

# How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services **West Mendip, 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 West Mendip. 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 West Mendip. 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 West Mendip covering the areas of Shepton Mallet, Wells and Glastonbury. We visited both public spaces (for example, Glastonbury Library and Wells Library) and closed spaces (for example, a community lunch group and talking cafés).

Our visits took place between 23 November to 16 December 2022.



## Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 32 people in West Mendip.

- 19 of our participants were female and 13 were male.
- All of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of participants fell into the 56+ age category.

# Key messages

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

- There is a lack of knowledge and awareness among participants of where to access SDUC services in West Mendip.
- Participants have a good understanding of what conditions/ailments should be classed as urgent.
- Participants gave mixed responses regarding how confident they feel finding information related to SDUC services.
- The MIU in Shepton Mallet is very well regarded, but there are concerns over its limited opening hours and fears of a potential closure.
- There are concerns over a potential closure of St Andrew's Mental Health Unit, and the impact this could have on residents.
- Some people don't use healthcare services because they don't trust the NHS or pharmaceutical companies.
- The majority of participants feel confident seeing the wider healthcare team for SDUC conditions.
- There is a positive attitude towards the GP appointment booking systems across West Mendip, which tend to offer routine appointments.
- Participants gave mixed responses to how they feel about the distance to travel to SDUC services. Complaints centred on accessing Yeovil and Musgrove A&Es using public transport.

# 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.

11 out of the 32 participants recalled that GP practices offer SDUC services. Two mentioned MIUs, four commented the pharmacy, five stated the 111 call service, two said the dental practice and one mentioned a physiotherapist. Three participants declined to comment because they said they do not use the NHS. Ten participants said they can't recall any other services, or they answered 'I don't know'.

### 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 you should be seen on the same day if you are in a life-threatening condition. Participants listed symptoms such as stomach pains, chest pains or problems with breathing as requiring SDUC. Participants also mentioned a painful/severe injury such as a breakage, or a serious infection.

Other answers related specifically to the participant's circumstances. One participant said breathlessness would require them to be seen the same day as they suffer from Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD). Another participant said any sign of infection as they are on immunosuppressants. A further participant said they have a sore foot and at times they can barely walk. If their foot became painful, they would want to be seen on the same day. Another participant commented that they would want to be seen on the same day if there were signs of cancer returning. This suggests that the term 'urgent' means different things to different people because of differences in perspectives and circumstances.

### 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. 17 out of 32 people answered this question. Nine participants said they feel confident, six said they do not feel confident and two responded 'I don't know'.

Out of the nine participants that said they feel confident, five said they use the internet to find their information. One participant said they feel confident because they used to be a nurse, while two others said that they feel confident because people share their healthcare experiences with others at talking cafés. Another said they don't normally go to the doctors, but they would know where to go.

Out of the six participants who said they don't feel confident, three said they don't have access to the internet. One participant said there is particular ambiguity about pharmacists because "using them is a new thing".

Some of these participants note that while there is information out there, it is not necessarily accessible. They said that you have to go searching for it, and that it's not always clear who to contact.

## Experiences 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 etc.) as opposed to A&E for a same day concern.

Participants shared both positive and negative experiences of using SDUC services. Experiences regarding the quality of care/service were largely positive. When more than one SDUC service had to be used at a time, participants shared mixed experiences.

For instance, while one participant described the same-day referral from their GP to their optician as 'seamless', another participant shared that when they had an infected tick bite they were passed around various services. They started at the GP Practice where they were directed to the pharmacy. The pharmacy then directed them back to the GP practice, who directed them to the local MIU. Staff at the MIU then referred them back to the GP practice where they finally received antibiotics.

### Shepton Mallet MIU

Participants told us positive experiences regarding the standard of care at Shepton Mallet MIU. We were told that the MIU is very well regarded, but that there are concerns over its limited opening hours and fears of a potential closure. One participant explained that this MIU is a vital resource for urgent care because: "Shepton Mallet is as far as you could possibly get from an acute hospital" and the town lacks local services.

Participants shared suggestions to improve the service at Shepton Mallet MIU. These include:

- Increasing opening hours
- Increasing staffing levels
- Expanding the MIU into a 'Cavell Centre' or a 'health and wellbeing hub', particularly because the population there is increasing.

### St Andrew's Mental Health Unit, Wells

Mental health support is a fundamental part of SDUC services. It is particularly important for people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Participants shared their concerns over the potential closure of St Andrew's Mental Health Unit in Wells. We were told that if the unit closed, people would have to travel to use mental health facilities in Yeovil. This particularly concerned one participant whose child was previously admitted to St Andrew's. They explained that if their child had been moved to Yeovil, they would not have been able to visit them as often.

One participant shared that their time in a mental health unit in Taunton was 'prison-like', but when they moved to St Andrew's, they felt 'safe and secure'. This participant said they would fear for the wellbeing of residents at St Andrew's if the facility closed..

### Accessibility and cost of living

One participant shared that they broke both wrists following a fall and were admitted to the Royal United Hospital in Bath. While they were able to be discharged that evening, they had to stay overnight to catch the morning bus as they couldn't afford the £65 taxi back home. Examples like this could show that as the cost of living crisis continues, people might put off receiving urgent care out of fear that it will result in unplanned expenses. It could also result in people having to stay at hospital for longer than necessary.

## Choosing not to use healthcare services

Three people told us they don't have recent experiences using the NHS because they don't use health and social care services.

One person told us that since leaving prison, they "fly under the radar" because they are 'not in the system'. They explained they are not registered with a GP, and avoid hospitals at all costs.

Another two people told us they don't believe in the NHS and instead adopt a holistic approach to health. They told us they are natural healers. They both shared they were sceptical of the NHS and the intentions of pharmaceutical companies.

Participants suggested ways to improve SDUC experiences. These include:

- Introduce a scheme where people can sponsor a nurse for their training costs to increase the number of medical staff.
- Ensure the different systems and services talk to each other. For instance, a GP should be able to easily read consultant notes.
- Provide waiting times for ambulances for situations not deemed a 'Category 1'. Category one is classed as a life-threatening condition, such as cardiac or respiratory arrest.
- Create resources to educate people where to go for what ailment/condition.



## Confidence in using the wider healthcare team

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



The majority (21) of participants said that they feel confident using the wider healthcare team. One participant said they don't feel confident. Ten people did not answer this question.

Out of the 21 people that said they feel confident, six mentioned that they regularly see professionals from the wider healthcare team. Two participants specifically mentioned the good experiences they had using advanced nurse practitioners. Three people said that they would be happy to see the wider team if it made their lives easier - either by being seen quicker or more locally.

 **I don't mind seeing whoever. It would be better than not speaking to anyone.** 

 **Yes, pharmacists are underrated. People automatically go and see the GP. Pharmacists should be boosted.** 

 **Any of them. Save space for those who need it.** 

 **You can go to the pharmacy for more things than people realise.** 

The participant who said they don't feel confident using the wider healthcare team said that pharmacists and nurses are less qualified than specialists. They feel that nurses are given the title Nurse Practitioner to sound more like a doctor when they aren't.

Despite this, those who participated are largely confident in the abilities of the wider healthcare team.

## 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.

We were told that GP practices in West Mendip offer routine appointments. While patients can book a same day appointment, these tend to be reserved for urgent appointments.

Out of the 20 participants that answered, 17 said that their practice offer routine appointments. 16 out of these 17 said that they will be seen within two weeks. Three participants said their practice doesn't offer routine appointments. The majority of participants had a positive attitude towards booking GP appointments in West Mendip.

## 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.

More than half of participants said they find transport to SDUC services difficult. Less than half said transport links are good because they can either walk or drive to services. Participants who said transport links are OK are either happy using public transport, can drive themselves, or are able to get a lift from others.

Comments included that when both the GP practice and MIU in Shepton Mallet is closed, it is too difficult for residents to access healthcare. Participants also highlighted how difficult it is to get to Musgrove A&E using public transport, and that accessing Yeovil A&E is even more difficult.

Participants said that if you don't have access to your own means of transport, accessing A&E services in the area is challenging.

## Recommendations

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

- Maintain the current GP appointment booking system. The system is working well because GP practices offer routine appointments and are able to prioritise patients according to needs.
- Use resources to create an integrated communications campaign (offline and online), that briefly lists the all the SDUC services in one place. This should be used consistently throughout Somerset.
- Consider the strong support for Shepton Mallet MIU and St Andrew's Mental Health Unit when considering the future of these facilities.
- Increase the number of staff working in the wider healthcare team, as participants show they feel confident seeing them for a same day concern.
- Direct resources into building trust with those who don't use healthcare services either because they are sceptical of the NHS, or are used to not being 'in the system'.
- Consider improving public transport routes into Yeovil A&E and Musgrove A&E.



## 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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