



healthwatch
Medway



Focus on the Deaf Community in Medway April 2020



Foreword

We wanted to understand the experiences of the Deaf Community in Medway. We wanted to know what they felt worked well for them, identify any gaps and explore what could be made better for them.

We spoke with 40 people face to face from the Deaf Community in Medway.

This report details everything that we heard.

All the feedback we heard has been shared directly with decision makers to ensure they clearly hear the voice of the Deaf Community and can plan services accordingly.

What were we trying to achieve?

When we visited the community, we had two objectives:

1. Hear first-hand from people who had recently used health and social care services in Medway
2. Understand and capture their feedback ready to share with decision makers.



What did we find?

We spoke to 40 people in total. They ranged from an 18 year old, up to a married couple in their 70s. Everyone lived in Medway apart from two people who had travelled from Folkestone to take part.

Accessing health services

The group talked to us about their frustrations in accessing services. People told us that when it worked well, it worked very well. However, in other cases it took weeks to get an appointment. Examples listed included GP appointments, dentists and hospitals.

People talked to us about appointments being cancelled due to the lack of an interpreter or examples when interpreters couldn't stay for the duration of the session.

GP surgeries

One person talked to us about the electronic board in the GP surgery which wasn't working, and they missed their appointment as they didn't hear their name being called.

Trying to get a same day appointment at the GP was reported to be impossible by the group as interpreters require advance booking.

People were told it would be a two week wait to organise an interpreter which caused great concern if they needed to see the GP for something urgent.

Dentists

We heard that visiting the Dentist was difficult for members of the group.

One person told us they had to communicate with the dentist by writing things down as they were unable to get an interpreter. The patient had been told it would be a 6 month wait for an interpreter.



What did we find?

Interpreters

“Deaf people tend to go to appointments with someone as there is no faith that there will be an interpreter – even though there was one requested. It shouldn’t be like that”.

“The interpreter couldn’t do the appointment date and time I had – so because of that my appointment was changed. It’s MY appointment not the interpreters, book another interpreter!”.

Everyone talked about a reliance on family members to be the interpreter, and the issues this can cause. For example, in the case of having to deliver bad news following a diagnosis.

Emergency treatment

“Emergency treatment just doesn’t exist for Deaf people- not at the dentist, the hospital or the GP”.

“In Accident & Emergency I had to wait hours for an interpreter to arrive. Why should I be made to wait because there isn’t a process in place for me to communicate the way everyone else can?”

We heard a story about a family needing emergency hospital treatment after their daughter had an accident. The daughter is Deaf and couldn’t communicate where she was in pain to the A&E staff. Her family arrived and had to act as interpreters during the emergency situation which they told us was very distressing. They had to wait 8 weeks for an interpreter to be provided by the hospital. During this time the family had to act as interpreters.



What did we find?

Hospital appointments

“There is a 2-hour limit for interpreters at a hospital appointment. Coming round after surgery I could not communicate as there was no interpreter. We need longer appointments – especially for surgery”

“I worry that my interpreter will not be there, it would be nice if they could arrive at least 10 minutes before the appointment time so we could meet each other, and if it could be confirmed in the appointment letter that an interpreter has been booked”.

Support and Information

“PALS at the hospital is a closed door – literally! I went to ask for assistance as my child (aged 13) was being asked to interpret for me as my interpreter had not arrived. Eventually when someone from PALS contacted me, after I emailed – due to the closed door – I explained the situation and was told they would sort it. Eventually 6 hours later one arrived from Maidstone.”

Respect

“Deaf people are fully capable of having families, working, having a successful career, hold jobs down, we shouldn’t be treated like this in health & social care”.



What have we recommended?

Based on the feedback, we have made the following recommendations:

- Primary care services and dentists should invest in training staff to learn basic sign language
- Hospitals should consider an on-call interpreter for emergency admissions
- Text service or email communication to be available in GP surgeries & Hospitals
- Interpreters to be booked for longer slots, especially if the appointment is for surgery and to cover delayed appointments on the day.
- Confirmation should be sent in writing that an interpreter has been booked – especially for hospital appointments.
- Interpreters should arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the appointment to meet the individual they are supporting and discuss what will be required during the appointment, and to discuss each other's style of communication.
- Future service development should involve members of the Medway Deaf Group to ensure the voice of Deaf people is heard by commissioners.



A bit about us!

Healthwatch Medway


Healthwatch Medway is the independent voice for local people in Medway.

We gather and represent people's views about any health and social care service in Medway.

Our role is to understand what matters most to people and to use that information to influence providers and commissioners to change the way services are designed and developed.

Our FREE Information and Signposting service can help you navigate Medway's complicated health and social care system to ensure you can find and access the services that are available for you.

Call us on 0800 136 656 or email enquiries@healthwatchmedway.com



Are you Deaf? Do our findings resonate with you? Tell us your story and we can ensure your voice is heard by the right people.



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