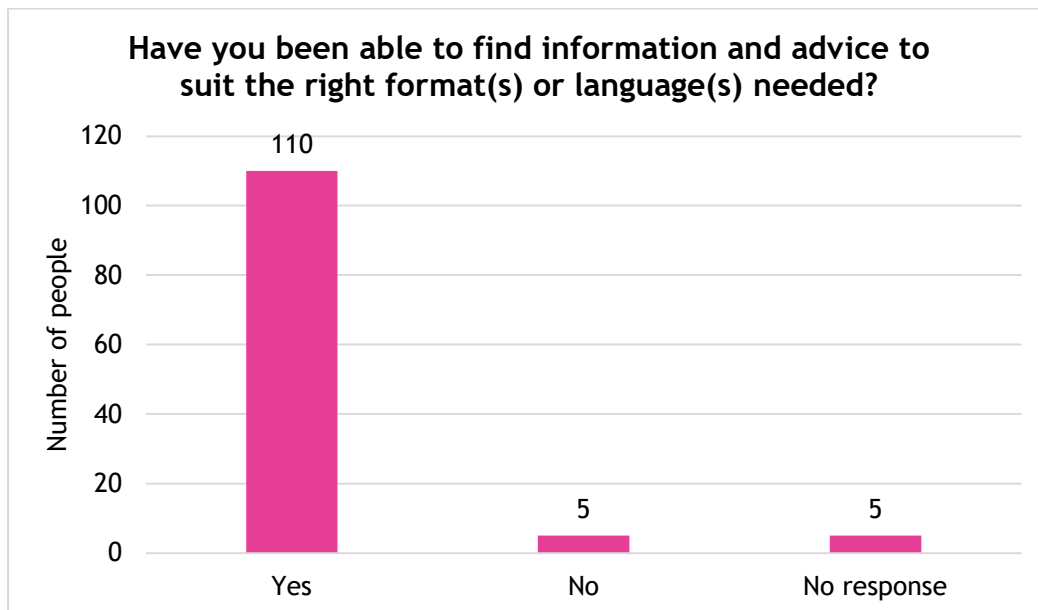
Question two

This graph shows that once people had accessed information, most were able to understand and act on it.



Question three

This graph shows that most people were able to access information in the format they required.



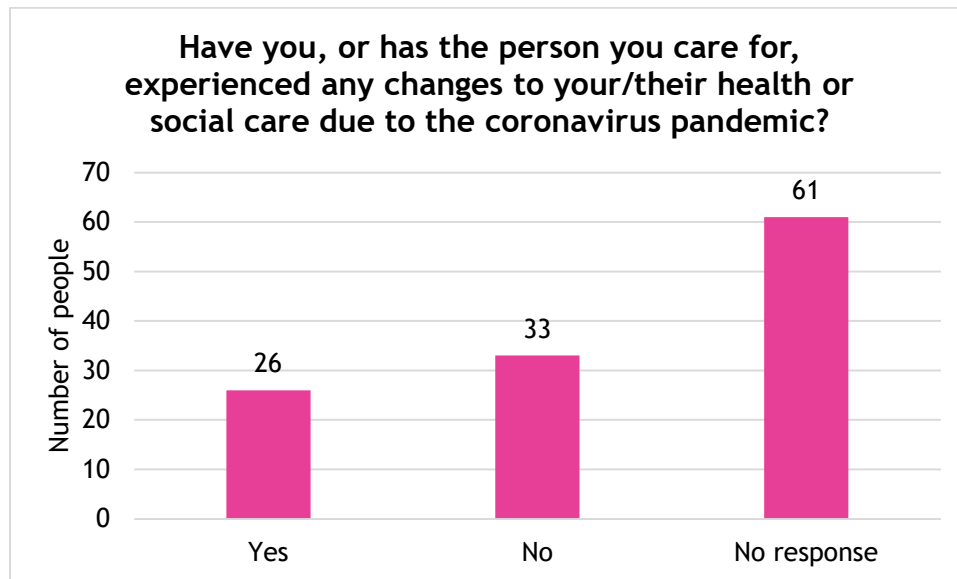
Question four

We asked the five people who had answered ‘no’ to question three to tell us more about their information needs or the information needs of the person they care for. Two people selected ‘I/they need information in another language(s)’, one selected ‘I/they need Easy Read information’, one skipped the question and the final person stated:

“Language from British government during COVID-19 to be understandable.”

Question five

This graph shows that most people who chose to respond had not experienced any changes to their health or social care services due to the coronavirus pandemic.



Questions six and seven

These questions asked people to name the health or social care service where they had experienced changes to their care and share their experiences. Only four people had named a service and shared their experiences.

Chopwell Primary Healthcare Centre

“I have used electronic and telephone consultations. This has been extremely useful during this pandemic not only for me but for others too.”

“Telephone consultation instead of face-to-face appointment, which was excellent. Picked up mother’s prescription – waited outside the surgery behind blue line – receptionist brought the prescription outside – very efficient service.”

This service was named once more but no review was given.

Urgent response team

“It was good they gave me a good check over, and what to do if got any worse to call 999. They spoke with my doctor, arranged script for antibiotics and steroids.”

Teams Medical Practice

“We had phone assessment and we had a quick response to our calls.”

Other services

A further 17 people also shared their experiences but did not name the service.

Seven people highlighted changes they had experienced when using services, None of these respondents expressed dissatisfaction and referred to:

- Successful phone calls or online consultations with GPs, orthotics and physiotherapists.
- Using online and delivery services effectively for medications from pharmacies.
- Changes to the location where services are delivered.

“Online GP consultations – which were great – quick and easy to get, resolved the issue.”

Three people highlighted the good quality of service they had received:

“Very helpful and understanding with my daughter’s mental health from the GP. I did not find the mental health crisis team helpful at all.”

“My symptoms became worse, so I phoned the hospital and they gave me an appointment after two days. I went to the RVI and I did the ultrasound and the doctor sent the report to my GP on the same day.”

“I had to contact the ambulance and they attended within ten minutes and they did their best as usual despite the coronavirus situation.”

Two people highlighted concerns about dentists and opticians being closed. Two more shared their experience of dealing with a broken tooth and highlighted that they were given advice by their dentist and put on a waiting list for treatment. Other topics highlighted once included:

- Appointment cancellation.
- Difficulties accessing support while shielding, as GP would not agree to patient’s shielding status.
- Need for podiatry support.
- Mental health concerns.
- Local council calling to see if any help was needed; this was appreciated.

Question eight

This question asked people to give us their contact details if they wanted to discuss their experiences in more detail. Only five people completed this question.

We managed to get in touch with three people to gather further information. One person told us that their daughter suffers from panic attacks and had a bad one. The paramedics came within ten minutes, which was very satisfying.

The second person had asked for a call by accident. The third person had nothing further to add to their survey response. The final two people were uncontactable.

4. Summary of results

Due to the size of the sample, it is not possible to identify any themes, but some are starting to emerge, as follows:

- It appears that services have proven very capable to change and adapt to the needs of the population and the pandemic quickly and effectively. This is a testament to the staff working within health and social care.
- People were generally happy and accepting of the changes they experienced and felt it has been well organised and coordinated. So far, evidence suggests that people are happy with remote consultations, either online or via the telephone.
- People were generally satisfied with changes they experienced at their GP or pharmacy in accessing their medication.
- People highlighted difficulties in maintaining physical and mental health, with people noting difficulties simply because of the impact of lockdown, or because of specific reasons, such as reduced access to healthcare from their GP, consultant, or community services.
- People highlighted concerns about access to dentists and opticians, but we also heard some positive stories of people receiving advice from their dentist and being put on a waiting list for treatment.
- People highlighted appointment cancellations but, in these instances, people were generally highlighting that an appointment was cancelled and did not appear to be dissatisfied with this.

As we take forward our work on Healthwatch England's Because We All Care campaign, we will be watching our data to see if these themes continue to emerge. In the future, we intend to do further work on any themes that are highlighted out of this work and Because We All Care, together.

5. Demographics

The table below shows the demographics of the respondents.

In our future work with Healthwatch England's #BecauseWeAllCare campaign, it would be beneficial to do targeted work with men, young people, students, the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community and Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities.

Gender		Sexuality	
Male	33	Heterosexual	124
Female	97	Bisexual	1
Transgender	0	Gay man	3
Unknown	88	Gay woman	3
Age		Other	0
17 and under	0	Unknown	87
18–24	2		
25–49	36	Ethnic groups	
50–64	55	British	121
65–79	35	Irish	4
80+	5	Gypsy or Irish Traveller	0
Unknown	85	Other white background	0
Disability		Indian	2
Yes	37	Pakistani	0
No	95	Bangladeshi	0
Unknown	86	Chinese	0
Carer		Other Asian background	1
Yes	25	White & Black Caribbean	0
No	107	White & Black African	1
Unknown	86	White & Asian	0
Employment status		Other mixed background	1
Student	1	Caribbean	0
Employed/self-employed	69	African	0
Not in paid employment	17	Other Black background	0
Retired	39	Arab	1
Unknown	75	Other ethnic background	2
Marital status		Unknown	85
Single	30		
Divorced	11		
Married	74		
Civil partnership	5		
Living with partner	0		
Widow	9		
Unknown	89		

6. Contact details



Healthwatch Newcastle
MEA House, Ellison Place
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS

Healthwatch Gateshead
MEA House, Ellison Place
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8XS



0191 338 5720

0191 477 0033



07551 052 751

07535 877 831



info@healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

info@healthwatchgateshead.co.uk



www.healthwatchnewcastle.org.uk

<https://healthwatchgateshead.co.uk>



@HWNewcastle

@HWGateshead



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