

# What people have told us about health and social care during the pandemic

## What we did

In May 2020 we ran a survey asking local people about their experiences of health and social care during the pandemic. The survey covered three main areas:

- Information about how to stay safe during the pandemic
- Accessing health and care during the pandemic
- Changes to appointments and services

The survey was completed by 151 residents of Surrey: demographic details are given at the end of this report, along with the full questionnaire.

### Our sample

- 54% classified themselves as vulnerable and 19% told us they were shielding
- Our survey was primarily shared online, although we did distribute paper copies of the survey to partner organisations and received a small number of responses.

## Recommendations for those planning and delivering services

1. **Establish ongoing contact with those whose treatments and services have been cancelled or delayed**, and who now may be on extended waiting lists. In the absence of firm plans offer reassurance that they are still on the waiting list and provide signposting, advice if their condition deteriorates, or self-care advice where appropriate.
2. **Build on new processes that are working well:** especially smart use of patient-facing IT but also agility in service transformation, try-test-refine innovation. Seek rapid patient feedback on service changes to inform development.
3. Many of the improvements to services are delivered online - video consultations, online appointment booking, email communication. We recommend work is undertaken to **identify and understand the digitally excluded population and develop strategies to ensure this group have good awareness of services and equal access to them.**

## What we heard - summary

Most people are satisfied with the information and care received during the pandemic. However, many have experienced changes including cancellations and delays in secondary care. While people accept this as inevitable, it is having a real impact on their wellbeing.

- ✓ 80% found it easy to keep up to date with information about how to stay safe during the pandemic
- ✓ Of those accessing health and care, 70% were satisfied with the service they had received
- ✓ Phone, video or even email consultations were frequently considered an improvement on face to face services
- ✓ Some people have had good experience with necessary appointment changes - good alternatives and clear communication
- ✗ Those finding it hard to keep up with information were mostly vulnerable
- ✗ Where information has been hard to access it has most often been about physical or mental health concerns
- ✗ People's expectations of services are low and they are stoical in the face of uncertainty and delays
- ✗ Many people with cancelled appointments have had no further contact from their healthcare providers: they do not know if or when their care will resume
- ✗ Some are facing health problems that impact on their quality of life, and do not know how or when help will be available

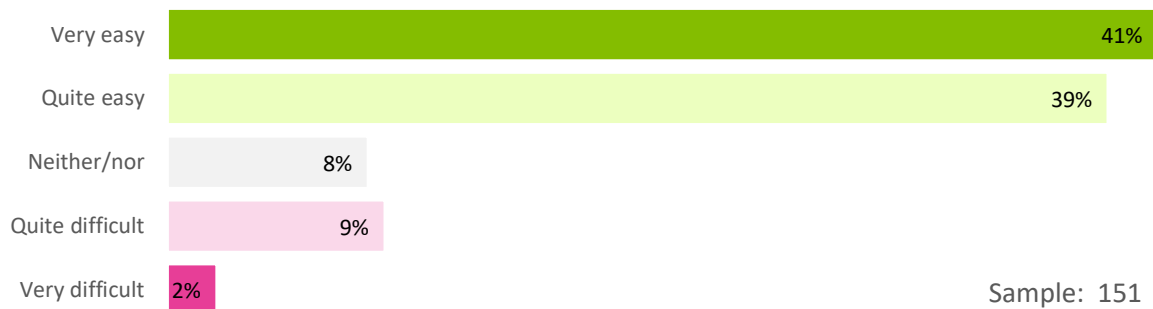
## Main Findings

### Information during the Pandemic

#### IN BRIEF:

- Most people have found it easy to stay informed about COVID-19
- A small number of (mostly) vulnerable people have struggled to find the information they need
- Where people have struggled to find information it has been around their non-COVID-19 needs: physical health, mental health and everyday living.

The majority found it easy to keep up to date with information about how to stay safe during the pandemic.



Even those considered vulnerable or shielding gave very similar responses to the total sample, with  $\frac{3}{4}$  saying they had found it easy to keep up to date. 897 9260 2795



Information came from a variety of sources and a range of media

- Government messages from the daily bulletin and Gov.uk
- Messages from people’s own healthcare providers, councils and voluntary support organisations
- Media dissemination of official messaging, online and offline

- Unofficial and personal sources such as social media, friends and family

*I've received letters, emails and phone calls, plus I try and keep up-to-date with the TV news bulletins, and what's in the newspapers. Also, help offers from friends and relatives.*

*Runnymede check on me each week. Well done Runnymede*

*News, daily government update, online, Facebook etc*

*Regular texts from GP surgery and reading legitimate news stories*

Occasionally there has been lack of clarity:

*It has not been perfect, particularly regarding outdoor exercise and use of vehicles to arrive at places to exercise*

*The most recent statements were not coherent and did not make sense especially about the young children returning to school who cannot social distance*

**A small number of respondents did struggle to find the information they needed.**

Of these 16 respondents 11 told us they were classified as vulnerable (over 70, pre-existing health conditions) or had issues that made the information especially important to them (other health conditions, loved one living in residential care).

The three main problems reported by this group were:

- lack of information, contradictory or confusing information

*There is no information on how to keep safe unless you are in the shielding group. Generally information is difficult to understand, purposefully unclear (such as PM speech) and I feel contradictory and misleading at various times*

- Information not being in accessible formats

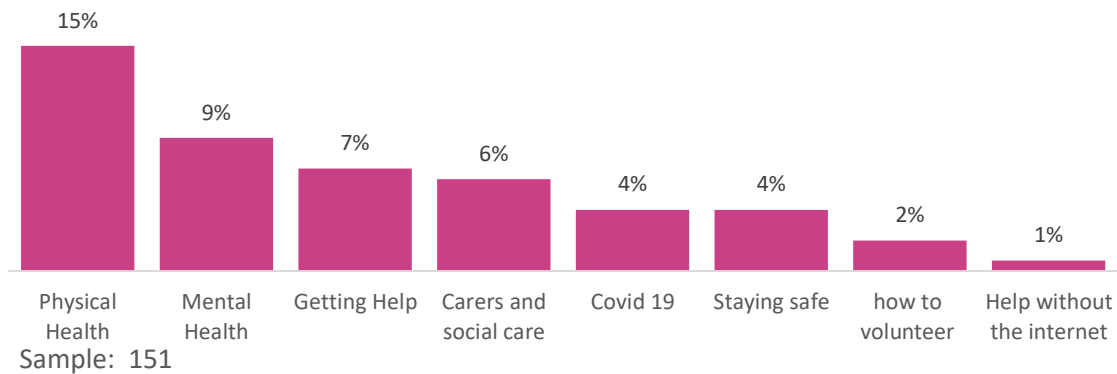
*Every contact seems to be online which is hard for a visually impaired person like me I couldn't even contact my GP to find out why I wasn't on the vulnerable list*

- Lack of communication or follow-up

*They had an initial call to tell them they are concerned and then nothing, no follow-up and no help*

**When prompted, among the total sample the most difficulties reported were around information related to non-COVID healthcare:**

Have you found it difficult to get clear information about:



**We heard about:**

- Services that were unavailable - GP appointments, dental services, physiotherapy, pain relief, cataract operations
- Reduction in support for mental health - both reduction in services and the impact of social distancing on informal support for mental wellbeing
- Lack of condition-specific information, especially for those vulnerable but not shielding: what to do if you live with ME, have regular blood tests for a specific condition/medication
- Problems accessing shopping

Few respondents felt they needed more information relating to COVID-19 and within this most comments were general rather than specific to the respondent.

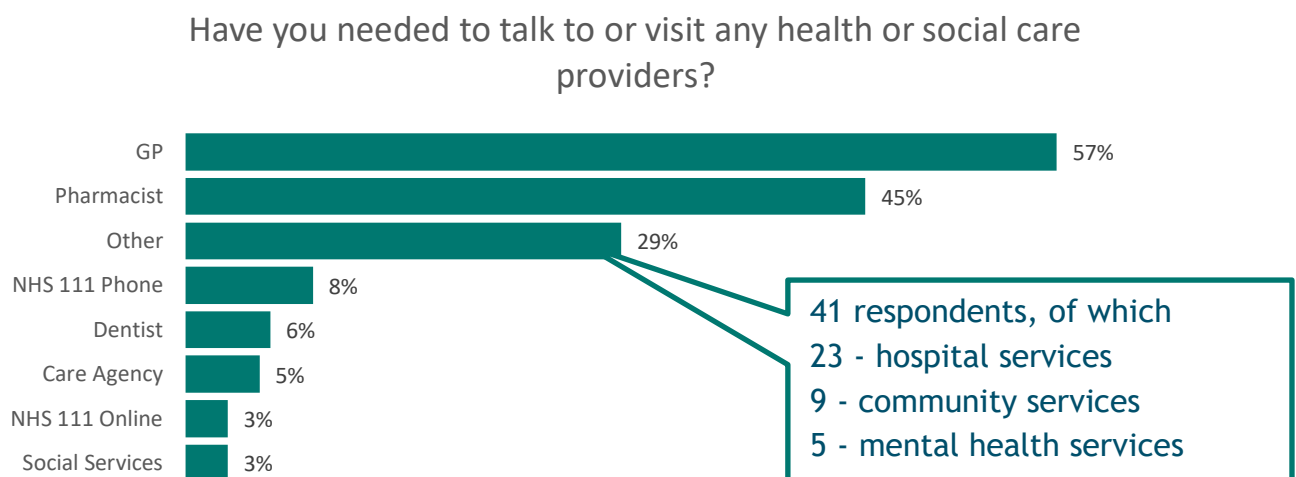
*“There are many more symptoms of the virus than just the 2 of cough and fever. It is obvious that many more have had it than official figures show”*

## Access to Healthcare during the Pandemic

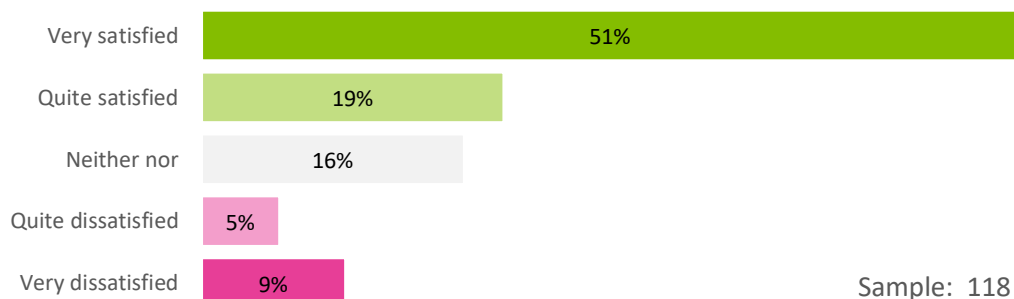
### IN BRIEF:

- 4/5 of our sample had accessed healthcare services since lockdown
- The majority were satisfied or neutral about their experience. For some the service they received is a marked improvement on pre-pandemic standards - convenient, fast, effective
- However, this level of satisfaction includes many whose expectations are low: they are stoical about the lack of face to face healthcare at a time of crisis
- The most common reason for dissatisfaction was cancellation of face-to-face services

### Many of our respondents had accessed health and care during the pandemic



### Most people were satisfied with the service they received:



**Some new ways of working have been very positively received:**

*I emailed consultant. Consultant phoned me. Consultant then emailed me with advice to change drug dosage. I forwarded email to GP. GP changed dosage. All happened within 36 hours OMG. Have you got ANY idea how long this used to take before COVID?*

*Three times by phone with local surgery doctor, diabetes nurse, and COPD nurse. One visit to receive a B12 injection in the surgery car park, while still seated in my car*

However, we found the Dunkirk spirit alive and well in Surrey: **services are not always meeting people's needs, but expectations have been lowered during the crisis.**

*I understand that these are exceptional circumstances and everyone is doing their best. We all have to accept that things are going to be different and difficult, not least for those in the front line. Though I desperately need treatment, it is more important that those giving the care stay safe and alive*

*They have all been as helpful as they could be during this pandemic!*

**For those who reported an unsatisfactory experience, the most consistent concern related to cancelled services that could only be carried out face to face:**

*Needed to have a pessary ring replaced, have a diabetic review done, and have their toenails cut. They have had none of those things done*

*I should have had a physical examination by the oncologist to pick up any new lumps but this didn't happen*

However, much of the dissatisfaction we were told about related to individual circumstances rather than systemic issues:

*GP responded very promptly but was unknown to me and unaware of my circumstances and made me feel that I should not be contacting them regarding the issue*

## Changes to appointments or services

### IN BRIEF:

- The majority of people responding to our survey had experienced changes or cancellations to services
- Many have received no update on what will happen next, and many are concerned or have experienced problems
- For some, conditions are worsening and uncertainty is having a negative impact on quality of life

### Changes had been experienced across a wide range of services

79% of our respondents had experienced changes to appointments or services.

Where people told us about which services had been changed, we heard about changes to GP services (13 mentions) most often. However, we also heard about physio/orthopaedic services/podiatry (9 mentions), cancer-related services (8) dentistry (6) and a wide range of other specialist hospital services such as MRI scans and diabetes clinics.

### Many people are in the dark as to when their appointment or service will be reinstated

Of those experiencing changes, 47% had appointments cancelled and had heard nothing since:

*Rheumatology said I would get a call or a letter but nothing has happened. I also had an appointment in gynaecology for June which is cancelled with no further communication*

*Neurology - letter, no appt, will get back in touch when they have one*

17% had appointments changed and had been offered new appointment dates

39% had experienced switches from face to face to phone/video consultations

### The lack of treatment or information is causing problems for many

Half those experiencing delays or cancellations were concerned or had experienced problems as a result. Among these the most frequent were



- Conditions worsening, or a longer wait with health issues:

*My eyesight has got worse in both eyes now and my pain is increasing!!*

- General concerns about long term conditions:

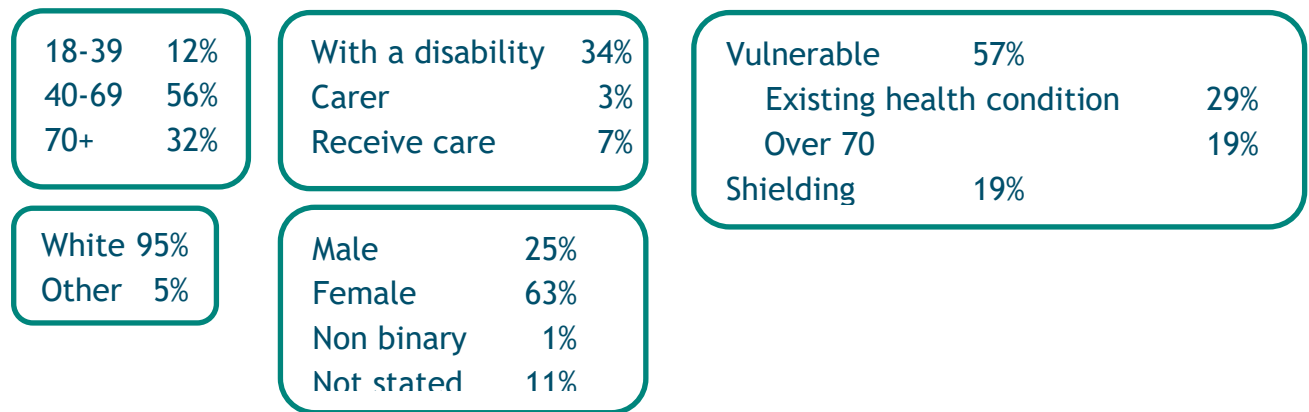
*Concerned about my ongoing health problem and also pacemaker check up*

*My health is OK when it is well supported. At present I feel alone and unsure of what I can or can't expect*

## Sample

The survey was hosted by SurveyMonkey and shared online with our partner organisations and social media. We also offered paper copies for organisations to distribute to their members, and a small number were completed and returned.

We are aware that our survey was primarily shared online and that this is a limiting factor. We remain concerned about those who risk exclusion as a result of increasing digital transformation and, as noted above in our recommendations, we advocate more work to establish who is most at risk in Surrey and what can be done to mitigate that risk.



## Questionnaire coverage

1. Consent to store and share responses
2. How easy have you found it to keep up to date with information about how to stay safe during the Covid-19/coronavirus pandemic?
3. Have you found it difficult to get clear information about any of these topics (precoded list including physical health, how to get help)
4. Which of these social care or healthcare providers have you/they needed to contact since the pandemic began? (precoded list including GP, pharmacist)
  - a. If yes to any of these, can you tell us what happened? For example if it was a GP appointment was this face to face, by video or by telephone?
  - b. How satisfied were you with the help or care received and the way you received it?
5. Have there been changes to appointments that had been made before the pandemic, or to services you/they use regularly? What happened?
  - a. How do you/they feel about this (precoded including concerned about what will happen next, it has caused problems) + open ended for further comments
6. Demographics and health status:
  - Vulnerable/shielding; living with disability
  - Carer/cared for
  - Age, gender, ethnicity