



Summer 2021 - Experiences of Care Homes during  
the Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Summary

Between July and September 2021, we ran a survey on our website to collect feedback about people's experiences of care homes during the pandemic. The survey was aimed at people who had a friend, relative, or other loved one living in a care home. We wanted to find out more about people's experiences of communication with care homes, visiting care homes, and the impact of the pandemic on those living in care homes.

The survey was promoted online, via our membership newsletter, and on social media. We received 18 responses to our survey.

Feedback that we gathered through our survey was mixed, but tended to be more negative. We found that:

- People's experiences of communication from care homes was mixed, although more people reported having a negative experience than a positive experience;
- People's experiences of communicating with their loved one in a care home directly was mixed, although more people reported having a negative experience than a positive experience;
- People's experiences of visiting their loved one in a care home was mixed, although more people reported having a negative experience than a positive experience;
- The majority of people felt that the pandemic had a significant impact on the activities their loved one in a care home was able to take part in;
- The majority of people felt the pandemic had a severe impact on the physical health of their loved one in a care home;
- The majority of people felt the pandemic had a severe impact on the mental health and general wellbeing of their loved one in a care home; and
- The majority of people had concerns about the quality of care and support their loved one in a care home received during the pandemic.

A number of issues raised through this survey are issues that we have previously identified in other work and reports on care homes during the pandemic that we have done.

## Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on care homes, both here in Liverpool and across the UK. In Winter 2020, we spoke to members of staff at a number of care homes in Liverpool, along with friends and relatives of care home residents, to collect their feedback and experiences of care homes during the pandemic.

As part of this, we asked care home staff and managers a number of questions, including what they felt worked well, what they found difficult, PPE, testing for staff and residents, the impact on residents, communication with residents' families, staff morale, guidance, and support from external agencies. We asked family members about their experiences with visiting care homes, staying in touch with their relative, and receiving updates from their relatives' care home. We published a report detailing feedback we received from friends and relatives of residents in November 2020, and a report detailing feedback we received from staff in March 2021.

Since that time, there have been a number of changes to both Covid-related restrictions for the general public, and for guidance for care homes. In July 2021, we launched a survey for friends and relatives of care home residents, to collect further feedback about their experiences of care homes during the pandemic. We were interested in finding out what people's experiences of care homes was at this time, and how much people's experiences had changed across the course of the pandemic.

Two versions of the survey were available. One version was for people with a friend or relative currently living in a care home. The other version was for people with a friend or relative who had been living in a care home at some point in the pandemic, but was no longer living in a care home (either because they had moved elsewhere, or passed away).

We made two versions of our survey available because we wanted to make sure that anyone with experience of a care home during the pandemic could provide us with feedback if they wanted to. We asked similar questions in both surveys.

We asked people questions about their experience and views on the following things:

- communication with their loved one living in the care home;
- communication with the care home itself;
- arrangements for in-person visiting;
- impact of the pandemic on activities for care home residents;
- impact of the pandemic on the physical health, mental health, and wellbeing of care home residents; and
- concerns about care during the pandemic.

We chose these questions because we knew they were areas that had been significantly impacted by the pandemic, and were issues that had been raised with us by care home staff and residents' friends and relatives previously.

Our survey was hosted on the Healthwatch Liverpool website. We promoted it through our membership newsletter, and via social media including Twitter, Facebook, and Nextdoor.

The survey was open between July 20 and September 3. During this period, we received 21 responses in total. One of these was a duplicate response, and two other submissions were from people who did not live in Liverpool and were not providing feedback on a care home in the Liverpool area. We removed these responses, and passed the feedback about non-Liverpool care homes to the relevant Healthwatch for that area. This left 18 valid responses in total.

While this is a small response rate, the feedback we have gathered represents an important snapshot of people's experiences with care homes during the pandemic.

## Findings

9 respondents (50%) had a relative currently living in a care home. Of the other 9 respondents who no longer had a relative living in a care home, 7 people told us their relative had passed away during the pandemic and 2 people told us that their relative was now living elsewhere.

11 people told us the name of the care home their loved one was either living in or had lived in. We are keeping this information anonymous, to ensure responses remain confidential. Respondents named a range of care homes, situated across the city, including both residential and nursing care homes. The majority of care homes named provided care and support specifically for older people.

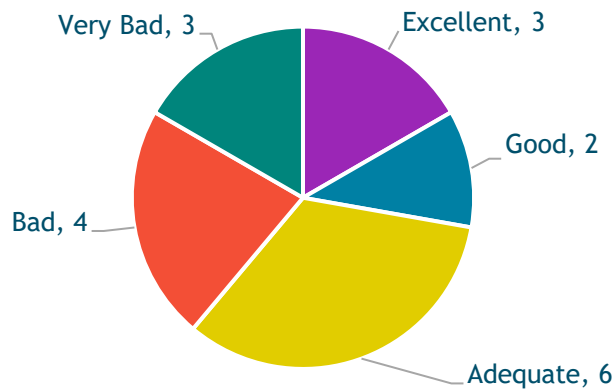
10 people told us how long their loved one had been living in the home. Answers ranged from 4 weeks to 5 years.

Feedback from respondents was mixed.

### Communication with care homes

We asked people about their experiences of communication with their loved one's care home. We specified to people that by this, we mean updates and communication sent by the home regarding their loved one's health, events and activities inside the home, etc. We received 18 responses to this question.

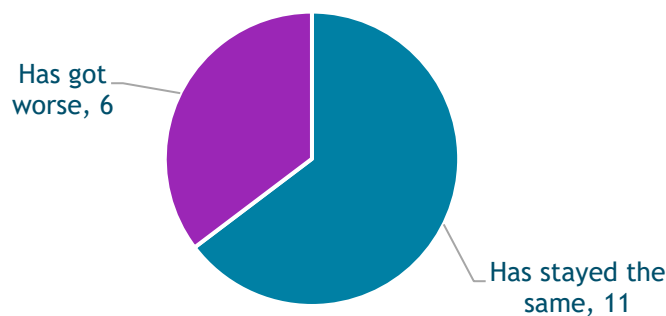
How would you describe the communication you receive from your loved one's care home?



Feedback about communication from care homes was mixed, although was slightly more negative than it was positive. 7 people (38%) described communication from their loved one's care home as 'bad' or 'very bad', compared with 5 people (27%) who described communication as 'good' or 'excellent'.

People whose loved one was no longer living in a care home were more likely to describe their experiences of communication with the care home negatively than people with a relative currently living in a care home. Those with a relative living in a care home currently were more likely to report communication with the home as 'average'.

Does the above statement reflect what communication from your loved ones' care home was like throughout the pandemic (since March 2020)?



We asked people if communication from their loved one's care home had changed throughout the pandemic. We received 17 responses to this question.

No respondents said that communication with their loved one's care home had improved with the pandemic. 6 people said that communication with their loved one's care home had got worse during the pandemic. People with a loved one still living in a care home

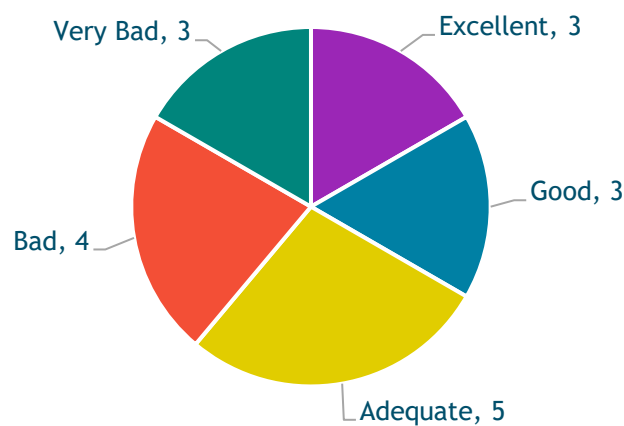
were more likely to say that communication with their loved one's care home had got worse during the pandemic.

There was no strong correlation between how people rated communication with their loved ones' care home and whether they felt communication had improved or got worse during the pandemic.

### Communication with residents

We asked people about their ability to communicate directly with their loved one living in a care home. We received 18 responses to this question.

Currently, how would you describe your ability to communicate directly with your loved one?

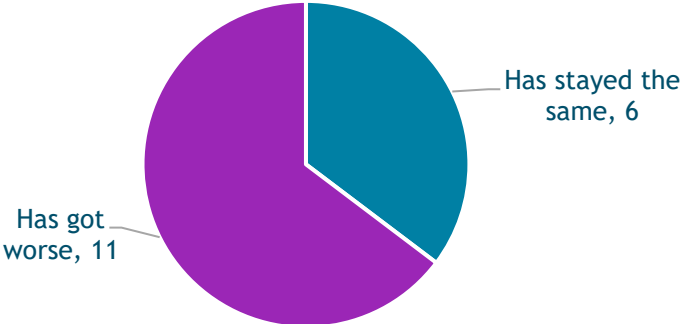


Responses to this question were mixed, although feedback was slightly more negative than positive. 7 people (38%) said their ability to communicate directly with their loved one was 'Bad' or 'Very Bad', compared with 6 people (33%) who said their ability to communicate directly with their loved one was 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

People with a loved one currently living in a care home were more likely to give positive feedback about their ability to communicate directly with their loved one. 4 people with a relative currently living in a care home said their ability to communicate with their loved one was 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

In contrast, 5 people whose loved one was no longer living in a care home told us their ability to communicate directly with their loved one had been 'Bad' or 'Very Bad'. All of these people told us their loved one was no longer living in a care home because they had passed away.

Does the above statement reflect what communication with your loved one was like throughout the pandemic (since March 2020)?

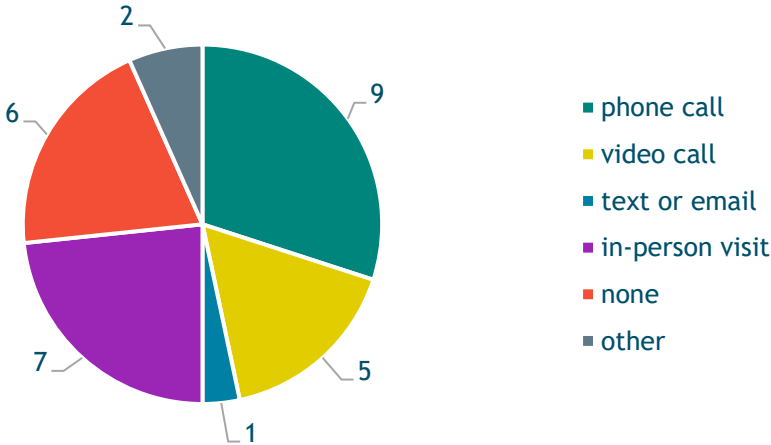


We asked people if direct communication with their loved one had changed throughout the pandemic. We received 17 responses to this question.

No respondents said that communication with their loved one’s care home had improved with the pandemic. 11 people (61%) said their ability to communicate directly with their loved one had got worse throughout the pandemic.

There was no strong correlation between how people rated communication with their loved ones’ care home and whether they felt communication had improved or got worse during the pandemic.

What ways have you been able to communicate with your loved one during the pandemic?



We asked people about the ways they had been able to communicate with their loved one during the pandemic. This was a multiple choice question - respondents could select more than one method of communication. We received 18 responses to this question.



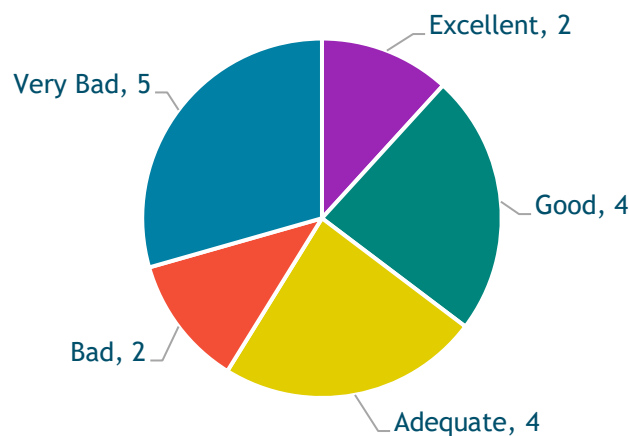
The most common method of communication with a loved one in a care home was via telephone calls (selected by 9 people), followed by in-person visits (selected by 7 people), and then video calls (selected by 5 people).

Worryingly, 6 people said they had no method of getting in touch with their loved one during the pandemic. 5 of these people had rated their experience of communicating directly with their loved one as either 'Bad' or 'Very Bad'. 4 of these people said their loved one was no longer living in a care home, while 2 people said their relative was still living in a care home.

## Visits

We asked people about their experiences of in-person visits with their loved one living in a care home.

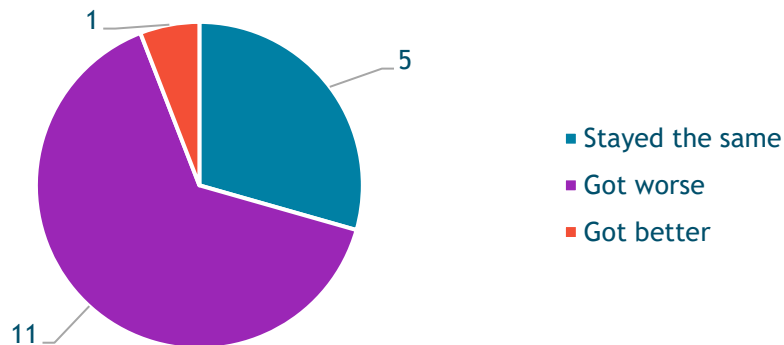
How would you describe arrangements for in-person visits with your loved one?



The most commonly selected answer to this question was 'Very Bad', with 5 respondents (27%) choosing this option, although 6 respondents rated their experiences of in-person visits as 'Good' or 'Excellent'.

People with a loved one no longer living in a care home were more likely to have a negative experience of in-person visiting, with 5 people whose loved one no longer lived in a care home rating their experience as 'Bad' or 'Very Bad', and only 2 people rating their experiences of in-person visiting as 'Good'.

Does the above statement reflect what visiting arrangements were like throughout the pandemic (since March 2020)?

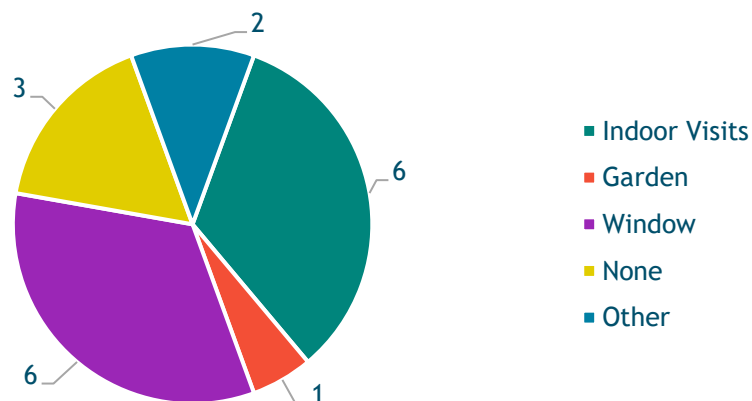


We asked people if their experiences of visiting arrangements had changed throughout the pandemic. We received 17 responses to this question.

One respondent said that visiting arrangements had improved throughout the pandemic. This person had a relative currently living in a care home and rated their experiences of in-person visiting as 'Adequate'.

11 people (61%) said their ability to visit their loved one had got worse throughout the pandemic. People whose loved one was no longer living in a care home were more likely to say that visiting arrangements had got worse during the pandemic.

What ways were you able to visit your loved one during the pandemic?



We asked people about the ways they had been able to visit their loved ones in person during the pandemic. This was a multiple choice question - respondents could select more than one method of visiting. We received 18 responses to this question.

The most common responses, chosen by 6 respondents (33%) were indoor visits, taking place in a special 'pod' or dedicated visiting room in the care home, and window visits. A

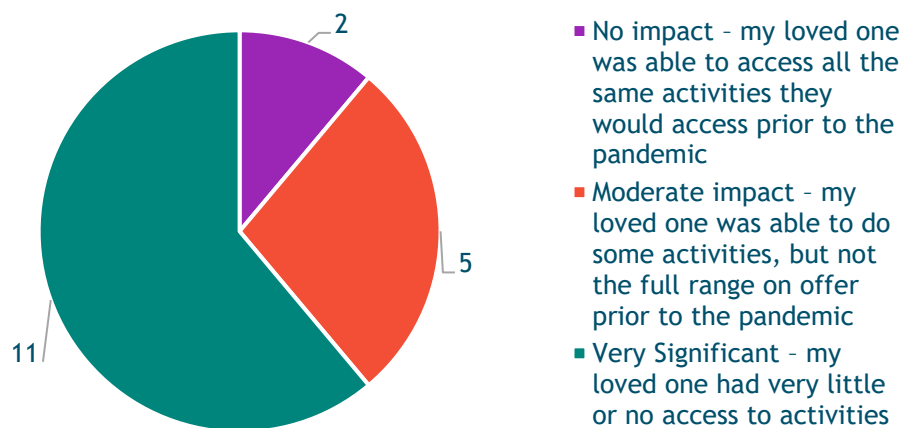
window visit is where a visitor to a care home can see or speak to a resident from outside, standing nearby a window.

3 respondents said they had not been able to visit their loved one. All of these people told us that their relative was no longer living in a care home.

## Impact

We asked people a number of questions about what impact the pandemic had had on a number of aspects of their loved ones' life.

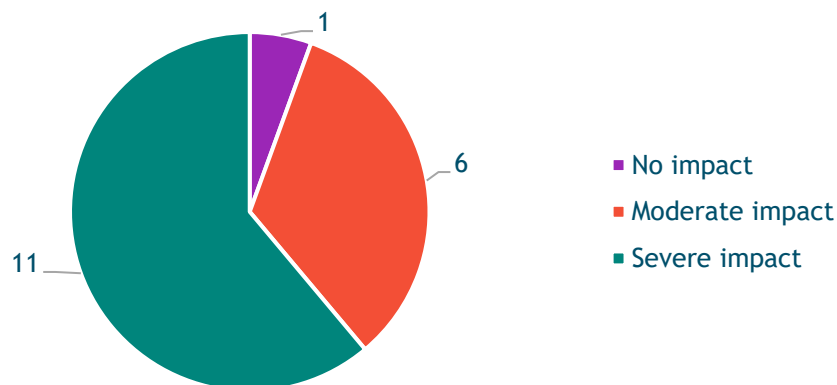
What impact, if any, has the pandemic had on the activities your loved one has been able to do or participate in?



We asked people about the impact the pandemic had had on activities available for their relative in a care home to participate in. By activities, we mean entertainment provided by the care home for residents such as trips out, film nights, gardening, games, celebrations for national holidays, etc. We had 18 responses to this question.

11 people (61%) said that the pandemic had a very significant impact on the activities available for their loved one. People with a loved on still living in a care home were much more likely to say the pandemic had had significant impact on their relatives' access to activities.

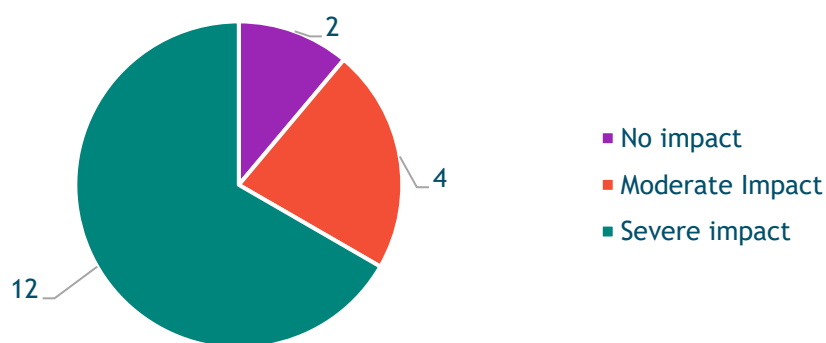
What impact, if any, do you feel that the pandemic has had on your loved ones' physical health?



We asked people about the impact they felt the pandemic had had on their loved ones' physical health. We had 18 responses to this question.

11 people (61%) told us that the pandemic had a 'severe' impact on their loved ones' physical health. This was the most common response for people whose relatives were still living in a care home, and for people whose relatives were no longer living in a care home. One person said that the pandemic had 'no impact' on their loved ones' physical health. This person told us their relative was still living in a care home.

What impact, if any, do you feel that the pandemic has had on your loved ones' mental health and overall wellbeing?



We asked people about the impact they felt the pandemic had had on their loved ones' mental health and overall wellbeing. We had 18 responses to this question.

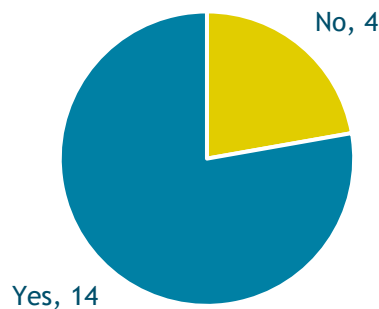
12 people (66%) said that the pandemic had had a 'Severe' impact on their loved ones' mental health and overall wellbeing. This was the most common response for people

whose relatives were still living in a care home, and for people whose relatives were no longer living in a care home.

### Concerns with care

We also asked some questions about whether or not people had any concerns with their loved ones' care during the pandemic.

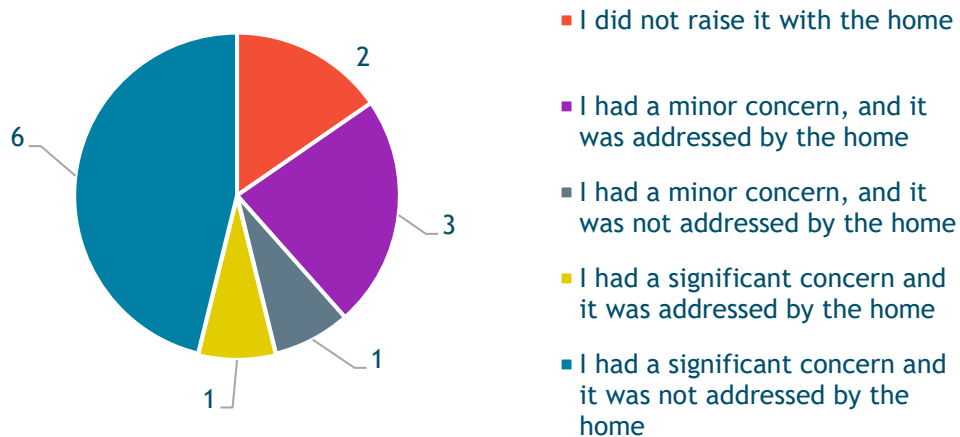
While your loved one was living in a care home during the pandemic, did you have any concerns about the quality of care and support that your loved one received?



We asked people if they had any concerns with the quality of their loved ones' care during the pandemic. We received 18 responses to this question.

14 people (77%) said they did have a concern with the quality of their loved ones' care. People whose loved one was no longer living in a care home were more likely to say they had a concern with quality of care, with only one person whose loved one was no longer living in a care home saying they did not have any concerns about the quality of care.

### Yes, I had a concern with the quality of care and support my loved one received



Where people told us they had a concern about the quality of care and support their loved one received, we asked them more about this concern.

2 people told us they did not raise their concern with their loved one's care home. 4 people told us they had a minor concern with their loved one's care. 3 people told us their minor concerns were addressed by their loved ones' home, but one person said their loved one's home had addressed their minor concern. Worryingly, 7 people told us they had significant concerns with their loved one's care and only one person with significant concerns said that their loved one's home had addressed this concern.

### **Free text comments**

At the end of the survey, there was space for people to leave free text comments to tell us more about their experiences with care homes during the pandemic if they wished. We received comments from 9 respondents (50%). 3 of these comments were from people with a relative currently living in a care home, and 6 were from people with loved ones who were no longer living in a care home.

All of the free text comments that were left were negative, highlighting problems and concerns that the commenters had experienced or were experiencing. Because the free text question was optional, this may have been self-selecting

Most of the comments detailed people's experiences with visiting and communication with their loved one during the pandemic.

*"I think the home worked the best they could in this situation but by the nature of the pandemic it was very difficult to communicate with mum as visits had to be booked and you could not always get the time you wanted owing to the demand and because of my work situation whereas before I could drop in virtually anytime to the home. The skype calls and window visits were very difficult for her owing to dementia."*

*"In April 21 I was granted [essential care giver status], I have 2 hour visit twice week in mums room. Family can take mum out but due to her mobility its a taxi. Communication from [the home] is diabolical. [the home is] being heavily supported by agency staff."*

*"The visiting situation is not adequate at all in the area it is held. I'm sure now the visit could be in a better area of the home."*

*"I visited my mother at the start of the pandemic. The home then stopped visits, obviously. Phoned a few times only received stock answer of she is ok. Found out she had a covid test. Negative. I don't know if not visiting her had any effect on her because the dementia was taking over before the visits stopped."*

Other people raised issues with poor communication with care homes, both around restrictions on visiting and their loved ones' ongoing care.

*“When visits were allowed, this was extended to 2 people. As there are 3 children, it meant one of us was unable to visit. Due to dementia, only face to face visits were appropriate ... This was not communicated until I was made aware that I was not allowed to visit. I was allowed to visit only as she was passing away ... this was significantly distressing.”*

*“On the whole, communication was very poor. I felt my views did not count - so what is the purpose of having Lasting Power of Attorney?”*

*“Home failed to update us, we continually had to chase for answers, inconvenient visiting times, only after kicking up a fuss started to arrange visits on a Saturday one visit or zoom call allowed per week for half an hour.”*

Some respondents also raised the differences between different guidelines and rules around visiting in different health and care setting as a point of confusion, particularly when residents were moving from one setting to another.

*“At the hospital I was able to visit mum daily for one hour. But [the care home] tried to insist on 14 days of “isolation” despite mum having had 2 jabs (and me) and 3 negative flow tests.”*

A number of people raised concerns about the quality of their loved ones’ care, including concerns about the imposition of DNAR (Do Not Attempt Resuscitation) decisions on care home residents. Some people raised serious concerns they had regarding care and treatment their loved ones received.

*“The government was wanting relatives to agree to dnar for residents I refused. I was asked 3 times when he was admitted to hospital”*

*“The biggest concern I had - that mum with her poor memory might refuse [medication] ... she had declined the [medication] while in hospital ... Whilst this might not have been [care home]’s error ... there was never any mention when I had phoned several times regarding her medication.”*

*“Concerns were addressed through involvement of District Nurses / Community Matrons, but given it was a nursing home with qualified nurses, the necessity to observe somebody waiting in pain and discomfort for another health professional to arrive, appeared inappropriate and was distressing all round, not least for my relative in pain!”*

## Conclusion

Feedback that we gathered through our survey was mixed, but tended to be more negative. While some people told us they had good or excellent experiences of communicating with their loved one directly, their loved one’s care home, and of in-

person visiting during the Covid-19 pandemic, these more positive experiences were not shared by the majority of respondents to our survey. A significant minority of people described their experiences of visiting and communication with their loved one and their loved one's care home as bad or very bad. The majority of respondents also reported that the pandemic had impacted on their loved ones' physical health, mental health and wellbeing, and on the activities they were able to partake in whilst living in a care home. The majority of respondents also told us that they had concerns about the care and support provided by their loved one's care home during the pandemic, and most respondents who told us this also said that their concerns were not addressed by their loved one's care home. Some of the free text comments left by respondents discuss some of these negative experiences and concerns in more detail, and also highlight the impact of these experiences on both care home residents and their loved ones.

A number of issues raised through this survey are issues that we have previously highlighted in our other work and reports on care homes during the pandemic. These include:

- relatives feeling un- or under-informed about how care home residents were doing day-to-day, and having to proactively contact homes to get updates about how residents are doing;
- frustrations with scheduled and time-limited face-to-face visiting;
- virtual visiting and window visiting being difficult and inappropriate for care home residents with dementia;
- confusion and frustration exacerbated by differences between national Covid regulations or restrictions for the general public or in other care settings, and stricter Covid regulations and restrictions in care homes;
- the impact on relatives of care home residents of restrictions on the number of visitors allowed; and
- the quality of life and mental and physical health impact of Covid-19 related restrictions on care home residents.

Because our survey was open to anyone who had a relative living in a care home at any point in the pandemic, some of the feedback we have received may reflect people's experiences during the early stages of the pandemic, or during national lockdowns, when restrictions in care homes were at their strictest.

Changes to national guidance for care homes on visiting may have since mitigated some of these issues. For example, the UK government lifted restrictions on the number of named visitors a care home resident in England could have in new guidance issued on August 16 2021. Previous guidance issued had limited the number of named visitors (specific individuals able to regularly visit a care home resident). Initially, residents were limited to 2 named visitors (as of April 12 2021), and this was later expanded to 5 named visitors (as of May 17 2021).

We believe it is important to make sure we are collecting feedback from as many people as possible, and that it is important to document people's experiences from all periods during the pandemic. While guidance and practice may have changed, it is important for social care providers and the local authority to understand and be able to respond to



people's concerns and experiences around not being able to visit loved ones in care homes. Many issues that have impacted on communication between care homes and relatives of residents and visiting, such as issues around staffing, are also ongoing. Additionally, it is unclear from our survey, how well changes to guidance on visiting have been communicated to residents' families and how well this is working in practice.

We will continue to monitor feedback we receive about care homes, and will continue to monitor the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in this area.

## **Where we use your feedback**

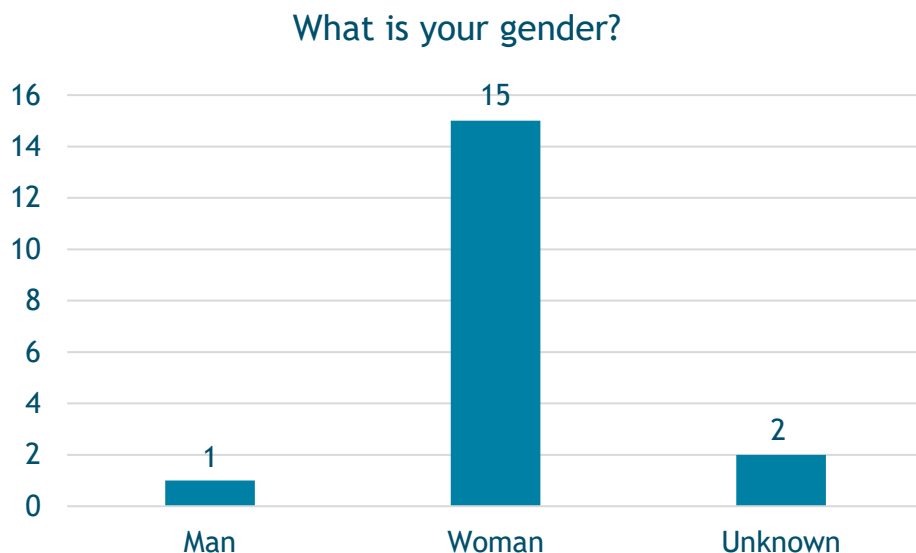
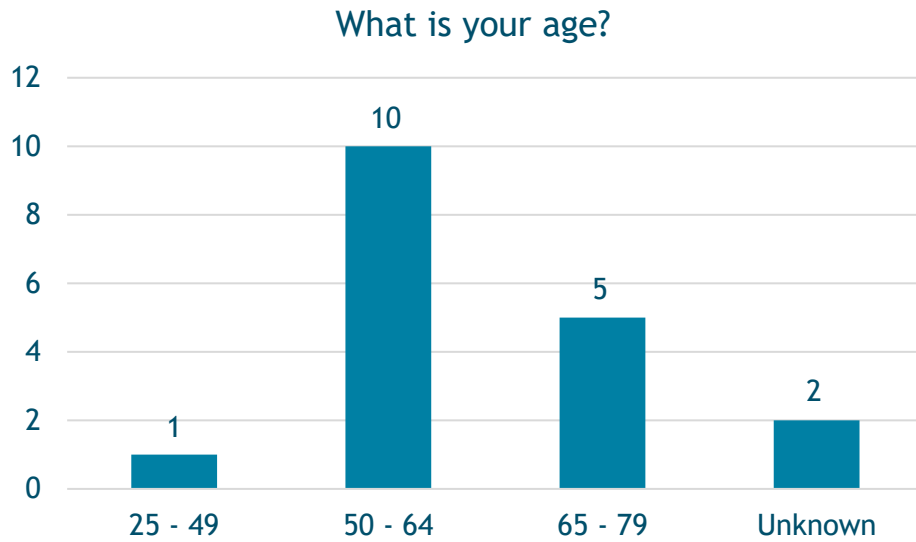
Locally, we will pass this feedback on to Liverpool City Council and the local Public Health team, who work with local care homes and also set local visiting guidelines. We'll also pass this information on to other local decision makers, including the Liverpool Quality Assurance Group, and the Care Quality Commission teams in the North West. We will also use the feedback we have received in another piece of work we are currently undertaking around Care Homes during the pandemic.

Nationally, we will pass this information on to Healthwatch England. They use the information they get from local Healthwatch across England to build a picture of what is happening nationally. They feed into national reports, research, and Parliamentary enquiries.

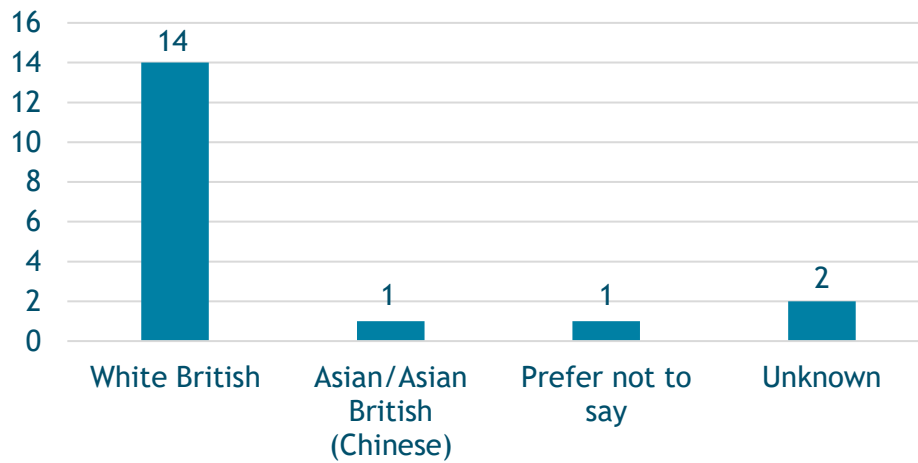
If you have any feedback about Liverpool care homes during the pandemic, you can contact us at [engagement@healthwatchliverpool.co.uk](mailto:engagement@healthwatchliverpool.co.uk).

## Appendix 1 - Demographic Data

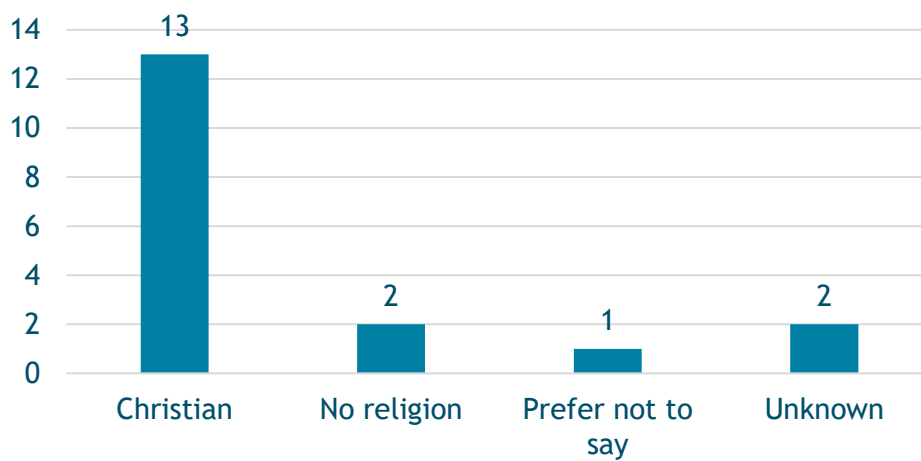
We asked respondents a number of optional demographic questions, including their age, their gender, their ethnicity, and whether or not they considered themselves to be a carer. We asked this to see who we were hearing from, and to establish if any of these factors had an impact on people's experiences with care homes during the pandemic.



### What is your ethnicity?



### What is your religion or belief?



### Are you a carer?

