

Updates and key themes September 2021



www.healthwatchnorthtyneside.co.uk

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1. Our year so far - April to Sept 2021

It's been a busy six months and we are on course to talk to more people in a year than ever before. We do our best to hear from all sections of the community in North Tyneside. The lockdown restrictions meant that our community engagement activities were limited, but we were very active online and managed to reach over 1,000 people through engaging at the GP led vaccine centres in North Tyneside - a massive thank you to the Primary Care Networks for their support

We are a small staff team currently at 3.6 FTE. We have a fantastic team of volunteers, who have dedicated approximately 1,100 hours of volunteering time between April and September. Our volunteers help us by supporting engagement events, interviewing people over the phone or in person about their experiences of services, administrative support in our office, running focus groups and being our Trustees. Without them we would not achieve what we do.

We published our annual report for 2021/21 in June. In this we highlighted how we worked during the pandemic, a key theme of this was partnership working. We are pleased to say that this has continued and we have been able to ensure that services hear people's views and respond.

1,482 people have shared their views and experiences



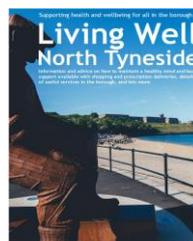
1,806 people talked to us at 24 events across North Tyneside



1,224 residents participated in our GP access research



88,000 Information booklets distributed since Jan 2021

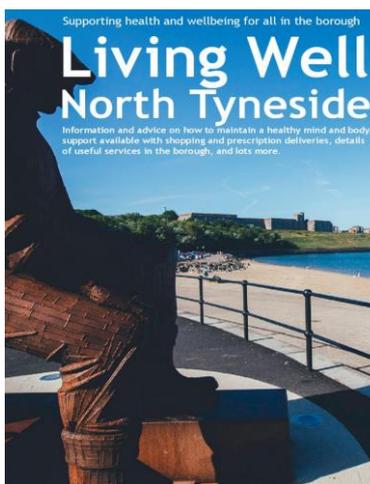


2. Providing Information

Healthwatch North Tyneside is commissioned to provide Information and signposting for local health and care services. Alongside providing an information service (available 5 days a week by phone, email, website and social media) we also lead particular campaigns to respond to gaps in information local people highlight to us.

During the pandemic we heard how people have had difficulty finding useful, trusted information about local health and care services, and about how to get involved in events and groups.

2.1 Living Well North Tyneside booklets



In December 2020 at the first PCN lead vaccine session at the Oxford Centres, Healthwatch North Tyneside identified an opportunity to share important information with people whilst they were waiting for their COVID vaccine. We worked with partners to test the appetite and ensure these could be handed out in a covid safe way.

We then led the drafting, development and distribution of two booklets with the support of the CCG and funding from the Public Health team at North Tyneside Council, VODA, Age UK, the Carers' Centre and our own funds.

33,000 copies of the first edition were handed out to people getting their vaccinations between January and March. It was targeted at older people and other higher risk groups who were prioritised for the vaccine. The content included what to do when you feel ill in North Tyneside, healthy mind and healthy body information, tips for keeping well in winter, and information about local support services.

The second edition included more general health and wellbeing information and 55,000 copies are being distributed at all of the North Tyneside vaccine sites.

Feedback from residents has been very positive.

We are in discussions about a further edition, again aimed at the priority groups, to link to the booster campaign.



2.2 Living Well North Tyneside Website



Healthwatch North Tyneside is also an active member of **The Living Well North Tyneside Partnership**, a group of local organisations working to improve access to information in the borough. The Partnership includes North Tyneside Council, North Tyneside CCG, VODA, the four Primary Care Networks (PCNs) of GP Practices, TyneHealth GP Federation, and the Community and Healthcare Forum. The website is due to launch

2.3 Covid Vaccine programme information



We have been working closely with the CCG, TyneHealth, North Tyneside Council and VODA since December 2020 to provide public facing communications for the North Tyneside Vaccine programme including:

- Frequently Asked Questions for the whole system based on the questions residents have asked
- A central website with information about the vaccine programme in one place -TyneHealth
- Gathering feedback and raising issues with providers and decision makers to improve service delivery and residents' experiences
- Targeting engagement activities providing information and promoting the programme - including supporting surge and pop up activity on the ground.
- Fielding and resolving individual cases which do not fit within the majority of standard circumstances.

In response, we have produced information about how to Book appointments, change booking etc that has been used across North Tyneside. Our online guidance about 'how to change your covid appointment' has been accessed by **60,413** users in June, July and August, with over 1,000 paper copies also being distributed.



We are currently working with the Public Health team and VODA to continue to deliver outreach support for the covid and flu vaccine programmes across the borough, with a particular focus on areas with lower take up of the covid jobs.

3. Key issues people have told us about

3.1 GP Access and Livi

Access to primary care and GP services has the been the most commonly raised issue with Healthwatch North Tyneside since 2015. As an organisation we have conducted several evidence gathering and research projects to better understand local people's experiences and help providers to improve their services.

The Covid-19 pandemic led to significant shifts in the ways GP practices operated, particularly the shift towards greater use of virtual appointments. The pandemic also created greater pressures and demand for these services, particularly as lockdowns eased. Covid case numbers remained high while self-isolation caused shortages among practice staff.

We undertook a research project to understand people's experiences of accessing GP services and their expectations of services in the future. We gathered people's views and experiences between April and July 2021. During this time, lockdown restrictions were easing. We



conducted this research via an online survey, a paper survey handed out at vaccine centres across the borough, interviews at the vaccine centres and a small number of focus group engagements targeting groups in the community that we hadn't heard from.

Alongside this work, North Tyneside Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) asked Healthwatch North Tyneside to develop and deliver a survey to hear the views and experiences of people who have used the Livi online GP service to see a GP. Livi is a digital app that lets patients, book and see a GP by video using a tablet or mobile phone. Appointments are available

Monday to Friday 7am-10pm, Saturday and Sunday 8-4pm. North Tyneside CCG commissioned Livi for a 12-month pilot to deliver additional appointments for people registered with GP practices in North Tyneside.

In total we have heard from 1,224 people from across North Tyneside. We are currently analysing the data collected and providing feedback to the CCG, Primary Care Networks, TyneHealth and eventually individual practices. These reports are being prepared for publication.

GP Access - key issues

It is clear from the results of this research that local people are generally proud of the NHS and the response during the pandemic, and they want the NHS to be the best it can be. The detail in the feedback we received showed that people had put a lot of thought into their responses. When people get treatment and care they are overwhelmingly positive about it.

- People are tremendously appreciative of the work of primary care during the pandemic and the delivery of the vaccine programme. **"We are extremely fortunate to live where we are...how lucky are we to have our wonderful NHS"**
- However, there is significant frustration about not being able to get a face to face appointment and the timeliness of care appear to be growing concerns as lockdown restrictions ease. This is the most frequently commented on issue in our work at Healthwatch North Tyneside.
- Different GP practices have different approaches, particularly when it comes to how you book an appointment and their approaches to triage - again a major source of frustration for many residents. This is also a source of confusion for people, especially when different experiences of friends and family contribute so strongly to people's overall impression of how services are operating.
- Many of the changes to service delivery introduced during covid have been positive for some people - many find virtual appointments more convenient. For people the key issue is **choice** of method of appointment - with phone and video being popular options if people have skills, equipment, ability, confidence and feel it's appropriate for their issues. There is an opportunity to build on and further embed what has been successful whilst refining the things that are not working quite so well.

- There is a clear need to better inform people about their options for care, to explain how things work now and build confidence in the new ways of service delivery.
- There are distinct opportunities to involve residents in working up the longer term service changes.

We expect to publish the detailed findings of this work in the coming weeks.

Livi users experiences and views of the wider population

We are publishing a report into people's views and experiences of using Livi. This work has been commissioned by North Tyneside CCG and has contributed to the CCG's evaluation of the Livi pilot. The report will be available here www.healthwatchnorthtyneside.co.uk

3.2 Vaccine programmes - Covid and flu

The pandemic offered a unique opportunity to strengthen our relationships with the CCG, TyneHealth and VODA through delivery of the Covid Vaccination Programme. Healthwatch gathered people's experiences throughout, regularly feeding these back to providers and the public health team.

Feedback from users has been overwhelmingly positive **“it was an utterly brilliant set up with friendly volunteers and support staff - it was perfection”** with 89% describing their experience as excellent.

Our close working enabled issues to be resolved quickly. Examples include: changing how queuing systems worked, ensuring vaccine cards were handed out, and finding and publishing answers to questions.

We have produced two reports to North Tyneside's Vaccine Board highlighting key lessons, these included:

- The need for clear, system wide communications. Residents were confused by services being offered by different providers - GP delivered services vs those provided by national services e.g. Centre for Life. We expect this to be exacerbated with the large number of providers potentially involved in a booster programme.
- Frustrations with booking systems and how to change bookings.
- Having a single point of information for everyone to refer too - this was TyneHealth's website and will be Living Well North Tyneside in the future.
- The need for a helpline to support residents resolve issues, rather than people being bounced between their GP practice and 119. This is being considered for the booster programme.
- Issues with vaccine records being updated - the CCG oversaw the process of resolving problems which was incredibly helpful.

We have also been involved in tackling inequalities in vaccine uptake and targeting communications to particular groups in society, including working with the Carers' Centre to develop the approach to inviting carers for their vaccinations. More recently we have suggested that GP practices should contact those people who haven't yet taken up their vaccine offer - this hasn't happen to date.

We are currently visiting the current vaccine site to observe delivery and suggest ways to improve the services.

We will be continuing this vaccine focused activity into the booster and flu programme.

3.3 Menopause

In March 2021, we undertook exploratory online research into experiences of menopause support in the area. This was prompted by a request for information about local peer support that highlighted potential gaps in provision.

We received 65 detailed responses to our online survey, offering a clear insight into people's experiences. Many thanks to those who responded or who shared our survey.

People said:

- They felt poorly informed about what to expect during the menopause and struggled with symptoms for many years without realising the cause. Health, work, relationships and quality of life were adversely affected.
- Accessing information about menopause was described as a 'minefield'.
- Sharing experiences with others in the same situation made people feel more informed and less isolated.
- They wanted guidance on how and where to get reliable and comprehensive information and support.
- They felt the need for more comprehensive training for GPs to diagnose menopause-related symptoms and offer a range of holistic treatment options.
- They wanted more publicity and education about menopause.

We have raised the topic of menopause support with GPs and North Tyneside's Living Well Locally Board by sharing our report. It was further shared with the local committee on GP training and education. At our suggestion, a menopause support page will be added to the Living Well North Tyneside website when it is launched.

3.4 Waiting for treatment

Between December 2020 and June 2021 we gathered feedback about people's experiences of waiting for treatment. We heard from 38 people through interviews and an online survey. We plan to run this exercise again in the coming weeks.

People told us they found waiting for treatment **"Stressful and exasperating"** and **"I know that everybody's under stress... and I appreciate that things aren't normal"**

People said the following would be helpful during this difficult time:

- Regular communications to check in to ensure the patient is ok and provide updates about progress and timescales - people said they had to chase for progress updates and often **"didn't know if I'd been forgotten about"**. At the same time people don't want to **"be a bother to services"** by constantly chasing. An agreed frequency of contact would be useful.
- Provide information about managing the condition and what to do if a condition worsens whilst they are waiting - particularly when it is difficult to access support from a GP.

- Many people would prefer their appointments to be rescheduled rather than cancelled completely. However, there is a risk in rescheduling when there is a lack of certainty over whether the appointments will take place. Whatever approach to appointment cancelling/rescheduling is taken, this must be explained to people.
- Be honest about what is going on and why.

Healthwatch England has recently published this information for patients waiting for treatment https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/advice-and-information/2021-09-06/what-expect-when-waiting-care?utm_source=20181130+-+Advice+and+information+alerts+RSS&utm_campaign=fb397a73c7-RSS_EMAIL_CAMPAIGN&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_be486db2a7-fb397a73c7-247057297&mc_cid=fb397a73c7&mc_eid=3547ffb535

3.5 Maternity and child health during covid

We heard from 136 people about their experiences of maternity and child health services during covid. The feedback covers different points in time during the pandemic, and we know that services evolved and developed during that time as the pandemic progressed and service delivery adapted. The key themes we heard about are:

- Very positive feedback about individual staff and teams “All midwives during my birth were fantastic. The care I received was faultless. It far surpassed my expectations”
- There were challenges in getting support from professionals, particularly during the first lockdown
- Feelings of isolation and lack of support as family and friends were unable to help out because of lockdowns and social distancing
- The importance of continuity of care and relationships with professionals
- First time mums were highlighted as being particularly vulnerable because of limitations of support
- The importance of women having someone to support them at scans and key appointments. This was particularly challenging early in the first lockdown but the easing of restrictions last summer was greatly welcomed.
- Virtual classes/support are convenient for many people. The programme of online support which has been growing since last summer has been well received.
- Inequalities - some people paid for support privately when the public provision had been closed. Other people didn't know this was an option or could not afford it.
- Mental health - Many mothers have reported the impact on their mental health of being pregnant/having a baby during a pandemic. Normal anxieties have been heightened and people have felt very isolated and uncertain. Those with pre-existing mental health conditions have felt this more acutely. Mothers want staff to enquire about their mental health.

We are sharing detailed finding with providers and commissioners and recognise that services evolved significantly during the pandemic.

3.6 Pharmacy and prescriptions

During the lockdowns, we worked closely with VODA's good neighbours project to deliver prescriptions to people who were shielding. This allowed us to hear about the difficulties people had been having in accessing their prescriptions. In addition, we also received feedback directly to Healthwatch about others who were struggling. In response, we carried

out a short research project. 58 people responded to our survey and 6 interviews were carried out.

The key themes arising were:

- Pharmacy staff generally very helpful - people told us that pharmacy staff often resolved problems and chased practices when there was a problem with a prescription.
- People had limited understanding of the market, different providers and the options available. We identified that people were quite loyal to their chosen pharmacy for regular prescriptions, even when they were frustrated with the service.
- Charges and costs - concerns about charges being introduced for delivery of prescriptions during the pandemic.
- Choice in how to order prescriptions is important. People highlighted that they liked to have a choice in how to request a repeat prescription at a surgery. Phone line and online, via website and apps, are important, but a small number of people were frustrated that paper drop off requests were no longer accepted.
- Digital exclusion - people who are not online are missing out on accessing services from online providers and online ways to order prescriptions. There is a feeling that that they are being increasingly excluded and are finding it more difficult to access services.
- Multiple repeat prescriptions - we heard about:
 - Potential wastage - some people with a number of items on repeat prescription often struggle to only order 1 item, particularly when ordering by phone. They often end up ordering everything, even when they don't need it.
 - Having items on different days - some people have multiple items to order and pick up on different days. This can be confusing and result in multiple trips to the pharmacy. We identified at least 3 people whose prescription set up was changed to make it more convenient for both the user and services.
- Being kept informed about the progress of orders. There was some frustration with people not being kept informed:
 - When a repeat prescription is requested too early - some surgeries appear not to tell people that they cannot process these requests, resulting in confusion and delays.
 - When an item is not available - having to make repeated trips to a pharmacy to see if it is back in stock.
- Support and advice when product not available. If an item was not available, people told us they wanted guidance about alternatives and what they could do if their supply at home ran out.
- Long waits at some pharmacies - a few people mentioned longer queues at pharmacies, particularly where neighbouring pharmacies had closed down.

In response, Healthwatch North Tyneside has provided a guide to the different delivery services offered by pharmacies based in North Tyneside. We are also sharing the feedback with providers and commissioners.

3.7 Carers' experiences during Covid

In partnership with North Tyneside Carers' Centre and on behalf of North Tyneside's Carers' Partnership Board, we have coordinated a survey of carers, focusing on their experiences during Covid. This builds on the engagement activities conducted by the Carers' Centre and

Healthwatch during the pandemic. We received 258 responses to this survey, conducted between May and July 2021. The Carers Centre and Healthwatch have provided a first view of the data to the August Carers Partnership Board meeting.

The key issues from this research include:

- 50% of carers said they felt more isolated
- 20% of respondents said they had felt at breaking point, with a further 74% saying they had struggled to cope all or some of the time.
- Impacts on emotional and physical wellbeing were highlighted
- The closure of services or changes to the way services were delivered during lockdown had multiple impacts.

Our detailed analysis of the data continues and we will be presenting a report to the Future Care Board, other strategic groups, as well as providing feedback to individual services where possible.

3.8 Adult Social Care service user engagement

We have been separately commissioned by North Tyneside Council's Adult Social Care team to interview a proportion of service users about their recent experiences with the adult social care team. The feedback we gather feeds into the team's internal audit and quality review processes. We contacted 188 people between October and March and 64 participated in telephone interviews averaging 20 minutes in length.

Feedback has been generally very positive with people saying they felt listened to, involved in decisions and supported - *"She kept checking I was happy with what we were considering. She really made sure things fitted who I am and how we live."*

From this cohort of interviews we have identified some areas that can be improved, particularly around improving the information available, continuity and communications with customers and delivery of some activities, including carers assessments. The Adult Social care team have developed an action plan for these and a summary will be published.

We continue to interview users and are in the process of preparing the next report.

In our wider Healthwatch work we are also hearing about increased challenges of getting a care package in place, indicating pressures within the system.

4. Other issues

4.1 NHS system change and service user voice

We are starting to raise awareness of the planned NHS system changes with residents of North Tyneside.

We are working with the other 13 Healthwatch across the North East and North Cumbria ICS footprint to work with the ICS to ensure local people's voices are heard in the new arrangements and that Healthwatch's statutory role is understood.

More locally we are working closely with our neighbours at Healthwatch Northumberland and Healthwatch Newcastle and Gateshead about common themes across our North of Tyne and Gateshead area.

4.2 Inequalities and Digital Inclusion

Digital inclusion continues to be an important focus within our work, as people tell us about their ability and willingness to access services online. We are linking the evidence we gather to the digital inclusion research the CCG is funding by Newcastle and Northumbria Universities.

We are also feeding evidence from our research into the Inequalities Strategy working group. Since the pandemic, we have noticed an increased difference in service available to those able to pay for some services, dental treatment, domiciliary care some hospital consultant appointments, when compared to those receiving publicly funded services.

4.3 Mental Health

Healthwatch is working with service users and carers organisations to lead the co-production element of the Community Mental Health Transformation activity in North Tyneside. We are also looking at how to gather further feedback about younger people's mental health support.

4.4 Dentistry

We are increasingly hearing about challenges of accessing dental treatment from residents. This includes delays to appointments, children unable to get check ups and difficulty in finding an NHS dentist that is taking on patients. Some people have found themselves taken off their dentist's list after not attending for an extended period due to covid. We are also hearing that some treatments are being made available to private patients but delayed for NHS patients. We plan to gather evidence on this issue to better understand what is happening.

4.5 Waiting times, good communications and virtual appointments

We will continue to gather views and feedback about these issues over the coming months.