

YOUR HEALTH AND CARE
INSIGHT INTO ACTION



(Insight from 15 March - 10 April 2020)

Published: 15 April 2020



Where is our insight coming from?

At present, our opportunity to directly engage with West Sussex residents is limited to social media, our website feedback and responding to calls and emails via our Helpdesk Hub Team.

We've therefore also asked our community partners to be our *eyes and ears* so we can understand the experiences of those they support.

Specifically, we're asking people to share what is working well and where there are gaps and glitches within the provision and delivery of health and social care services in West Sussex. This report is a collation of all of these sources of insight.

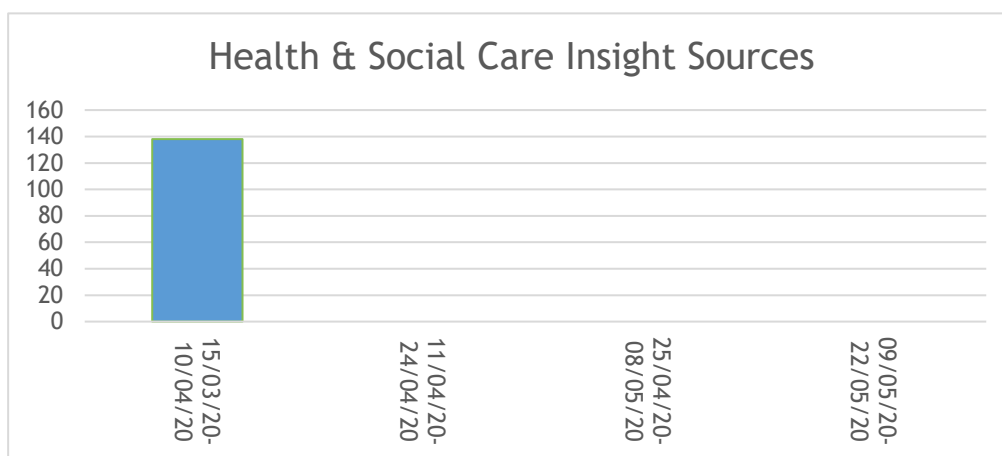


At a glance

In normal circumstances, people want health and social care support that works for them - helping them stay well, get the best out of services and manage any conditions they face. Currently, COVID 19 has meant people are seeking to deal with some very basic needs in the face of fear and uncertainty.

We'll produce this report (fortnightly) to show the public our partners and those that are accountable for health and care support and services, what people have shared and what has been done as a result.

We also regularly update our [Frequently Asked Health & Care Questions Answered](#) - in response to what we are hearing.





Information & support when it's needed?

For those living with long-term health conditions

We've heard from some people who believe they need to shield themselves but have not received a letter from the NHS, so do not have access to priority support. In many cases they are left **anxious as they struggle to get support with shopping and medication, many having to go out themselves.**

Others have shared that they tried registering as a vulnerable person (the criteria for the extremely vulnerable definition can be found [here](#)) and got a *sorry* message at the end of the form but no signposting then as to where to go.

“ John shared:

I am in the at-risk group. I have waited 2 weeks to get support after contacting my GP. I have heard nothing back from anyone. Today, I had to go out to a local shop for food. I am not happy.

Please note - we have also heard from other patients who's GP practice has signposted them to where to get support.

Beth shared (on 7 April):

My husband is at high-risk as he has cancer and diabetes. My son has asthma. I was advised to go the dot gov website, which we did at the beginning of last week, to register as vulnerable re potential food delivery... Whilst we appreciate how hard all this is, I am still having to risk shopping on a fairly regular basis as I do not drive and can't carry too much weight.



If you are struggling with any practical support needs please visit the West Sussex County Council's [Community Hub](#) page.

We've heard from local mutual aid and parish councils that there is still a lot of confusion around the government support for vulnerable people and who can receive a food package with no further action on their part.

Our actions:

- We've asked for the pathways for how people can get the support they need - so we can give clear and trusted information and advice.
- Our 8 April published [FAQs](#), which details where to go for support regardless of whether you have received a letter from the NHS and this was mailed to local parish councils, mutual aid groups and community and voluntary organisations, to raise awareness of the current routes for support.
- This report, along with our updated FAQs, is shared with a wide range of stakeholders, including GP practices to raise awareness of how to support patients going forward.



During your pregnancy, giving birth and whilst breastfeeding

“Maria shared:

I'm breastfeeding and got very distressed as I had a cough and temperature. I was frightened that I'd have to give up feeding my baby. I struggled to find information online and became overwhelmed by the results. I wasn't sure about which were trusted sources and struggled to search as I feel unwell.

Anonymous story:

A pregnant lady had a meltdown at her partner not being allowed into the scanning area. They had both arrived for the appointment. She looked very distressed and frightened. I don't know if she thought something was wrong or expecting bad news.



This is a trusted source for parents, their friends and families (up to 5 people) to have access to a wide range of information and resources, both local and national, at their fingertips.

There is information to answer your [coronavirus concerns](#) and if you don't get the answer you need, you can use the live chat or ask a question - you'll need to [create](#) or use your account for the latter.

Information on how appointments for scans and other maternity-related appointment can also be found [here](#) for St. Richards and Worthing Hospitals. Please check your local hospital's website before attending an appointment.

Some of the insight we've seen is still suggesting women are anxious over not having their partners at the birth.

People also shared that they were having challenges getting specific baby formula/milk, but these seemed to be in the early days of the panic buying. Others said how supportive their pharmacies were in sourcing specific milk for health issues.

Our actions:

- We've asked for the breastfeeding information to be made clearer for people who have [symptoms of coronavirus](#). For more information please see our FAQs.
- We've proactively asked for this report to be shared with the community midwife teams to ask them to check pregnant women are accessing local information and understand who can support them and when.



Getting prescriptions and medication

A large amount of the insight we've received relates to medication and people struggling to get prescriptions. We've also heard how community pharmacist teams are going above and beyond to support local people. The areas of concern have been:

- Inflated cost of over-the-counter medication -mainly during the early days of panic buying
- Opening times of community pharmacies
- How to access home delivery
- People struggling with social distancing and hearing what staff are saying

Our actions:

- We've been working closely with the Sussex Pharmaceutical Committee (LPC) Team on how to support the community hub and volunteers to be able to safely arrange collection of prescriptions.
- Discussions with local pharmacies has assured us that supplies of over-the-counter items are largely in stock and pricing is down to supply chain increases. However, we'd like to hear from you if you see products that are much more expensive than previously.
- Our [FAQs](#) has lots of useful information and we are promoting this on social media.
- We asked the LPC to encourage pharmacy members to take photos of their opening hours and post these on local community Facebook pages and to use these to share news.
- We're flagged the need for pharmacy staff to speak up because of the muffling effect of wearing masks and talking from a distance.



We wanted to highlight what is working well for people, recognising there are many more people delivering equally fantastic support - we simply haven't heard about these.

Balcombe Parish Council promptly set-up the co-ordination of village volunteers to respond to local needs arising from the COVID 19 situation. *Quite early on in this crisis, we were able to set-up a good process with the Ouse Valley doctors surgery in Handcross. They also run the surgery in our village, but unfortunately, they closed it at the start of the pandemic, which means a lot of our elderly residents had no way of collecting their meds since Handcross is about a 15-minute drive away. We reached out to the practice and set-up a volunteer rota - where across day someone from our village collects all the meds for residents and drops them off. We're really pleased with how this is working and appreciate the Clinical Commissioning Group working with us to develop a process that works.*

Big shout out to the wonderful team at Boots Pharmacy (Worthing) who helped with my 87 year-old mum's prescription as an emergency when she couldn't get through [to her usual pharmacy]. Awesome! Simple amazing service. "Thank you" doesn't quite say enough!

A big thank you to Bakhai Pharmacy for delivering my prescription without being asked. I was going to phone to request this as I'm self-isolating but they beat me to it. Thank you again. This sentiment was repeated quite a few times by other grateful customers. They also have a high profile on the Shoreham Covid Support Facebook Group.



Access to health services when its needed?

We've heard some **positive comments** on new steps put in place at local GP Practices and hospitals.

We've also heard a few personal accounts of very **positive experiences of A&E** during the lockdown. A&Es are still there for life-threatening and serious health conditions, as is 999.

“Older carer's comments:

This elderly gentleman, who is a carer for his wife, was very impressed with the new system put in place at Harbour View Surgery in response to the coronavirus. He said that he found it very easy to navigate and that it didn't make him stressed like it normally does when trying to get an appointment (his wife is virtually housebound and needs home visits, but he can find this a struggle to get understood.) *I rang the surgery who triaged the situation. A doctor spoke to me and immediately arranged a home visit. They were lovely and spent a long time chatting with my wife and assessing her. Both of us felt listened to and cared for.*

Anonymous stories:

My husband needed an x-ray. He's been treated for cancer for many years and the drugs have complications. The hospital was great. They couldn't make an appointment for the x-ray (we wanted to try and avoid seeing people as he is highly at risk), but reassured us that the department was very quiet and that he would be seen quickly. They were right - there was barely anyone there, and the experience wasn't as stressful as we thought it might be.

Well done to Worthing Cardiology Department for a telephone outpatient consultation that was effective, informative and friendly. In 6.5 minutes, we covered my recent holiday, my test results and any further intervention required, and the long term implications for the NHS of this new way of working.

Instead of a 30-minute drive, each way, paying for car parking, sitting in a crowded waiting area for at least 15 minutes - I had a really useful and effective consultation.

You may see our poster at your local GP practice as you enter, if you have a face-to-face consultation, as a gentle reminder that staff are doing their best. It also invites people to contact us if they have any concerns.

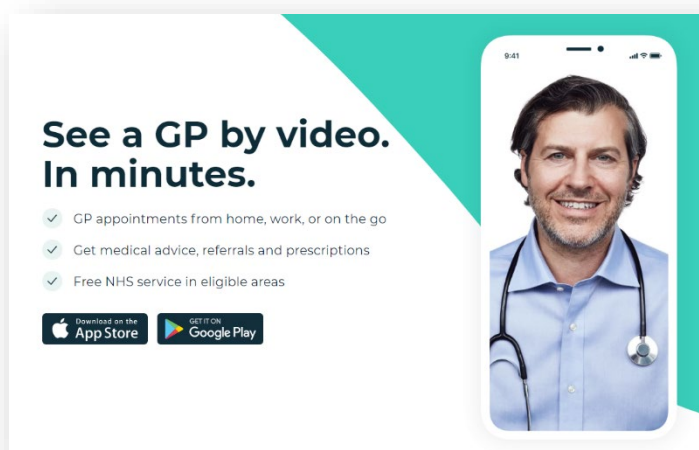
At present most complaints handling is on hold due to the demand on healthcare staff. You can however still talk to our Independent Health Complaints Advocacy Service (IHCA) Team about your concern and future options.





LIVI the Digital GP Service

People have alerted some issues with the LIVI: a surgery not getting the right contact information and the service faxing prescriptions - both leading to NHS time being wasted, and a surgery not being an active member of the service that has been commissioned and advertised for residents in Crawley, Horsham and Mid Sussex.



All Surgeries are making provision for video consultations and there is guidance on how to make the most of these appointments in our FAQs.

Our actions:

- We've escalated the issues around LIVI and can confirm that prescription will now go through to community pharmacies (not faxed), and the CCG are looking into the other issues.

Cancelled appointments and hospital operations

Residents have been receiving letters to confirm the cancellation of hospital appointments and planned operations. We have heard the eye clinic letters did not include any information about the community support available to people whilst they wait on these services returning to normal.



Our actions:

- We've been able to work with the Clinical Commissioning Group and our community partners to make sure that information about available support is included in letters.

You can find out more information about this support and other community services at the end of our FAQs. There is also information in this about keeping yourself safe from scammers during this time.

Discharge from hospital

Through our *eyes and ears*, we heard people were having issues with getting home from hospital (as transport teams could no longer go to the hospital) and people being discharged with only one day's medication. The latter leading to some patients having to go back to hospital because it was not possible to get the medication they urgently needed.

Our actions:

- We escalated the discharge issues and have been assured patients will be discharged with 7 days' worth of medication. The transport issues are being worked on currently.



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Lack of dental care

Most dentist practices are now closed for face-to-face consultations, but people are still having emergency dental needs and we've heard people are struggling to get these met.

“Anonymous stories:

I've tried every emergency dental line around Sussex and even Kent. They have said all dentists are closed due to the virus! I'm in complete agony. The closest one, I've found open is in North London, almost leaving me no choice but to go.

My temporary filling has come out. The work was due to be done a couple of weeks ago but was advised I do it when this has all blown over. I've tried phoning emergency hospitals, but they offer advise only Tried 111, but no emergency dentists open. Ended up having to go to A&E - prescribed antibiotics and strong painkillers.

Gemma shared:

Gemma posted that she had has a toothache and no dental treatment available. Healthwatch signposted her to our website and guide, as this has the contact details for the emergency dental services in West Sussex. Gemma contacted them and has been told they are only allowed to do extractions at the moment.



Responses to social media posts have suggested there are offers of support:

Someone wrote Chichester Hospital emergency dentist is offering a good service for emergency treatment for vulnerable people. Another person had an email from their dentist, saying if its an emergency they will try to do something.



Dr.Keval Chavda

Qualified from: BDS Sheffield , 2016

GDC No: 265188

Our actions:

- All our dental insight has and is being shared with the Local Dental Committee to escalate this issue, as a Sussex-wide concern and to seek to ensure there is more emergency support provided.

The West Sussex Emergency Dental Hub has now started, with locations in Chichester, Crawley and Haywards Heath. Referrals to the emergency service will be via dentists and we are checking now if GPs can also refer patients. Patients will not be able to self-refer.



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The Brighton emergency service will be seeing patients from vulnerable groups and those who are shielding because of COVID 19.

It was recognised that there was more to be done in terms of communications with dentists, the public and the 111 service to make them aware of the service. This should happen in the next few days.

Getting social support?

Existing social care services

Following the Government's advice to close services to enforce social distancing, many are now adapting and offer alternative services.

For example, West Sussex County Council's In-house Day Service staff have been working increasingly creatively with people who would normally access services. This has included regular phone catch-ups and use of social media communication such as Skype and Facetime. Dave services have also developed activity packs for people that have been supplied out to them at home. These are then being referred to in communications and some virtual activity sessions on social media have begun to happen.

Healthwatch is here to make care better

We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We're here to find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need.

We also help people find the information they need about services in West Sussex.



Here to help you on the next step of your health and social care journey

We have the power to make sure that the government and those in charge of services hear people's voices. As well as seeking the public's views ourselves, we also encourage services to involve people in decisions that affect them.



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