

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield

Key issues from February 2022

In February 2022 we heard 67 pieces of feedback about health and social care services. This month, we largely heard more detail about recurring themes – difficulty getting through to GPs on the phone, struggles to access NHS dental care even when people are in pain, and people having hesitations about the NHS complaints process. We also heard mixed experiences of hospital care.

GPs

In February we heard 37 pieces of feedback about at least 16 different GP practices. Roughly half the people we heard from were positive about their experiences, talking about good treatment explanations and feeling well looked after by staff.

“Feel well looked after when visiting staff friendly and helpful”

For the people reporting less positive experiences, the issues were largely a continuation of existing themes. The most common issue we heard about was people struggling to get through to their GP practice on the phone, including a number of people who need an appointment to follow up previous treatment or test results but are struggling to do so.

“Told several times ‘all lines are busy’ and the line cut off several times”

Issues with long telephone queues (sometimes meaning large phone bills) and the line dropping/call being cancelled are also ongoing, as are some other reasons people are frustrated about communication, such as GPs not issuing prescriptions or needing several phone calls to follow up on standard requests.

“I can't make an appointment online as the ‘contact us’ form is temporary disabled, and has been every time I try for last 3 months”

We're also continuing to hear that alternatives to telephone calls aren't being offered. We heard this from one person with autism who said phone calls are challenging for them, as well as people who tried to use online options for booking appointments and requesting sick notes, but the GP websites didn't work so they had to telephone anyway.

Hospitals

In February we heard about 5 people's experiences in hospital. We heard once again about pedestrian signage at the Northern General Hospital being difficult to follow, and signposted routes to entrances being worn away or ending unexpectedly. We also heard about inconsistent guidance as to whether people with communication barriers could be accompanied by a family member to their appointments.



Largely, though, people who had a stay in hospital were positive about their experiences, describing caring staff who were able to talk them through their procedures and reassure them about their recoveries.



Dentists

This month we heard from 7 people who were struggling to access NHS dentistry. Most of these people were in pain but had been told that this wasn't urgent enough to get treatment, and were told to pay privately (which they couldn't afford) or join a waiting list (which would be two years or more).

"Lost a filling and in pain"

Someone else had managed to access urgent care previously, but the dentist who triaged them gave them temporary fillings and said they were unable to provide their follow up treatment. They cannot find an NHS dentist who is able to replace these with more permanent fillings.

"If I go private I'm looking at a £650 bill which I simply cannot afford."

NHS complaints processes

Building on an emerging theme through December and January, we heard from more individuals in February who have felt unsure about the NHS complaints process. One person told us they are scared of making a complaint at their GP, as they don't believe it will make a difference and will actually result in more issues. Another said they tried to make complaints to their dental practice, but were repeatedly told that they hadn't received any of the letters, which they sent by recorded delivery.



This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion, who we've partnered with to provide a feedback-sharing platform

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

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