

# How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne, Somerset

July 2024



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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 report presents the views of people we spoke to in Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne. You can view the outcome of our other engagement visits by viewing our [series of reports](#), including the results of our countywide survey.

The aim of this particular engagement was to understand people's views on SDUC services at the local level. 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 contacted our various partners in health and social care and set up a series of visits to community groups and public spaces in Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne. Together with the Somerset ICB we created a set of eight questions that we used for 1:1 interviews (see Appendix).

We spent approximately five days in Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne. We visited both public spaces (for example, Ilminster Library) and closed spaces (for example, a parent and baby group).

Our visits took place between 12 June and 11 July 2023.

## Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 56 people in Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne.

- 42 of our participants were female and 14 were male.
- Most of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of our participants fell into the 66 to 75 age category.



# Key messages

We collected lots of information about people's use and views of SDUC, and we identified several key messages.

- A large majority of participants could recall that pharmacies offer SDUC services. Just over half mentioned GP practices and just under half said MIUs. Few could recall the NHS 111 call service.
- The majority of participants said they think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day if they were experiencing urgent but not life-threatening symptoms, for example, the presence of a lump.
- The majority of participants said they feel confident about sourcing SDUC related information.
- Participants shared both positive and negative SDUC experiences with us. Negative experiences centred around the quality of SDUC at Chard medical practices while positive experiences highlighted the same day support by pharmacists and by Crewkerne and Summervale surgeries.
- The majority of participants told us they are happy to see the wider healthcare team for advice (particularly pharmacists). However, residents in Chard told us they have been experiencing prescription delays.
- Participants from Chard told us that it is very difficult to secure a GP appointment, and many participants told us this has got worse since the GP practices in Chard merged.
- Participants told us there is no NHS dentist in Chard and that residents can't even get on the waiting list to see a private dentist.
- Most participants said that travelling to Taunton or Yeovil Hospital is difficult for those without their own transport due to poor transport links.

# What people told us


## Knowledge of SDUC services

We wanted to find out how much people know about SDUC services in their area, under what circumstances they think they would require SDUC, and whether they think there is enough information out there.


### Awareness of SDUC services

We asked people whether they could think of any other healthcare service that offers SDUC services, other than the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department.

46 out of the 56 participants recalled that pharmacies offer SDUC services. 30 participants mentioned that you can visit the GP on the same day, yet a few commented that this is not normally possible.

 **Same day at the GP – that’s a joke. People are resorting to private services (if they can afford it).**



 **If you can get through, you get a call back but you’ll be lucky to be seen on the same day.**



26 participants said you could go to a MIU and most of these mentioned Chard MIU. Four out of the 56 participants could not recall SDUC services other than A&E.

### What conditions require SDUC?

We asked people under what circumstances they think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day.

The vast majority of participants said they think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day if they felt their/someone’s condition was urgent, but not life-threatening. Participants defined life-threatening as requiring a 999 call or a visit to A&E.

Participants gave examples of situations they consider urgent, these include being in pain, feeling ill for a few days with no improvement, something requiring quick action, for example, the presence of a lump, and anything of concern regarding a child.

Ten people did not answer this question.

### Finding information on SDUC

We asked people whether they feel confident finding the information they need to access various SDUC services.

The responses to this question were mixed, but the majority said they feel confident finding the information they need to access various SDUC services. These participants said they find their information from the internet, friends and family, other members at social groups, the NHS website and information leaflets at the surgery. One participant told us they feel confident because they work in the health and social care sector.

The remaining participants said they feel OK about finding the information they need to access various SDUC services, but there is a need to advertise these services more locally. Those that do not use the internet or have a smart phone feel less confident than those that do. One participant said they were invited to a session on how to use the NHS App by their medical practice, but the App could not be downloaded onto their particular phone.

## Experience of using SDUC services

We asked people to share their experiences of using SDUC services with us, and to tell us whether they would feel confident seeing the wider healthcare team (GP, pharmacist, advanced nurse practitioner) as opposed to A&E for a same day concern.

We received mixed responses when we asked participants to share their experiences of using SDUC services with us.

### Positive experiences

#### Same day pharmacist and dentist support

A number of participants told us they have had positive same day experiences at local pharmacies. Most of these participants said pharmacies helped with prescribing medication but others said they also provided diagnostic support for symptoms such as rashes.

While routine dental appointments in the area are difficult to access (see below), one participant told us they were seen on the same day for a dental emergency and had a positive experience.

#### Same day appointments at Summervale Surgery (Ilminster) and Crewkerne Surgery

While some participants had negative SDUC experiences at GP practices, those at Summervale Surgery and Crewkerne Surgery recalled positive experiences. In particular, participants praised the telephone system at Summervale Surgery, which allows patients to select 'option one' if they feel they require an urgent appointment.

#### Quality of care at Chard MIU

Several participants told us that they have positive experiences using Chard MIU. This included treatment for injuries such as falls, and support for services such as changing catheters. In particular, the quality of the service and staff were praised.

However, many concerns were raised about the opening times and the capacity of Chard MIU.



**The MIU in Chard gets so busy they sometimes have to close the door and stop accepting people, meaning you have to travel to Yeovil Hospital.**





### Negative experiences

#### Quality of care at Chard MIU

Some participants told us that the quality of care provided by GP practices in Chard was poor. For example, one participant told us that while pregnant, they suffered from flu symptoms and breathing issues. A GP at one practice proceeded to send them home without checking their blood pressure or conducting a 'proper examination'. This participant still felt unwell two days later and decided to ring NHS 111 who advised them to go to hospital. They were admitted for a few days with high blood pressure. This participant said they were: "disappointed by the GP's lack of care."

Another participant told us that when their five month old child received a vaccine for travel purposes, their arm swelled the next day and there was liquid coming out of the needle site mark. When the participant called the GP practice, they were told to come in that day but were sent home, to be told it would clear up. The participant was unhappy that no medication was offered, so decided to ring NHS 111. Within minutes, a doctor had sent photos to Musgrove Park Hospital and the participant was asked to take their child in straight away.

 **The staff at the hospital were disgusted the GP practice didn't advise me or treat my child with antibiotics. It turned out that the wound was infected.** 

Lastly, we were told by two participants that they decided to move GP practice from one in Chard to one in Ilminster, because they were unhappy with the service provided in Chard.

### **Confidence in using the wider healthcare team**

The majority of participants told us they are happy to see the wider healthcare team for advice (particularly pharmacists). However, several residents in Chard told us they have experienced prescription delays recently, meaning they have to travel back and forth to different pharmacies. These participants expressed concern that such delays will worsen people's conditions to a point that they may require urgent care for things like ear or urinary tract infections.

## **GP practices and appointments**

We asked people how their appointment booking system works at their GP practice, and whether they are able to access appointments for non-urgent conditions in a reasonable timescale such as two to 14 days.

### **Crewkerne**



Participants from Crewkerne told us that the GP appointment booking system largely involves telephoning the practice in the morning and entering a queuing system with the option to select a call back. On the whole, participants from Crewkerne feel positive about the booking system, and are often seen within a week or one to two weeks.



Three participants said the length of time you have to wait to see a NHS physiotherapist could improve, and one told us they opted to see a private physiotherapist due to the wait.



### **Chard**

Participants from Chard told us that it is very difficult to secure a GP appointment, and many participants told us this has got worse since the GP practices in Chard merged.

 **It was great about five months ago, I could easily make an appointment for the same week, but since the merge managed by Ariel Healthcare it takes a long time to see a doctor for non-urgent medical issues, usually two to three weeks. I don't bother now, I know I can speak to the pharmacist who is really good and understanding.** 

 **I haven't had an appointment since the surgeries merged.** 

 **I haven't seen a doctor for six months since the three surgeries in Chard merged. It was easier to book appointments before this happened. I have to call the surgery in the morning for my child's appointment, but I don't know until the day of the appointment which surgery I have to attend.** 

 **Since the three practices merged into two with Ariel Healthcare, it has got worse for appointments; it's usually three to four weeks before I can be seen.** 

A number of people told us that since the merger, the information about which surgery to attend for your appointment isn't clear. This has resulted in situations where participants have turned up for their appointment at the wrong surgery.



## Ilminster



Participants told us there are a variety of ways to book appointments but this is largely done over the phone. Participants have mixed views about trying to book appointments. While some said you can't see a GP, or that it's impossible to get a same day or even next day appointment, praise was given to Summervale Surgery, particularly around the helpfulness of receptionist staff.

## Dental care in Chard

We were told that it is difficult to access dental care in Chard. Participants told us there is no NHS dental practice in Chard and residents can't even get on the waiting list to see a private dentist. There is concern that this could result in an increase in dental related emergencies.

 I can't get see a private dentist in Chard as they're full. I have been told there is a five year waiting list for an NHS dentist in this area. My partner also isn't registered with a dentist and has been suffering with mouth abscesses. He can't get an emergency appointment so is self-medicating with pain killers. 

 I don't have an NHS Dentist, and there is only one private dentist in Chard which is full. I will try to register with a dental practice in Taunton. 

 There is only one dental practice in Chard and it is private. Two dental practices have closed, meaning that people have to travel to Yeovil/Axminster/Seaton, incurring transport costs. 

## Transport to SDUC services

We asked people how they feel about the distances they need to travel to their GP practice, A&E etc. We also asked whether they could drive and have their own means of transport.

## Crewkerne

We were told that Crewkerne residents tend to travel to Yeovil Hospital for the A&E or hospital appointments. Participants said that without your own transport, this journey is difficult because buses only run once an hour and it costs about £40 by taxi to get to Yeovil Hospital. A few participants mentioned that there is a hospital in Crewkerne, but they are not sure what it's used for. These participants suggested that this hospital could be used to provide more local hospital services to residents in Crewkerne.

## Chard

Chard residents told us that accessing their GP practice is OK because it is within walking distance. We were told their nearest A&E is at Taunton Hospital, but that there is no direct bus service and it is roughly a 30 minute drive. Participants said this journey is manageable only if you have your own means of transport.



## Ilminster

Similarly, Ilminster residents told us that accessing Yeovil Hospital is difficult if you don't have your own means of transport. While one participant praised the Red Cross hospital transport service, another mentioned that they can't get hold of hospital transport.

# Recommendations

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

**We recommend that the majority of resources should be directed towards improving SDUC services in Chard:**

- Carry out an investigation into the quality of care and access at Chard medical practices following the recent merger.
- Put in place a robust communication plan for the merged Chard medical practices so that patients know well in advance the location of their appointment.
- Investigate concerns of prescription delays at pharmacies and implement plans to improve stock levels particularly in Chard.
- Direct more dental funding towards the dental practice in Chard to increase dental access in the area.

## Crewkerne

- Look into whether some hospital services could be housed in Crewkerne Hospital to reduce transport barriers for Crewkerne residents trying to access hospital services.

# 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.

Thank you also to the voluntary and community sector organisations who help to support the engagement activity.

## Appendix

### 1:1 interview questions

1. Other than the A&E department, can you recall any other health services that offer same day urgent care services?
2. Can you recall an experience using a same day urgent care service? If so, what went well/what could be improved?
3. Are you able to access appointments at the GP for non-urgent conditions in a reasonable timescale e.g. 2-14 days?
4. Do you feel confident finding the information you need to access various same day urgent care services?
5. Under what circumstances do you think you would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day?
6. How confident would you feel in seeing the wider healthcare team for same day conditions e.g. a pharmacist, GP, advanced nurse practitioner instead of going to A&E?
7. How do you feel about the distances you need to travel for same day urgent care needs for a minor injury/ illness? (I.e. distance to GP practice/ A&E)
8. Is there anything else you would like to share with the NHS regarding same day urgent care and access?



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