

How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services **Bridgwater, 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 Bridgwater. 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 Bridgwater. 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 Bridgwater at both public spaces (for example, a community drop-in group and Bridgwater Library) and closed spaces (for example, a carers group, parent and baby groups and a talking café).

Our visits took place between 28 November to 14 December 2022.



Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 25 people in Bridgwater.

- 15 of our participants were female and ten were male.
- All of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of participants fell into the 26-35 and 56+ age categories.

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 Bridgwater.
- Most participants have a good understanding of what conditions/ailments should be classed as urgent.
- The definition of urgent varies according to the individuals affected. For instance, 'urgent' means different things to people with different worry levels.
- Participants gave mixed responses regarding how confident they feel finding information related to SDUC services.
- Those who work in health and social care have a much better understanding of SDUC services than those who don't.
- First-time parents feel like information and support, particularly from health visitors, is lacking.
- Participants shared both positive and negative experiences of using SDUC services.
- 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 Bridgwater, 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 Bridgwater Hospital by 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.

14 out of the 22 participants that answered this question said that GP practices offer SDUC services. Four mentioned the 111 call service, four commented the pharmacy, four stated the dental practice, four mentioned MIUs and two said a health visitor. Three people said they only know of A&E and one answered: "I don't know".

For the one person that said 'I don't know', they explained that they have a Lifeline device (a medical alert system). When they press the device, they let other people decide what service they should attend.


What conditions require SDUC?

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


Answers tended to vary according to what group we visited. Participants at parent and baby groups considered any unexplainable change in their baby as a reason to be seen on the same day. Examples of changes mentioned include changes in personality, becoming unresponsive, contracting a fever, unexplained rashes and dry nappies.

Outside of this group, most participants said you should be seen on the same day if you are with a life-threatening condition or experience a medical emergency that can't be treated at home. Participants listed symptoms such as difficulty breathing, blood in urine or an infected wound as requiring SDUC.

A few participants said a condition does not need to be life-threatening to require same day care. One participant said that any noticeable change in your body requires SDUC. Two participants commented that the mental health of patients should be taken into account when GP practices decide whether to offer a same day appointment.

 **If you develop a condition that worries you, it depends on people's worry levels. This should be taken into consideration.**



 **Understanding of those who have mental health conditions. These needs should be taken into account.**





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. 19 out of 25 people answered this question. Ten participants said they feel confident and nine said they do not feel confident.

Those that said they feel confident said they get their information by searching online, by using community groups and by talking to friends and family. Three people said they only know information on SDUC because they work in or have experience working in health and social care.



One participant works in health and social care with people with complex needs.

 **I'm a healthcare assistant but if I wasn't, I would say there's not enough information.** 

 **If you're not experienced in it [the system], you won't know where to go.** 

 **Trying to find information for clients with complex needs is difficult. They have to go a long way for treatment and there is often no joined-up thinking in terms of using their medical records.** 

Out of the nine participants that said they don't feel confident, two said they don't have access to the internet and have to rely on others. The remaining participants said they don't feel confident but haven't needed to find information on SDUC.

 **There's not enough information but even if there was, people wouldn't think about it. You only need it when you need it.** 

One participant suggested that more information needs to be available offline, and that information should be easy for all to understand.

Information for first-time parents

Participants told us that SDUC information for first-time parents needs to improve. Participants told us that they have had to rely on friends and family for advice, and that the health visitors should do more to support them.

One participant said they are lucky because they have experience working with children, but if they were a first-time parent with no experience they would be "rocking in the corner".

Another participant explained that they received no contact from their health visitor in the first two years of their baby's life, and that this made them feel isolated.

One participant said that health visitors could do more to help first-time parents by promoting Musgrove Park Hospital's HANDi Maternity App. This App advises parents what to do if they notice certain changes in their baby. This participant said the App is invaluable but not widely used, and that they only know about it because they work in health and social care.

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 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 of GP practices were largely positive. Examples include being able to access same day appointments and being taken seriously by GPs.

One participant shared a negative experience concerning a lack of professional knowledge.

The last time I called 111 I was experiencing severe abdominal pain. I was told to wait and book in for a GP appointment. By the time the clinician had called me back, I was in an ambulance and diagnosed with sepsis.

Three parents shared their concerns that dairy intolerance in babies is poorly understood by health professionals.

One parent was concerned about their baby's reaction and recalls a long-winded experience. They called the GP practice and the GP (a locum) agreed to call them back the same day. The locum GP then declined to see their baby because of their age. They then took their baby to Musgrove A&E, where staff were brilliant. This participant has since spoken to their routine GP, but felt this concern could have been dealt with at the GP practice.

Another parent said that their baby's dairy allergy was not flagged on the system when a nurse administered a vaccine that contained milk powder. Their baby had a reaction, and the parent feels less confident about using vaccines. This parent felt medical professionals should have known about this and should warn parents beforehand.

Confidence in using the wider healthcare team

The vast majority (20) of participants said they feel confident using the wider healthcare team. One participant said they don't feel confident. Another participant said they don't feel very confident, and the remaining three did not answer this question.

Out of the 20 participants that said they feel confident, four said they would only use the wider healthcare team if:

- No one else were available.
- They are professionally trained.
- This meant they could avoid seeing a GP receptionist.
- Their child had an illness or they needed medicine [referencing pharmacists].

The remaining 15 felt very confident. Nine of these participants shared positive experiences seeing pharmacists, advanced nurse practitioners and mental health nurses.

Nurse practitioners are amazing. People underestimate them, they are so well trained. If they can prescribe, you don't need to see a GP.

I've seen a pharmacist a few times, but I don't think it's widely known that people can go to their pharmacist for advice.

It's not very well known that nurse practitioners are very qualified people. People don't want to see them but you are booked in with them for a reason.

Pharmacists are coming into their own.

The pharmacist is my first port of call.

They know when to say you now need to see a doctor.

The wider health care team is my first port of call.

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 Bridgwater tend to offer routine appointments. While patients can book a same day appointment, these tend to be reserved for urgent cases.

Out of the 18 participants that answered, 13 said their GP practice offers routine appointments. Two said their GP practice doesn't and three participants said 'I don't know'. Nine of the 13 participants said they can expect to be seen within two weeks.

The majority of participants had a positive attitude towards booking GP appointments in Bridgwater.

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.

15 participants said they feel positive about the distances they need to travel to SDUC services in Bridgwater. 11 of these participants said they can drive and have their own car. Five participants said they find it difficult to travel to SDUC services. Three of these participants said they can't drive. One participant said they feel OK about the distance to SDUC services and four participants didn't answer this question.

Q It's fine if you're used to living in the country. If you can drive you can go anywhere. It's your choice [where you live] and you get used to driving.



Q It's never going to be on your doorstep.



For those that said they find the distance they need to travel to SDUC services difficult, concerns centred around accessing Bridgwater Hospital.

Q Bridgwater hospital is very unfortunate in it's location. It costs £8 one-way for a taxi. Bus services are appalling and irregular.



Q It's difficult because there are not many bus services to Bridgwater Hospital.



Q It's virtually impossible to get to Bridgwater Hospital. Buses run every two hours. My son works full-time and my daughter works long hours. I don't drive and a taxi costs me £7 one-way.



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.
- Increase the number of staff working in the wider healthcare team, as participants say they feel confident seeing them for a same day concern.
- Consider improving public transport routes into Bridgwater Hospital.
- Provide more advice more regularly for first-time parents through health visitors. This could include promoting Musgrove Park Hospital's HANDi Maternity App.

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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