



# How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services in Somerset

July 2024



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\* **Note:** This report was produced in July 2023 but published in July 2024, along with a series of related reports.

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# About us

**Healthwatch Somerset** is the county's health and social care champion. We are part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision-makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care.



**Evolving Communities** is a community interest company. We specialise in gathering and reporting people's views and experiences of health and care services to help drive and guide positive change. We achieve this at a national, regional and local level by delivering local Healthwatch services, Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnerships, and a range of consultancy projects for the NHS, local authorities, Integrated Care Systems, and health and social care service providers.

Evolving Communities worked in partnership with Healthwatch Somerset to deliver this project independently for the Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB).

## Background

In 2022, we were asked by the Somerset ICB to review how Same Day Urgent Care (SDUC) is provided in West Somerset. This request followed the closure of the Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) in Minehead in March 2022. We produced a [report](#) highlighting the opinions the public had towards SDUC services in West Somerset.

The Somerset ICB then asked us to gather the views of people living across the county. We did this by creating a countywide survey and by engaging with local people at community groups, libraries and other public spaces in Bridgwater, West Mendip, Frome, North Sedgemoor, Central Mendip, Taunton Dean, Yeovil, South Somerset West, South Somerset East, Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne. This allowed us to collect the views of residents at the local level.

You can view the outcome of our other engagement visits by viewing our [series of reports](#).

The aim of this survey was to get a broad picture of the views on SDUC across the county. This report will be used in conjunction with the series of reports to help inform SDUC strategy in Somerset going forwards.

### Defining Same Day Urgent Care

**SDUC is defined as any form of unplanned healthcare that is required on the same day as the patient becomes aware of the health need. It can include minor or major injuries or any form of acute illness.**





# What we did

We replicated the survey used in our West Somerset SDUC project and together with Somerset ICB, amended it slightly. This survey was available to be completed online or via the telephone and was promoted through our social media channels, website, e-bulletin and through our various partners.

The survey contained a combination of free text and multiple choice questions so that we could compare different districts, but also give people the opportunity to share their experiences in more detail.

Our survey ran from 17 to 30 November 2022.

## Who we spoke to

A total of 167 people completed our survey. We collected demographic data from our survey respondents. Some key points to note are:

- About three quarters of our respondents were female and one quarter were male.
- There were respondents from various age groups from 26-35 up to over 86.
- We had the highest number of responses from people aged 56-65 and 66-75.
- The majority (95%) were of White British ethnic origin.
- 11% of our respondents had children under the age of 16.
- 19% of respondents considered themselves to be carers.
- 60% considered themselves to have a long-term condition or disability.

**Figure 1. Map showing the distribution of people who answered our survey**

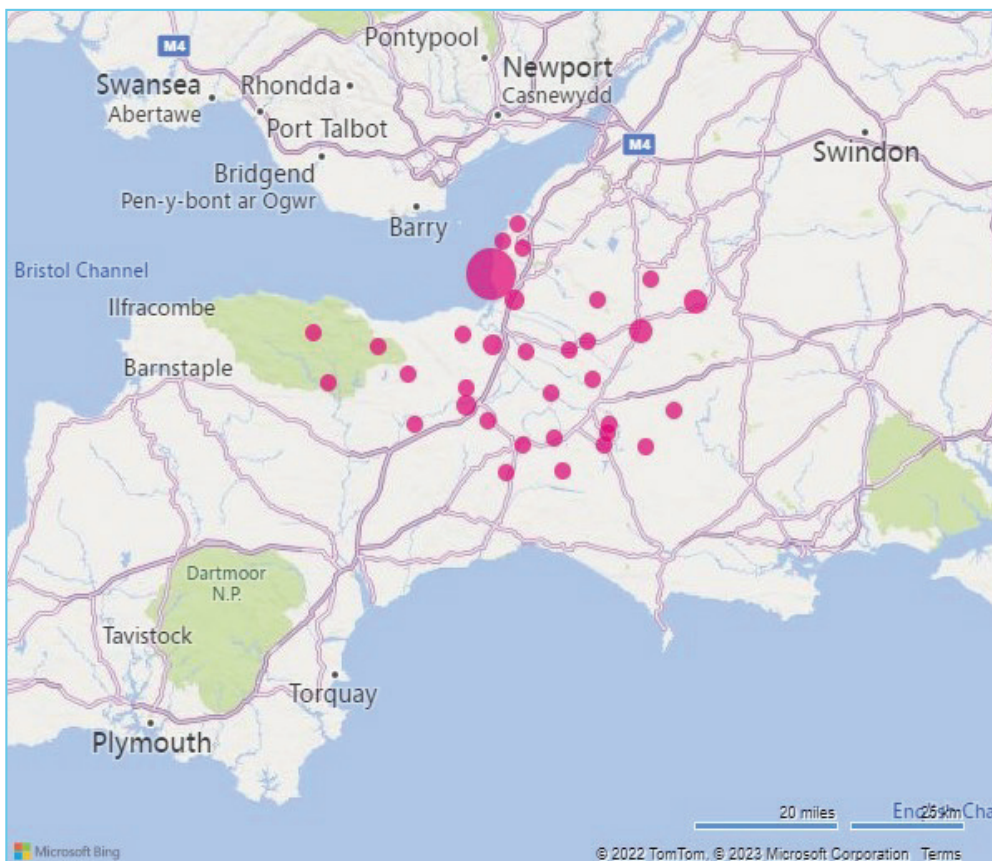


Figure 1 shows us that we received survey responses from participants all over the county of Somerset. The number of respondents residing in the TA8 postcode was particularly high (50 respondents).

# Key messages

- The vast majority of respondents (over 90%) could recall that MIU, the 999 call service and the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department offer SDUC services.
- Less than 50% of respondents were able to recall that mental health services, dental practices and opticians offer SDUC services.
- A large proportion of respondents rely solely on online sources (Google search, NHS and GP websites) to get SDUC information.
- The level of confidence respondents had towards finding SDUC information varied.
- Respondents in the under 55 age group ranked their communication preferences differently to those in the over 55 age group. However, both groups listed the NHS 111 website and GP websites as their top two preferences.
- Most respondents said they think the NHS should communicate about SDUC services 'when a service is changed' or 'monthly'.
- We received the most amount of feedback on MIUs. The majority of the positive feedback related to the quality of care/service of MIUs. Negative feedback centred around access issues – particularly opening hours and staffing levels.

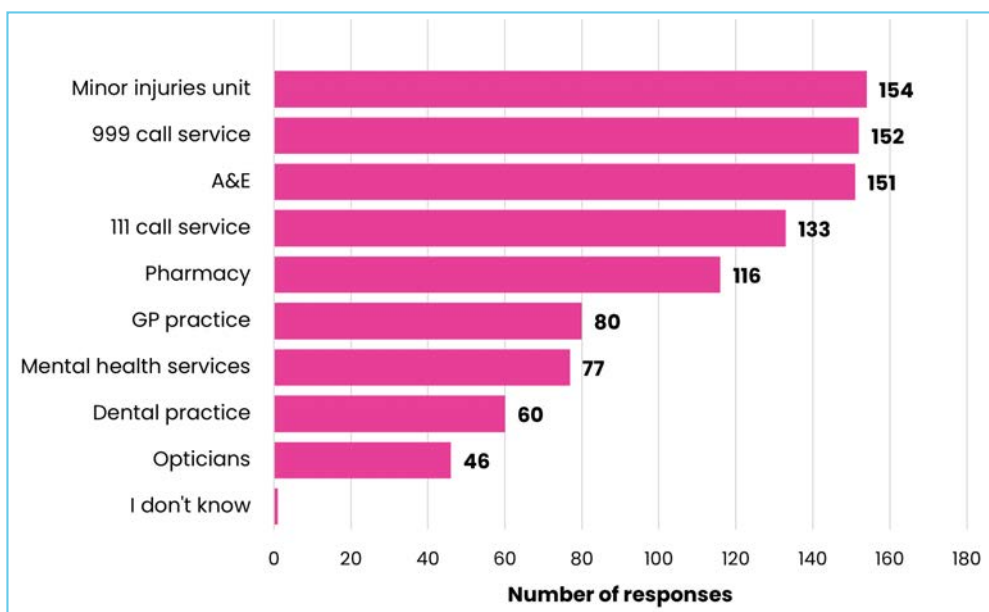
# What people told us

## Information and communication

We wanted to know what people knew about same day urgent care services, and how they tend to receive information about them.

Our first question aimed to understand what services people consider to be SDUC services.

**Figure 2. Which of the following services do you think offer same day urgent care services? (Tick all that apply)\***



\*All 167 people answered this question. Each person may have ticked more than one answer.

All of the above services offer SDUC services. The vast majority (over 90%) of respondents recalled that 'a minor injuries unit', 'the 999 call services' and 'A&E' offer SDUC services. Interestingly, three more people ticked 'a minor injuries unit' than 'A&E'.

Less than 50% of respondents were able to recall that 'mental health services', 'your dental practice' and 'your opticians' offer SDUC services.

We then asked people how they see or find information on SDUC in Somerset. 70 people answered this question, and their responses are summarised below:

- 36 respondents rely solely on online sources (Google search, NHS website, GP website). Only one person explicitly mentioned Apps- the NHS App and the HANDi Maternity App.
- 11 people will call their GP practice, MIU or A&E to get information.
- Six people rely solely on their general knowledge and/or past experiences.
- Five people use a combination of online sources and general knowledge/past experience.
- Six people said they work for the NHS, and that's how they get their information.
- Six people will visit a GP practice/MIU/A&E to get their information.

This shows that online resources are where the majority of people get their information on SDUC services. People also rely on telephone calls to their GP practice, MIU or A&E for information, presumably so that they can be signposted to the most appropriate service.

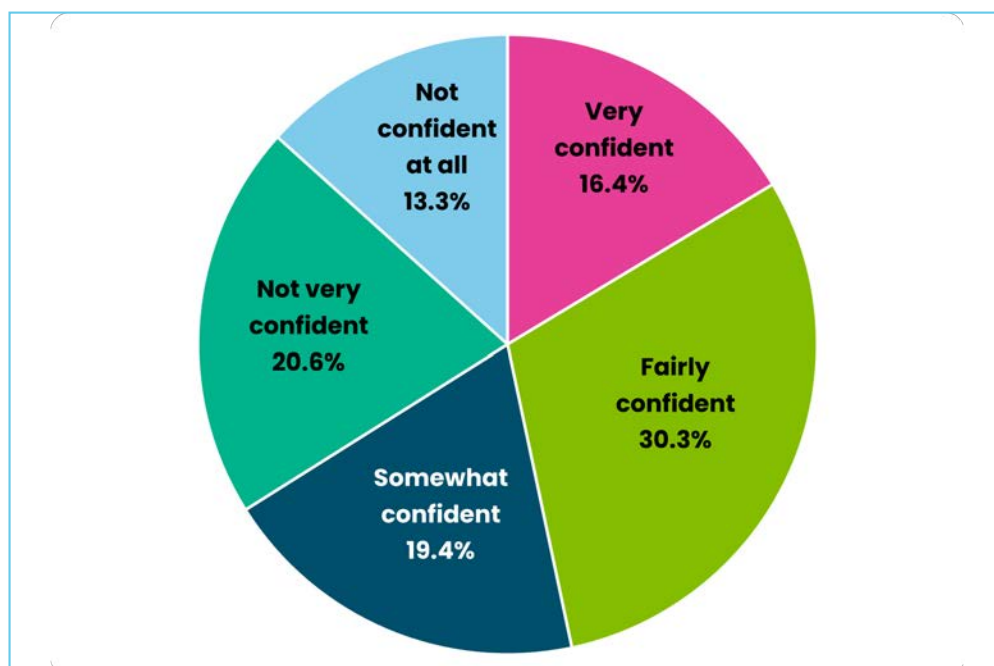
Six people said they find this information because they work for the NHS. One person explained that this gives them at an advantage.



**As a trained nurse I have the knowledge to access, but the public would not have a clue.**



**Figure 3. How confident are you in finding the information you need to access same day urgent care services?\***



\*165 out of 167 people answered this question.

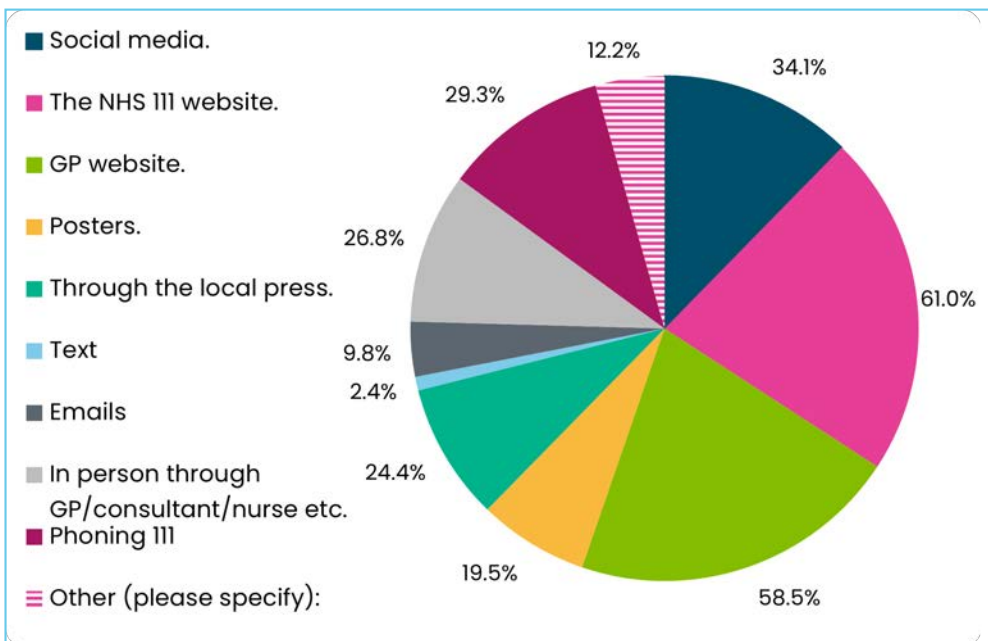
We wanted to know how confident people feel in finding the information they need to access SDUC services.

The results show that over 30% of people said they feel 'fairly confident' in finding the information they need. 47% said they feel either 'very confident' or 'fairly confident' while 34% said they feel either 'not confident at all' or 'not very confident'. This suggests that there are mixed levels of confidence across the 165 people who answered this question, likely due to differences in levels of experience with and knowledge of health and social care services.

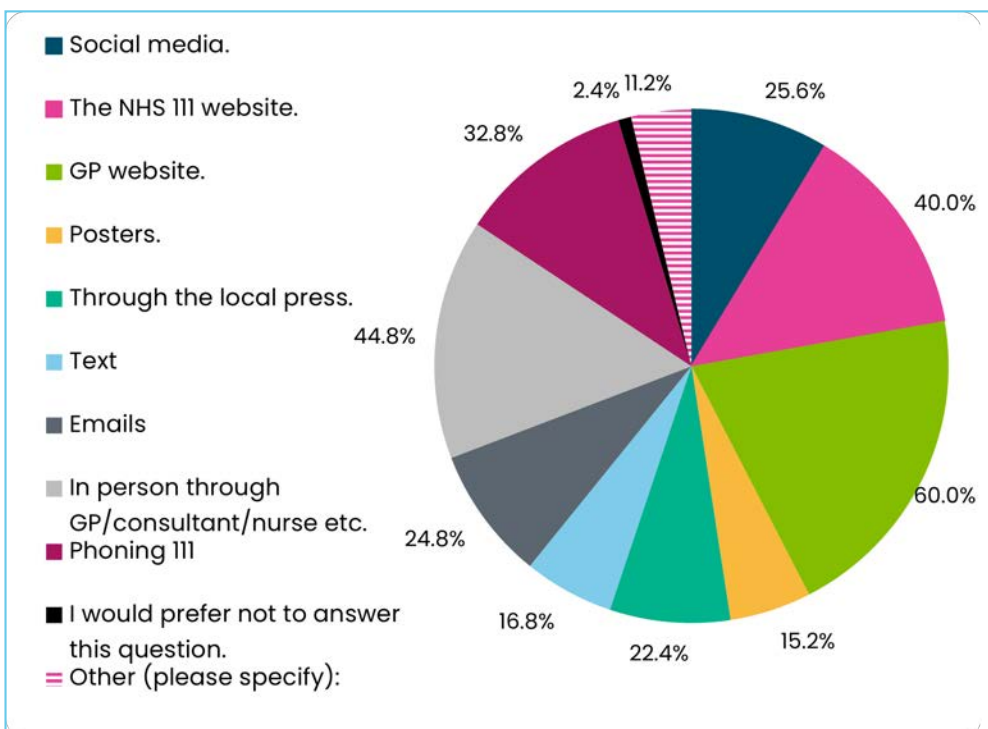
### Communication preferences

To understand how communication could be improved, we asked people whether they would prefer to receive communications about SDUC services in a certain way. We analysed the data to see if preferences varied according to age.

**Figure 4a. Responses from those under 55 years of age\*\***



**Figure 4b. Responses from those over 55 years of age\*\***



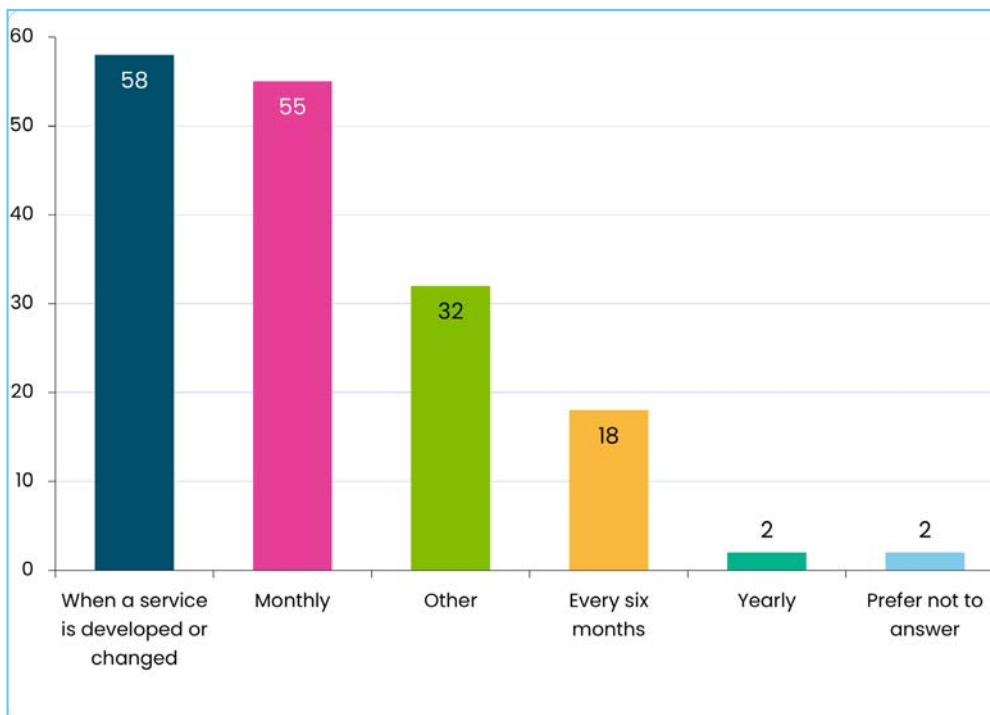
\*\*Each person may have given more than one answer.

## Key differences between the age groups

- More people from the over 55 group (49%) chose in-person communication (through a GP/consultant/nurse etc) than those under 55 (27%).
- Less people from the over 55 age group (26%) chose social media than the under 55 age group (34%).
- More people in the over 55 age group chose emails (25%) than the under 55 age group (10%).
- More people in the over 55 age group chose text messages (17%) than the under 55 age group (2.5%).

Next, we asked people how often they think the NHS should communicate to the public about SDUC services. This was asked to help advise the NHS as to whether they should produce communications more or less frequently.

**Figure 5. How often do you think the NHS should communicate to the public about same day urgent care services?**



The results show that a large proportion of people said they would like to receive information 'when a service is developed or changed' (35%). This is similar to the number of people that said they would like to receive information monthly (33%).

For those that answered 'other (please specify)', there were many comments suggesting that information should be provided all the time.

There should be public information campaigns all the time about everything! [There is] inappropriate use of A&E etc.

As the picture [of the NHS] changes all the time it needs to be a message that is repeated over and over and over again to people.

As regularly as possible. If people understood where to go it would put less pressure on A&E and the 999 services.



However, there were just as many comments suggesting that frequent communications could cause information overload.

There should be easily searchable information via websites/NHS Apps, rather than bombarding people with information that is not required at the time.

Some respondents said that communications campaigns should be targeted so that they land at key points throughout the year.

Especially around tourist season- there are lots of silly reasons for A&E visits around this time from visitors to the area.

Balance between time given to communications, which often land well at key points in the year e.g. school/summer holidays, preparing for bank holidays and Christmas.

It is clear that communications on SDUC services are necessary, but that they should also be delivered appropriately.

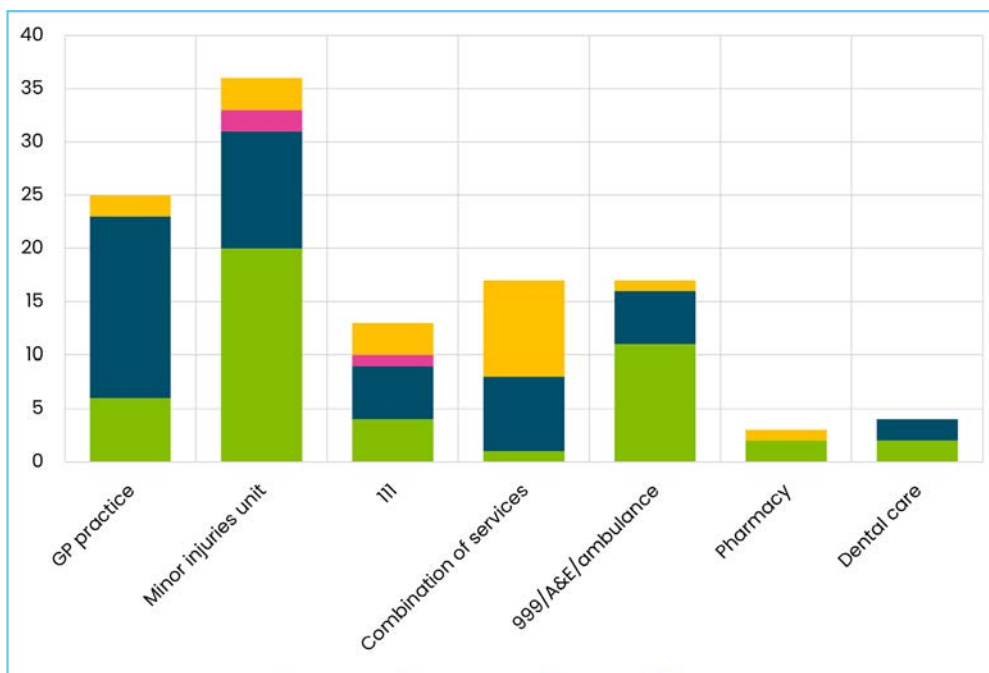
[I] would not expect people to understand a complex system, so signposting and help with decision making is important e.g. 111 online or via the telephone.

## Experiences of using SDUC services

We wanted to know what people in Somerset thought of their local SDUC services, and how they could be improved.

115 respondents gave feedback on their experience using a SDUC service. This feedback was given using a free text box. We received the most amount of feedback related to MIUs and the least amount related to pharmacies.

Figure 6. Type of feedback received and its sentiment



## Feedback themes

The feedback received has been categorised by sentiment but also by theme. Each piece of feedback relates to one of the following categories:

- Access to services
- Quality of care/service
- Both quality of care/service and access to services.



We explore the themes here for the service that people talked to us about the most – MIUs.

## MIUs



31% (36) of people who answered this question gave feedback that centred around MIUs.

Out of the 11 people that gave negative feedback, 10 were about access to MIUs. Respondents mentioned that their MIU is not open for long enough or not open for enough days. They commented that their MIU opening hours have recently reduced, or they don't have an MIU in their area but feel they need one.


 In Shepton Mallet we are as far as you can get from an acute hospital so it is vital we have our MIU. The MIU service has been cut which leaves us very vulnerable!! 


 I have used the MIU in Glastonbury which is a walk-in. They were very good. I live in Yeovil and think it's outrageous there isn't a MIU in Yeovil with a walk-in centre. 



 The local MIUs need proper staffing and need to be open seven days a week. 

 We went to Bridgwater Hospital at 7pm at night to find it closed due to staff shortages. We had to wait nine hours to be seen at Taunton A&E. 

20 out of the 25 respondents who gave positive feedback on MIUs praised the quality of care/service received.

 Attending MIUs have been brilliant for small things that GP surgeries in rural areas no longer seem to cover. As a farming family working with prickly, sharp and fast-moving equipment, we have had a few accidental injuries needing stitches [but not serious enough for A&E]. 

 Shepton MIU are brilliant. I had an allergic reaction that they sorted quickly. Had I had to get to a doctor or hospital farther away, or wait for an ambulance, it doesn't bear thinking what would have happened. 

 I had a fall and went to the MIU in Frome. It worked very well as I had banged my head and cut my knee. They checked that I didn't have concussion, patched my leg up and sent me home with advice etc. 

Respondents suggested a number of things that can be done to improve people's experiences using MIUs.

- Making the reception area at MIUs more private, to avoid everyone hearing your personal details.
- Increase the capacity of MIUs so that more people can be seen more regularly, including during the evening and weekend. This should reduce the number of people going to A&E.
- Consider putting new MIUs into towns that lack local SDUC services.
- Make it clearer how long someone can expect to wait at an MIU before being seen. One participant suggested using a virtual queue to reduce traffic at the unit.

## Recommendations

We would like the Somerset ICB to consider the following recommendations, based on what people have told us:

- Provide a basic level of SDUC knowledge to all, but focus on organising the information that currently exists so that it can be searched very quickly at the time of need. Crucially, people should know where to go and who to contact for certain conditions/situations.
- Use resources to create an integrated communications campaign (offline and online), that briefly lists the all the SDUC services in one place. Efforts should be directed towards raising awareness of less well known SDUC services. This should be used consistently throughout Somerset.
- Understand that a large proportion of people use online sources to get their information, so websites and information pages should be kept up-to-date at all times.
- When sending SDUC communications, consider targeting different groups according to their communication preferences. This will ensure resources are used as efficiently as possible.
- Schedule SDUC campaigns at key points in the year (reflecting seasons, events, academic calendars etc.). Avoid bombarding people with multiple messages at once.
- Consider putting more resources into MIUs. They are valued resources, and expanding them could increase capacity at A&E.
- Consider altering GP appointment booking systems so that all allow people to book a routine appointment in the first instance, and then a same day appointment if urgent.

## Next steps

This report was shared with the Somerset ICB in 2023, as part of a series of reports about people's views of urgent care in different areas of Somerset. This work and our findings have informed a review into how urgent care is provided in Somerset. Healthwatch Somerset will be working with the ICB to respond to the issues raised during this engagement.

# Stakeholder response

Kirsty Ash, Head of Urgent and Emergency Care, NHS Somerset



Somerset ICB would like to thank the residents of Somerset who participated in this survey, which has provided information needed to help improve access to services. We would also like to thank Healthwatch for providing the team who undertook and managed the engagement process on behalf of NHS Somerset and our health and care partners.

As part of our Same Day Urgent Care improvement work, that this survey forms a core part of, the Somerset system will:

- Explore the findings to support the development of a Same Day Urgent Care communication strategy. This will include the use of different media types, supporting a number of different services across Somerset.
- Development of access to resources to support patients in self-care.
- Working to increase the awareness of Same Day Urgent Care services in West Somerset.
- Somerset ICB and partners to support the development of neighbourhood groups across Somerset with a focus on continuing to support access to Same Day Urgent Care through pilots that look at different ways of providing services based on local need.
- Somerset A&E delivery board to looking at how we might improve all elements of Same Day Urgent Care mentioned in the recommendation within this set of engagement reports.
- The development of a network of Urgent Treatment Centres based around our existing Minor Injuries Units.
- Development of a workforce plan to help further develop the Same Day Urgent Care workforce required by the Somerset system.

## Considerations

It is important to note that these visits took place at a time where the public would have been aware of the impending strikes planned by NHS staff over concerns in pay and working conditions. These events may have influenced public opinion.

## Thank you

Evolving Communities and Healthwatch Somerset would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views and experience through the engagement activities that were part of this project.





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