

COVID related Public Feedback Summary report 3rd July - 27th August 2020

Background

Throughout July and August (3rd July - 27th August) we have gathered direct feedback from 5 people about their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from 3 organisations who support a wide range of Medway residents including people living with mental health, physical disability, sight loss and impairment, carers, and those in supported accommodation.

Together these organisations shared with us experiences of people in Medway, this represented approximately 419 people living in Medway.

Methodology

We have been running a series of social media adverts promoting an online survey. People were also encouraged to share feedback with our Helpline, either by phone, email or text.

To ensure more than one method of gathering data, Healthwatch staff and volunteers have established a regular phone interview with organisations. These calls enable us to capture the feedback that the organisations are hearing from their own clients and/or members. It is particularly important as it enables us to hear from communities who may find it harder to share their feedback such as people living with Dementia for example.

Every fortnight we have been sharing a weekly insight report to provide a timely snapshot of how people are coping. These reports are shared directly with decision makers to help support their emergency and recovery planning.

This bimonthly report is based on the weekly snapshots, but to investigate the data further and strengthen the validity of reporting there has been a process of triangulation including:

- Wherever possible quantifying anecdotal comments to give a sense of weighting
- Analytics from social media posts to gauge subject areas creating most public interest
- National trends from other Healthwatches and Healthwatch England
- Medway wide discussions to sense check the snapshot data

- Desk based research with other parts of the system, to compare emerging data sets and trends

This report aims to summarise and reflect the changing experiences of people living and working in Medway during the Covid 19 pandemic. If you require more detailed reporting on a particular theme, please contact us.

Introduction

We have heard a range of issues over the last 8 weeks and have summarised these in this report. We have broken the report into sections, exploring certain topics.

Quotations in italics are direct quotes from the public.

Section 1 looks at issues related to the impact of lockdown such as:

1. Substance misuse
2. Access to food
3. Mental Health support services
4. Easements in lockdown

Section 2 looks at issues related to medication and physical health such as:

1. Access to GP/Nurse
2. Dental care
3. Optical screening

Section 3 looks at issues related to care and support packages such as:

1. Hospital care
2. Benefit support

Section 4 looks at issues related to the vulnerable:

1. Support for the young and vulnerable

Topic 1 - Issues related to the Impact of lockdown

Themes under this topic:

- Substance misuse
- Access to food
- Mental Health support services
- Easements in lockdown

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

AMAT told us that they have noticed as lockdown has eased, making it easier for residents to shop, some residents are drinking on a more regularly basis. AMAT have put into place social activities and support groups for residents to get involved in.

The BBC reported:

Addiction services in England could struggle to cope with "soaring" numbers of people misusing alcohol, the Royal College of Psychiatrists is warning.

Many adults are drinking more since the coronavirus pandemic began.

The college estimates that in June, more than 8.4m people in England were drinking at higher-risk levels, up from 4.8m in February.

It says deep cuts made to addiction services could mean patients will miss out on life-saving care.

The rise in risky drinking comes at a time when more people addicted to opiates are seeking help from addiction services, says the college, referring to National Drug Treatment Monitoring System statistics showing 3,459 new adult cases in April - up 20% from 2,947 in the same month the previous year.

People with alcohol use disorder are more likely to develop serious complications if they catch Covid-19.

The college is asking the government to invest millions more in addiction services.

ACCESS TO FOOD

Malnutrition

Medway Foodbank told us about a person who, due to a complete breakdown in personal finances, was admitted to hospital with malnutrition.

Support for families and new parents

Medway Foodbank told us about a rise in families with children reaching out for support, including young mothers with babies, some living in small spaces, in shared accommodation who are finding it difficult to get food (seek support for themselves and their babies). Medway Foodbank have been able to offer support packages, including baby milk and supplies for these members of our community.

The Guardian reported:

UK's poorest 'skip meals and go hungry' during coronavirus crisis

The coronavirus pandemic has had a catastrophic effect on the nutritional health of the UK's poorest citizens with as many as one in 10 forced to use food banks, and vast numbers skipping meals and going hungry, according to the government's food safety watchdog.

Food insecurity has shot up even further since lockdown as people's income reduced, the Food Standards Agency (FSA) said, heightening the risk both of malnutrition and obesity as struggling families adopted highly restrictive "basic sustenance" diets that largely cut out healthy foods.

The impact on people's health and wellbeing is revealed in a "snapshot" FSA-commissioned study of individuals' experiences of food insecurity, which shows in grim detail how people living in poverty have struggled to feed themselves and their families adequately since lockdown.

The FSA study warned the problem would worsen if incomes continued to shrink as a result of the economic fallout from the pandemic. Food insecurity is broadly defined as experiencing hunger, the inability to secure food of sufficient quality and quantity to enable good health and social participation, and cutting down on food because of a lack of money. The government last year agreed to monitor food insecurity, though the first results will not be ready until summer 2021.

The agency's latest tracker survey shows that food insecurity in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was experienced by about 16% of adults - equivalent to up to 7.8 million people. This figure more than doubled under Covid-19 and has remained stable over the first four months of the pandemic.

The tracker also showed that food bank use has remained high, with one in 10 people reporting they had accessed one in June. Separate figures published by Food Standards Scotland found 5% used food banks. Prior to Covid-19 best estimates put UK food bank use at about 2% of adults.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES

Pathways have told us that their service users are still being affected by the continued closure of support groups, such as Turning Point, Open Road and Community Centres due to Covid.

The BBC reported:

Coronavirus: Severe mental health problems rise amid pandemic

Doctors are seeing a rise in people reporting severe mental health difficulties, a group of NHS leaders says.

It follows a more than 30% drop in referrals to mental health services during the peak of the pandemic.

But there are predictions that the recent rise will mean demand actually outstrips pre-coronavirus levels - perhaps by as much as 20%.

The NHS Confederation said those who needed help should come forward.

But the group, which represents health and care leaders, said in a report that mental services required "intensive support and investment" in order to continue to be able to help those who needed it.

The NHS Confederation's mental health lead, Sean Duggan, said that when coronavirus cases were at their highest, people stayed away from services, as they did from other parts of the NHS.

The report said that as well as people whose conditions deteriorated during lockdown, NHS services also expect an increase in demand for mental health services as a direct result of the pandemic itself,

EASMENTS IN LOCKDOWN

KAB told us that they have seen an increase in service users expressing anxiety around the resumption of health and social care services, triggered by shops and restaurants reopening.

Pathways to Independence told us that they have seen an increase of behavioural issues in some service users who are not wanting to engage and so are missing appointments. Because of this people are relapsing because they are not attending to receive their scripts. There is a support system in place for these people.

TOPIC 2 - Issues related to medication and physical health

Themes under this topic

- Access to a GP/Nurse
- Dental care
- Optical screening

GP ACCESS

"I was not able to access a GP further to a fall, without having to run the gauntlet of receptionists at Woodlands family practice. I never got to speak to my GP but instead was given a message via a secretary. I had to pay to see an osteopath because I didn't want to risk a visit to A&E without speaking to a medical professional first".

AMAT told us that residents are still finding it difficult to get an appointment with their GP. Some residents have been able to visit the Nurse who is now in place part time, working from the AMAT HUB.

AMAT told us of a client, who is Type 2 diabetic who needed a blood test. They are registered with DMC Boots but for the past few weeks have had no luck obtaining an appointment.

End of life care

“I have concerns about my brother who is on End of Life Care under a DMC surgery. The GP's are supposed to attend to him every two weeks. It has become increasingly difficult to get them to do this, especially over the lockdown period. I have to ring every time to get them to attend.”

DENTAL CARE

“I visited my dentist for a regular check-up. I called the dentist the day before, just to check my appointment was still going ahead as I had not heard anything. The receptionist confirmed my appointment and informed me of all the COVID precautions in place and what treatment was available. The appointment went well and was well co-ordinated and safe.”

AMAT told us about a resident who had been in severe pain with a tooth for 3 weeks. They were unable to get an appointment with their dentist and tried various avenues, including Dental Line. The resident could not live with the pain and so ended up removing the tooth themselves.

The Daily Mail reported:

Agony at dentist's as 10million visits are hit by delays due to coronavirus lockdown as experts warn of an oral health timebomb for children

Patients face agonising waits for dental treatment after ten million appointments were delayed because of Covid.

The British Dental Association (BDA) warned that the waiting list backlog could take months to clear as campaigners said the crisis is disastrous for children's oral health. While most surgeries reopened last month, strict infection control rules mean they are restricted to just a handful of patients a day.

The BDA now estimates more than ten million check-ups and treatments – such as fillings and root canal work – were put on hold during lockdown.

Even those patients lucky enough to get an appointment face charges of up to £40 for PPE on top of any treatment costs.

Health campaigners say the crisis could be particularly devastating for the oral health of children, with tooth extraction already the leading cause for hospital admissions in youngsters. The lack of routine appointments could also see diseases like mouth cancer being missed.

Before coronavirus struck, ten million treatments would have been performed by NHS and private dentists over a three-month period, the body said. Treatment fell by 97 per cent after dentists were ordered to close their doors during lockdown, leaving a small number of 'hubs' to treat dental emergencies.

Since reopening, most practices are operating at a quarter of their normal capacity.

ACCESS TO AN OPTICIAN

AMAT told us of one resident who urgently needed to see an optician but was unable to get an appointment.

TOPIC 3 - Issues related to care and support packages

Themes under this topic

- Hospital care
- Benefit support

HOSPITAL CARE

Communication

whoo cares told us about a gentleman who was admitted to Medway Maritime Hospital following a fall. It is suspected that he fell due to a seizure. Even though the gentleman informed the staff that he needed his medication, anti-depressants, and anti-seizure medication, he was not listened to. Staff did not use his name when addressing him but referred to him as 'sir' and did not make eye contact. Social distancing made it even more difficult for him to understand when someone was addressing him. Whilst in hospital he had a panic attack; he alerted the nurse who told him to try to calm down, which made him feel more agitated and unsupported. Due to the lack of support he decided to discharge himself a number of days later, one day after his operation, against medical advice. Since leaving hospital, he has not received any follow up on his mental health.

"My partner tried to take his own life. He was taken by Police to Medway Maritime Hospital, then to Maidstone Priority House. He was assessed and was almost sent home to be in my care and the crisis team. He had further suicidal thoughts, and because we have children at home, he was found a bed at a hospital. I was told it was Littlebrook but in-fact he was taken to St Martins in Canterbury, but I was not informed. I have had no contact from the hospital so no idea when he was due to come out, communication with me is non-existent. When I call the hospital, staff are very vague."

Patient Support

"Such a welcoming experience at Elliot Ward at Medway Maritime Hospital when I attended for a pre-op assessment. Thank you to all three members of staff for making me feel so safe and informed".

BENEFIT SUPPORT

AMAT told us that some service users are being affected by their (PIP) Personal Incapacity Payments being delayed due to appeals not going ahead because of lockdown.

The UK Rules reported:

Claimants are asking how long after PIP assessment do you get a decision? To the dismay of people on disability benefits, the PIP waiting time for decision has seen a sharp rise - yet again. Processing delays mean most claimants are waiting longer in 2020 (around three months).

Latest reports suggest that many people are having to wait an average of fourteen (14) weeks when making a new claim for Personal Independence Payment (also called PIP). In fact, PIP waiting times refer to how long it takes to process a claim for Personal Independence Payments.

The decision timescale runs from the first registration, through the application process, to finding out whether a claimant will get PIP. The latest news on pip benefit 2020 shows more bad news. It highlights a notable divergence between winning a DWP appeal when compared to that of going to an independent tribunal.

TOPIC 4 - Issues related to the vulnerable

Themes under this topic

- Support for the young and vulnerable**

SUPPORT FOR THE YOUNG AND VULNERABLE

Medway Foodbank told us about a service user who had recently made contact for support. They had just been re-housed, had serious mental health issues and had nothing in the way of basic items to support themselves such as a cup, plate, cutlery. This seems to be a regular issue; young vulnerable members of our community are finding themselves being re housed with little or no basic equipment. Medway Foodbank have good relationships with Street Angels, One Big Family and MEGAN to signpost service users for support.

The BBC reported:

Coronavirus: Thousands of homeless 'back on streets by July'

Thousands of homeless people who have been housed during the coronavirus pandemic could return to the streets by the end of June, a charity has warned.

Since the lockdown began, more than 14,500 people who were on the streets or at risk of sleeping rough have been given emergency accommodation.

But Crisis has warned contracts between local councils and hotels are due to end as government funding runs out.

The government said councils must continue to provide accommodation. But councils have asked the government to be clear on what extra practical support they will get.

Crisis called the action to house rough sleepers over the past weeks "extraordinary", adding: "This has demonstrated that when the political will is there it is possible to end homelessness." But the charity said the government should take further action to provide everyone with permanent housing, warning that if not people will be forced to return to the streets.

Matt Downie, director of policy at the charity, said most contracts between local authorities and hotels are set to end at the end of June and the charity had received "no indications at all" from the government that more money is coming to extend the scheme.

Mr Downie said: "We will take one of two paths here: one is that 15,000 people are permanently helped out of homelessness through the amazing Everyone In scheme, or we will see a massive increase in rough sleeping in this country just at the point when we thought it would be possible to avoid that.

"It's within the government's control to make decisions so that doesn't happen, for example to either continue hotel schemes or to give alternative arrangements to local authorities and individuals." Crisis has estimated it would cost £282m to provide the people in emergency accommodation with permanent housing and support for the next 12 months.

What have we done with all this feedback and insight?

We will continue to share our intelligence related to education with Medway Council.

We are taking our intelligence from this report, and from feedback received throughout lockdown, through to our workplan for 2020/21. This will enable us to explore the issues in more detail. For example, we are working on a project which is looking at how GP surgeries are supporting their patients remotely during the COVID pandemic.

We are currently collating feedback about peoples' experience of using the dentist during the pandemic. Colleagues at Healthwatch Kent are doing the same so we will be able to combine the feedback across Kent & Medway. Healthwatch England have also been raising this at a national level after collating feedback from the network (including ourselves).

We are monitoring the Kent and Medway plans to restart health services and encouraging leads to gather and use feedback from the public where there are opportunities to do so.

We continue to share feedback with the relevant Health and Social Care organisations to inform their impact assessments and plans.

We have shared the feedback we've heard about loneliness and isolation with Medway Council to help inform their plans for raising awareness and delivering the right support to people.

We continue to share the relevant feedback with Mental Health Commissioners too.

Thanks to everyone who shared data and feedback with us. Please do continue to chat to us about all your experiences, big and small. Your feedback really does make a real difference.
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