

How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services Yeovil, South Somerset East and South Somerset West

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.

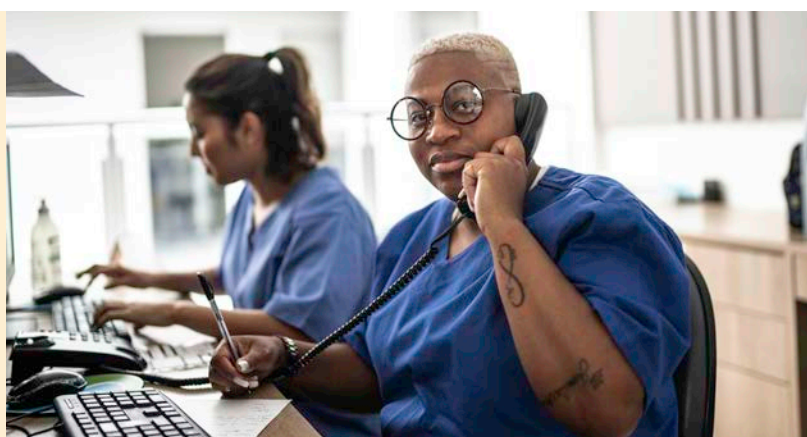
The Somerset ICB then asked us to gather the views of people living across the county. We did this by creating a countywide survey and by engaging with local people at community groups, libraries and other public spaces in Bridgwater, West Mendip, Frome, North Sedgemoor, Central Mendip, Taunton Dean,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

This report presents the views of people we spoke to in Yeovil, South Somerset East and South Somerset West. 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 Yeovil, South Somerset East and South Somerset West. This includes the areas of Martock, Langport, Castle Cary, Wincanton and Ilchester. 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 Yeovil, South Somerset East and South Somerset West. We visited both public spaces (for example, Martock Library) and closed spaces (for example, carer support groups).

Our visits took place between 9 June and 12 July 2023.

Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 49 people.

- 41 of our participants were female and eight were male.
- Most of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of our participants fell into the 66+ 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 recalled that NHS 111 provide SDUC services, followed by GP practices and pharmacies. No participants mentioned that MIUs, dental practices and opticians offer these services.
- 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 e.g. being in pain or prolonged sickness.
- Overall, participants feel OK about finding the information they need to access various SDUC services. Several participants find their pharmacist to be a helpful resource.
- Participants shared both positive and negative SDUC experiences with us.
- The vast majority of participants told us they are happy to see the wider healthcare team for advice, and that they often see advanced nurse practitioners instead of a GP.
- We were told that it is particularly difficult to access dental care in Yeovil.
- GP practices in the areas tend to offer appointments by phone and through the Ask My GP App. Access to and quality of GP appointments varies by area.
- The large majority of participants we spoke to said they feel OK about the distances they need to travel to access their GP practice and Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department.

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.

37 out of the 49 participants recalled that NHS 111 offer SDUC services, though many said they have not used it. 30 mentioned that you can visit the GP on the same day, yet a few commented that this is not normally possible.

29 participants said you could go to a pharmacy to get advice from a pharmacist on the same day. Three out of the 49 participants said they could not recall SDUC services other than the A&E department, while eight participants did not answer this question. One participant recalled Somerset Mind's 'Mindline' telephone helpline. No participants mentioned MIUs, dental practices or opticians.

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. Conditions mentioned include: falls, a mental health emergency, being in pain, requiring urgent medication, prolonged sickness and a chest infection.

Some said they would want to be seen on the same day if they had signs of a life-threatening condition, for example, a stroke or heart attack.

It is clear that some participants interpreted this question as requiring treatment at A&E, whereas others interpreted it as seeing a GP or nurse practitioner.

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.

Overall, participants feel OK about finding the information they need to access various SDUC services. Participants told us that they may not be knowledgeable about various SDUC services, but they would know where to look to get advice. This includes asking a friend or neighbour, watching the news, searching on Google or listening to the radio. Several participants mentioned that they go to their pharmacist for advice on SDUC services and they praised pharmacies in the Martock, Ilchester and Yeovil areas in particular.

Some participants mentioned that there is confusion around whether to call NHS 111 or 999, so education in this area would be beneficial.

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.

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

Positive experiences

Children are often offered a same day appointment

Participants told us that while securing a same day appointment for themselves is difficult (particularly face-to-face appointments), their children are often offered a same day appointment.

Q My son who is 4 years old needed an appointment in April this year. He was seen on the same day, which is important for children.

Negative experiences

Patients are often pushed between their GP and their pharmacist

A number of participants told us they feel like they are pushed from pillar to post when they need to be seen urgently. In particular, they feel as though they are passed between their GP practice and their pharmacist.

Q I was unwell with a rash. I saw the pharmacist who suspected it was shingles and said go to the GP straight away. I went in person to the surgery and was told you must go home and ring for an appointment. I did and rang but there were no appointments for that day. I got a next-day appointment with the nurse who diagnosed shingles and sorted a prescription. By this time I was feeling much worse. [Castle Cary]

Q The pharmacy is great, but they often have to refer you to the GP, so you then have to wait for an appointment before receiving a prescription. [Ilchester]


Q I knew I wouldn't get into the GP so I went straight to the pharmacy. However, they suggested something which I had to purchase because I didn't have a prescription from the GP.


If pharmacists had greater prescribing powers, it would reduce the pressure on the GP practices, save patients' time and reduce the amount of prescription delays. It is possible that fewer prescription delays could result in a reduction in demand for urgent care.

The quality of care provided by NHS 111


Negative experiences


Q My wife fell and was on the floor. I rang NHS 111 and they just wouldn't listen to me. It was the worst experience! [Castle Cary]


 NHS 111 were useless! I'd got 16 stitches in my leg and blood was coming through the dressing. I'm 91 and no family live close to me. I waited from 9:30pm until 5am for a call back. I had a call from Glastonbury hospital and two nurses came out to see me and dress the wound but I had to wait such a long time. [Castle Cary]




Positive experiences

 I called NHS 111 and they sent a paramedic out. The paramedic took me to A&E in their car, I thought it was a very good service. [Martock]



 NHS 111 have suggested a couple of places I can go to be seen and let me know the waiting times at each place, that was helpful. [Ilchester]





It is clear that NHS 111 experiences differ by individual circumstance. The positive experiences largely revolve around NHS 111's signposting advice while negative experiences tend to concern the length of time patients have to wait to receive a callback/update.

Quality of care and follow up care at MIUs, GP practices and hospitals


Negative experiences


One participant describes their frustration at not being seen on the same day at their medical practice for an urgent condition. They go on to say that when they were seen, medical staff overlooked their allergies, and they went on to have an allergic reaction.

 In March this year I had breathing problems and telephoned Martock & South Petherton Medical Centre for an appointment. I was told that someone would call me back on the same day but I didn't receive a call until the next day. I still had breathing problems and got an appointment the next day. During this medical episode, I was prescribed antibiotics which I am allergic too. My allergy can be found on the front page of my notes. When I asked why my notes hadn't been read, there was no response. [Martock]




Another participant shared their frustration regarding the quality of care at Yeovil hospital. They were particularly concerned by the lack of communication and postoperative care provided by the hospital.

 I recently fell over into the road while using my mobility scooter. My husband phoned for an ambulance but we were told it would be a five hour wait. My husband asked people from the community centre to help get me into the car and I was driven to A&E. I thought I had broken my hip but I wasn't told by hospital staff what injuries I had. I knew I was operated on because of the scar on my leg. At no point during my stay (three days) did medical staff explain what procedure/operation I had. I was not offered physiotherapy or given any after care. I was placed in a care home to recover for two months without physiotherapy, exercise plans or advice. [Yeovil]



Positive experiences


One participant praised the quality of care provided at Shepton Mallet MIU.

 I had a wonderful experience at Shepton Mallet Treatment Centre. I had an eye operation there and they sent transport for me. The surgeon was brilliant and even gave me a follow up phone call to check how I was feeling post operation. I was very impressed. [Castle Cary]




Confidence in using the wider healthcare team

The vast majority of participants told us they are happy to see the wider healthcare team for advice. Residents in Ilchester, Wincanton and Castle Cary told us it is commonplace to see a nurse practitioner at the GP practice and that they have had positive experiences. Just one Martock resident shared a negative experience with us regarding an appointment with an advanced nurse practitioner.

 I had an appointment to see the nurse about a lump on my foot. I was told it was nothing to worry about, but it turned out to be sepsis.



As mentioned, residents in the Martock, Ilchester and Yeovil areas particularly praised their local pharmacists for the SDUC advice they give.

 I rang the pharmacy to ask about hay fever medication as I was concerned it would interact with my other medication. Because the pharmacist could see the list of other medications I am taking, they were able to advise me. I thought it was a brilliant service. [Martock]




The few that weren't confident using the wider healthcare team said this is because they haven't used them before or because they suffer from health-related anxiety (and would therefore feel more comfortable speaking to a GP or going straight to A&E).

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.

Yeovil

Participants from Yeovil told us that the GP appointment booking system either involves calling the GP practice in the morning and waiting for a return call or filling out an online form via Ask My GP, to then be triaged. We were told you can book appointments in advance in Yeovil and that sometimes you are seen within two weeks. Participants from Yeovil have raised some concerns regarding access to and the quality of GP appointments.


 I don't use the GP as you cannot get appointments. When I was feeling really anxious and depressed I rang and tried to get an appointment. The receptionist was so rude and dismissive so I hung up.



This is concerning because if patients don't feel comfortable making appointments, they may be more likely to end up requiring emergency care for conditions that could have been treated via a GP.

Two Yeovil residents told us getting a face-to-face appointment has become more difficult recently.

 I find accessing a face-to-face appointment with my medical centre almost impossible. I don't know who my doctor is. While growing up I had a doctor who knew my family and grandparent's medical history. The doctor was very familiar with all our medical issues, the care we received was person-centred which was comforting, but that doesn't seem to happen now.

 There are issues with getting appointments face-to-face, due to online Ask My GP and the triage process.

Martock

Participants from Martock told us the GP appointment booking system involves either ringing the practice around 8.30am (where there is often a queue) or by contacting the GP practice online by using Ask My GP. Both services offer a call back option, but one participant told us they didn't get a call back until three weeks later.

Langport

Participants from Langport told us you can book appointments by calling the practice at any time of day (not just at 8.30am) and that you are likely to receive an appointment quite quickly. One participant said: "I rang Langport surgery and was booked in for blood tests the following day"; while another said: "Langport surgery provides an excellent service."

Castle Cary

Participants from Castle Cary told us the GP appointment booking system involves either ringing the practice in the morning or by contacting the GP practice online by using Ask My GP. Participants in Castle Cary felt largely positive towards access and quality of GP appointments.

Wincanton

Participants from Wincanton told us the GP appointment booking system involves either ringing the practice at 8.30am or 2pm, or by contacting the GP practice online by using Ask My GP. Participants in Wincanton felt largely positive towards access and quality of GP appointments. However, some told us that Ask My GP can only be used during opening hours, so they can't contact the practice at weekends.


Ilchester

Participants from Ilchester told us the GP appointment booking system largely involves contacting the GP practice online by using Ask My GP. However, we were told Ask My GP is only available to use in the morning so if you don't use it in the morning, you have to wait until the next day.

Participants said there are no same day appointments, and because Ilchester Surgery is only open on certain days and times, access to appointments is difficult. One participant recalled how they once had to wait six weeks for a GP appointment.

Dental care in Yeovil


We were told it is difficult to access dental care in Yeovil, particularly via NHS dentists. There is concern this could result in an increase in dental related emergencies.

 I cannot get an NHS dentist. I could be put on a waiting list of 2,000 people for all I know. I started dental treatment (teeth removed, ready for dentures) before COVID-19. After COVID-19 I found out my dentist had gone private, so I could only complete the treatment if I paid thousands of pounds. I can't afford that so I now have lots of teeth missing.




 I tried to get my daughter an appointment at the dentist recently and was told because she turned 18 in the early part of this year she no longer fits the criteria of having an NHS dentist. I am disgusted, my daughter will now have to access a private dentist which is going to be an expense we can't afford; though I'm not sure if I can get my daughter registered, as the private dentists seems to be at breaking point.



 I don't have a dentist, and I haven't seen one for six years when my NHS Dentist went private. I am concerned about the affordability of seeing a private dentist.



 I don't think there are any NHS dentists in Yeovil anymore.



Transport to SDUC services

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

The large majority of participants we spoke to said they feel OK about the distances they need to travel to access their GP practice and A&E. However, we were told it would be difficult for those who don't have their own means of transport or a support network of friends and family.

Recommendations

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

We recommend making the following changes across the Yeovil, South Somerset East and South Somerset West areas:

- Introduce a robust marketing communications plan to raise awareness of all SDUC services in the area, with a particular focus on what MIUs, dental practices and opticians have to offer.
- Continue to promote the use of the wider healthcare team for same day concerns, as participants have told us they are happy with the quality of care they receive.
- Consider, if possible, granting pharmacists with greater prescribing powers to avoid patients having to go between the pharmacy and the GP practice.
- Continue to promote Ask My GP and sessions on how to use it. If (as we have been told) Ask my GP can only be used within certain hours, consider extending these hours to capture more people.
- Consider increasing the number of face-to-face appointments alongside the increase in online appointments to prevent digital exclusion.
- Continue to educate people about when to call NHS 111 or 999.

Yeovil:

- Direct more dental funding towards the dental practices in Yeovil to increase access to NHS dentists in the area.

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.

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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