

How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services North Sedgemoor, 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 report presents the views of people we spoke to in North Sedgemoor. 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 North Sedgemoor. Together with the Somerset ICB we created a set of eight questions that we used for 1:1 interviews (see Appendix).

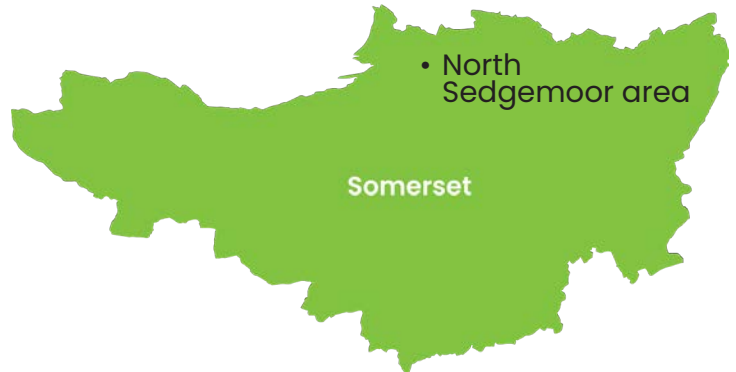
We spent approximately four days in North Sedgemoor. We visited both public spaces (for example, Cheddar Library) and closed spaces (for example, a knit and natter and Age UK group).

Our visits took place between 8 and 17 March 2023.

Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 22 people in North Sedgemoor. This covered the areas of Axbridge, Cheddar and Burnham-on-Sea.

- Seventeen of our participants were female and five were male.
- Most of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of our participants fell into the 50 to 64 age category.



Key messages

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

- Just under half of participants said they can't think of anywhere other than Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department that offers SDUC services.
- The majority of participants said they think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day if they were in a life threatening condition.
- Participants displayed mixed levels of confidence in terms of how they feel about sourcing SDUC-related information.
- People with visual or other impairments or those without a support system may be disadvantaged.
- People shared largely positive SDUC experiences with us.
- All participants said they feel confident using the wider healthcare team for a same day concern.
- Most participants shared that they dislike the GP appointment booking system as it results in long queues (either outside the practice or on the phone).
- Participants expressed concern over the lack of face-to-face appointments.
- We were told that if you live in Cheddar or Axbridge it's particularly difficult to access Weston-super-Mare hospital as you can't get there by bus.

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 A&E Department.



Ten out of the 22 participants said they can't think of anywhere other than A&E that offers SDUC services. Five participants said the NHS 111 call service, five mentioned MIUs, four said their GP practice and four recalled the pharmacy.



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 majority of participants said they think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day if they were in a life threatening condition. The life-threatening symptoms mentioned include severe headaches, chest pains, breathing problems, heart issues and signs of stroke. Three people mentioned that they have specific conditions and if their symptoms flare up, they would want to be seen on the same day.

 I suffer from angina so if that flares up and I am experiencing chest pains/tingling, I would likely ring 999 to bypass the doctor and be seen. 

 I have had pneumonia many times, so whenever I get a chest infection I need to be seen on the same day. 

 I'm on steroids and chemotherapy, so I would want to be seen on the same day if I have an infection or breathing problems. 

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. Those who said they feel confident finding the information they need to access SDUC services said there are information leaflets available, there is information on the internet, they have relatives who help them or they work/have worked in health and/or social care.

One participant said that the onus should be on the individual to find this information, because: "it's such a broad field that it cannot all be handed to you."

Others said their relatives help them find the right information: "My daughters call the GP practice for me, and they find out where I need to go if I am sick."

It is important to acknowledge that there will be people that have no support system when they fall sick, and that this will make them more vulnerable than others.


One participant told us they don't feel confident finding information related to SDUC services because they are severely sight impaired, and a lot of healthcare communication is visual. They said they can't read text online easily, nor see information in the waiting room. This highlights the ongoing need to improve accessible communications so that no one is left to fend for themselves.

One participant shared with us that while there is probably information out there: "I wouldn't be able to point it out to you". This suggests that marketing campaigns may need to be refreshed, or rolled out in rotations, so that the messaging is noticeable.


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 (for example, GP, pharmacist, advanced nurse practitioner) as opposed to A&E for a same day concern.


People shared largely positive experiences of using SDUC services with us.

 I broke my foot last year and was seen on the same day at A&E. My youngest sister took me in and I was seen within five minutes.




 I fell off my chair and used a pully system to call the ambulance, three paramedics came quickly.




 On New Year's Day my daughter fell ill. I called NHS 111 and they were as good as they could be. We had a call back within the hour and by 4pm had a phone appointment where they prescribed antibiotics.




 I went to MIU Bridgwater for a chest infection and they were brilliant.



 My mum had a bad tooth. She called the GP and they called back with a very quick dental surgery appointment.



 I went to my GP for breathlessness and was seen that afternoon by the paramedics assigned to the surgery.



Confidence in using the wider healthcare team



All participants said they feel confident using the wider healthcare team for a same day concern. A few participants said they feel confident so long as they have the appropriate qualifications. People particularly praised the care of advanced nurse practitioners, saying that they are all well qualified, especially the specialist nurses.



A few people mentioned that they use the local pharmacy, although one participant said the pharmacy won't see you if you have a UTI and are over the age of 60. Another participant said they like to speak to the pharmacist but they often tell you to see the doctor.

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 between two to 14 days.



People told us that their GP booking system involves phoning or visiting the practice in the morning and receiving a triage phone call later in the day. Most participants shared that they dislike this system as it results in long queues (either outside the practice or on the phone) and this makes it difficult to access an appointment.



 **All appointments tend to be gone by the time the phone is answered.** 

 **Ringling up involves such a long wait.** 

 **You call in the morning and appointments are gone.** 

 **I have to go and queue outside just after 8am. There's no point calling as you don't get through.** 



 **The GP system is a joke. If you get an appointment it's unbelievable. Who sees a GP? No one does! I won't go private out of principle.** 

 **I have to phone every morning to try and get an appointment. It's awful. If you are on the phone at 8.30am you are 20 or 30 in the queue. You are then told there are no appointments available for the day. It's a lottery.** 



Most people told us they can't book routine appointments at their GP practice. However some said you can, so it may depend on the practice. A few people said you can't book an appointment in advance for anything other than blood tests or monitoring. One person mentioned that their practice has not been able to offer routine appointments since COVID-19.

People also told us there seems to be a shortage of doctors at their local GP practice. As a result, they are seeing advanced nurse practitioners/inhouse paramedics instead. Four participants expressed their concern that there is a lack of face-to-face appointments.

 **It's very difficult to get a face to face appointment. I'm worried they might miss something.** 

 **I don't think it's right to issue antibiotics over the phone. I think it will result in conditions going undetected.** 

 **I find booking a telephone appointment daunting as you have to keep repeating yourself.** 

 **I can't see the doctor at the surgery. I have to have a telephone appointment for my asthma review and I think that's not right.** 

Transport to SDUC services

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

Participants have mixed views on how they feel about the distances they need to travel to get to SDUC services. Those that felt positive are able to walk to their GP practice and drive or get a lift to Weston-super-Mare hospital.

We were told that if you live in Cheddar or Axbridge it's particularly difficult to access Weston-super-Mare hospital as you can't get there by bus. We were told that the bus route to the hospital has been removed, and it can cost £25 for a one way taxi. Those that use bus services to access services spoke positively about their free bus pass.

Recommendations

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

- Use resources to create an integrated communications campaign (offline and online), that briefly lists all the SDUC services in one place. This should be used consistently throughout Somerset.
- Create an integrated communications campaign listing the types of conditions or symptoms that pharmacists can help patients with. An emphasis should be placed on promoting this outside of the pharmacy to reach those who don't normally use it.
- Investigate how accessible SDUC information is and take steps to improve it. Rotate and refresh SDUC marketing campaigns so that the messages are more noticeable.
- Consider offering patients more face-to-face appointments to reduce the chance of symptoms or conditions being missed.
- If some medical practices in North Sedgemoor do offer routine appointments, then advertise this directly to patients. This will help manage the flow of patients as some are either: 1) Unsure if their practice offer routine appointments or; 2) Under the impression that they are not offered.

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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