

December 2020 COVID-19 Insight Report



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:

The feedback in this briefing is based on experience shared by three¹ groups, their volunteers, members, and service users. Groups included members with communication needs such as BSL, braille, audio or large print.

-  **Dementia Carers Support**
-  **Remark!**
-  **Deaf Multilingual Community Support**

¹ Feedback collected was between September – December 2020

COVID Vulnerability

Across all groups we spoke to, many of their members were at high risk from COVID-19 - due to being pregnant, aged 70 or over, or living with pre-existing health conditions. In addition, some members were carers for a person of high risk.

Accessing Services

We were told that some people face multiple challenges when trying to access services. For example, when trying to contact the Lewisham and Greenwich Trust, local clinics, or GP surgeries for blood tests or routine procedures. Service users report long delays on the phone, waiting for their call to be picked-up. Others report being left on hold - sometimes for over an hour. In some instances, particularly for blood tests, service user's give-up trying to get through on the phone and just turn up, without booking an appointment.



Deaf Service Users

Deaf service users, and those with additional communication needs, find it hard to access services. We were told that GPs and other medical professionals will not always accept interpreters without vocal permission from the service user before they will speak to a third party (interpreter). As many deaf service users cannot speak, this is an impractical request. Deaf service users told us they often have no choice but to make arrangements by letter instead - creating delay in seeking medical help, often resulting in making health issues worse.



Deaf service users told us they are reluctant to seek treatment if a hospital, doctor, or dentist cannot provide a British Sign Language (BSL) interpreter for the appointment, and we were told some services refuse to do so - even when consultations involve technical and detailed descriptions. This causes additional worry and anxiety for people during an already stressful time.



We collect feedback in a variety of ways, including calls from individuals who come to us for information, signposting and support, zoom calls with groups run by charities or community organisations, and intelligence shared by our volunteers.

You can contact us via phone: **07903 685 534**, or by email 'info@healthwatchgreenwich.co.uk'.