



# Experiences of managing health and care during the coronavirus pandemic 2021

## Summary

### Background:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a drastic effect on people's lives and forced health and social care services to change how they operate. To see how local services have been working longer term, we followed up a previous [survey that we completed in 2020](#), where we asked Wandsworth residents about their views on how the pandemic affected their health and wellbeing and their health and social care.

### What we did:

We launched an online survey to find out from people living in Wandsworth about what they feel has worked well or less well in the last year for health and social care services and how things should develop in the future. Questions included in the survey covered topics such as physical health, mental health and wellbeing, access to various services and information and support received from such services. We also asked respondents about what they thought Healthwatch Wandsworth's top three priorities should be in the next year. The survey was open from March 2021 to May 2021.

We also co-hosted a coffee morning with [Wandsworth Carers' Centre](#) and attended a workshop with [Generate](#), which was attended by people with learning difficulties to hear about their experiences during Covid-19 and lockdown.

### What we were told and recommendations:



Many people felt that despite the pandemic, health and social care services provided sufficient and excellent help and support. For all conclusions and recommendations, see the final chapter of our report. Highlights include:

- ✓ Emergency care and regular health check-ups were said to be available as normal only with minor delays.
- ✓ The information provided by GP services and the vaccination programme were particularly praised.

However, a lot of people reported having difficulties with accessing various health and social care services, which in turn has led to the deterioration of their overall health.

- ✗ People's mental health suffered due to the pandemic, and many struggled to get timely access to NHS mental health services.
- ✗ Cancelled and rescheduled appointments and surgeries were a source of anxiety to most people, and many of them commented on these delays negatively impacting their physical and mental health.
- ✗ Respondents reported difficulties booking GP appointments.
- ✗ People who were caring for someone else felt that there was a lack of support and information from social care services and an impact on their mental health.
- ✗ Lastly, people commented on the issues in communication between services and towards patients.

Therefore, our recommendations included that services consider:

- Provision of communications and transparency about appointment accessibility and waiting times for services whilst signposting to alternative support.
- Provide support to carers, people with learning disabilities and others who might find it difficult to get an appointment due to their circumstances.
- Review and monitor how long it takes to access services.
- Provide more support to people with information about coping and managing their mental health and quick routes to seek more support if needed.

**Thank you to everyone who shared their experience with us to help us write this report.  
Thank you also to all staff and volunteers involved in this research and writing this report.**

## Background

COVID-19, also commonly referred to as coronavirus, has had a dramatic effect on the way people conduct their lives. Since its emergence in December 2019, COVID-19 has led many people to adapt to new ways of interacting with other people. From 23rd March 2020 a state of ‘lockdown’ began in the UK to contain the spread of COVID-19. Since then, we have experienced two waves of the pandemic and varying levels of lockdown. Many services were paused at times during the pandemic as services needed to rapidly change the support they offer the public and the way they provide care. As the situation evolves the health and care system continue to plan services in response to the virus and in the context of wider measures to contain the virus.

There is an increased need to understand what is working well for local people and what can be improved as well as what needs to be considered as the situation continues to change. We initially launched a survey in 2020 to hear from people who live in Wandsworth about their views on how local services worked during the coronavirus pandemic. In March 2021 we launched a second survey to hear how things have been working longer-term.

At the time of collecting responses, Healthwatch Wandsworth (HWW) was also setting priorities for the coming year of 2021/22. As the independent champion for people in Wandsworth using health and social care services, we wanted to know what people thought was important for us to focus on.

## What we did

### Our Consultation Survey

We opened an online survey at the beginning of March 2021 and closed it at the end of May 2021. We included a prize draw for those completing the survey and advertised the opportunity to take part via a press release, our local contacts and social media.

We also co-hosted a two-hour coffee morning with Wandsworth Carers Centre on Friday 19 March 2021, where we asked some key questions from our current Covid-19 survey and asked carers what they think HWW priorities should be for the following year.

Lastly, we attended a workshop with Generate on Thursday 20 May 2021. The session was attended by members with learning difficulties. The focus was on hearing about member’s experiences in accessing healthcare services during Covid-19 and lockdown and what effect the lockdown has had on their mental and physical wellbeing. We focused on a few of the key questions from our Covid-19 survey.

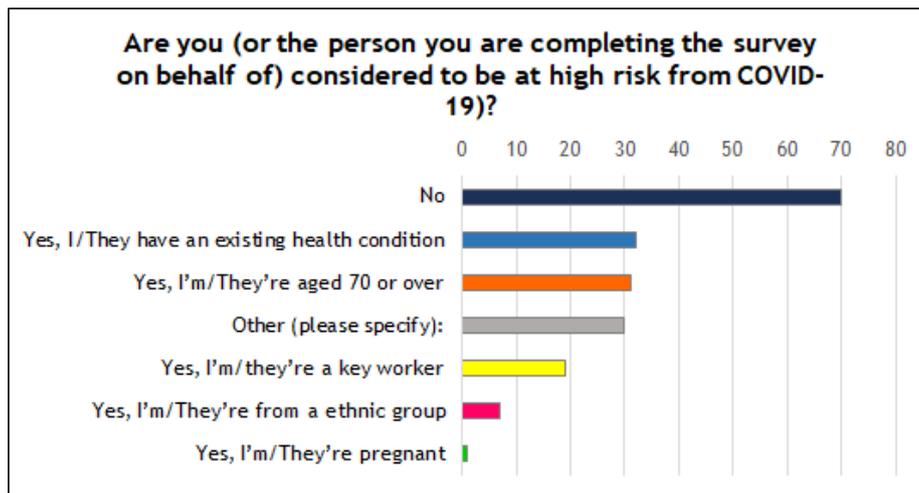
## Who was involved?

We received a total of 150 responses to the survey. The Carers Coffee Morning session was attended by 13 carers and the Generate workshop was attended by 8 members with learning difficulties.

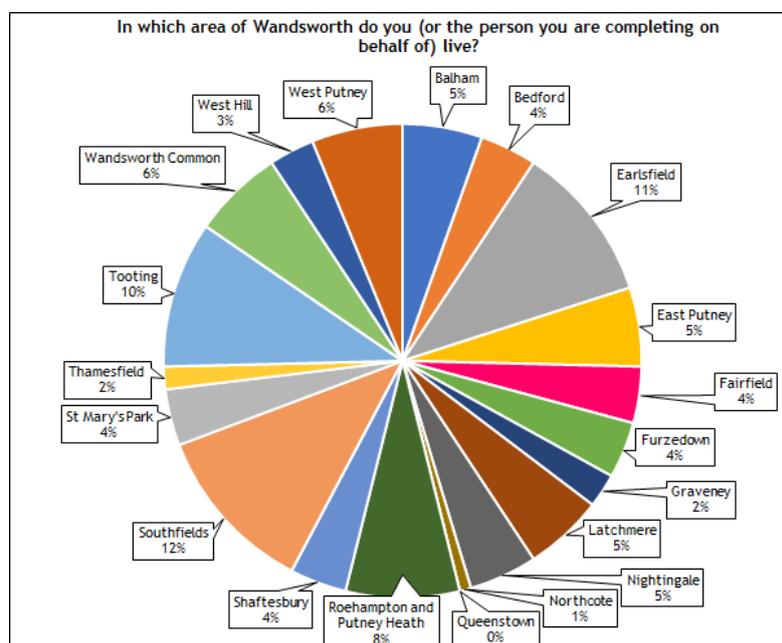
Online survey respondents:

Almost all (98%) respondents completed the survey about themselves. Those who completed the survey on behalf of someone else were the mother, wife, and daughter of respondents.

Nearly half (70 people) of respondents completing the survey were not considered to be at high risk from COVID-19. Of the respondents that were at risk of COVID-19, the majority (32 people) were at risk due to having an existing health condition and/or due to being aged 70 or over (31). Nineteen people said they were at risk due to being keyworkers, seven due to being from an ethnic group, and one because they were pregnant. Almost all respondents who selected 'Other' as the reason for being at high risk from COVID-19 (30 people) referred to specific existing health conditions that they had. The most mentioned health conditions were asthma, diabetes, cancer, and kidney disease.



We also asked people which area of Wandsworth they live in.



## Findings

Due to the length of our report, we added a Table of Contents below to make it easier for our readers to navigate to topics of interest.

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### Involvement and Support for Carers

A hundred and fifty people responded to this question. The majority of 130 respondents stated that this question was not relevant to them. **Fourteen** people answered that they **did not feel that they were sufficiently involved and communicated with** regarding the care of the person they help with their daily living. A further **seven** people felt that they were **sufficiently involved and communicated with**.

Six people provided further comments. One respondent commented that they do not currently care for anybody and a further was unsure of the question.

Two respondents commented on **lack of support** from social care services.

**“Have not even been informed that my sister's keyworker has changed & they have only rang her twice a week not visited so I have had to break my shielding to support her.”**

A further respondent commented that **“extra care housing, no updated care plan in place, very little communication during lock down.”**, while another said that **“I was not contacted at all to see how I was coping as a 1-1 carer during the pandemic.”**

One respondent commented **“Only one call from the GP in April 2020 to discuss DNAR and nothing after that.”**

At the Carers Coffee Morning, we asked carers about **support they need or would like to receive from health and social care services now and for the coming year**. We also asked them what is **important to them in the coming year to manage their health and that of the person they care for**.

- People commented on having difficulties with a carer's assessment or having not received an assessment at all. They would like to see more communication and information about assessments and would like them to be made easier for carers in the future.
- Others had problems with accessing various services. One person mentioned the lack of availability of NHS mental health care ("**It has been hard to get access to mental health services for my son and I have had to pay for private care.**"), others had difficulties reaching the access team at Wandsworth Council, while others were concerned about not being able to get in touch with their husbands in care homes.

**"I am scared and nervous and very sad to think about my husband in the care home and every time I call there is no one answering the phone and they don't call back."**

**"Access to my husband who is in a care home, as he is bedridden we cannot meet in the garden."**

## **COVID vaccination**

All respondents (150) responded to this question, of which **130 people (88% of respondents)** had been offered the Covid-19 vaccine **and had taken up the offer**. A further **9 people (5%)** had been offered the vaccine but have chosen **not to take up the offer**, while **11 people (7%)** had **not yet been offered the vaccine**.

We asked people if they could tell us more about their experiences; 131 responded.

A hundred and twenty-seven people reported having received the vaccine in various locations, via GP, pharmacy, community centres and various vaccination centres. Two participants participated in clinical trials. Six respondents had theirs at their workplace with one respondent indicating that it is important for them to protect others "**As I am a key worker I feel that this is important to protect myself and others. I feel more confident and have positive thoughts. I believe with the vaccination I do have some immunity to fight against Covid-19.**". Two respondents were offered the vaccine due to their caring responsibilities, a further three respondents being given priority due to having cancer. Another respondent commented that "**Coming from BAME community, the minute I was offered the vaccine I took it. I also work in a high risk job where social distancing isn't possible therefore vaccination was of utmost importance.**"

**Almost all** who had received the vaccination **commented positively on their experience** with no or very minimal side effects. People were complimentary on the **efficiency of the service, and friendliness of staff**.

**"It was all done very efficiently, from contacting me to receiving the vaccination. I was also later contacted by another vaccination centre to check whether I had or needed a vaccination as they were doing my age group."**

**"Was a very smooth process at a health centre, staff very good, everything explained clearly. I had a fever/chills during the night after having the vaccine but no other side effects."**

Eleven respondents commented that they had experienced side effects that lasted for a few days. Some of the main symptoms reported were feeling unwell, sore limbs, flu like symptoms and pain in arm. A further two people experienced more serious side effects.

“was in bed due to fever, headaches, body pain and swelling on and off for about 2 weeks.”

“I have had the first and I had a really bad reaction - in bed for three days, sick and unwell for another two weeks. Shakes, fatigue, body aches, headaches, brain fog.”

One respondent experienced some difficulties with the signage and logistics of the vaccination centre.

“The staff do not monitor the time you are waiting after vaccination so not clear when I could leave after the 15 minute wait. It would have been helpful if this had happened, as I was expecting to be told when I could leave by the staff rather than having to ask when I could go.”

One respondent would have liked if the second vaccination was offered quicker.

“I’ve had first jab of no issues except concerned & not happy about the gap for second jab.”

The two common themes among the nine respondents who decided not to take up the vaccine offer they received were either not wanting it or not knowing what the long-term effects of the vaccine were.

“No one knows the long term effects of these vaccines and chances of death are so minuscule that there is for more to be feared by taking the vaccine...”

“Female under 40, not in contact with any at risk family or friends. Risk of vaccine is higher than risk of covid for me personally at this stage. I am not anti-vaccine. I have had many in my life. Just don’t like taking drugs I don’t need, not even paracetamol.”

One respondent who is awaiting an appointment has faced many difficulties:

“Unable to access until he turns 16. The guidelines state that it can be given to children with neuro disability aged 12-26 but I cannot get a Dr to agree to this. Numerous conversations and emails (including SAGE and Pfizer) later and we are still no further on.”

One respondent did not think she needed the vaccine saying “I have Covid-19 antibodies.”.

We also asked people with **learning disabilities** about their experiences with getting the vaccine at the **Generate workshop**. Members had mixed responses, with most members saying how it was **stressful waiting** for people with learning disabilities to **be prioritised in the vaccine distribution** and confusing waiting to **receive an invitation** for the vaccine.

Whilst most people we spoke to were offered the vaccine through a formal letter, the **youngest people had a more stressful experience**:

- One person explained how they had to get their parents to **reach out to the doctors personally** to ask for the vaccine, even though they and their parent were in need and in vulnerable positions.
- Another person felt that there were **mixed messages** from staff at the GP surgery and on different occasions some were saying that they were entitled to the vaccine and another saying they were not. This confusion made them feel even more stressed and anxious about getting the vaccine.
- One of our younger members also added how she felt **excluding some young people with learning disabilities** from being prioritised was a serious problem. She explained how she

lives with just her mum, and if something were to happen to her mum, she would not be able to live alone. Therefore, she felt that her and her mum should have been prioritised for the vaccine. She felt the government neglected to think of prioritising young people who live in a **two-person household**. She said how her friends were in a similar situation as her and have still not been offered the vaccine, which she felt is a mistake.

### Accessing healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic

We asked people about their experience of trying to access healthcare during the pandemic. Respondents were presented with a list of options, and they could select as many as applied to them.

- 82 people had needed health and care services during the pandemic
- 25 people did not need any healthcare services
- 14 had needed healthcare but had not tried to get it
- 19 people had other unspecified experiences

At the Carers Coffee Morning:

- 2 carers answered 'I have needed healthcare but have not tried to get it during the pandemic'
- 1 carer answered 'I haven't needed any healthcare services'
- 1 carer answered 'Other'

66 people said they experienced difficulties getting support or that their healthcare worsened. 24 agreed this was the case and 42 agreed to some extent. 79 people did not experience difficulties or thought that their healthcare worsened.

Comments from respondents about accessing healthcare during the pandemic showed mixed experiences. For some, accessing healthcare had been satisfactory but for others it had caused both physical and mental suffering, with some respondents raising more than one issue. There was considerable overlap of the key areas identified in the comments as what was happening in one area impacted on other areas in people's daily lives.

#### Treatment and tests

Thirty-one people had **visited hospitals or GP surgeries** for treatment and tests for a variety of health issues from major surgery to routine tests.

Despite the pandemic, some respondents received good and prompt treatment. Healthcare teams were praised, and emergency treatment had been available. It was appreciated that regular blood tests for on-going conditions could still take place.

- ✓ One respondent with a relative who required heart surgery wrote that it took place **"in Feb and that went very well - the full team were fantastic at St Georges."** Another, who wrote of a relative who had needed respiratory tests and a heart scan and monitor, also said of St George's Hospital **"we can't praise them enough."** For one respondent a referral for a suspicious lump had happened within two weeks. Another had been an in-patient for **"a couple of weeks. Service and everyone fantastic & got the help & follow up required."**
- ✓ Those who had to visit A&E, due to falls and accidents or painful conditions, also reported a good service. Others had contacted GPs in emergency situations and had been satisfied with the care received:

“Had to go to A&E following a fall - brilliant.”

“I developed dangerously high blood pressure.....I was able to see my GP in person and went to A&E at St Georges.”

- ✓ One respondent who had two cycling accidents during the pandemic was seen and given treatment quickly at St George’s A&E on both occasions, although a companion had not been allowed in on the first occasion, early on in the pandemic.
- ✗ One respondent illustrated the other side of the picture where people were reluctant to go to A&E at hospitals because of fear of Covid - in this instance the GP advised against a visit to A&E which was a great relief to the respondent.
- ✓ Those who required regular blood tests or scans had found that these had continued as normal, although results could be delayed. One respondent had been to hospital for a regular three-yearly mammogram, and another had “**attended monthly appointments at hospital for my condition. It was as normal.**”

A pattern emerged where **emergency treatment, surgery for very serious conditions and regular tests had been accessed almost as normal** during the pandemic. However, **routine surgery and non-urgent conditions had not**, and this caused concern as below.

### Delays within the services

Again, respondents could choose as many options as applied to them.

- 25 respondents had appointments cancelled or put on hold by a service.
- 19 had appointments cancelled or put on hold by more than one service.
- 29 had appointments rearranged or delayed by the service.
- 2 carers’ (at the Coffee Morning) appointments were cancelled or put on hold by services and
- 3 carers’ appointments were re-arranged or delayed by the services

Thirty-eight respondents specifically commented on delays to, or absence of care and treatments and although many were understanding about the difficult conditions the pandemic had created, there was also much frustration about the delays. These delays ranged from difficulty in making appointments to cancellation of appointments already planned. Respondents reported having to wait months for appointments or rescheduled appointments.

- ✗ One respondent wrote of referrals to two clinics “**all delayed. Appointments re-arranged and changed numerous times. One letter told me my appointment was at 04:30am. A mess!**” This respondent eventually turned to private medicine to help her.

Two other respondents also decided to go private, one relieved she had done so as she was diagnosed with cancer.

- ✗ Another respondent acknowledged that oncology services had continued but that “**there have been long and potentially harmful delays to other treatments and follow-up of cancer-treatment related conditions**”.

Regular screening procedures for some conditions had stopped and the delays had made life much harder with an impact on overall health, particularly mental health. Most frequently mentioned postponed appointments were physiotherapy, audiology, eye condition services, urology, rheumatology, chiropody, cataract surgery, hernia surgery, eye and dental services. One respondent wrote of “**waiting months**” for some required injections and physio.

**“Difficulty in walking causing depression and anxiety.”**

**“The stress of the inefficient and inconvenient system had a negative effect on my overall health mentally and financially.”**

Some of the patients themselves turned down offered appointments because they did not want to go to surgeries or hospitals because of the risks of Covid.

- 1 person had **cancelled all** appointments personally due to the pandemic
- 9 had **cancelled some** appointments
- 6 **rearranged or delayed** appointments
- 2 people would have had to travel on public transport and preferred not to do that during lockdowns.
- 2 carers at the Coffee Morning said that they **cancelled some** of their appointments due to the pandemic

An air of resignation emerged in responses such as:

**“I felt that my surgery was overwhelmed by covid and that had to take priority.”**

**“I can understand that the system is under strain and the medical issue is not classified as ‘urgent’ but the wait times are so much longer.”**

It was not just medical services that suffered from delays.

- × Another respondent had found it hard to access support and help with breastfeeding her new baby and had turned to the local voluntary and independent sectors. She felt that the lack of availability of Wandsworth’s statutory services **“put babies and their families at risk.”**
- × Two respondents had experienced delays in the services of Talk Wandsworth which upset them deeply. One of these had wanted the bereavement services and commented **“Corona has been devastating experience for all family.”**

### GP Services

Much of the comments on GP services was about the way in which these services were accessed, but the quality of the service was also referred to. Even though there was little face-to-face contact, respondents found their experience with the GP surgery, either with doctors or nurses, to be suited to their needs with some saying their experience was **“brilliant”** and **“fantastic”**.

- ✓ **“I needed a GP appt urgently.....easy to arrange.”**
- ✓ **“Upper Tooting surgery were excellent.”**
- ✓ **“I have to have regular blood tests - my GP surgery has been accommodating.”**

**Difficulties in getting GP appointments** was the most common complaint, and one respondent, in need of a GP, wondered if **“the NHS is really ‘open for business’ like they say they are.”** In addition, one respondent, who had a face-to-face appointment with the GP, found that physical access into the surgery was very stressful:

- × **“....you have to ring a bell and wait in the street with several other people then have conversations in the doorway with receptionist.....it was actually quite hard to get into the building and in my opinion the precautions were excessive now.”**

Some people shared more about their experiences with GPs at a later stage of our Covid-19 survey. They commented that they sometimes felt that the GP was not paying adequate attention to their care, or that it was extremely difficult to book appointments.

**“I feel home carers who normally do not get external help have been totally overlooked by GP etc during the pandemic.”**

**“Some GPs are more proactive and caring than others. It depends on which one you’re given. The closure of attending GP surgery, while understandable, has not been managed well in my opinion.”**

**“Some NHS GPs don’t book appointments if not on-the-day appointments. Some people’s lives may be in danger as not everybody can book appointments for the same day and these appointments run out so quickly. Some people cannot book appointments on the expected time due to professional commitments and/or other responsibilities. I spent weeks trying to book one; even when manifesting to be feeling unwell for a long time.”**

Another respondent could not understand why it had been possible to go to hospital for an X-ray and to the GP surgery for a blood test and a Covid vaccination but not be able to see the GP.

Others, however, did not blame the health service and variously blamed the pandemic, politicians, or their own reluctance to use the service in these times.

#### Phone calls, online and video consultations replacing face-to-face appointments

A majority of respondents had experienced telephone and online consultations with various health professionals. For some, this change to accessing healthcare had worked well and was said to have improved some people’s overall health, while it had made others’ experience of the pandemic very difficult.

- × **“Weirdly I had an asthma check by telephone.”**
- × **“Getting to see a GP in person has been impossible. Physiotherapy over a telephone is not the same as being seen in person. How can they gauge your range of movement without seeing you, especially if you do not have access to, or are uncomfortable with, video calls.”**
- ✓ **“Shorter wait times! I love telephone consultations as well - saves time not having to go to the GP.”**

One respondent pointed out that the remote appointment system worked when they were working from home but would have been difficult if working in an open plan office with no idea of the timing of the call.

Telephone calls to surgeries were more time consuming for those who reported difficulties. There was a feeling that health care support was lacking.

**“Calling my GP to get a telephone appointment takes far too long. Then I’m told they don’t have any appointments and I should call back later.”**

**“The GP’s office now only answers the phone during certain hours, making it even more difficult to reach anyone.”**

One online facility that was praised was ordering repeat prescriptions. This service seemed to be a great success.

- ✓ **“Having switched to using online pharmacy for regular prescriptions and phone consultation with GP practice to enable this which is much preferred - doesn’t waste everyone’s time going to the surgery.”**

There were also instances of GPs or consultants offering telephone appointments but of them being refused by the patients concerned who did not find that satisfactory. This had caused delays in treatment.

These responses reflect similar attitudes towards this new way of conducting appointments to ones in our recent report on [‘Wandsworth experiences of digital and telephone health and care appointments’](#), which found that:

- ✓ Some people praised and preferred telephone appointments, particularly for routine checks. Common reasons included needing less time to go to the surgery and not having to wait in the waiting room and for those who may have difficulty leaving home.
- ✗ While other people had negative experiences of digital and telephone appointments. They most often referenced long waiting times to speak to healthcare personnel, unhelpful first points of contact, rushed calls and feeling that they did not provide the same level of care as face-to-face appointments.

### Changes in healthcare and wellbeing

We also asked our respondents about whether they have experienced any improvements to their healthcare and if this had an impact on their overall health. The picture was again very mixed and many of the answers reflected the issues of the previous question.

- **Fourteen** respondents simply responded not applicable.
- **Thirty-eight** respondents said “No”, “None” or “No change” with no further comment.

Of those who commented, many mentioned **remote appointments** either as an improvement or a worsening of their health care, and **delayed appointments** with GPs or hospitals as a reason for their deteriorating physical and mental health.

### Outdoors and Exercise

Greater opportunity for exercise was given as a reason for improvement in overall health. This was not linked to improvements in the healthcare system but to people using their own initiative. Parks and the commons in the borough had enabled respondents to increase exercise e.g.

- **“From May to November I walked every day on the Common and that helped my general fitness as well as my state of mind.”** Bad weather over the winter had stopped this exercise but the respondent intended to take it up again when the weather improved.

On the other hand, we received comments from people whose access to physical exercise and outdoor spaces became more limited. Without public sports facilities, such as tennis courts and the gym, being open, many people were not able to exercise enough, which in turn affected both their physical and mental health. Similarly, short days, lack of time spent outdoors, and bad weather negatively affected people, and they particularly struggled during winter.

- ✗ **“really hard to get enough exercise with green space very crowded and sometimes impassable.”**
- ✗ **“Lack of contact with ... exercise facilities - pools. I've lost much strength.”**
- ✗ **“Not being allowed to go out as I need help to be mobile”**

Other ways that people’s wellbeing has changed during the pandemic included:

- **Having more time** with family which had improved **“general wellbeing”**.
- **Asthma:** One respondent found that her asthma had improved with the fall of levels of pollution, but another found that her asthma had worsened as people used their cars more trying to avoid using public transport.

- **Better general health:** One respondent noted a better health than before the pandemic having been able to receive treatment. Two felt that they had benefitted from there being fewer winter colds and other viruses around. One felt reassured by the relatively rapid roll-out of the Covid vaccine in the local community.
- **Deteriorating mental health:** people also said that they experienced mental health issues to different extent, many of which stemmed from the loneliness and isolation experienced during the pandemic. This matter is covered in more detail in the '*Mental Health*' section of this report.

We also asked **Generate members attending the workshop** in May 2021 about what effect the lockdown had on their physical health and wellbeing.

- People agreed that it was difficult to get used to a **change of structure and daily routine:** one member shared how they have struggled not having their normal routine, which was disrupted by the lockdown.
- Another member shared how she lost close family and friends to Covid-19 which also made it an incredibly difficult period for her and her family. Whilst she was offered a little support through the **grievance** counselling, she felt that more could have been done.
- Another member added that lockdown was difficult as there were many **mixed messages surrounding the rules**, for example to wear a mask or not wear a mask. She also said that there was limited information surrounding how to apply for an **exemption badge**, for those who are unable to wear a mask. All these factors added more stress and made lockdown even more difficult.

### Information and support from healthcare services about whom to contact for further advice and support

Respondents could select more than one answer option about whether they had received enough information and advice support:

- 71 people felt they have **received enough information and support** from healthcare services during the pandemic about whom to contact for further advice and support
- 43 people felt they had **to some extent**
- 19 people felt they **have not received enough information and support** from healthcare services during the pandemic about whom to contact for further advice and support
- 9 people were **unsure**.

At the Carers Coffee Morning:

- 7 carers answered '**Yes, to some extent**'
- 1 carer answered '**Yes**'
- 3 carers answered '**No**'

For those who made a comment for this question, the main sources of information mentioned were:

- **GP practices** were particularly praised. A number of practices have been sending regular texts to patients giving them information, particularly for weekend services and who to

contact if needed. The MyGP app was also mentioned. Two respondents used the word “**excellent**” to describe the information service and one said that it was “**reassuring**”.

- A few respondents mentioned gaining useful information from the **NHS 111** and specific **hospitals** as well.
- **Wandsworth Borough Council**: One respondent said that “**best information from LB Wandsworth and online.**”
- **Wandsworth Community Transport** were considered by another respondent to “**have been amazing.**”
- One respondent, an employee of an unnamed local authority, mostly got information from that employer rather than the NHS.
- **Own research, including the Internet and the Government web site**: Those who had found out information by their own research, using the internet, were satisfied with what they found.

**Not everyone was pleased with the amount of information and support given.** One of the respondents relying on internet searches felt that this was the only way to find information. Another felt that “**Communication about what services were provided were not always clear.**”

## Social care

- 2 people said they or the person they completed the survey on behalf of **received social care or support paid for via Wandsworth Council** to carry out daily activities
- 6 people **received social care or support which was self-funded**, and
- 141 respondents **did not receive social care or support**

Nine people wrote a comment on **what has worked well and/or if they have experienced changes to the social care for the better**:

- 2 of those were positive, one saying that social services had worked well and the other describing social services and the carer as “**fantastic**”.
- One respondent found services were “**about the same but with expected delays**” with another also saying that social care was about the same but that there were different needs now.
- One respondent said that friends had been supportive.
- One respondent had received care after a short period in hospital with no comment on whether this had worked well.
- 3 respondents had not found care had worked well.  
“**No, it has been an awful service we have been left with no respite for a year. No support from social services.**”
- Another respondent said that “**Social care by regular allocated staff good, but very little communications from management and have had to fight for end-of-life care plan still not in place**”

When asked about **whether anything has been more difficult than usual in getting social care support**:

- 3 respondents had not found anything more difficult.
- One more found that things took more time.
- One respondent commented that it took months to make contact with a social worker.
- One said how supportive friends had been in the absence of any “**government backed social support**”.

- One said that the service was about the same but did not “always know if there is support available for different needs that each individual has!”
- One simply said “All of it is difficult.”

## Mental Health

The next section of our survey aimed to explore how people’s mental health and wellbeing were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

A total of **149** people answered our question about how much the coronavirus pandemic affected their mental health and wellbeing, or the mental health and wellbeing of the person they were completing the survey on behalf of. **Twenty** said that the pandemic had **no impact** at all on their mental health and wellbeing, while only **one** person reported a **positive impact**.

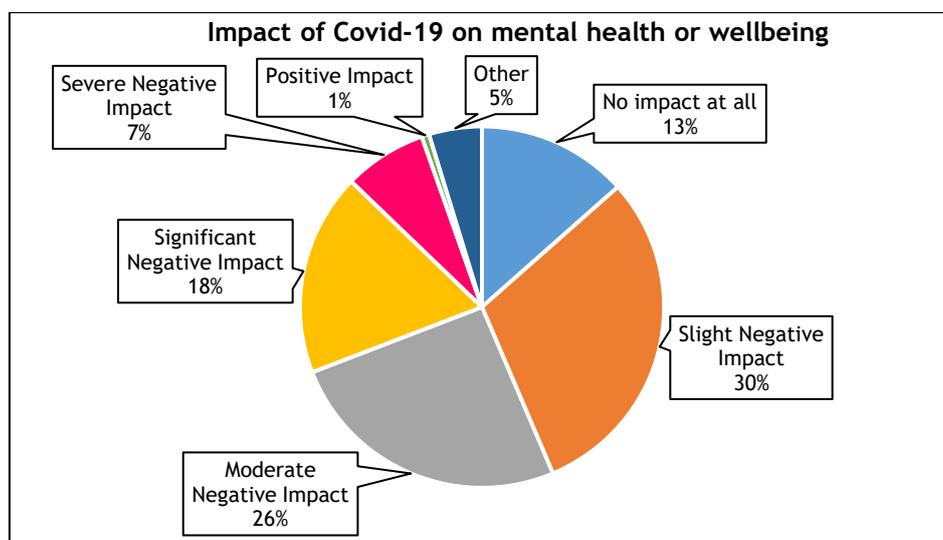
**Most of those who responded (81%) were affected negatively by the COVID-19 pandemic to varying extent. More than half of respondents said that the pandemic had a slight or moderate negative impact on their mental health and wellbeing, and 25% said that this impact was significantly or severely negative.**

Carers who attended the **Coffee Morning** reported similar effects:

- 3 carers answered ‘Severe negative impact’
- 3 carers answered ‘Significant negative impact’
- 2 carer answered ‘Slight negative impact’
- 2 carers answered ‘Moderate negative impact’
- 1 carer answered ‘No impact at all’

Out of the seven people who replied ‘Other’ to this question:

- 3 people reported that they thought that the pandemic had a **mixture of positive and negative impacts** on their mental health or wellbeing
- 2 people found **social isolation** difficult to deal with
- **one** said that the **lack of support** had a severe negative effect on families.
- On the other hand, **one** person said that having time off due to being furloughed during the pandemic allowed them to **rest and better manage their chronic condition**.



## What has affected your mental health or wellbeing the most during the pandemic.

When asked about what has affected people's mental health and wellbeing the most during the pandemic, key themes were:

### Lack of social contact (64 responses)

Nearly half of the 133 people who responded to this question commented that the lack of social contact during the pandemic has severely affected their mental health and wellbeing.

**Friends and family** have been a big source of support to our respondents during the pandemic; 35 people reported that not being able to physically see their loved ones had a negative effect on their wellbeing. Often people said they lived in different cities or countries from people they knew and were unable to meet up due to the travel restrictions. Similarly, many people who answered this question said that they live alone and felt **lonely** and **isolated** during this period.

**"Feeling stuck while family are abroad. Not being able to get to them if needed."**

**"Live alone: isolation really debilitating. Saw neighbours and friends in cold front gardens but so missed regular human contact."**

Some people missed the social aspect of **working on-site/in the office**, while others missed being around people in general, commuting and meeting new people.

**"Lack of meeting people, shaking hands, conversation, no travelling"**

### Covid-19 virus (24 responses)

Some people said that it was the threat of catching the virus and decision makers' handling of the pandemic that has affected their mental health and/or wellbeing negatively.

People had a difficult time coping with the **changes and uncertainties** that the pandemic brought about and felt that they had no control over their lives. Many were scared that they or people they know would **catch Covid**, which often stopped them from leaving their homes or caused anxiety when they had no choice but to go out. They were also worried about the consequences of other people **disregarding lockdown restrictions**.

**"... However anxiety about health of my parents has been quite high and I am still very anxious about going out and mixing with people - I am still living a 'lockdown' life and have been since early March 2020; working from home 100%, only essential shopping in person, at home exercise, no socialising in person"**

Some of our respondents thought that **"the government response was too late at almost every stage"**, **"More control of numbers would have been better"** and that they received **"Inadequate support from council and government, DWP"** and other governing bodies. People also felt that they were **"not honest with public"** and that COVID-related messaging was **"mixed, unclear"** or exaggerated at times.

### Lockdown restrictions (41 responses)

On the other hand, about a third of people who responded to this question said that the pandemic-related restrictions had more of a negative impact on their mental health than the pandemic itself.

**"Lockdown has had a catastrophic effect on the health of our nation. Closure of schools and tennis courts etc has been a catastrophic mistake. Telling old people to isolate is pure wickedness."**

**“Almost all my activities have ceased (voluntary work, group meetings, exercise in pool, visits to galleries etc). I feel that I had lost my identity & depression worsened.”**

People felt that the lockdown restricted their usual **freedoms** and found the **boredom** and **repetitiveness** of having to stay at home difficult to cope with. They missed pursuing various **leisure activities**, such as going to restaurants, the cinema or museums and travelling.

**“Am a widow and used to rely on friends' company and culture, e.g. art galleries, museums, to get through life”**

**“Loneliness, not being able to meet friends, boredom, feeling tired of the routine, being cooped up inside”**

#### Concerns about own health or the wellbeing of loved ones (40 responses)

Almost half of people with health concerns said that their existing **mental health** difficulties, such as depression and anxiety, worsened during the pandemic or that they **started experiencing sleeping difficulties, general feelings of stress and anxiety, often felt low, depressed and tearful or found it hard to relax.**

**“Depression much worse tried getting help from GP prescribed antidepressants I could not take for medical reasons & told me to ring back in 2 wks. I didn't bother with either”**

A similar amount of people's mental health and wellbeing was negatively impacted by **physical health issues**. Some were concerned about continuing to receive care for chronic health problems, while others worried about whether they would receive care should they fall ill. One person said that catching Covid-19 was what had the biggest negative impact on their health.

**“I have had sleepless nights worrying about my health”**

Many people said, however, that they did not receive enough support for their health concerns, as there were **delays in treatments and surgeries and long waiting times to GP or hospital appointments**. Reduced services also meant that people were not able to access physiotherapy or routine checks in person. **The negative effect that these delays have had on people's overall wellbeing** has been discussed in detail above in the '*Accessing healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic*' section of this report, however it is apparent that they **worsened people's mental health as well and caused further anxieties about their and their loved ones' health.**

**“As my experience attempting to get a mammogram and being taken seriously by my GP illustrates, I have felt the health service to be unreliable. This lack of support or lack of confidence in the service is, in many ways, more stressful than the actual medical condition.”**

**“Difficulty in walking causing depression and anxiety.”**

#### Caring responsibilities (11 responses)

People also commented that home-schooling and **looking after their children** while working from home has had a negative impact on their wellbeing.

**“restrictions involved with living with son and two young children under lockdown and zoom primary schooling”**

Similarly, individuals who have been **taking care of family members** felt that they were left with little to no support from health and social care services, which in turn has caused a great deal of stress.

**“As an unpaid carer for my disabled daughter I feel that we have been left to cope on our own for a year without any support”**

**“Severe negative impact on many families with new babies as they were left isolated at home, with little or no in person checks on baby’s health, weight gain, or parents’ mental wellbeing. Lack of support to resolve breastfeeding difficulties has been shown to increase the risk of postnatal depression.”**

Other causes of reduced mental health and wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic included the **breakdown of relationships, difficult work environments, computer-related issues, not being able to understand what is happening due to a learning disability and the COVID-related death of loved ones and acquaintances.**

#### Positives, coping mechanisms

Lastly, although only a couple of people said that the pandemic had an overall positive impact on their mental health and/or wellbeing, some of our respondents mentioned a few things that helped them cope during the pandemic and keep their mental health at bay.

People mentioned **saving time on commute** and being able to spend that **extra time** with their family as one of the main positive impacts that Covid-related restrictions had on their wellbeing. Another person mentioned that being furloughed actually provided them with the time needed to **rest and manage a chronic illness**. Having access to **outdoor** spaces and being able to exercise outdoors also had a positive influence on wellbeing.

**“It’s been great having an allotment nearby - has enabled me to get out to a semiprivate but sociable space and enjoy growing veg and fruit, and eating them. Have also enjoyed cycling and walking to explore the area or just get around - haven’t used public transport at all over the last year, so have relied on my bicycle for journeys over a mile.”**

In order to reduce the negative impact the pandemic would have had on their wellbeing, people **kept in touch with their loved ones online or over the phone, exercised and set daily goals** to attain a sense of purpose. Some also found putting things into **perspective** helpful in lifting their mood.

**“...I often felt sad, but was able to remind myself that at least I had not caught the virus, when so many others had. This bucked me up when I felt low.”**

#### **Have you needed to access mental health and/or wellbeing support?**

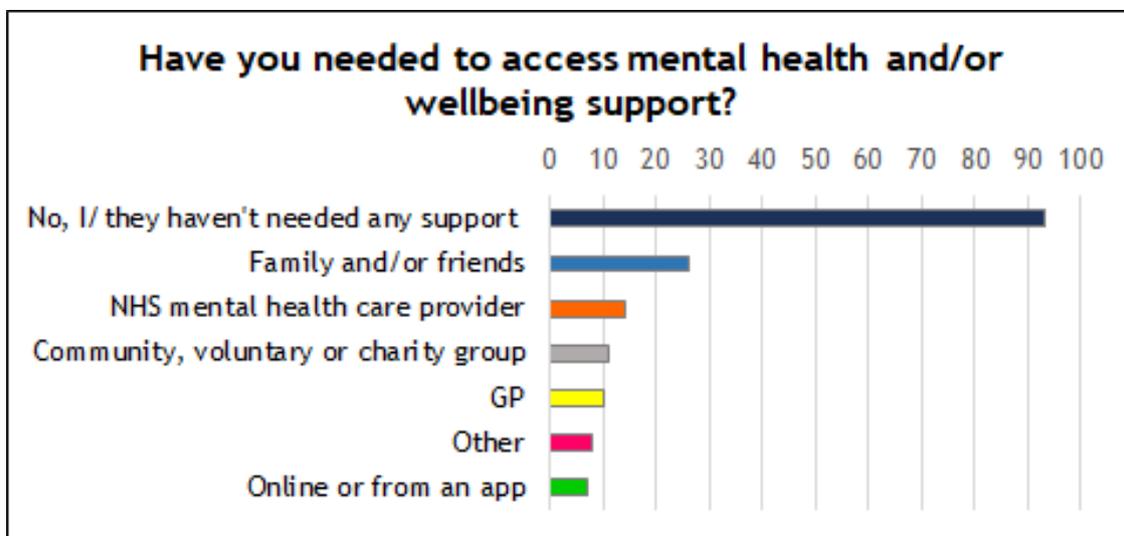
Overall, **145** people answered our question about whether they or the person they completed the survey on behalf of needed to access mental health and/or wellbeing support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most people (**93**) reported that they **did not need** any.

The majority of people who said they needed support turned to their **family and/or friends (26 in total)**, twice as many as those who accessed other forms of support. **Fourteen** people accessed support from an **NHS mental health care provider**, **11** people received support from a **community, voluntary or charity organisation**, while **10** approached their **GP** and **seven** sought support **online or through an app**.

Out of the **eight** people who accessed **other forms** of mental health and/or wellbeing support not listed above, **four** did so from a **therapist and/or four from a private service**.

**“Tried talk Wandsworth but was not able to offer any 1-1 managed to get them through my company”**

One person said that they **did not know where to seek help** while another **decided not to take on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** offered by the NHS as they believed it would not have helped alleviate their stress, which derived from not being able to get a diagnosis for a physical health issue.



### Has anything been more difficult about trying to get wellbeing/mental health support?

**Eighty-eight** people answered our question about whether they found anything more difficult about trying to get mental health and/or wellbeing support. **Sixty-four** people said ‘No’ to this question, and **26** people said that they found getting support **more difficult** during the pandemic.

We also asked people to reflect on the difficulties they had.

Sixteen people commented on these difficulties being due to the **reduced accessibility and availability** of the support they needed; half of them had issues with not being able to receive support face-to-face as they found telephone and Zoom appointments hard to manage or less personal, or they could not meet up with their main source of support, their friends and family, in person. The limited capacity of counselling sessions and long waiting lists to access mental-health services also caused difficulties for people.

**“My friends who help also have other caring responsibilities and as a result they’re being overloaded”**

**“Waiting over 2 years for a me[n]tal health assessment”**

**“... it has been all via telephone and I find it difficult to communicate that way as it’s less personal.”**

One respondent found that telephone support for mental health problems was **“very poor”** as it was limited to 20 minutes every two weeks, while another trying to arrange therapy with Talk Wandsworth found that a missed telephone call meant that access to the service was cancelled, and a re-application would then be required.

Three people **did not try to access support or did not know where to get it from** and two further people said that they found reaching out **“too overwhelming”** or were **“not good at reaching out and asking for help”**.

Other reasons for finding it more difficult to seek mental health and/or wellbeing support included people finding others to be **dismissive and disregarding towards their problems** and

thinking that GPs may be more overwhelmed emotionally than they were. One person said that **“too many changes each day can bring a different problem”**, while another found it difficult to get help as the person they were living with was the one impacting their mental health.

We also received comments about the **positive experiences** people had when accessing mental health and/or wellbeing support. One person said that having **established contacts** in place before the pandemic was helpful, while another said that the **online support they received through their private insurance** went smoothly. A further respondent had received good help from ‘Wandsworth Mental Health’ **“but it was the American provider that helped a lot.”**

When we asked carers attending the **Coffee Morning** the same question:

- 6 carers answered ‘Yes’
- 4 carers answered ‘No’
- 3 carers answered ‘n/a’

### Information and advice

**Nine** out of 150 people responded to this question citing additional communication needs. These needs included **British Sign Language, special formats, Easy Read information, and other languages**. 2 respondents specified that their additional **communication needs centred around a learning disability**, and a need for **“social story printed material”** such as **Makaton**. Another respondent specified that their communication need did not involve an impairment, but rather a need for more **“clear and consistent information from the government”** regarding COVID-19 related rules.

### Have you been able to find information and advice in the format(s) or language(s) needed?

Out of the **24** respondents to this question, the majority (**18 people**) told us that they were able to find information and advice in the format(s) or language(s) they needed. The remaining respondents said they were not able to find the information, with one respondent commenting that **they faced difficulties in finding information due to partial sight problems and deafness**.

### Have you managed to find information and advice you need in a clearly communicated way?

Out of **134** people, **114** people told us that they were able to find information and advice in a **clearly communicated way**. However, the other **20** people told us that they were **not able** to do this.

When we asked people what they needed information on that they were not able to find, they primarily elaborated on the **unreliable quality of information** that was available. Respondents told us that information was often inconsistent or lacking, while one other respondent commented that a lack of information about the COVID-19 vaccine **“causes anxiety”**. The inconsistency of information also caused people to be confused on what **COVID-19 rules** applied to them or not.

**“We don’t get enough information about when we will get the vaccine through our GP either 1st or 2nd jab. this causes anxiety.”**

**“Govt material far too complex and many people ignored the detail and guessed what was allowed”**

**“Public health info had been generally pretty poor/inconsistent/confusing across the board re Covid.”**

**“I just wanted generic information - I find the .gov.uk website extremely unwieldy to use.”**

Members attending the Generate workshop were also asked if they found information on Covid-19 that was useful. One member shared how he found most of the information through **Generate’s services**, in particular through **Social Opportunity activities**. He continued that he found it **“difficult to understand some of the things that people say”**. **Four** Generate members said **no**; **they did not believe they received enough information**. Another added that there was **not enough focus on people with learning disabilities** during Covid-19. They felt that until the nation-wide campaigns about prioritising the vaccine, there was nothing specific mentioned about people with learning disabilities even though they are more at risk.

### **Where have you found useful, up-to-date information?**

A total of **135** people answered this question with most people getting their information from **government and NHS websites**. When we asked people to specify the places where they found their information, out of 45 people who chose to elaborate:

- **11** people told us they found information through **Wandsworth Council** communications such as email newsletter and website
- **8** people pointed to **online sources** included the BBC, YouTube, WHO, Independent, and the Guardian
- **10** people cited **print media sources** included local council flyers and leaflets, and newspapers such as the Times
- **2** respondents also commented that they found information on the **ZOE COVID Study app** which monitors COVID infection and vaccination rates in the UK

Carers attending the Coffee Morning listed the **Government website** and **local healthcare services** (3); **local government** (3); **social media** (2); the **NHS website** (1) and other unnamed resources (4).

### **In 2021, what would you like to have more information about?**

**Ninety-three** people answered this question to tell us about what they would like to have more information about in 2021.

#### Government transparency during and after the Pandemic (9 comments)

**Two** people were interested in having more information on **financial transparency** of the government such as the financial interests of the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) as well as the funding shares of taxes that were being used for social care and mental health programmes.

**“What provision is being made for adult social care and for mental health. We pay a contribution for social care in our council tax and I would like to know how that money is being spent.”**

Another **four** people wanted more **transparency and clarity of information** coming out of the government. They wanted to know what state-supported programmes were available, to have more clear information, and to know how scientific evidence was being vetted.

**“Scientific evidence to support the restrictions that are in place, especially to support lockdowns and the use of masks in schools all day. I cannot bare the patronising**

**government adverts on the radio, infantilising the population. Most people are able and happy to make their own risk assessments with the correct information”**

**“public enquiry by independent Scientists, Professors etc about BAME, Government handling of Corona”**

#### Resuming Access to Services (17 comments)

Respondents were curious about **how, when, and for who services could be accessed**. Two people wanted more information on how the health system would be able to catch up with missed appointments and more transparency and clarity on information on who would be able to access and receive care in the near future.

**“Who the services are being provided too and how to access them. I was self-referred to talk Wandsworth and needed to talk to a therapist but was only sent to attend workshops. If there were any criteria, it should be clearly stated”**

**“The priority list for the treatment of those on the waiting list backlogs and how those priorities have been reached. Those treatments at the bottom of the priority list (which apparently include hip and knee replacements) should be properly publicised so that those with no chance of treatment in the foreseeable future can plan in the full knowledge of their situation. Obfuscation of the facts is completely unacceptable.”**

Six people commented on the way they would like to **access services in the future**. Responses reflected people’s mixed views on switching to remote appointments. While some mentioned a desire to go back to “normal” and return to in-person appointments, others wished to continue having the availability of remote appointments due to their convenience.

One person commented that they would like to see **“Improving access to services (GP, hospital) through better use of technology”**.

Two people commented that they would like more information on **out of hours services**.

**“Out of hours contact as can be very difficult during those hours.”**

#### The Ongoing Pandemic

**Fifteen** people said that they would like more information regarding the ongoing pandemic, this includes vaccine information and updates regarding the state of COVID-19.

**Eight** people told us that they wanted information relating to **vaccines**. This included how the vaccines worked in the body, the vaccines’ effectiveness against new COVID-19 strains, and potential boosters.

**“To keep updated on the vaccine/booster situation and any other preventative measures that should be taken.”**

**One** person also told us that they would like more information on how to deal with **long COVID**, a phrase used to describe the symptoms that linger after a recovery from a COVID-19 infection.

**“How to deal with long covid. I'm still physically suffering after a year.”**

**Three** people expressed a need for information on the **COVID-19 situation as it evolves** further. Two of those people were concerned with current information regarding new infection hotspots, and statistics for specific areas, while the other wanted information on how to prepare for any future pandemics.

## Coming out of Lockdown

Eleven people told us that they would like to see more information related to coming out of lockdown and looking toward the future. They expressed that they wanted clearer information on **rules**, both so that they could know when they could resume normal life and so they could be aware of any new regulations in order to avoid a further lockdown situation.

**“Clear communication about the relaxation of lockdown and the continuing health precautions to be followed”**

## More Variety of Information

Ten people responded with comments on specific subject areas that they would like to see more information on. These areas included **women’s health, nutrition advice, prevention medicine, safe computer usage** for vulnerable users, and **breastfeeding**.

## **How support organisations in the system worked together**

A hundred and twenty-seven people answered this question, with the majority (93 people) saying that they felt the **services providing their care worked and communicated together well** at varying level. In contrast, the remainder of respondents felt that the services providing their care worked and communicated together poorly.

We asked respondents to give us further details on their view of how **well** different services were able to work and communicate together. For those who were satisfied with how different services worked together, communication between different health professionals was key.

**“GP, Hospital and private consultant - all communicated well across services and to myself”**

**“Efficient links between GP, hospital, emergency doctor.”**

**“A few hiccups but got there in the end.”**

For those who viewed the connections between services as **poor**, they told us that there was little communication between these services and that they would benefit from **more cross-communication** so that all involved parties are kept up-to date.

**“I think direct communication is lacking at various levels where all relevant parties are kept updated. I think hospitals & GP practice should collaborate more closely.”**

**“..., individual staff members from St George’s and Wandsworth HV service, trained local volunteers and local independent practitioners, all had to seek out updates on Breastfeeding services available- no support or leadership from the council on collaboration or funding joined up digital services etc”**

**“Throughout my NHS experience there was a distinct impression that the system was broken. One element had no idea or link to the other. I received so many letters that were unnecessary, a complete waste of resources! Improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the NHS systems seems urgent.”**

One person commented on **how healthcare professionals could be communicated with**, saying that GPs could only be reached by phone, while only nurses were available for in-person contact.

**“I wondered where the GPs were. We could only speak to them on the telephone. Whereas the practice nurses were in the front line of care.”**

One person also mentioned that **“All NHS Comms are poor, (but the quality of care is high)”**.

Carers attending the **Coffee Morning** session were also asked about this matter as well:

- 5 carers answered ‘Adequately’
- 3 carers answered ‘Well’
- 3 carers answered ‘Poorly’

And finally

### Anything else people wanted to say about healthcare or social care experience?

Sixty people answered this question.

#### Feeling Let Down by Elements of the Healthcare System/Government

Twenty-five people commented feeling let down by various elements of the healthcare system or government. Most often these respondents mentioned a lack of support from services that would usually help them. This lack of support was felt from many corners, from GP surgeries to government assistance for care homes.

Comments referring to **lack of support from GPs** echoed those outlined in the “*Accessing healthcare during the COVID-19 pandemic*” section above in terms of struggling to book appointments or not receiving adequate attention.

Other respondents were dissatisfied and felt that there was a **lack of support from the NHS and government** for the services that they needed. They commented that more resources and better prioritisation of care services would have benefitted them.

“During the pandemic my elderly mother was in a care home. The home itself were amazing but I felt they were less supported by Government/NHS and at the beginning of the pandemic and subsequently had a lot of unnecessary deaths occur. In addition, many of their staff have not agreed to take the vaccine and this is an issue for transmission to residents.”

“It has been exhausting having my daughter home for nearly a year with hardly any support. The services that are supposed to support us have disappeared.”

“I think in general terms I'd feel more supported if local Public Health was better resourced, to enable more intensive/quicker Covid19 contact tracing and isolation. That's not the fault of Public Health or the NHS, but very much a reflection of govt. priorities!”

#### Satisfaction with Services

Nine people commented that they were satisfied with their healthcare or social care experience. This ranged from thinking the **services were working just as they did before COVID-19**, to mentioning how the services were able to **respond and adapt to the pandemic in a positive way**.

“I just want to say how good our Doctors have been and how good the hospital staff have been dealing with our appointments during this pandemic.”

“Generally, it has felt supportive”

“One of the most wonderful proactive services in Wandsworth is Move More Wandsworth which supports those living with cancer in the borough to be more active. They rose to the challenge of the pandemic to use online platforms, and when permitted, to use the Enable-operated outside spaces to keep in touch with cancer patients especially those isolated and / or shielding. They adapted well and quickly.

**Bravo Enable! (In contrast to Places Leisure, who seemed much more content to shrug and shut up shop). Move More has been a lifeline.”**

### Communication Problems

**Eight** people mentioned communication problems as a barrier to accessing care. Some of these people thought that this problem stemmed from **scattered or understaffed organisations**, or different services not having **direct communications** with each other leading to confusion.

**“Services are not communicating properly due to people who are working from home or shortage of staff”**

### Wish to Move Away from Remote Healthcare

In line with previous responses, there were **13** people who commented that they hoped that appointments would move away from the telephone and toward **in-person interactions** again.

### **Top priorities**

We asked people about their top priorities for the next year; **144** people answered this question and were able to leave comments on **three issues** they thought were most important.

There was a significant variety of comments about what was important to people, many of which were reflective of the main difficulties they reported to have experienced during the pandemic, such as accessing appropriate care, mental health, loneliness, or lack of information. Some themes we can draw on about health and social care include:

#### Access to services was mentioned the most (52 times)

People wishing for **better access to services**, related to a variety of services, **but mostly GP services** (mentioned **26** of the 52 times).

**“Access to health services for people with severe mental health conditions. Have seen people fall through the gaps.”**

**”The ability to contact & make appointments (& out of hours) with GP online - this saves time for everyone”**

**“Good access to GP services (no delays) when required”**

Easier access to specialists, screening, quicker referrals or self-referral, integrated services and care were also mentioned throughout the comments.

There were **24** comments that mentioned concern about **long waiting lists**, **delays** or specifically the **backlog** in health and care appointments and treatment.

**“Improve the appalling administrative problems in the NHS - delayed and cancelled appointments, appointments scheduled with the wrong team or at the wrong time (after critical meds have runout, or before critical blood tests have been done!)”**

**“Clearing the backlog as this is a threat both to life and mental health”**

**“Waiting lists - I did have one hospital appointment. I went privately as I knew I would never get seen. They tried to invite me after my GP intervened, but they sent the appointment a day late so I could not go. They app system at St George’s tried to fit me in at 4am in about 2 years!”**

“Timely tests. When you are in pain and being given appointments for months and months away is not helpful, especially if it is by phone in the first instance as you then have to wait again for months to see or receive treatment”

“Contacting people who are waiting for treatment to make sure that are ok”

“Easier Access to see specialist”

“Immediate referrals - hospitals.”

21 people talked about the **use of telephone or digital technology compared with face-to-face appointments**. Many wanted more availability of face-to-face appointments (mentioned 13 times), a few felt telephone and digital means could be helpfully used. Again, many references to wanting face-to-face appointments referred to GPs.

“GPs to return to face to face appointments, and to enable easy booking of appointments e.g. online rather than having to sit on the phone for hours.”

“Access to health care via new ways ie Skype etc”

One person mentioned specifically their concern about “**Data safety with the fast emergence of new digital services**”, which is something people have stressed to us before as important when new technology is being used.

Mental Health was mentioned 30 times

Many comments related to the importance of **availability of support and access**. 16 people did not elaborate further than saying that ‘Mental Health’ was an important priority.

“**Make Mental Health services more available - it is hard to get some Gps to take mental health seriously & to get appropriate care in a timely way.**”

“**Access to health services for people with severe mental health conditions. Have seen people fall through the gaps.**”

“**More emergency counselling especially for young people who seem most at risk of suicide and self harming. I paid for help but the young people seem to have been left high and dry.**”

“**Arrange a safe place to talk with other people about the impact of covid.**”

Support for people with **dementia** and **young people** were mentioned by a few people.

Prevention initiatives to help people keep well was mentioned 28 times.

This included **exercise** programmes and **weight management** programmes.

“**People's physical health - a lot of people have been sitting around**”

“**Get back to swimming because pools have been closed I have lost so much of my mobility as only way I can exercise**”

“**Local Public Health doing more to help those with obesity problems and poor nutrition.**”

“**Getting back to Paul's Cancer Support Centre. To re-establish connections & exercise programme**”

“**Keep open wellbeing clinics**”

Other themes we could identify in the comments included:

- 17 comments mentioned either **isolation** or looking forward to **socialising** and seeing **family and friends**
- 12 comments mentioned wanting **better information about services and conditions**. Some of these comments related to information about the vaccine and Covid. Others were about services and their opening times.
- 11 comments talked about **keeping residents informed**, many talking about the virus and vaccines.
- 8 comments talked about the importance of the **vaccine roll-out**.
- 9 comments talked about **support for older residents** in the borough, including **care workers** supporting them at home and care homes. **Dementia** and **mental health** was mentioned by one respondent.
- 2 comments mentioned the importance of support for people with **Learning Difficulties**.
- Other comments included concern about **funding for services**, **community safety**, **enquiries into aspects of the pandemic**, reinstating a variety of **community-based support**, **financial hardship** and 5 comments talked about **social distancing** and ensuring measures were adhered to.

Carers at the Coffee Morning listed better access to **GP services**, looking at the effectiveness of **care coordination** and the need for a **centralised system/single point of access** for information as the main HWW priorities for 2021/22.

“Look at care coordinators, I find it very difficult to meet my care coordinator and there is no continuity (Springfield Hospital MH team).”

“Complexity of organisations doing different things, there is no one stop to get an answer. There needs to be a centralised system ma single point of access.”

### Anything people would do differently in future to keep safe from viruses and infectious diseases?

Overall 114 people answered this question.

- 61 people said ‘No’
- 53 said ‘Yes’

Fifty people elaborated on what they would do differently in the future to keep themselves and the community safe from infectious diseases and viruses and/or ways they thought health and social care services could support them in doing so.

#### Preventative and safety measures (29 responses)

More than half of people who added a comment thought that keeping up with some of the safety measures introduced in the UK due to the coronavirus pandemic would help prevent future outbreaks. Wearing **masks** in public, especially during cold and flu season, **handwashing** and **avoiding crowded places** (e.g., central London, public transport) were the most mentioned measures, while many people also thought that they will be more likely to stay on top of **vaccinations** in the future. Others were planning on making **lifestyle-changes** on an individual level, such as losing weight and starting to eat more healthily.

### Changes in health and social care support (15 responses)

Responses were mixed in terms of where individuals were hoping to receive support from with the above; some people seemed happy to act **independently**, while others hoped that the **government and health and social care services** will aid the public in keeping safe.

About third of our respondents thought that **health and social care services operating well** are key to the public's wellbeing. Similarly to the opinions expressed above some people would like to have more remote appointments, while others would prefer to get back to face-to-face appointments. Some respondents hoped for improved support with matters such as breastfeeding, cancer, losing weight and **"Printed social stories for those with additional language processing needs"**. Lastly, one respondent hoped to receive **"Quality Support for disabled families without charging them outrageous amounts of money from their benefits"**.

**"online/video/phone consultations as the 'norm' especially for routine appointments, check ups/repeat prescriptions. Avoiding having to go in person to appointments when not necessary. Screening questions for all patients ahead of appointments in person so they don't bring infections into clinical areas. Routine wearing of facemasks as the 'norm' in clinical situations but allowing reusable ones (specifying at least 3 layers)."**

**"To ensure that hospitals and ALL GP practises continue the extraordinary thoughtful , clean , helpful and efficient ways in which many of them , including my own, have operated"**

### More information about Covid (11 responses)

People again expressed their need for better public engagement and more information about the virus (e.g. **"Immediate information regarding new outbreaks of Covid"**), the vaccination programme, and information about how to keep safe in general. As it has been highlighted in previous sections of this report, people would like better communication from their GP services and doctors.

**"Spreading message at grass root level. Teach students & motivate them to spread message in their families. Health care staff can help."**

**"Expect mask wearing will be more of a thing - I have no problems with this. But advice on the practicalities of mask use would be quite good e.g. do I have to dispose of 'disposable' masks after every use, or can they be left outside to air for several days?"**

**"Vaccines will become important. These will need to be well publicised. My experience as volunteer rep etc has shown me that not everyone has access to the internet, You will have to get back to the old fashioned method of leaflets in doors."**

Lastly, some people were asking for **more general support for certain communities**, such as older people and people living on their own. These were often mentioned alongside calls for more human contact, ending lockdowns and getting back to normal.

**"Please don't fence me in: mental health depends on human contact and varieties of experience. Please fewer rules, e.g. only one outing a day. Trust us old persons to take a few risks, "because they're worth it".."**

**"when concerns are raised to Wandsworth action is taken and monitored and people who have no family more protected and spoken to."**

**“More support for those older members of the community. Everywhere is packed with young people whether gyms, parks outdoor spaces, public transport etc. Older people just have to muddle through this or restrict their activities/movements”**

### Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Most responses echoed the opinions voiced in previous sections of the report. People commented on the lack of access to various health and social care services, on their deteriorated mental health and the isolation felt during lockdown. The need for better communication from GP services and the negative impact of reduced health care services on people’s overall health was yet again emphasised.

Some respondents called for mask-wearing to become the norm to prevent infections and for more support for people of low income. They were hoping that Wandsworth Council and the health care services in the borough will actively encourage lifestyle changes and healthier choices, such as active travel and spending more time outdoors, by e.g., providing nutritional advice, increasing public facilities, and reducing air pollution.

Lastly, respondents praised the vaccine programme, healthcare workers, volunteers, and their church.

### Conclusions and Recommendations:

Thank you to everyone who took the time to share their experiences of accessing health and social care during the pandemic. Throughout the report we have included detailed information to shed light on the lived experiences people shared. However, below are key points for consideration by health and care organisations as we move through the pandemic.

**Availability of support and access was a key concern emerging from experiences and concerns about the future.** There continue to be people who report difficulty accessing services or a reluctance to seek support because they perceive services to be busy.

Consider providing transparent information about:

- waiting times to access services
- different ways people can book and re-book appointments and offer another contact if someone is having difficulties

Consider support for carers, people with learning disabilities and others who may find it more difficult to get an appointment due to their circumstances. It may be necessary to provide proactive contact or support from social prescribers or similar means.

Review/monitor accessibility of appointments:

- How many times/how long did it take someone to access a service.
- See our digital and telephone appointments [report](#) for recommendations on accessibility and choice of type of appointment. Many mentioned in both surveys that different types of appointments were needed, including face-to-face appointments.

Whilst waiting to begin services, there should be additional support in the interim such as alternative services and self-management services.

**Mental Health** was a second key theme throughout the survey. Most people reported an impact on their mental health and **a quarter said this was significant or severe.**

- Waiting lists and concerns about both mental health and physical health services were reported as having an impact on mental health.

- **Every service** should look for signs that people need support, and help them with information about coping and managing, and seeking more support if needed.
- Self-referral options information and support could enable people to manage.
- People who care for others reported that worries about caring for the mental and physical health of others had an impact on their mental health.
  - Every service should recognise carers and their mental health support needs (including those who do not recognise themselves as carers). The Make Every Contact Count carers module should be considered for staff training.
  - Additional mental health support for carers should be considered.

Other important themes:

- Signposting to prevention and wellbeing services/initiatives (physical and mental health)
- Information provision about measures being taken to prevent Covid infection and how to keep safe.