



Health, care and wellbeing services during Coronavirus pandemic Survey Report

Bury residents' experiences
of local services

Contents

Introduction to Healthwatch Bury	2
Executive Summary	3
Key findings	3
Our recommendations:	4
Background	5
Methodology	6
Findings	7
Demographics	15
Contact us	16

Introduction to Healthwatch Bury

This report has been produced by Healthwatch Bury. The Healthwatch network consists of 152 Healthwatch organisations across each of the local authority areas in England. It also has a national body called Healthwatch England based in London. We are all independent organisations who aim to help people get the best out of their local health and social care services, whether it's improving them today or helping to shape them for tomorrow.

Everything we say and do is informed by our connections to local people and our expertise is grounded in their experience. We are the only body looking solely at people's experience across all health and social care in Bury. As a statutory watchdog, our role is to ensure that local decision makers put the experiences of people at the heart of their care so that those who buy (commissioners) and provide our services (NHS Trusts, GPs, the voluntary sector and independent providers) can benefit from what Bury people tell us. Our reports on various elements of health and social care in Bury can be found on our website at the following link: healthwatchbury.co.uk or by contacting us directly using the details on the back cover.



Executive Summary

During these unprecedented times health and social care services have had to quickly reconfigure their services. COVID-19 has changed the way people access services and it has changed the way health and social care staff support service users. The aim in conducting this survey was to find out more about people's experiences of using health and social care services during the COVID-19 lockdown. We wanted to find out what has worked well and what could work better in order to influence future service improvements. A total of 89 surveys were completed and the findings in this report are based on their responses.

We found that those who responded found it easy to find clear and understandable information about Coronavirus and how to keep themselves and others safe. The main source of information were TV/Press and Downing Street briefings and accessing newspapers online.

Over half of the respondents (65%) stated that their mental health and wellbeing had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. When we asked more information about this the answers were very varied and can be seen on page 9 of this report.

Nearly half the respondents reported that their appointments or operation had been cancelled during the pandemic. This is a worrying trend and Healthwatch will continue to support patients to ensure that we feed this information back to the decision makers.

It is also important to note that while we received responses from people of all age groups the majority (88%) were female and White British (89%) which means that more consideration needs to be taken when planning engagement and survey promotion in the future.

Key findings

1. 47% of the respondents reported that their health appointments or operations had been cancelled during the pandemic.
2. Over half of the respondents (65%) stated that their mental health and wellbeing had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, 46% of those reporting increased feelings of anxiety and social isolation.
3. 82% said they found it easy to access clear and understandable information about what to do to keep yourself and others safe during the Coronavirus pandemic.



Our recommendations:

- Wherever possible local communications should reinforce national messages in a clear and unambiguous way.
- Changes to services should be communicated effectively and include a timeline wherever possible.
- Mental health services should recognise that digital services are unsuitable for many people and shape services to recognise this.
- Promotion and reassurance should be offered that the NHS is 'open' for use and safe to use with effective infection control measures in place.



Background

The World Health Organisation declared on 11th March 2020 that the COVID-19, originating in Wuhan province in China, had reached pandemic levels. It was beginning to spread through the UK. The Prime Minister announced on 23rd March 2020 that people should 'stay at home', and that certain businesses should close. Over the following weeks admissions to hospitals and deaths due to COVID-19 soared, and all areas of our lives were touched by this new, highly infectious disease.

The health and care services have borne a huge burden as a result of the pandemic, and care for most other conditions was seriously curtailed or altered. GP practices moved almost entirely to telephone and online consultations, pharmacies moved to delivery services where possible. Elective hospital care was postponed indefinitely. Social care came under enormous pressure.

We wanted to find out how this was affecting people across Bury, to understand what the impact of the pandemic was, how people found out information about COVID-19 and how they had felt about the changes in their care. Healthwatch therefore conducted a survey to find out how people in the Borough were being affected by the pandemic and what their experiences of health and care were, in order to help the NHS and social care shape how services respond.

Methodology

Survey questions were devised following an analysis of existing surveys and engagement activity being undertaken across the country, both within the Healthwatch network and by public and voluntary organisations.

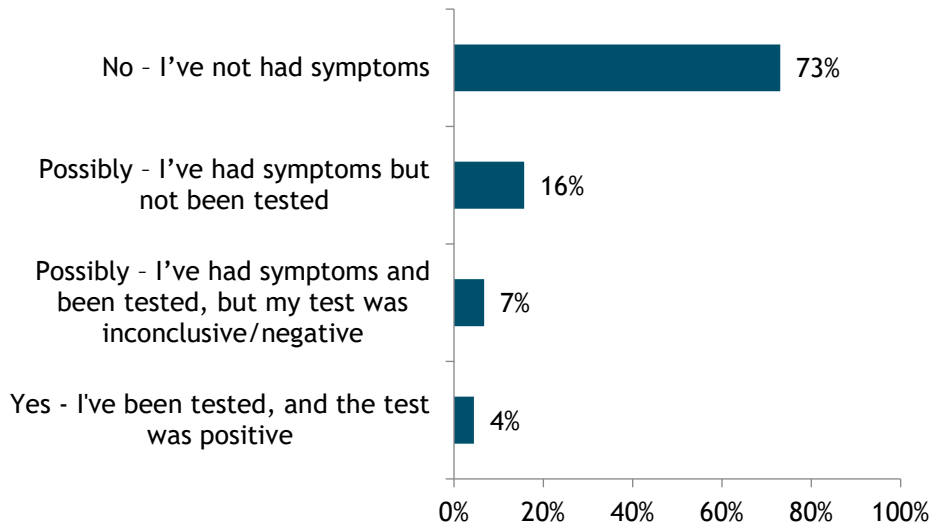
Following its official launch in September 2020, the survey was distributed and promoted in a range of ways, including:

- Promotion via Healthwatch Bury's website and social media channels (Twitter and Facebook)
- Asking statutory organisations, health and social care providers, local businesses, voluntary sector partners and community groups to promote the survey.
- Direct emails to contacts and organisations
- Document versions of the survey were available for download from the Healthwatch Bury website and hard copies were available on request. An option for completion over the phone with staff members was also put in place.

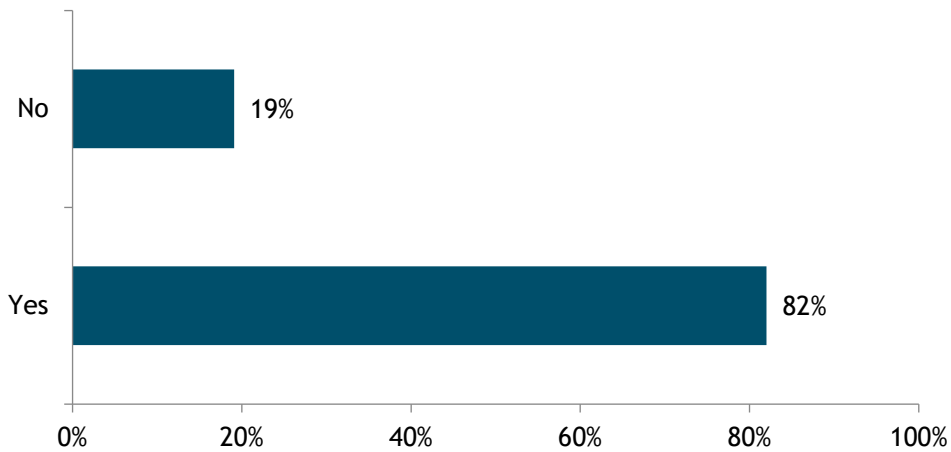


Findings

1. Have you had Coronavirus/COVID-19?



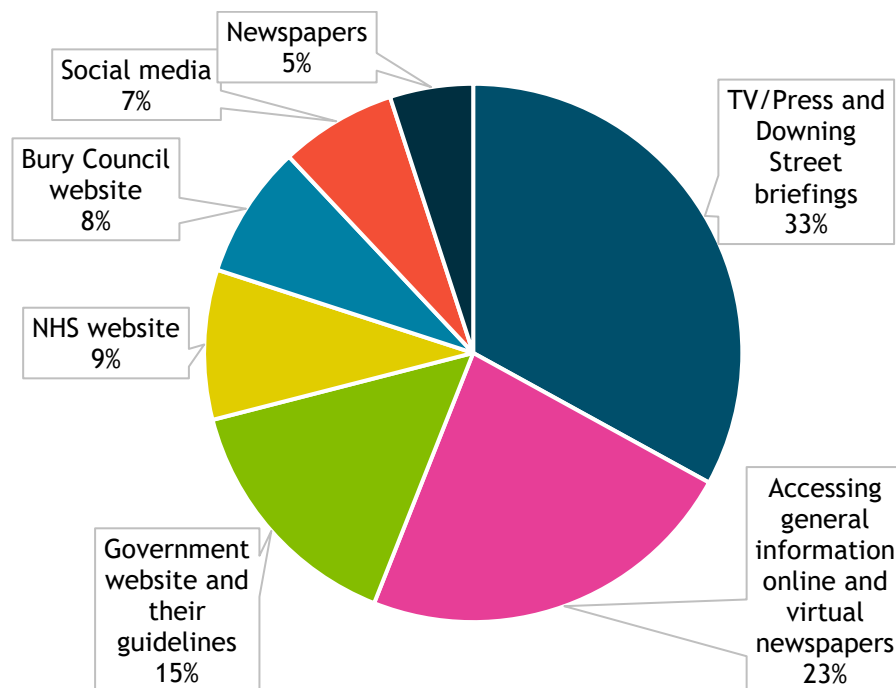
2. Have you found it easy to find clear and understandable information about what to do to keep yourself and others safe during the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic?



82% of the respondents found it easy to find clear and understandable information about Coronavirus and how to keep themselves and others safe. However nearly fifth of the respondents faced some challenges when trying to find information during the pandemic.

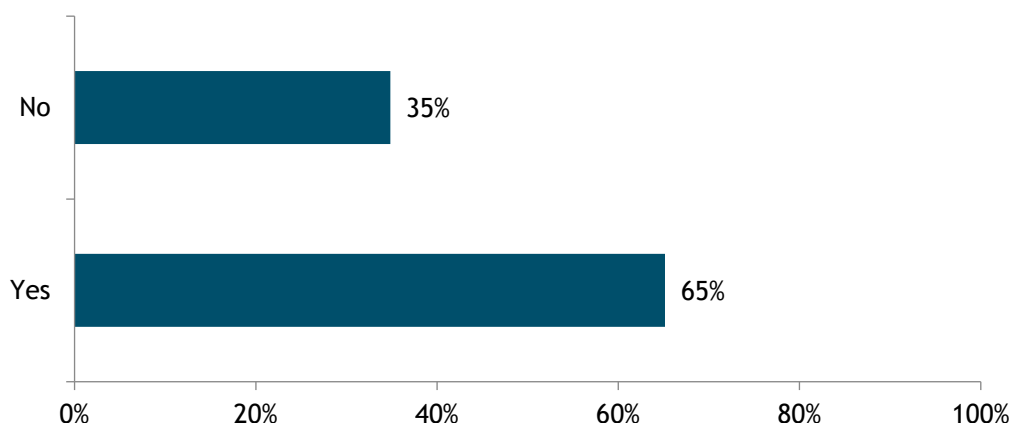
3. Would you like to tell us more about this, and where were you able to find this information?

The graph below illustrates where the respondents mostly accessed the information about the Coronavirus pandemic. 11% of the respondents also said they found information available confusing and messages unclear.

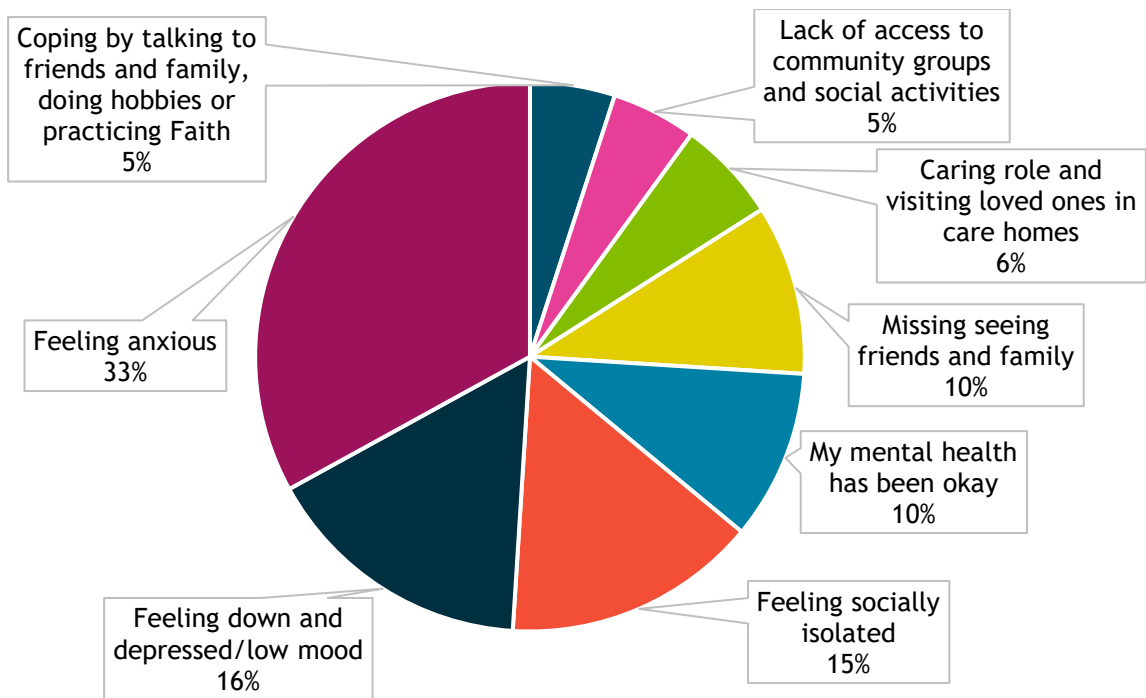


- *The basic rules seem clear but then when it comes to the interpretation and the details get confusing. We followed the briefings on TV post on social media and information on the radio etc.*
- *I am deaf. Information in BSL has been very few. Signhealth has been great but have not seen anything from government. Lots confused.*

4. Has your mental health and wellbeing been affected by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic? For example, through increased anxiety, as a result of social isolation, or a lack of access to community groups and activities?



5. Would you like to tell us more about it?

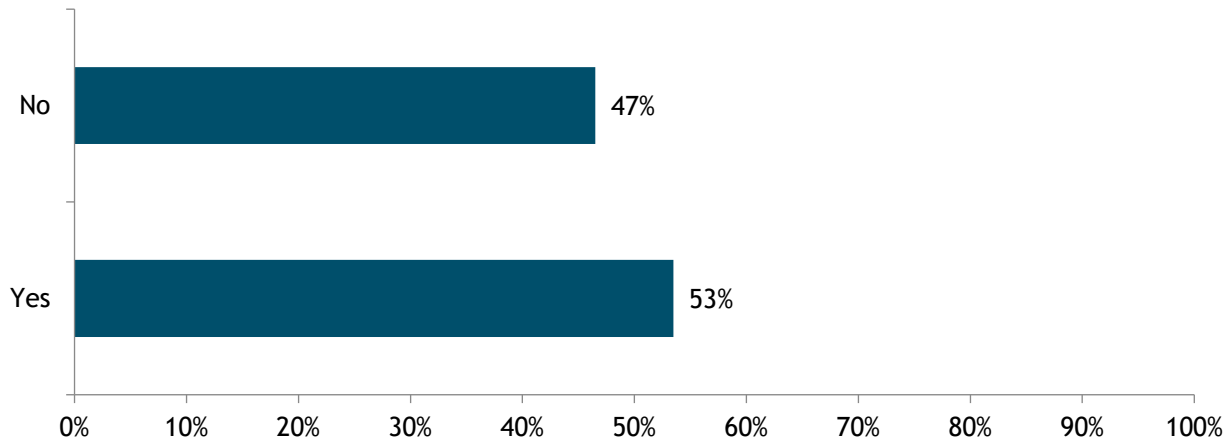


Over half of the respondents (65%) stated that their mental health and wellbeing had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. When we asked more information about this the answers were very varied but main themes can be seen in the graph above.

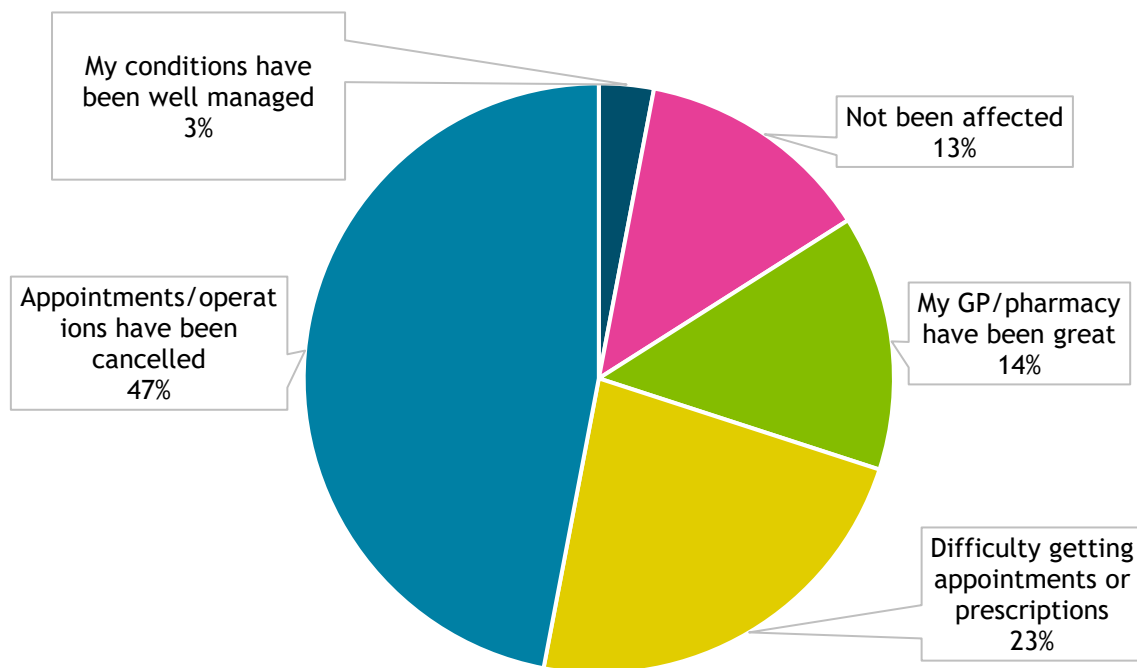
33% of the respondents said they had experienced increased anxiety and another 16% reported feeling isolated and lonely during the pandemic. Some of the comments can be seen below:

- *I miss seeing people from BIG anxiety group, only talk on Zoom once a week not in person. I miss seeing family members. Staying in gets boring seeing four walls every day. Going out having to wear a mask and socially distance and also worrying all the time about the virus or if anyone in my family would get Covid-19. I feel a bit better now the Covid-19 vaccine is out and helping people.*
- *I got pregnant at the start of the pandemic and then lost my job. Maternity services have been greatly reduced, I haven't been able to see friends or family, and I'm worried about the prospect of giving birth alone (and then not being allowed visitors in the hospital or once I get home). The whole thing has been anxiety inducing and isolating and I'm worried that something will go wrong as Covid-19 seems to be prioritised over all other medical situations.*
- *My husband unfortunately had to go in residential care due to Alzheimer's as found wandering early morning by police in pyjamas. He was taken to A&E in June - was able to see him there but not when on ward for observation. Saw him in July through window of care home when took clothing. Did not see him until Mon 21 Sept when spoke with him through window when taking winter clothing and small gifts for 87 birthday in September. Spoke on phone two weeks prior to that date. Feel isolated but have Carelink. Miss going out to interests since March - feel depressed - do get calls from Healthy Minds.*

6. Has your healthcare for other conditions been affected by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic? For example, through cancelled operations or appointments, difficulty obtaining prescriptions or medication, difficulty making GP appointments?



7. Would you like to tell us more about it?



47% of the respondents reported that their appointments or operation had been cancelled during the pandemic.

- Couldn't get appointments or prescriptions. Hospital appointments cancelled, telephone calls arranged instead. I had to wait for call for example for diabetes. Call never came at arranged time. Then received letter in post saying appointment had been changed to August 2022. Couldn't see Dentist and teeth came out. Dentist wouldn't fix it and I was left unable to eat. Same with the GP and other appointments all cancelled.*

- *Cancelled cataract op in the beginning of April. I can hardly read or do crosswords, also people are blurred at a distance. Now having op in October. I am currently waiting for the hearing test for over 6 months and cannot hear TV or phone conversations clearly. If I can have eyes seen to why not hearing? Need to have pastime activities to alleviate boredom and loneliness*

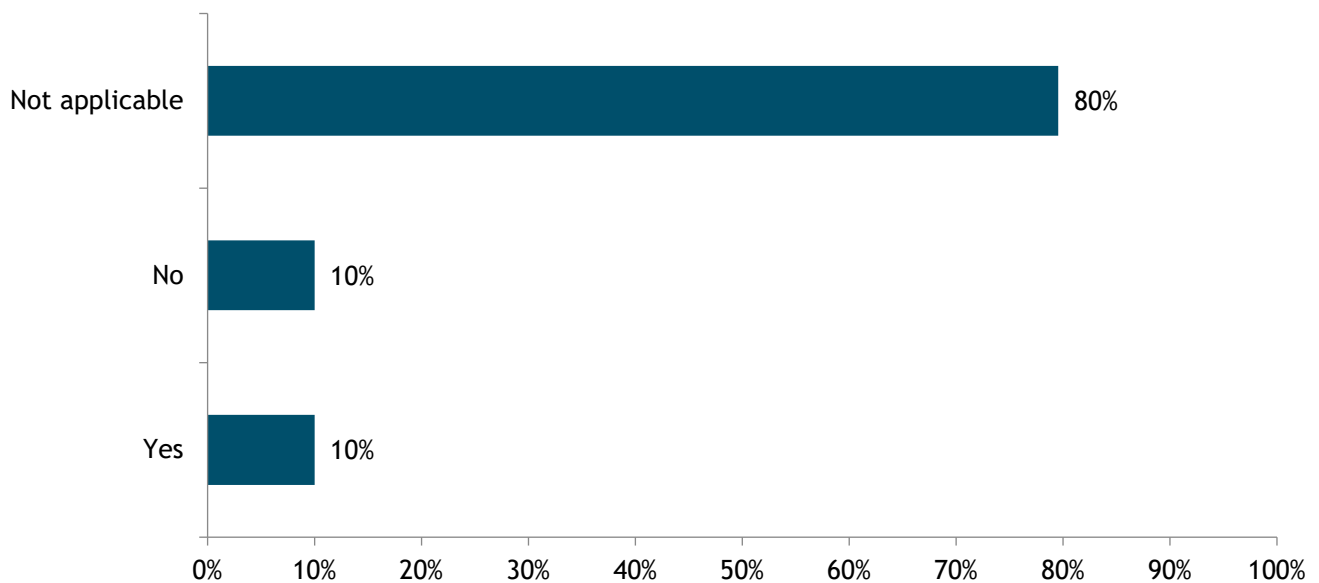
Further 23% stated they had experienced difficulties getting appointments or getting hold of their prescriptions:

- *Some of my prescription medications have been hard to get hold of and have been delayed on more than one occasion.*

14% stated they were really happy with the service they had received from their GP or pharmacy:

- *I feel that my GP surgery have been fantastic I feel the askmyGP app makes life a lot more simple. Also I have had some medical issues which had been dealt with fast and efficiently.*

8. Has your experience of social care been affected by the coronavirus/COVID-19 pandemic? For example, visits from care workers, access to residential or care homes, etc



9. Would you like to tell us more about it?

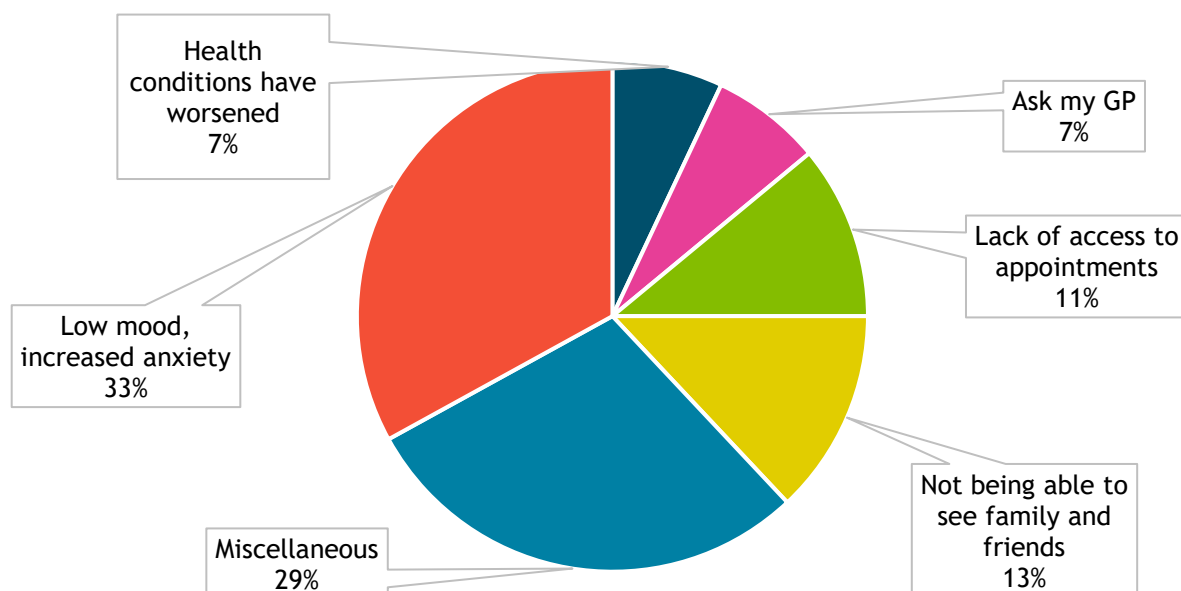
Visiting care homes during the pandemic was a concern for residents' families and also to the staff members who work there:

- *My father was in a care home and I was barred from visiting in mid-March. He died from Covid three weeks later and I was never able to see him.*
- *I work in Health & Social care. It has affected the mental health of residents and staff. Lack of visiting for relatives/residents and a substandard testing regime that quite frankly does little to keep the homes safe when you wait 4+ days for test results.*

Coronavirus also impacted on social care staffing levels:

- *My father has twice-daily care visits. His mood has suffered because the routine of these has been disrupted, and the increased workload on the carers due to colleague sickness has been evident. My father is now very isolated, and his mood and cognitive facilities are showing that strain. As his sole, face-to-face family contact, I have been visiting frequently (I do his medication every few days, too) to give him an outlet for that frustration.*
- *Grandfather has dementia which has got much worse over the pandemic and it has been a HUGE struggle to put services in place for him and even get through to the social services.*

10. Is there any other way that you feel your health, care, or wellbeing has been affected by the coronavirus pandemic that you would like to tell us about?



33% of the respondents felt that they have experienced low mood and anxiety due to Coronavirus pandemic:

- *I feel my mental health has been effected definitely but I have been able to gain the right support from my GP to meet my needs. I have had trouble sleeping I think caused by the worry of how change has/will affect my children, my relationship with my partner due to added strain of finances, being at home when we are usually at work and having no routine. Going back to work and the children at school and nursery have certainly helped.*
- *My whole wellbeing has been affected. I am suffering from deterioration of mental health and physical health it has affected my autism. I have been unable to access food, medication any support for wellbeing. I am isolated trapped at home no family no transport. Thinking of death all the time experiencing suicidal thoughts.*

Lack of access to appointments was also a reoccurring theme:

- *Yes I can't get any help because of Covid-19 for my wife's mental health or even my own.*

More comments can be seen below:

- *The ongoing lockdown in Greater Manchester. Feels like most of this year we have been at home. My husband is clinically extremely vulnerable. We understand the reasons but get extremely frustrated at others flouncing the rules.*
- *I received phone calls at the start from the Creative Living centre and Bury Involvement group - this helped me the most during this last 9 months.*
- *The askmyGP website has been really effective in dealing with issues when cannot get a face to face appointment. Being able to put information and photos if needed on helps to get the support needed for medical conditions. I feel that having to stay apart from close family members is upsetting and affects my wellbeing, just being able to go back to their homes/them back into my home would make a big difference to us all.*
- *Long-term I feel that my health conditions have deteriorated for the details I've given in the other question and from the lack of interaction with other people i.e. lack of mental stimulus.*

11. Is there anything about your current situation you would like to share with us?

A number of respondents were hopeful and positive about vaccinations and how they might help to ease life back to normality:

- *It's hopefully going to get better now the vaccine is out. My husband had his first dose and I've had mine just yesterday because I want to feel safe again and get back to some sort of normality.*

Missing friends and family was also something that was frequently mentioned throughout the survey by many:

- *As with many others, missing my family and face to face contact with friends and volunteer colleagues.*

Job loss and retirement and work in general has caused some frustration:

- *I & my boyfriend have both been affected by redundancies at our workplaces. More worried about money & future.*
- *I have been working in school throughout, the media need to be more aware that us staff in special schools are not sat at home but still teaching every day whilst having our own mainstream children at home on their own online learning.*

Support for carers:

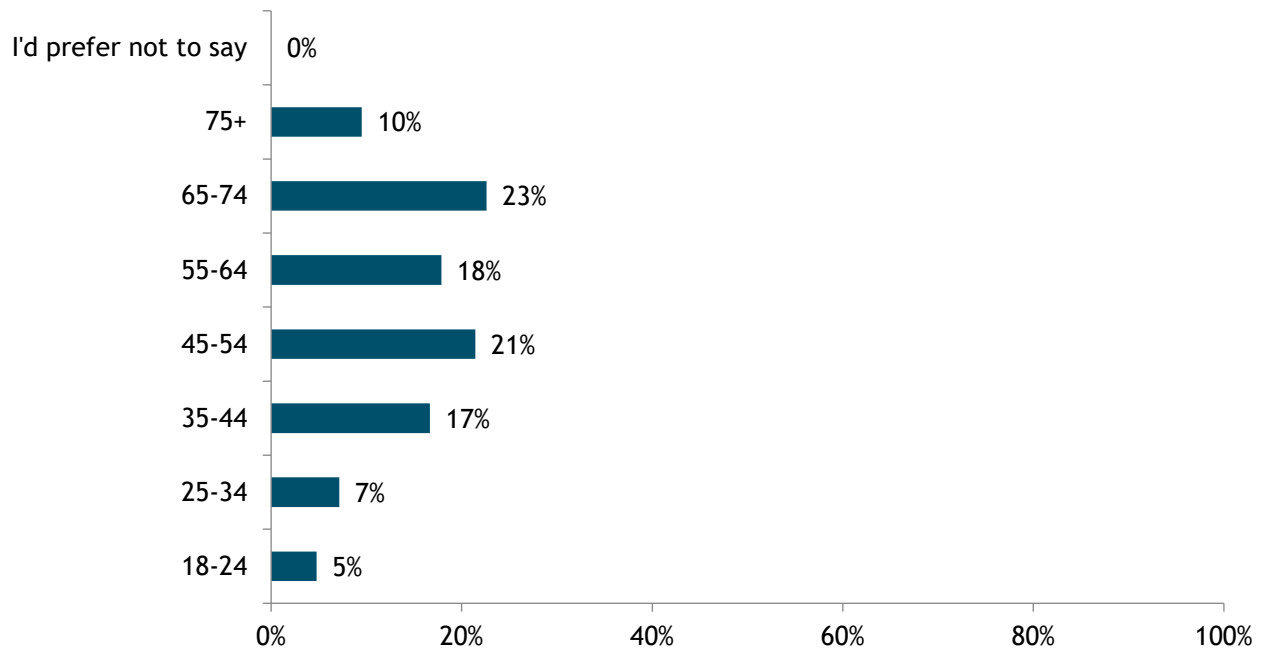
- *I care for my elderly mum - her not being able to see GP face to face has been difficult.*
- *I am a carer and have received good support from Bury Carers Hub on telephone and Zoom.*

Housing:

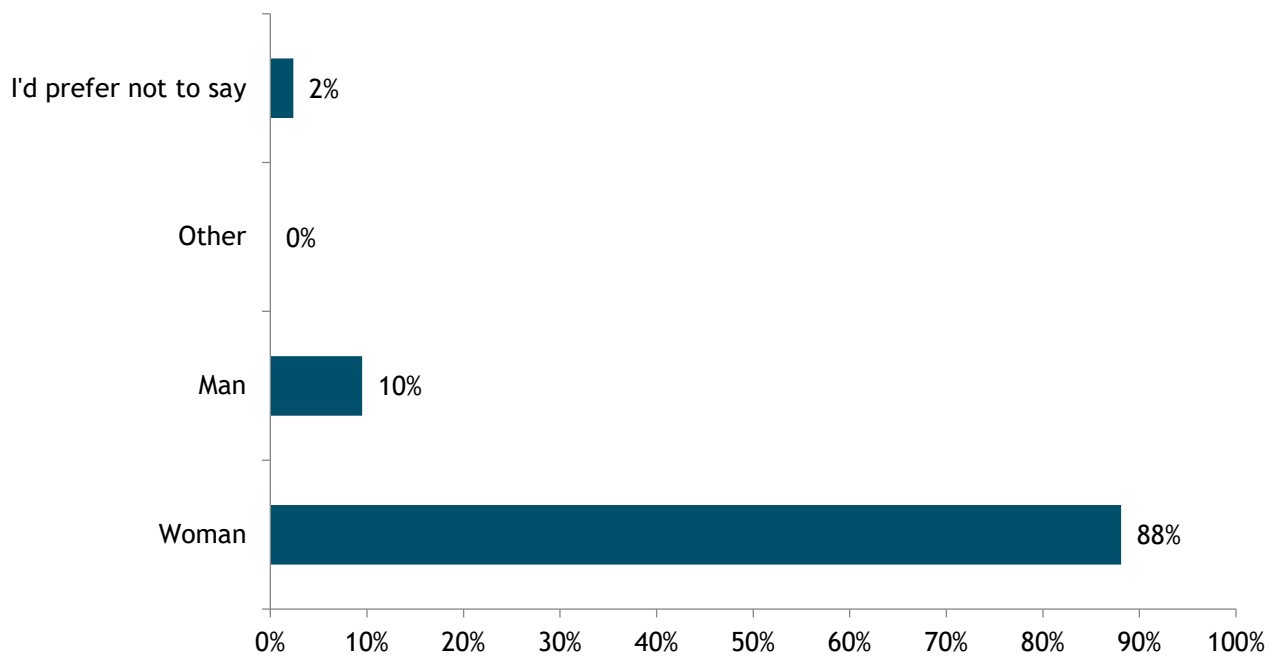
- *I am in the process of moving to council ground floor accommodation due to arthritis, this has all become much more complex and time consuming.*
- *I need rehousing for support which seems futile to try.*

Demographics

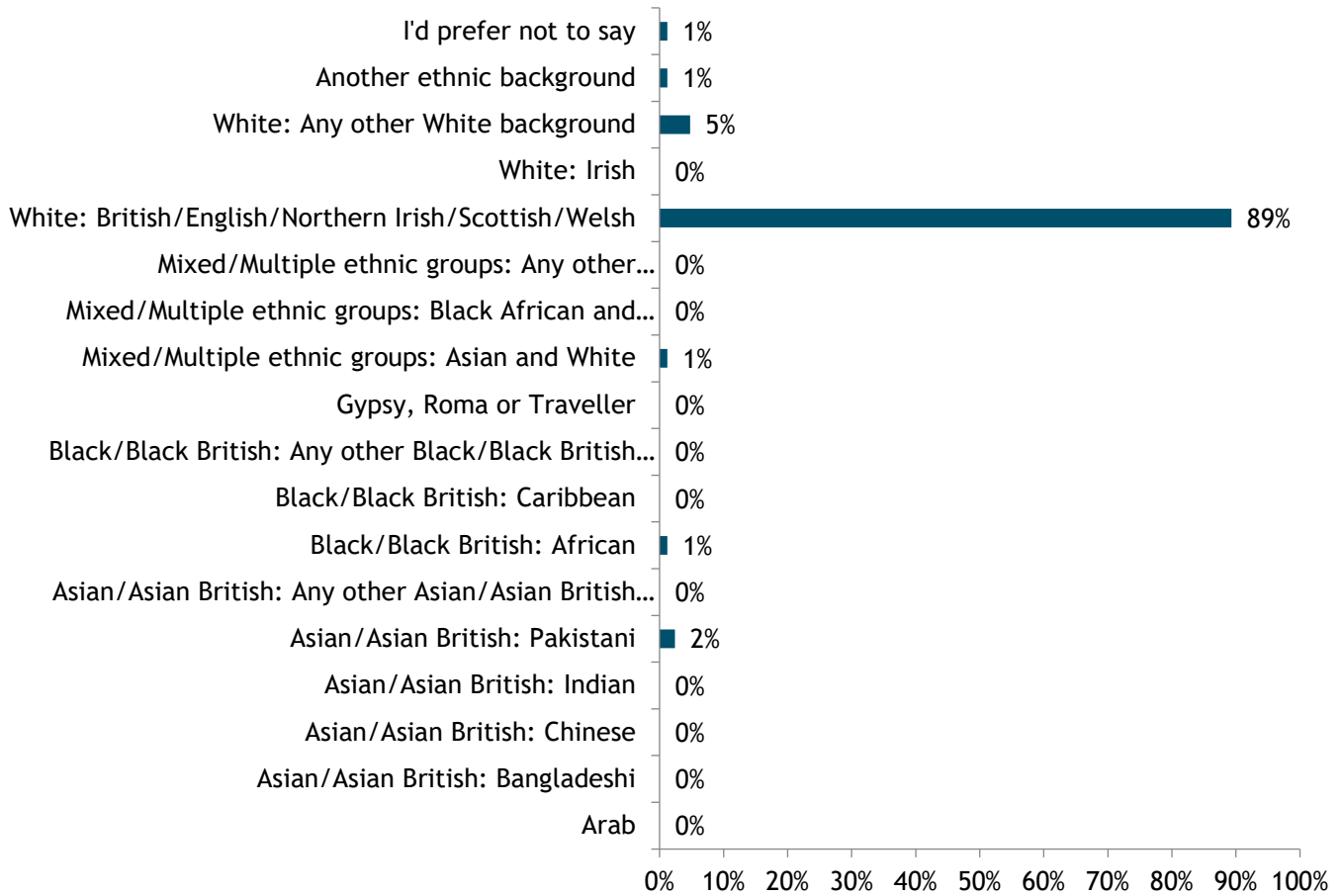
12. Please tell us which age category you fall into:



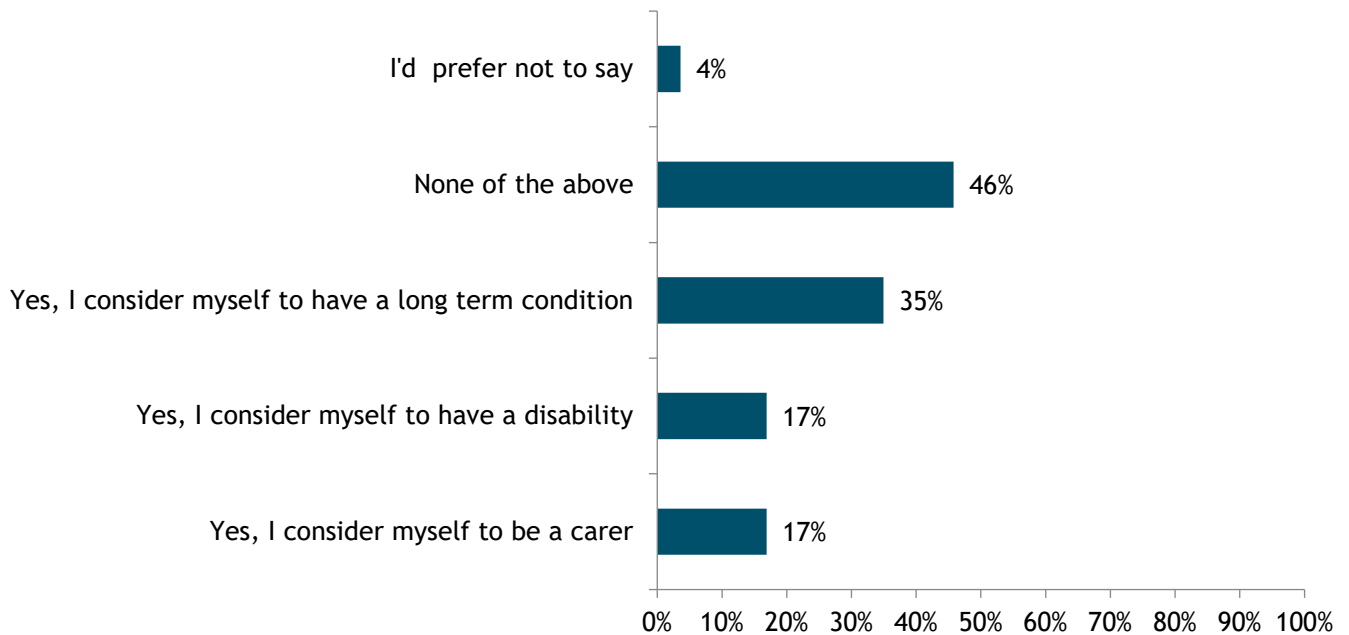
13. Please tell us which gender you identify with?



14. Please select your ethnic background:



15. Do you consider yourself to be a carer, have a disability or a long term health condition? (Please select all that apply):



Contact us

If you require this information in an alternative format, please contact our office via the details below.



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