

Insight Bulletin – August 2022

About Healthwatch Surrey

One of the statutory duties of Healthwatch Surrey is to share residents' experiences of health and social care with the people and organisations who make decisions about those services. We share what we hear in regular meetings with providers and commissioners, with ICS Boards and in system oversight meetings.

This bulletin highlights a selection of the themes we've been hearing about recently.

Praise and Thanks – the value of listening

Every month we share some of the positive experiences of health and social care that people have told us about. Our return to agenda-free community engagement has reminded us how much people value being listened to, and this month we'd like to share some positive feedback about our own listening events. We visit groups who often don't feel heard, and while gathering their insights we've been heartened by the welcomes we've received:

"It would be great if you could be here regularly for our clients to feel they have someone to talk to that cares about their health outcomes."

Community engagement, Food bank

"We are forgotten about here. Please will you come back and see us, we have learned so much today."

Community engagement, Community centre

"You know it's been so helpful to chat with [Healthwatch Surrey] today, sometimes it feels like there are all these closed doors which can be opened by speaking to someone... thanks for your help and writing everything down, I'm going to follow up on all of this at home, I have been

living with this on my own really and it would be good to speak to others about how they manage. I'm really glad I stopped today."

Community engagement, Day centre

Locations and dates of our upcoming engagements are at the end of this bulletin.

Cost of living 1: The hidden costs of health and social care

We regularly hear from people who are struggling with the hidden costs of health or social care. With the growing cost of living crisis it's reasonable to expect these hidden costs will have an increasing impact on people's health and wellbeing.

Many hidden costs relate to transport:

"My wife is disabled and in a wheelchair. She has to go to East Surrey hospital to have her blood tests. Her doctor's surgery ... say that she isn't housebound and won't send a nurse to the house. So, we take a taxi to the hospital. This is expensive as we need to have a disabled taxi to take the wheelchair."

Community engagement, Carers Hub

"I come under specialist consultant care at St Peter's, which includes appointments every two weeks, alongside daily medication. The impact this has is additional fees for car parking at the hospital, and fees for childcare."

Helpdesk

But we also hear about a range of other challenges:

"Daughter had an issue with her foot. We were told to go to the pharmacy. We needed a cream which we had to pay £12 for. If I had been seen by the GP, I could have got this for free."

Community engagement, Foodbank

"I've ... been told I need Vitamin D and Calcium and protein drinks but I'm

still waiting for the hospital to send the paper work so GP can issue prescription. It's costing me money and I have very little money."

Community engagement, Drop in centre

And of course there is a national focus on the issues in dentistry, where the barrier to treatment is entirely one of cost:

"I'm now a state pensioner and my £700 income cannot stretch to private dental fees."

Helpdesk

"I'm on a minimum wage and I can't afford to go privately to the dentist and really hope I'll find one one day as I'm scared that something's going wrong with my teeth because times to times I feel pain and sometimes cracks in my mouth. "

Helpdesk

We are alert to the potential impact of increases in the cost of living on people's health and wellbeing over the coming months and will report trends as they emerge.

Cost of living 2: Struggles and support accessing benefits

We often hear from people who find the processes involved in claiming benefits or negotiating with social services a challenge, and many rely on assistance to access the support they are entitled to.

"Citizens Advice come here weekly, I saw them today and they are helping me to sort it [housing and benefits] all out with the council."

Community engagement, Community hub

"The benefits system is crazy. They give with one hand and take with the other. That's if you have the information to know what you are entitled to. The MS nurse didn't know. I got my info by talking to the others here."

Community engagement, MS support centre

In the past Action for Carers have been able to support claimants, but we've

heard concern about the cuts to this service:

“It took me over two weeks to complete the Attendance Allowance forms – I nearly didn’t bother but I came to the Action for Carers hub and they encouraged me to do it and helped me.”

Community engagement, Carer support group

“Although I couldn’t have a face to face visit, the staff member was able to help me over the phone to fill in my sons PIP form. She made the whole process easy and without the stress I had previously encountered with the DLA form.”

Community engagement, Carer support group

The cost of living is escalating, and winter is approaching. It is increasingly important that people are empowered to access all the support they are entitled to. Services need to be vigilant, looking out for those who may find it difficult to understand or apply for the help they need.

Ongoing difficulties accessing GP appointments

We hear more about GPs than any other service, and what we hear has been boosted in the past weeks during our engagement for two PCNs about Extended Access.

We do hear many good experiences:

“I needed some help for a problem recently so I called up [my GP practice] got seen straight away, when I went through my symptoms they referred me immediately. I’ve got an appointment in a couple weeks.”

Community engagement, Community hospital

“Registered with xxx who have been excellent... my wife was able to go to the surgery and pick up all the forms. Transfer of records worked well – anytime she rang up the GP for anything, they would get a call. Doctors used video calls to ... look at areas of his body when it was sore.”

Volunteer community engagement event

“It was easy to get an appointment. I went online and requested one for my daughter who is 4; I requested one Friday so this is the first day

available so am pleased.”
GP engagement, PCN project

However we still hear that people are struggling to access appointments at some surgeries. The two issues we hear about most often relate to phoning in to the surgery, and appointment availability (especially non-emergency appointments):

“It’s a miracle even if one gets a receptionist to pick up a call.”
Social media

“It is impossible to get an appointment. I want to see the same GP and I don't get offered the same one. Because of my condition [Alzheimer's], it is easier to see the same person. Good surgery but access in is difficult. I walk in to make an appointment otherwise it is too difficult.”
Community engagement, Day centre

“My meds have also changed and need to see GP about this but just can't get an appointment. If you call at 8.30am, by the time you speak to someone, all appointments on the day have gone. They don't offer any appointments in advance.”
Community engagement, Community hospital

“I’m not able to make a GP appointment, I cannot see a doctor. You call and get triaged and then get a phone call. If you are not online it’s very difficult.”
Community engagement, Community café

“I have been poorly for just over a month and have, at every contact point, been told to fill out a form online. Not everyone can get online and also if you try to ring them or email them through their webpage in the afternoons it is closed.”
Healthwatch Surrey Website

Gathering and sharing our insight

We gather feedback through many channels including our agenda-free outbound engagement events, our Helpdesk, website, and social media. We continue our series of care home visits, which see us visiting one care home

each month. We also distribute flyers, advertise, engage with groups through our partners and contacts, and initiate focus groups.

If we hear a case of concern regarding patient safety, we immediately signpost the sharer to the appropriate body and escalate the case with the provider/commissioner.

We share our wider themes with Trusts, ICSSs, Surrey County Council, Public Health, CQC, and in various boards and groups across Surrey.



Our spotlight for engagements in September is Surrey Downs. Please note: these dates may be subject to change.

DATE	PLACE	TIME
05.09.22	Epsom Hospital (Outpatients), Epsom	10.00 – 12.00
08.09.22	Priory Court Care Home, Epsom (Enter and View Visit)	11.30 – 1:30
13.09.22	Plaza Hub, Epsom Square, Epsom	10.00 - 12.00
20.09.22	Cobham Community Centre, Cobham	11.00 - 1.00
21.09.22	Messy Bundles, St Marks Church, Tattenham	9.30 – 11.00
27.09.22	Dorking Family Centre, Dorking	10.00 – 11.30

We are also attending Farnham Wellness festival on the 17th September.

Friends and Family Care Home Survey

Our survey for friends and family of those living in care homes can be accessed via this QR code or found on our website - [Friends and family care home survey - Healthwatch Surrey](#).



**Friends and Family
Care Home Survey**



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