

Access to health and social care services in Sheffield

Key issues from December 2022 and January 2023

Through December 2022 and January 2023, we received 170 pieces of feedback related to health and social care services in Sheffield. During this period, we continued to hear from patients experiencing difficulty accessing GP appointments and NHS dentistry. We also heard views related to hospital care and treatment, including issues with maternity services. Feedback was shared relating to community pharmacies, where some people had encountered difficulties when trying to collect their prescriptions.

GPs

We received 91 pieces of feedback relating to at least 23 different GP practices across Sheffield. A large proportion of this feedback was positive; patients praised their GP practice for prompt treatment, good quality of care, and polite and friendly staff. Particularly positive experiences involved a high level of involvement in decisions about their treatment, and good continuity of care.

One particularly positive experience came from an individual who accompanied their relative to a GP appointment. The relative is Deaf, and the person who accompanied them said the GP made sure communication was effective. They ensured a BSL interpreter was booked, lowered their mask so the patient could lip read, sent relevant information to them via email, and phoned the individual who accompanied the patient post-appointment to ensure everything had been understood.

Some people did share less positive experiences. Many patients are continuing to inform us they can't access a GP appointment due to rigid booking systems in place; the inflexibility of having to phone the practice as soon as it opens is inaccessible for many. Some practices are still not allowing appointments to be booked in advance, which has led to many people giving up. Some patients have told us they ran out of phone credit whilst waiting in long queuing systems so were not able to speak to their practice at all.



“I was given an appointment with a practice nurse who listened and made useful suggestions. This was followed up by her sending me lots of really useful information.”



We also heard from some patients who felt their GP wasn't treating them with respect. One patient said they were referred for an autism assessment and felt their GP began treating them differently after this. At their next appointment, they felt the language used by staff was patronising and felt they were treated like a child. We also heard that women's health issues were not taken seriously by one GP. Concerns were expressed stating limited clinical questioning resulted in them having to be assertive and push for a referral themselves for further investigation. They described feeling 'fobbed off', rushed and not listened to.

"On the day appointments are all gone by the time the receptionist answer, despite calling as soon as they open."

Finally, we heard from two patients at different surgeries who stated their relationship with their GP had broken down due to recently making a complaint against the practice. This led to them both feeling they had no alternative but to register with a new surgery. A third patient told us they were worried about making a complaint about their GP because they felt it would negatively affect their treatment.

Hospitals, including maternity feedback

We heard from around 20 people about their or their relative's experience in hospital over December and January. Most of the experiences were positive and largely focused on the good quality of care received and caring staff, in both outpatient and inpatient settings.

"The prompt, friendly, efficient treatment was incredible"

We have also been hearing from members of the public who wanted to share their experiences of maternity services. A large proportion of the experiences related to concerns with limited/delayed breastfeeding support, which led to patients being advised by staff to bottle feed their babies earlier than they would have liked. Furthermore, we heard about delayed referrals for tongue-tied babies leading to breastfeeding complications and in one case malnutrition.



Examples were shared where treatment was not being clearly explained, and a lack of staff support when providing information to patients whose first language was not English was also raised.

Community Pharmacies – issues with prescriptions

Members of the public have shared their experiences of pharmacy services with us. We have continued to hear from patients who have told



us medication has been out of stock, meaning they have to phone around other pharmacies to try to locate their medicines. In some cases patients have had to travel much further to pick their medication up. Patients were often not notified the medication was out of stock before they visited, leading to further delays and complications. We heard that some of these delays meant patients had to go without their medication for several days.

One individual also shared feedback relating to a dispensing error. Their relative received a box of their regular medication, however when they came to take it, they discovered there was a completely different medicine inside.

“They looked on the system (...) and came back to say that the medication wasn’t in stock due to the manufacturer, they said there was nothing they could do.”

People still continue to struggle to access NHS dentistry

12 people contacted us in December and January stating they were struggling to access NHS dentistry. The majority of these people were seeking support to try to obtain urgent treatment as they did not currently have a regular NHS dentist. We heard that some of these people were only offered private care, which they couldn’t afford. All of the people we spoke to told us they had tried contacting many local dentists/NHS 111 but were told that their cases were not classed as urgent.



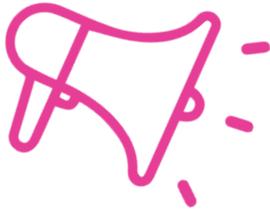
For example, one person we spoke to had called over 100 practices throughout Sheffield and the surrounding areas but all had stated they had long waiting lists. They had recently received treatment for a root canal but were told it was only a temporary fix, so they could lose their tooth if they were unable to obtain further treatment. They contacted NHS 111 but were told their situation was not classed as an emergency.

“I have been actively looking for a dentist, however, everywhere I call says their waiting list is around 2-3 years+. One practice told me they’ve had a list of 3000 people.”

We also heard from one individual who had not seen a dentist for over 3 years. They contacted ten dentists in Sheffield who according to the NHS website were accepting new NHS patients. However, when they called the practices to their disappointment they discovered they were not. They said the NHS website information was inaccurate and out of date.

Over the past 12 months, approximately 1 in 4 enquiries we have received were from members of the public struggling to access NHS routine and urgent dental care. We conducted research in January 2023, looking at the online NHS listings and phoning local dental practices, to find out the local picture. Only one dental practice said they could actually book us an adult NHS appointment. A further two practices told us they had new appointment availability from March/April 2023. Only one in five practices were currently able to see new NHS patients under 18 years old.





Sheffield Community Champions share their insights

The Sheffield Community Champion Volunteers, spread across eleven community partner organisations, undertake peer to peer engagement on health issues that affect them and the accessibility of services. Initially set up as Covid Champions, 98 volunteers currently promote health messaging, signpost to services and support community-based activities. We are sharing the Champions' insights as part of this briefing to shine a light on the issues local people are telling them.

The most common issue they're hearing about currently is the rise in the cost of living, and how that impacts on the daily wellbeing of local people and their families. The Champions are increasingly hearing from people having to access foodbanks for the first time, along with people worrying about the cost of keeping warm and cooking. People are now reporting "breadline living", especially those who are struggling to access benefit support. A key emerging concern is the impact on mental health as people struggle to cope with increasing costs.

The Champions are also hearing a great deal about accessing primary healthcare services. This includes difficulties contacting GP practices and getting an appointment, issues finding an NHS dentist, and delays in prescriptions.

Some of the Champions have also been supporting workshops and support groups for those affected by long COVID. Several of the Champion partner organisations are collaborating on a study on long COVID.

This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion, who we've partnered with to provide a feedback-sharing platform

Want to share your own experience? Get in touch

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