

Covid-19 communication; changes to
NHS services and mental wellbeing,
experiences of Coventry people

Briefing paper

July 2020



Introduction

During the current pandemic Healthwatch Coventry worked alongside Healthwatch Warwickshire to launch a survey to capture the views of the public. Our aim was to better understand the impact changes to services and support was having on local people.

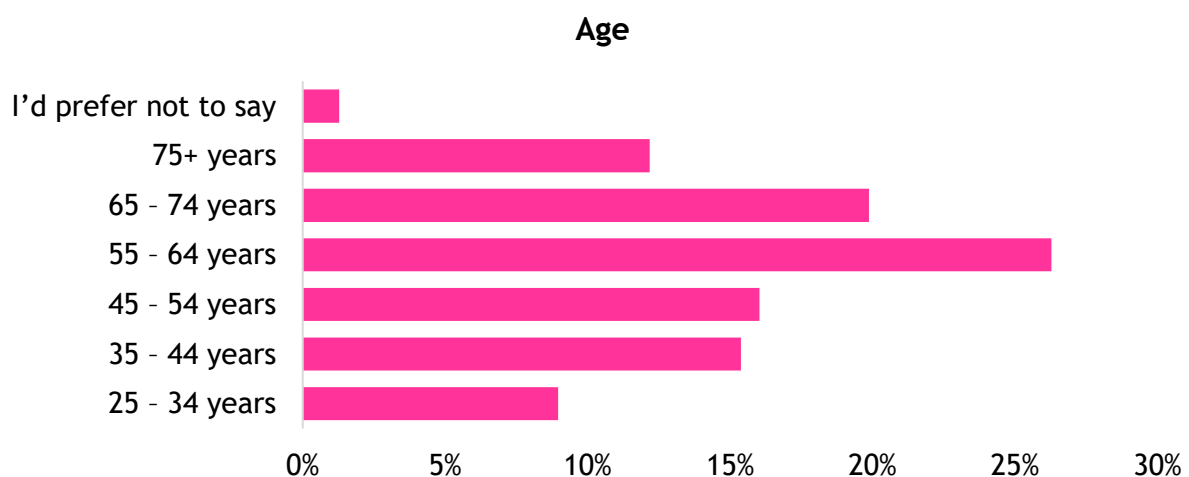
The survey was open between the beginning of May and 3 July 2020. Due to Covid-19 our focus was on promoting it digitally via social media, websites and local e-newsletters to ask about:

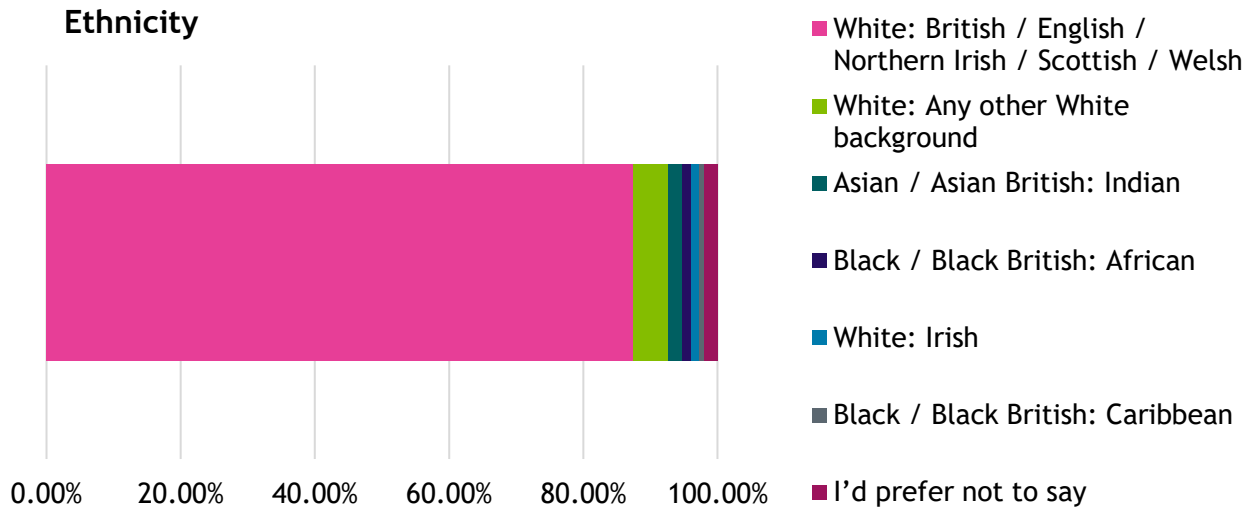
- What people thought about the information they saw/accessed
- How people have accessed services
- Changes to NHS and care services as a result of the pandemic
- Mental wellbeing

The survey we used was developed with Healthwatch England and 10 other local Healthwatch. We have adapted the survey template to reflect and gather more information about what we had been hearing locally.

Our findings

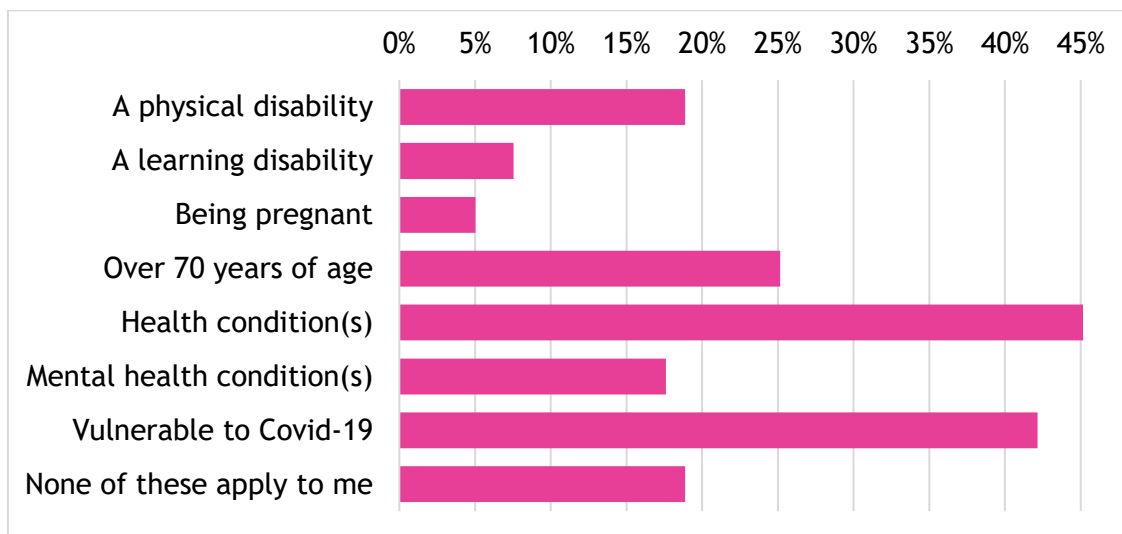
We received 159 responses from people who said they lived in Coventry. Those who responded were mainly women (83%) and the skew towards female respondents was greater than in other pieces of work we have done that used more mixed methods of gaining participants including face to face outreach. People who responded were also mainly from the white population.





More information about people who took part

32 people had a physical or learning disability and a significant proportion (45%) of the people who took part had one or more health conditions.

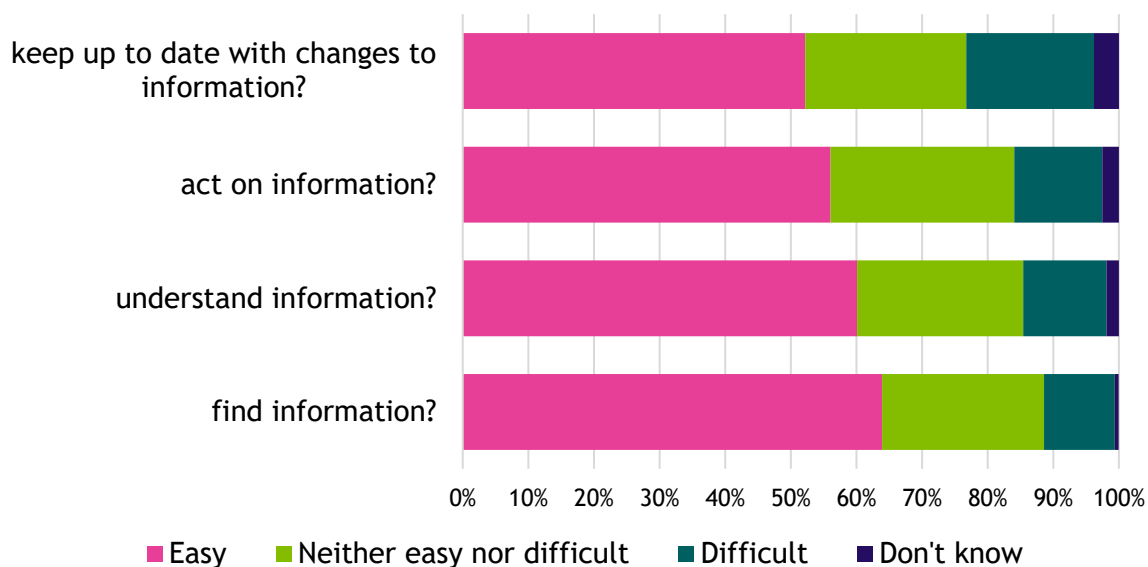


The types of health condition people had

Information provision to public

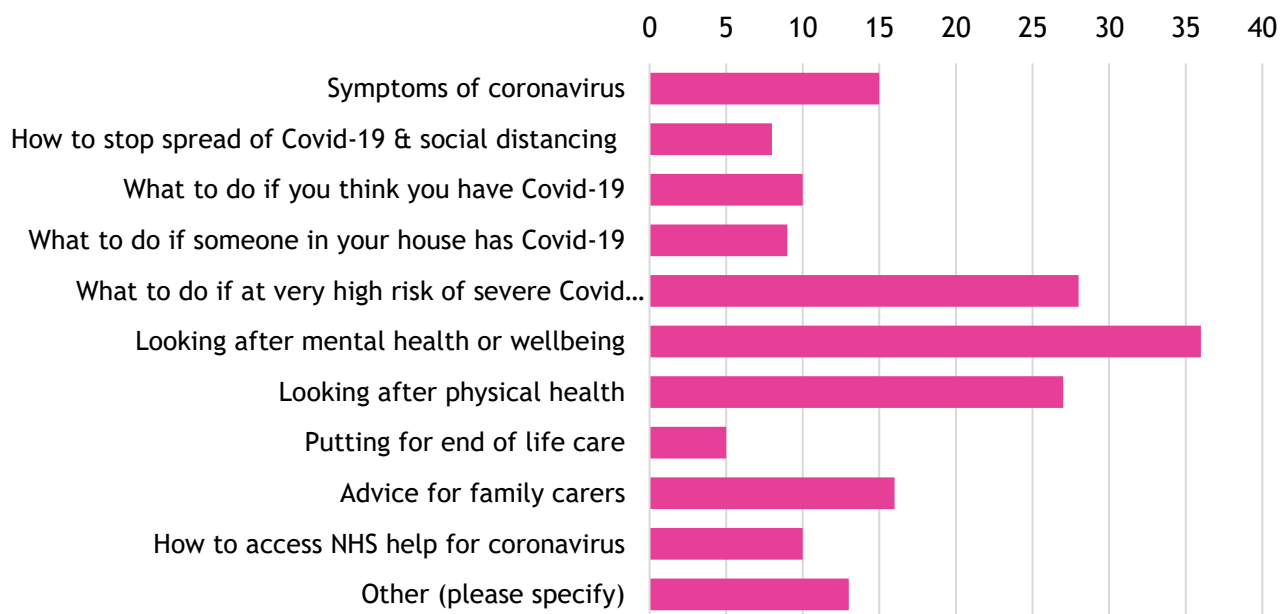
We asked people to thinking about the information they needed about how to keep safe during the coronavirus pandemic and how easy it was to find this.

Most found it easy to find and understand information. 12% said they found it difficult to understand information and 19.5% found it difficult to keep up to date with information.



We then asked about particular topics of information and if this was difficult to get clear information or advice:

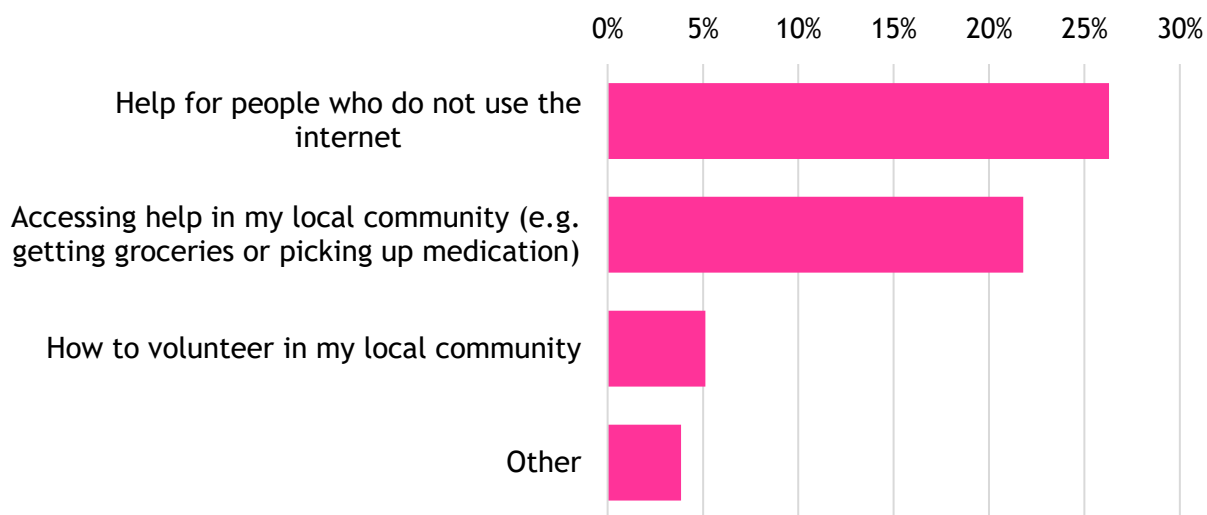
Number saying difficult to get clear informaiont about...



Regarding information about support in the community during the coronavirus pandemic, was asked if people had found it difficult to get clear information or advice.

59% said they had all the information they needed, meaning 41% did not. Of these respondents they indicated the following had been difficult:

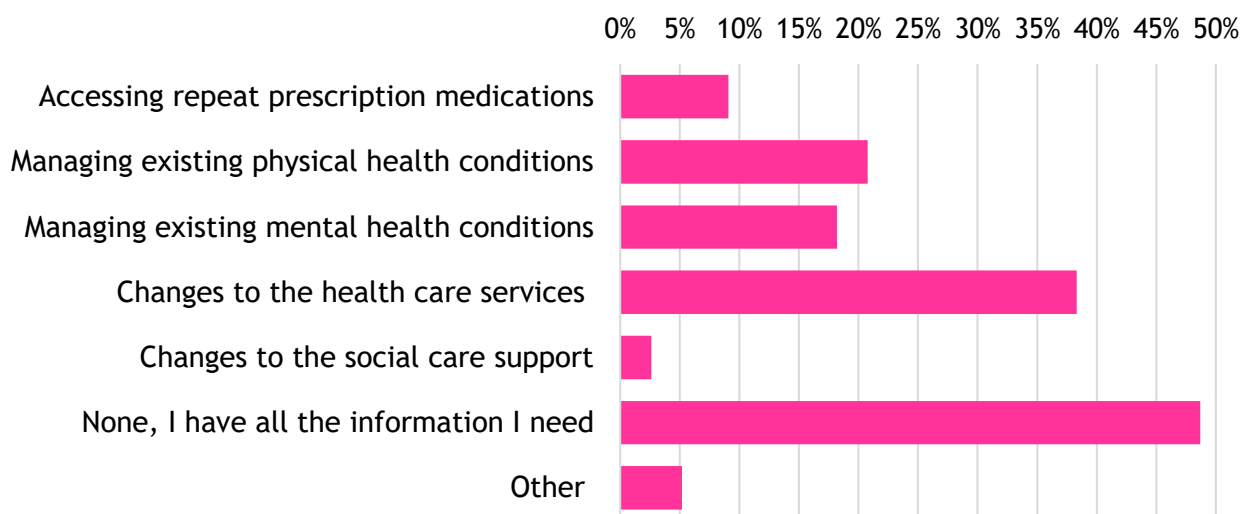
Information difficult to find



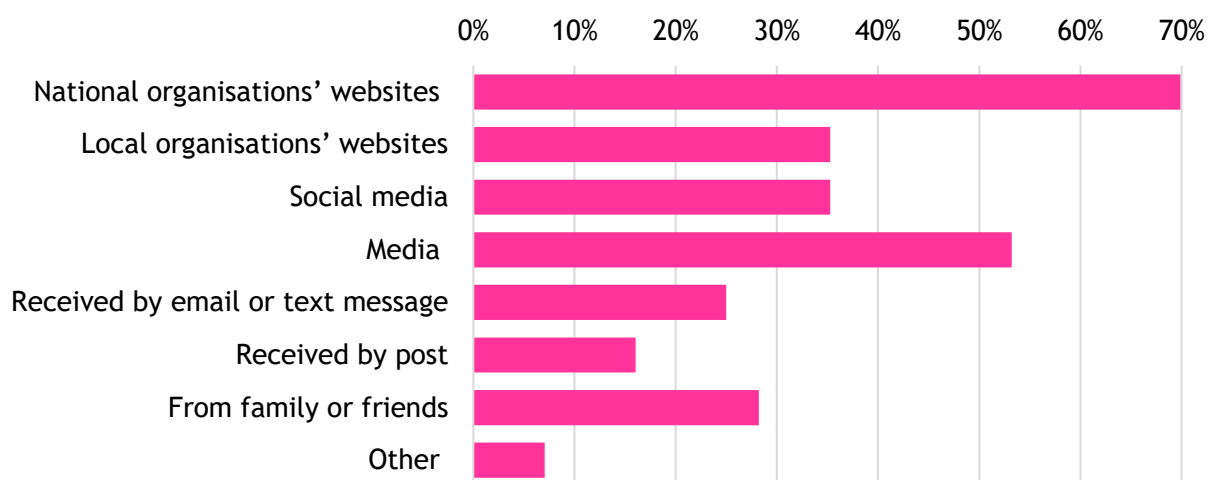
Information about health and social care during the coronavirus pandemic

49% of people said they had all the information they needed about health and social care services. 38% indicated that changes to health care services was the area they found it hardest to get information about.

Difficult to get clear information



Where have you found useful information or advice about the coronavirus pandemic?



Most people used national information and information in the media. Other sources of information specifically mention were:

- *Local authority carers pages have been helpful*
- *I have relied on my support staff and my family as the information on the television just confuses me. I had a letter from the government, I knew it was from Boris Johnson but I did not understand it despite my support staff trying to explain things to me.*
- *Coventry council*
- *GP who is amazing*
- *Daily Briefings from Downing Street*
- *I get a lot of information from the school I work at*
- *I work at the local hospital so have a wealth of information available*
- *Employer has been very conscientious in sharing briefings*
- *Research studies*
- *Health Forums and charity advice lines*
- *Work*

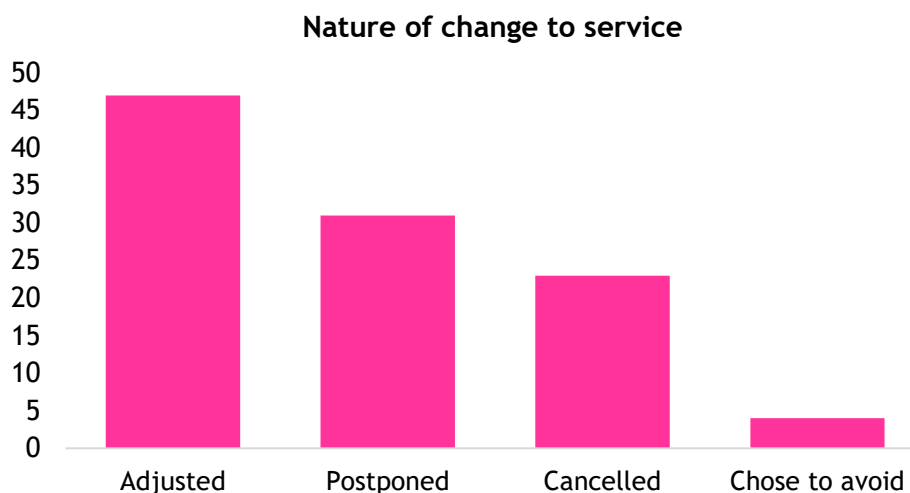
“A lot that has been said about this disease a lot of charts, statistics have been shown and discussed. Ordinary people just want to be told what is going on in simple terms”.

Format of information

15 people had an additional communication need and 11 said they would have liked information in a different way because of this. The majority said that easy read information would have helped.

NHS servicers

104 people (65%) said they or the person they care for had needed or used a health care service for something not related to Covid-19 during the pandemic. Of these 51.5% said they had experienced disruption/changes to service due to the pandemic.



We collected comments about people's experiences, which we have grouped below:

Comments about delay to treatment

- *They have been scheduling then cancelling appointments to the point that relative has not been seen for over 2+ years.*
 - *Hernia operation was ... delayed until rules on non-life threatening condition surgery were relaxed.*
 - *The postponement was frustrating but entirely understandable, as is the spouse who isn't ill being denied access to some parts of the treatment process.*
 - *I have cataracts and need a operation which has been postponed causing my sight to deteriorate*
 - *They're all either running slower (care coordination) or not accepting new referrals which has meant that I've had to find money to go private for a health condition that has meant I've had to be signed off work and I keep almost causing myself harm from collapsing/ falling over.*
 - *I had to postpone an urgent MRI.*
 - *I find it all overwhelming. All appointments cancelled for my children and myself*
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- *Appointment was cancelled*
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- *Elderly parent has health worries - not able to see a GP - scared of 'being stuck in the system' if rang for advice*
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- *Cancelled by oncologist*
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- *I need help with a new condition but find it difficult as my outpatient appointment was cancelled now the condition is getting worse*
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- *I had an outpatient physio apt cancelled, but I am not sure when to ask if it can be rearranged.*
-
- *Hospital appointments cancelled - do not know when they will happen*
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Maternity care

- *UHCW have implemented huge restrictions in how a pregnant women can access services, preventing partners from attending scans, inductions and postnatally. I then could not have my husband postnatally. Other trusts nationally are supporting birth partners more proactively.*
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- *UHCW put in place restrictions on visitors on 23 March. This had particular consequences for women giving birth during this period and restricted the presence of birth partners to only be present during active labour and the birth. I received a letter on 13 June informing me of these changes. Although I was aware of these changes, because they'd caused me a huge amount of anxiety in the lead. I really don't understand why it took 2.5 months to communicate this to people. I gave birth on the Friday so only received the letter when I returned from hospital. Throughout this the only visible communication has been through Facebook, with a continual promise that the restrictions will be reviewed in line with national guidance, however national guidance changed on 5 June and they continue to have these restrictions in place*
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- *Not having face to face midwife appointments, left me worrying if baby and I was ok, not having my partner there for scans and appointments etc left me worried, panicked and actually gave me anxiety. Something I don't suffer with*
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- *I had a baby 2 days before lockdown so been unable to have midwife visits. 1st appointment for heel prick test was carried out but felt rushed All other contact has been over the phone*

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- *Had no preparation for birth, now causing anxiety. Birth expectations class could have been done virtually via zoom/FaceTime etc*

Communication related

- *After having regular input and support all of a sudden there has been no support at all*
- *Involved taking more time off work to go back for blood test due to lack of information*
- *I have been left in the dark*
- *Too many blood tests difficult to access service for people shielding only got appointment this week and still do not know which consultant sent me as no contact from them*

Comments about remote appointments; GP and mental health

- *It was better to have appointments by telephone than not at all. We didn't want to visit the hospital or GP surgery because of Covid virus.*
 - *Appointments cancelled and phone meetings done, but not as good as a face to face discussion. Phone call re hip replacement check-up came 'out of the blue' and not on the date or time I had an outpatient appointment for a letter or phone call to say roughly when it was going to actually take place would have been much more helpful and given time to think through what I wanted to say and ask.*
 - *Hospital - changed to telephone consultation. GP - change of venue/telephone consultation*
 - *I'd like some face to face aftercare*
 - *If they responded to GPs emails of concerns. Phoned when they said they would.*
 - *Don't see how doctor can say what's the matter over phone without seeing you*
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- *First appointment was a telephone talk with GP then called into surgery as needed*
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- *Remote service by phone, might have been easier with video call?*
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- *Telephone consultations - worked very well. Would be interested in having video calls in future for certain ailments where appropriate*
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- *Consultant telephoned instead of face to face. Very helpful.*
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- *I had a phone consultation for something that really needed to be seen.*
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- *Phone access to GP surgery takes much longer. Phone access to Prescription hub is impossible! Hospital appointment cancelled but Consultant rang instead*
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- *I feel the psychiatrists actually listen better on the phone as they do not get distracted*
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Social care

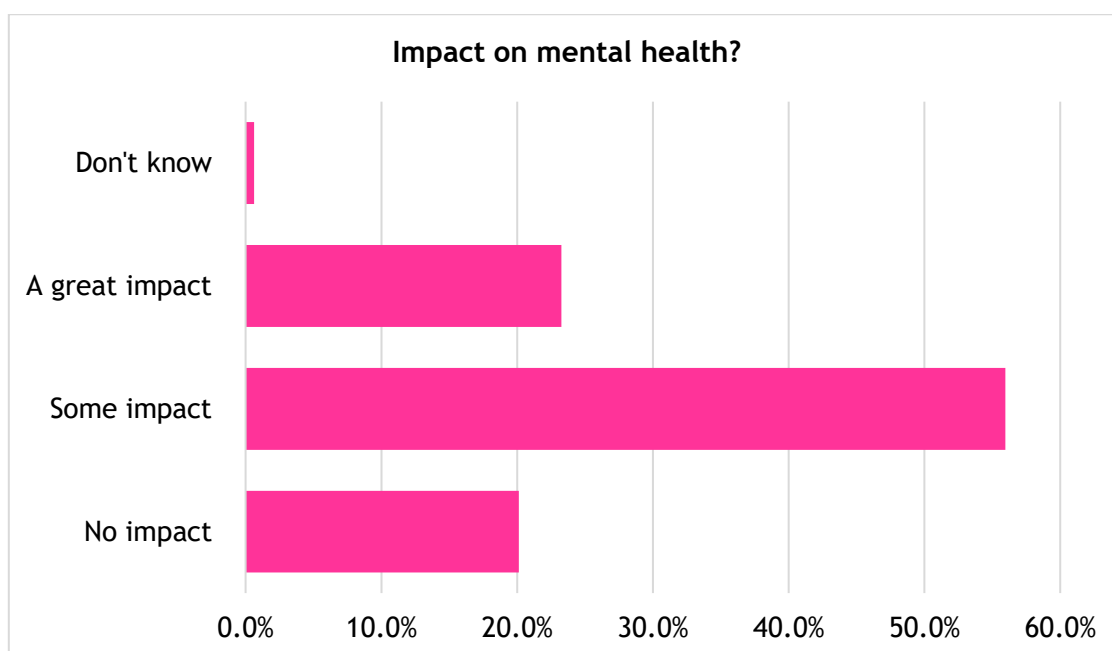
- *I have had to look after my husband 24/7 who has severe physical and mental health. As well as working from home and having disabilities of my own. Stressed as we will [need] to find a carer when it is safe for them to come into the home*
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- *Ego performance has just stopped for now. Not sure about independent support solutions.*
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- *They stopped sending us rota sheets in advance and made frequent changes so we rarely knew who would be coming. We needed the daily care visit lengthening from 45 mins to an hour as the call/visits were constantly over-running but it was difficult to know who to ask as the staff were all working from home.*
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Hospital discharge

- *My mother came out of UHCW after falling and breaking her hip. She ... was sent home with a walking frame, toilet frame, and meds. No exercises, no info about OT or physio community support. These would have been helpful but instead 8 weeks on she is still struggling to walk even with her frame. She gets a physio for half an hour twice a week at home, but to me progress is slow*
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GP services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Repeat prescriptions other surgery's allowing to log on and book then collect from pharmacy to speed process and not bother the busy surgeries. Thus surgery doesn't do it. It's always a painful experience</i> • <i>Excellent safe service at Kensington Road Surgery</i>
Hospital pharmacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Hospital pharmacy sent prescription directly to pharmacy so only one visit needed to collect (rather than one to give in prescription, which has to be ordered especially, and second visit to collect medication - helpful</i>
UHCW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The service I have experienced throughout, particularly from the haematology department has been fantastic. Haematology have gone above and beyond to provide while ensuring I was protected due to having to shield. There has been no reduction in the incredibly high standards of care provided!</i>
Mental health services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Unable to access talking therapies/counselling had to stop</i> • <i>I was receiving weekly art therapy from the Learning Disability Service before lockdown to help with my mental health issues. My art therapist has since moved on, I was told this would be happening. The lead therapist has been in touch with my mum and me by telephone to let me know the name of my new therapist and that she would be checking in with me weekly by telephone. My new therapist has rung me. My psychiatrist from the Learning Disability Service was due to see me last month for a check up. I could not go to Windmill Point but my psychiatrist telephoned me and also spoke with my support worker to find out how I am getting on with my medication and how I have been since she last saw me.</i> • <i>My CPN has been redeployed to other mental health services.</i>

Mental wellbeing



56% of people described some impact on their mental health:

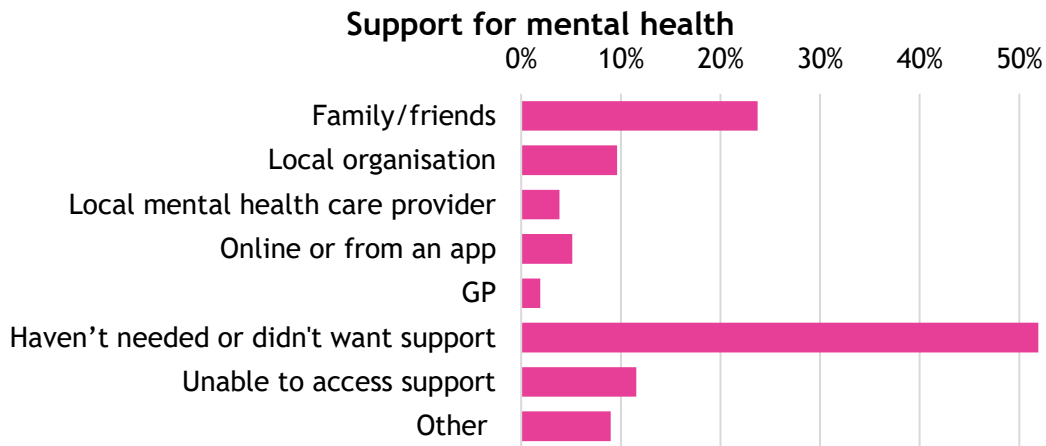
- Increased anxiety mentioned by 20 people
- Depression highlighted by 7 people
- Feelings of isolation and loneliness by 9 people
- Stress was mentioned by 6 people

People also talked about feeling scared, bored, having low energy, disturbed sleep and struggling emotionally. Three people talked about grief due to bereavement.

“Having to work from home and care for my 81 year old mother 24/7 after she left hospital early April, almost killed me. She wasn't sleeping due to pain. I felt completely unsupported for quite a few weeks before an OT made contact. I almost just walked away from it all.”



“Tearful 3 - 4 times a week where as I would never usually be like this”



“Talking to family and friends via video calls has been of great relief to me. I have not felt the need to seek help from professionals”

“Felt like Coronavirus was more important for GP to deal with than my mental health”

Five people identified the experiences of lock down as having a positive impact on their mental wellbeing.

Other comments

People provided the following comments illustrating how the pandemic had impacted on them:

- *As my mum was one of the thousands of people at serious risk of covid-19 that was missed off the government's list I have been unable to get home deliveries from supermarkets and have therefore had to rely on others to get us supplies as I cannot go out and as a consequence of this it has meant that I have had to spend more money on essentials than I normally would but I still only have carers allowance to rely on and that is an insult and no one seems to care ... yet again I am one of the forgotten ones and this does not help my mental well being*

- *The organisation who support me on a daily basis have been working hard to keep me safe during the coronavirus. I have found the whole situation extremely challenging and I do not know what impact it will have had on my long term mental health.*
- *My friend had Coronavirus symptoms and she was sent home from work. She had to be off sick from work for four weeks as she has diabetes and heart problem and from BAME community. She got sick note from 111 website and her GP gave letter of support that she has been in touch with her nurse and GP. Her workplace only accepted two weeks sick note, gave her ... a disciplinary warning letter. She was not paid her wages for the two weeks.*
- *Please reopen the services, I understand coronavirus is a bad pandemic but other health problems don't just stop but the impact it's having on people's lives is huge to just be left with no help, support or care*
- *I'm more than happy with the services I've received from the NHS these include giving birth 2 days before lockdown, community midwife checking on me via phone, GP surgery closed and changed location but informed and prenatal appointments and baby's jabs all done together*
- *I was phoned by the nurse practitioner from my GP surgery to ask if I was ok + let me know the surgery was open. This was a good gesture. They or the pharmacy also arranged for me to have my monthly medications delivered to my home - not sure which + have not asked to date.*
- *No social distancing or safe practices put in place at work*
- *I think there is a good balance for support and local services have been doing a great job under the circumstances*
- *Most options are centred around having digital technology. If you are shielding there is nothing much in place for emergency breakdowns (non medical) i.e my drain blocked fortunately I had insurance. There are lots of things besides health that have been impacted by this virus*
- *Shopping for food became an unpleasant chore: we were no longer able to get stuff delivered as we weren't on the official government list of priority needs and queuing to get in and move round (Sainsbury's Canley) was shambolically managed.*

Conclusions

This report provide insight into the experiences of people in Coventry during the Covid-19 pandemic. Whilst lock down is now being eased and more service reinstated the findings remain relevant when considering how to communicate with local people and respond to their needs in the next phase.

People highlighted:

- Challenges around getting the right information for them
- Insufficient communication from local NHS services
- Impact of service changes due to Covid-19 eg outpatient appointments delayed or tests postponed
- Understanding and praise for NHS services
- Uncertainty about what is happening regarding planned or ongoing treatment and if they should make contact with services or not
- Mixed experiences of the use of non face to face NHS contact (eg by phone or video)
- A lot of worries. Either general or specific.
- 56% identifying an impact on their mental health, however most not seeking outside help.

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