healthwatch Cheshire West

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# Public Views on Health and Care during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

## July 2020

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# Introduction

## What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch Cheshire, consisting of Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West, is an independent consumer champion for health and care across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester, forming part of the national network of local Healthwatch across England. Our role is to make sure that those who run health and care services understand and act on what really matters to local people.

Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West undertake continuous engagement activities with the public to hear about concerns and compliments regarding health and care services. The information we gather is then analysed so that we can identify and act upon trends and common themes by presenting our findings to decision makers in order to improve the services people use. We also share people's views locally with Healthwatch England who make sure that the government put people at the heart of care nationally.

## Asking people about their health and wellbeing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Since the beginning of May 2020, we have been asking Cheshire residents to complete a survey to tell us about their views and experiences during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic so we can understand what is working well and what could be improved, as well as considering people's mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic. We have been working in partnership with the communications teams at each Hospital and Community Trust, NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and Cheshire East Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council, who provide us with the latest updates from their organisations to ensure consistent communications across Cheshire.

As a part of this partnership working, the findings of this survey are reviewed regularly in order to provide up to date information to partners including the CCG, Hospital Trusts, Local Authorities, voluntary sector organisations, the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England. The survey is ongoing so that we can capture experiences as the situation progresses, with information continuously provided in a timely and useful manner to those people who make decisions on how services are delivered both nationally and locally.

The following is a report of the findings from the Healthwatch Cheshire Health and Wellbeing During Coronavirus survey. It is based upon the 1,121 responses up to Friday 3rd July 2020, of which 551 are from residents of Cheshire East and 571 are from people living in Cheshire West and Chester. The nature of the survey being made up of multiple questions means that across Cheshire we have close to 4,000 individual comments on health, care, mental health and wellbeing during this period. This particular report focuses on what people told us about their views and experiences of accessing health and care during this period, with a separate report being published regarding mental health and wellbeing.

We have chosen to produce a report based on responses up until the end of Friday 3rd July 2020 as the survey has since been adapted to continue to provide relevant information following the changes in Government guidance that took effect on Saturday 4th July 2020.

The survey is ongoing and we will continue to provide up to date information to partners and publish further reports on our websites. A reminder that you can access the survey at: https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/7W255V8

# Summary of Findings

## Information and advice

- The most common places people in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester have been accessing information about the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic have been through television, radio, newspaper and national organisation websites such as GOV.UK and the NHS. A significant number (over a third) also used local sources for information.
- The majority of respondents in both local authority areas have been able to access information regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the format they needed.

## Access to Healthcare

- Nearly half of all respondents across Cheshire (45.9%) have reported not feeling comfortable either making, travelling to, or attending appointments, or feel that they would be overburdening healthcare services if they did.
- The most common differences people experienced in accessing healthcare due to Coronavirus was people's GP appointments taking place over the telephone or by video call, increased waiting times for prescriptions, and being unable to find the over the counter medication required in shops and pharmacies.
- 85% of people in Cheshire East and 76% in Cheshire West and Chester who had tried to access their GP Practice rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5).
- Of those who had tried to access Hospital during this time, 88% rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5) in Cheshire East. This figure was 67% in Cheshire West and Chester, where 16% rated their experience as 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).
- There was praise for Pharmacies, with 84% in Cheshire East and 85% in Cheshire West and Chester rating their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5).
- Communication around changes of services due to COVID-19 was mixed according to our respondents, in some cases it was clear what changes were being made either due to signage, online information, or the service contacting individuals, but in other cases people reported no contact or unclear information.

## Access to Care

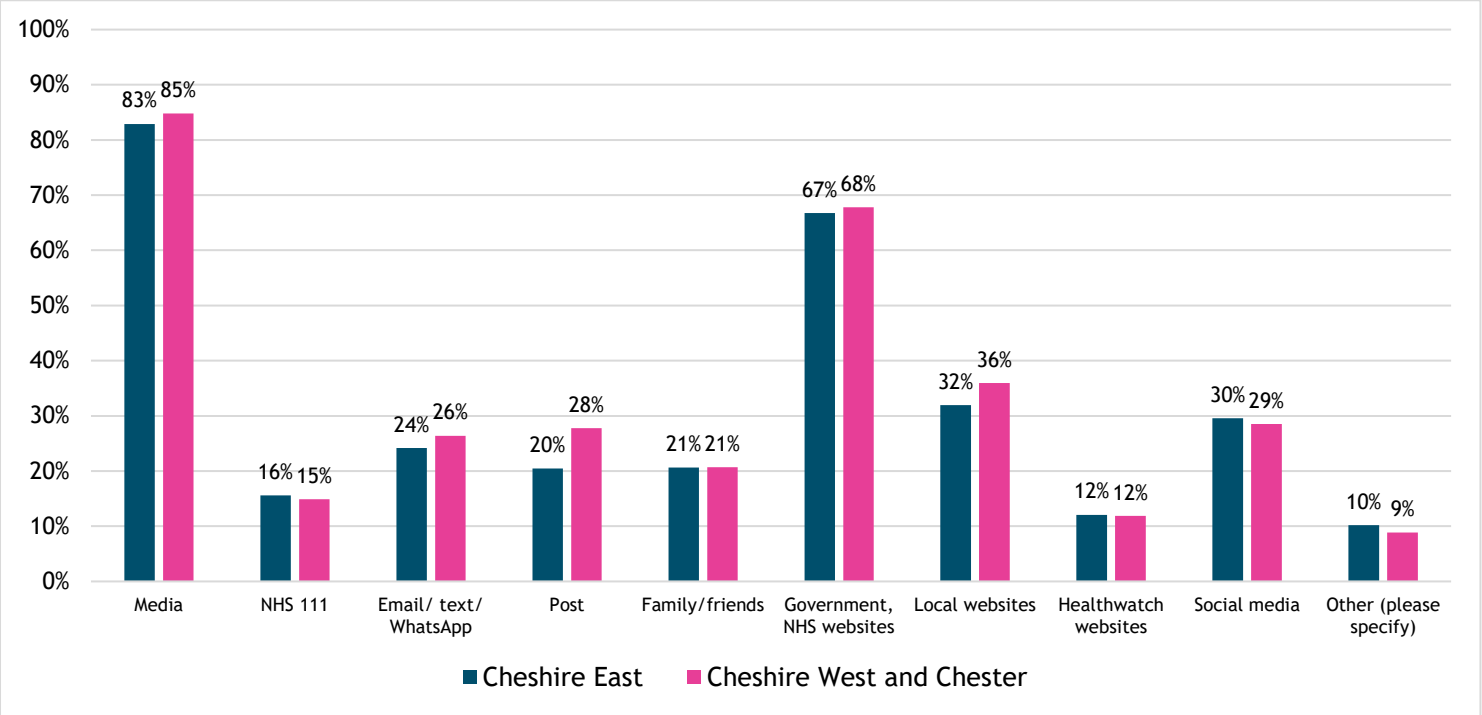
- Changes to Care services commented upon by respondents was mainly related to postponements or delays in implementation of care packages or assessment.
- Where care had been provided, people commonly described it as having been a 'good' or 'excellent' service.
- Across Cheshire, people told us about visits from Carers and Personal Assistants being stopped or reduced, leaving people with difficulties in shopping and cleaning and having to rely more upon friends and family for caring support.
- There were also concerns about packages of care not being implemented, or being ended, due to the lockdown.
- All comments regarding Care Homes referred to a relative or friend that people had been unable to visit.

# Survey Results

## Information and Advice

### Where have you found information/advice about the COVID-19 pandemic?

This question was answered by 1,103 people (538 in Cheshire East and 565 in Cheshire West and Chester).




- Media, such as television, radio, newspaper and online national organisation websites were the most popular information sources in both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester.
- National organisation websites such as the Government or NHS were mentioned by two-thirds of responses, with over 40% of respondents accessing information from local organisations' websites such as the local authority, hospital, Healthwatch or voluntary and community organisations.
- Of those respondents who answered 'Other', common responses in both local authority areas were from the workplace and from within NHS organisations.

## Do you, or does the person you care for/support, have any additional communication needs? I/they:

| | Cheshire East respondents (with % in brackets) | Cheshire West and Chester respondents (with % in brackets) | Total respondents (with % in brackets) |
|---|---|---|---|
| use British Sign Language (BSL) | 4 (0.8%) | 11 (2%) | 15 (1.4%) |
| need information in braille, audio or large print format(s) | 4 (0.8%) | 1 (0.2%) | 5 (0.5%) |
| need Easy Read information | 4 (0.8%) | 7 (1.3%) | 11 (1%) |
| need information in another language(s) | 0 (0%) | 1 (0.2%) | 1 (0.1%) |
| do not have additional communication needs | 497 (97.6%) | 531 (96.9%) | 1028 (97.3%) |

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

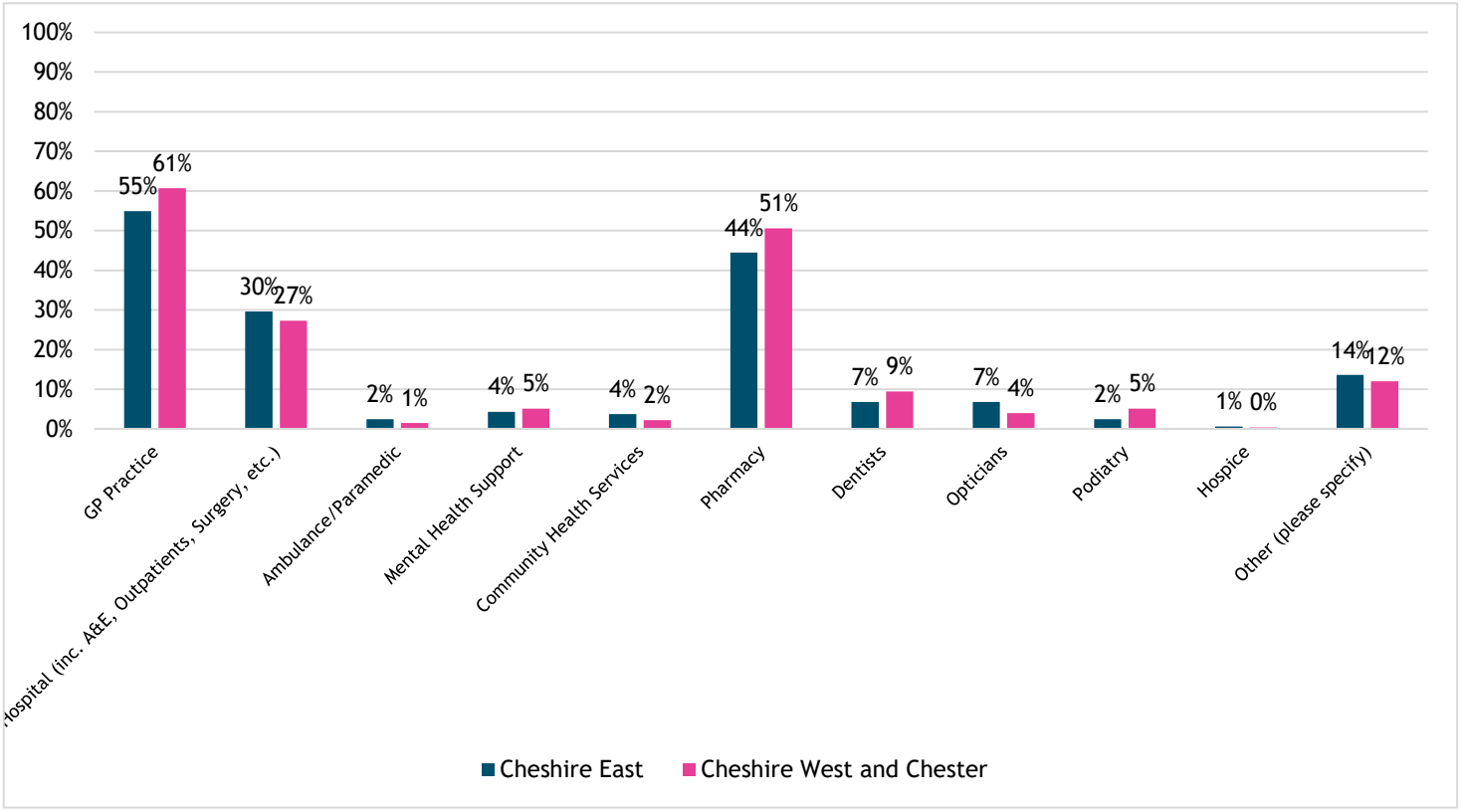
| | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| Cheshire East | 461 (94.9%) | 25 (5.1%) |
| Cheshire West and Chester | 485 (93.6%) | 33 (6.4%) |
| Total | 946 (94.2%) | 58 (5.8%) |

- The majority of respondents in both local authority areas have been able to access information regarding Coronavirus (COVID-19) in the format they needed.

## Access to Healthcare

### Are you currently accessing, or have you had to access any of the following services for other conditions during the pandemic? Please tick all that apply.

This question was added after the survey had already started as we saw a need to determine which services people were accessing. People who had not accessed any services were also asked to skip this question. As a result, the data for this question is based upon 437 responses (162 in Cheshire East and 275 in Cheshire West and Chester).




- Most respondents in both local authority areas who had tried to access healthcare attempted to at a GP Practice, Hospital, or Pharmacy.
- Of those respondents who answered 'Other', many answered N/A rather than just skipping the question, and others mentioned physiotherapy or private appointments.

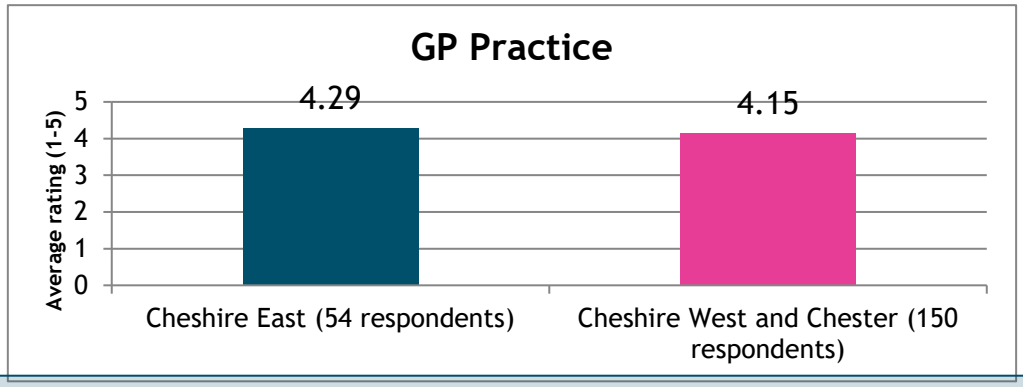
## Thinking about these services, do you think access to them has been impacted by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic? [please tick all that apply]

| Answer | Cheshire East respondents (with % in brackets) | Cheshire West and Chester respondents (with % in brackets) | Total respondents (with % in brackets) |
|---|---|---|---|
| My appointment at the GP surgery was via telephone/video call | 153 (29.6%) | 187 (36.4%) | 340 (33%) |
| I tried to get an appointment at my GP surgery and couldn't get one at all | 22 (4.3%) | 31 (6%) | 53 (5.1%) |
| I couldn't get my prescription medication | 32 (6.2%) | 16 (3.1%) | 48 (4.7%) |
| Increased waiting times to get prescriptions | 103 (19.9%) | 106 (20.6%) | 209 (20.3%) |
| I couldn't find over the counter medication I needed in shops or pharmacies | 80 (15.5%) | 71 (13.8%) | 151 (14.7%) |
| My regular hospital-based treatment was disrupted (e.g.: dialysis, chemotherapy, physiotherapy, mental health services) | 47 (9.1%) | 53 (10.3%) | 100 (9.7%) |
| My outpatients appointment was via telephone/video call | 48 (9.3%) | 72 (14%) | 120 (11.6%) |
| My outpatients appointment was postponed/cancelled | 7 (1.4%) | 33 (6.4%) | 40 (3.9%) |
| Planned procedures (e.g.: elective surgery) that I needed to have were cancelled | 28 (5.4%) | 43 (8.4%) | 71 (6.9%) |
| My access hasn't been impacted | 63 (12.2%) | 74 (14.4%) | 137 (13.3%) |
| I haven't needed to access healthcare | 143 (27.7%) | 115 (22.4%) | 258 (25%) |
| Other (please specify) | 104 (20.1%) | 89 (17.3%) | 193 (18.7%) |

- The most common difference in experience from usual cited by respondents in both local authority areas was people's GP appointments taking place over the telephone or by video call, with a third of all respondents in total giving this answer.
- Further common responses included increased waiting times for prescriptions, and being unable to find the over the counter medication required in shops and pharmacies.
- Of those respondents who answered 'Other', people talked about maternity and physiotherapy appointments being over the phone, having to attend A&E on their own, and delays or cancellations for various scans, tests and procedures.

## How would you rate your experience of the service you accessed?

This question asked respondents to rate their experience of accessing a particular service, with 1 being very poor and 5 being excellent. The charts below depict the average ratings people gave split by local authority for the three service types that had the most responses (GP Practices, Hospitals, and Pharmacies).




**In Cheshire East, 85% of people who had tried to access their GP Practice and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 6% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

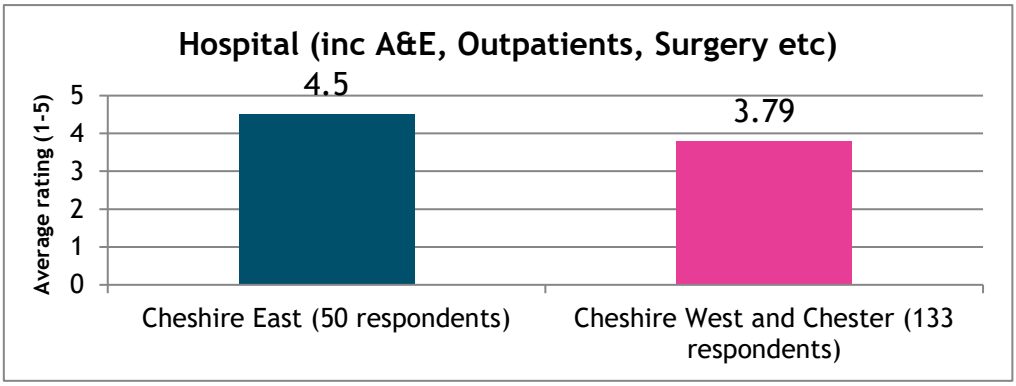
**Example comments about GP Practices in Cheshire East include:**

- *"Always excellent service and this didn't change at all."*
- *"The telephone/video consultation was amazing! Super quick and really efficient. I was assessed, and my Prescription was sent directly to the pharmacy. No waiting in a crowded room of sick people, and risking picking up whatever they might have. No inconvenience of parking, etc. Less risk for our GPs. Not having to leave the house when you're unwell was so welcome. I'd love to see this offered in the future if possible. It was so slick. I'm so impressed."*
- *"GP kept me informed about my appointment for B12 injection which I needed. Nurse rang me in my car and told me to come in."*
- *"Procedures in place to protect both themselves and the public."*
- *"The nurse took extra care with my case - above and beyond what was expected of her."*
- *"No negative impact for me at GP Practice. The service feels different as numbers of patients accessing the surgery seem to be being managed but the few services I have needed have been available."*
- *"I have been unable to have an appointment with my normal GP. You could only have an appointment with a doctor who would call between 8am and 6pm but you were not told which doctor or at what time they would call. This makes it very easy to miss the phone call."*
- *"Mental Health appalling, but that is not unusual. No contact since April at all. Too busy to communicate with me in an Autism-friendly way."*
- *"Totally contradicting advice from one day to the next. Inaccuracies when replying by email."*
- *"The fact they invite patients into their 'Orange' zone or 'Purple' zone for appointments and being told the purple zone is only for shielded people. We should all be treated as if shielding if invited for an appointment. This implies less safe for anyone invited to Orange zone."*

**In Cheshire West and Chester, 76% of people who had tried to access their GP Practice and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 7% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about GP Practices in Cheshire West and Chester include:**

- *"All the staff I met were very careful about social distancing etc."*
- *"GP telephone appointment excellent service. Need more communication on when regular service will resume as not sure when I can have my blood test."*
- *"The GP Practice and Pharmacy were set up amazingly for social distancing and the service I received was swift and efficient. I felt safe."*
- *"GP telephone appointment easier to access than trip to the surgery."*
- *"I had to attend the GP practice for mental health support, they were very quick in getting an important and then I was able to get help and support from Healthbox too which was quick and very lovely."*
- *"Kelsall Medical Practice are always excellent at putting patients first, nothing is too much trouble... The nurse was fantastic and despite all the PPE was her usual warm friendly self, putting us both at ease."*
- *"Easier to get GP appointment by telephone, almost impossible to get face to face even before pandemic."*
- *"Swift service, social distancing and protective equipment used. Felt safe."*
- *"Telephone appointment was easy to access, quick and efficient. Prescription was emailed to pharmacy. It was a better experience than usual!"*
- *"We needed to discuss a health problem with GP for 11-year-old daughter. GP phoned back, had excellent bedside manner, listened, questioned and came up with a logical solution for treatment."*
- *"I have collected our dispensed prescriptions from The Knoll Surgery on 3 occasions. On the first occasion at the end of March 2020 they dispensed 2 months of medication which was good as I did not need to visit again for 2 months."*
- *"Needed referral to musculoskeletal team - no appointments being made until after July 31st - waiting 4 months plus for referral and assessment - may need surgery but then likely even longer wait."*
- *"Daughter had suicide attempt school were aware, no mental health support once the school had closed. GP only offer medication no other support offered."*
- *"Speaking to a doctor I don't know and can't see is very difficult. I am not sure that information is correctly exchanged."*
- *"Having to wait longer for consultations and investigations not knowing if I have something wrong. No end in sight as to when services will resume."*
- *"I had to contact my GP surgery to make an appointment. When I told the receptionist the nature for my call she arranged a call with a nurse practitioner that day. I was prescribed antibiotics which was fine but I would have preferred a face to face consultation so she could see the problem."*
- *"Could not get an injection which I needed until things got really bad."*
- *"Completely unhelpful, go round in circles between GP and pharmacy trying to get prescription sorted because GP refuses to prescribe more than a week supply for a medication that is needed weekly and then loses the repeat request meaning doses are missed."*




**In Cheshire East, 88% of people who had tried to access Hospital and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst nobody thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

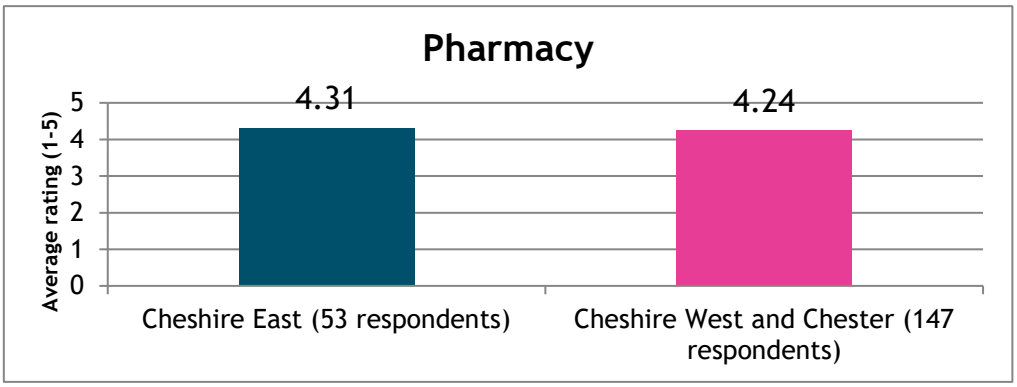
**Example comments about Hospitals in Cheshire East include:**

- *"Experience at Macclesfield Orthopaedic outpatients has been excellent."*
- *"Dermatology Unit at Macclesfield - waited in car for telephone call to say come in - treatment received and out in 30 mins."*
- *"Understand orthotics is in a waiting queue to re-open."*
- *"CT scan at Macclesfield Hospital - only saw radiologist and was out in 20 mins."*
- *"Quick, caring and took time where needed."*
- *"Waiting time was quick, service was friendly and patient."*
- *"The service they provided was understandable under the circumstances."*
- *"Was given medical help within 5 minutes of arriving at A&E, staff were very helpful and caring."*

**In Cheshire West and Chester, 67% of people who had tried to access Hospital and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 16% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments from people in Cheshire West and Chester who visited Hospital include:**

- *"I felt safe in A&E as very quiet and high levels of hygiene."*
- *"No issues for me from any of the services as they were purely for check-ups."*
- *"I understand the reason for cancellations but why is it taking so long to get moving again? We desperately need to get operations and treatments back to normal."*
- *"Leighton Hospital is unable to offer any assistance with my hernia problem because all surgery procedures have been postponed because of dealing with the virus."*
- *"Hospital phone appointment ran 90 minutes late. Very hard to plan things around a fuzzy 3-hour slot when you are working from home."*
- *"Antenatal appointments felt very rushed and impersonal due to number of people accessing the service."*
- *"I felt safe at the Nuffield… it did cost a lot (£1000) for all my treatment but I didn't feel safe going to my local NHS facility."*




**In Cheshire East, 84% of people who had tried to access a Pharmacy and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 2% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about Pharmacies in Cheshire East include:**

- *"Pharmacy excellent. Both for advice via phone, prompt provision of prescriptions and non-prescription items. Charming polite staff and clever arrangement of putting the items on my car roof following pre-arranged collection."*
- *"Pharmacy had all my prescription items ready for collection in the usual time."*
- *"Pharmacy ok but have to queue for longer than normal. Don't really understand the social distancing system."*
- *"I was unable to secure a prescription for essential, consultant prescribed medication."*
- *"Even though it was slower to get my prescription than usual the communication on process and timing was clear and my prescription was ready when the GP surgery had said it would be."*
- *"Once I was able to understand how to get repeat prescription via email it was less stressful and over the counter medicines such as antihistamines are now becoming more available."*

**In Cheshire West and Chester, 85% of people who had tried to access a Pharmacy and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 2% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about Pharmacies in Cheshire West and Chester include:**

- *"Excellent service in the pharmacy however contact as to when prescription is ready to pick up is not great as one month get notification and the next you don't."*
- *"Pharmacy no change other than having to wait outside with others in the rain as only two persons allowed inside at a time."*
- *"The wait was orderly outside the shop, one person at a time was allowed in, the door stayed open long enough to allow entry without touching. It was arranged that the counter and assistant were at least 2 metres away. My request was dealt with quickly and carefully. My prescription was placed on the counter and the assistant stood away as I leaned forward to collect. The door is a push button operation so can be operated with elbow."*
- *"Panic buying in shops meant I couldn't buy paracetamol for my parents. Both are 80 years of age. Had to wait outside the pharmacy for hours at a time for their medication. Sometimes it would be ready and other times not. Made an enquiry about getting it delivered direct to my parents' home address but was told this couldn't be arranged until after the pandemic… If I was not able to help them with collecting prescriptions and getting medication over the counter, I don't know how they would cope as they are remaining at home as advised by the Government."*
- *"I use Echo to order and deliver my prescription. They usually manage to get me everything I need and have proved to be a better option than going via my local pharmacy. But sometimes they struggle to get everything I need at the same time and I have had to wait for some of my medication beyond the time it was due for delivery. Fortunately, it was not an 'urgent' medication and it was inconvenient rather than a risk to my health."*

## Mental Health Services

A separate more comprehensive mental health and wellbeing report has also been published, but comments about mental health services in Cheshire East include:

- *"Mental health services are appalling, but that is not unusual. No contact since April at all. Too busy to communicate with me in an autism friendly way."*
- *"My mental health outpatient treatment has had to be terminated. All medical appointments have had to be over the telephone which is unsuitable for me as I struggle to communicate leading to less than optimal clinical outcomes."*

83.33% of 12 respondents from Cheshire West and Chester rated the mental health service as 'Good' or 'Excellent'. Comments include:

- *"Call to CWP staff support line for support with problems excellent."*
- *"Supposedly high priority but been waiting for months for any help. Made to answer the same assessment questions 4 times over the phone over several weeks and told they would get in touch soon to arrange something. Told I was getting 8 telephone*

*sessions of CBT and access to an online portal. Had 3 phone sessions which were awful and half the time the woman didn't ring on time (not helpful when I have a disabled baby to find supervision for so I can be available for the slot) and then told I wasn't going to get any more and was on a waiting list for something else instead."*

## Community Health Services

4 respondents from Cheshire East rated Community Health services, with 50% of them rating it as 'excellent'. Comments include:

- *"I have received excellent physiotherapy face to face, it was just a long unproductive chat over the phone."*
- *"Always excellent service and this didn't change at all."*

75% of the 8 respondents from Cheshire West and Chester rated these services as 'good' or 'excellent'. Comments include:

- *"Accessing physio has been a bit more restrictive."*
- *"Physios arranged home visits very swiftly and also arranged an Occupational Therapist assessment. Home aids, e.g. Bath bars, were quickly installed. All therapists were helpful and supportive."*

## Dentists

In Cheshire East, 75% of respondents rated this service as 'excellent', with comments such as; "*Quick caring and took time where needed."*

In Cheshire West and Chester, 40% of 20 respondents rated dentists as 'good' or 'excellent'. Comments include:

- *"Dentist lacking information and advice."*
- *"Have had infected painful tooth since 13 May. Cannot get dental treatment. Even though dentists can now open my dentist is waiting for PPE approval before it can treat anyone. I am on a list with other emergency patients."*

## Opticians

In Cheshire East, 75% of 13 respondents rated this service as 'good' or 'excellent'. Comments include:

- *"The optician had scheduled a telephone consultation which didn't take place."*
- *"Operated as well as they could under the restrictions."*

In Cheshire West and Chester, 69% of respondents rated opticians as 'good' or 'excellent'. Comments include:

- *"I spoke to my GP about a problem with my eye. Although she could diagnose it wasn't serious and prescribed antibiotic drops, it didn't solve the issue. Hence I have an optician's appointment next week."*

## Podiatry

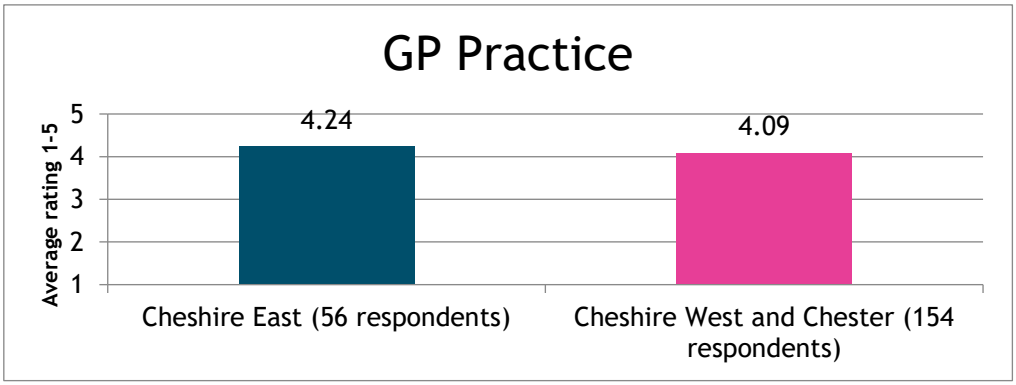
No comments were left regarding Podiatry in Cheshire East, although two individuals did rate their experience as 'good' and 'excellent'.

93% of 15 respondents in Cheshire West rated the podiatry service as good or excellent. Comments include:

- *"The podiatrists in particular were brilliant, I was ill with suspected Covid-19 for 6 weeks with an infected foot ulcer. They offered to come out but I refused as didn't want to risk their health. They rang me twice a week to check on me whilst I was ill. Their support was a huge help."*
- *"Podiatry. All safety measures followed effectively."*

# How would you rate the communication received about the changes in accessing the service during Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

## GP Practices




**In Cheshire East, 77% of people who have received communications about accessing their GP service and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 8% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about communication from GP Practices in Cheshire East include:**

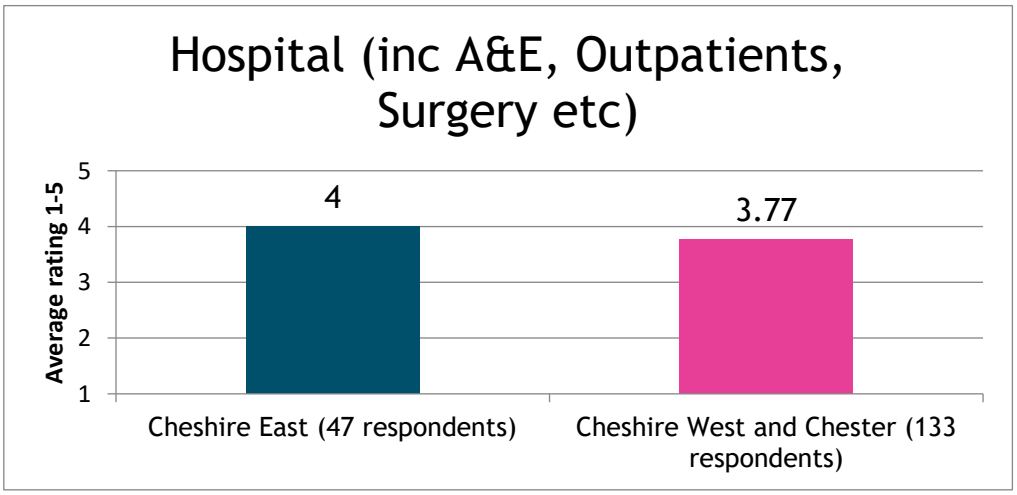
- *"Doctors sent messages through straight away to keep me up to date."*
- *"I use Patient access and it works very well."*
- *"Text message good and clear info."*
- *"Up to date texts on services offered and opening times."*
- *"The practice provided helpful pre-recorded advice when I rang to order a repeat prescription, then the person I spoke to gave me instructions and help to access Patient Online Services at High Street Surgery so I can now order online."*
- *"I received text alerts to keep me informed what was happening at the surgery and I received a questionnaire about my health before I attended the surgery for my appointment. Reception staff very pleasant and told me where to go and what to do. Put me at ease."*

**In Cheshire West and Chester, 58% of people who have received communications about accessing their GP service and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 16% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about communication from GP Practices in Cheshire West and Chester include:**

- *"GP changes made available in local social media, flyers to all household, etc."*
- *"Information about the access to services has been updated on the website."*
- *"Proactive notices at point of entry, plus detailed guidance available when phoning to check access. Polite, empathic, helpful."*
- *"Answer phone and websites clear."*
- *"Need updates on website/social media about how to request repeat prescriptions without having to attend the surgery."*
- *"Couldn't get GP appointment as receptionist refused, told to only ring 111 even after my explaining my health issues. Also asked should I be shielding, the receptionist again said no since when are they doctors. Had trouble accessing my B12 injections too."*
- *"GP didn't communicate I had to find out via their website the services available."*
- *"Just a letter - 'if you still have symptoms call after 31st July!'"*
- *"I have been kept informed about cancelled/postponed appointments in a timely manner, either by post or by phone."*
- *"When calling the GP Practice I was well informed about the procedure and, overall, this was fair at the time and easy to use."*
- *"No explanations. And no further contact for 12 weeks."*
- *"No communication at all about when appointments would resume."*
- *"No consistency in communication. Different person called each time and asked the same questions. Promises made to call which never materialised and told not able to provide me with a number to call to chase up."*

## Hospitals



**In Cheshire East, 65% of people who have received communications about accessing Hospital and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 8% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about communication from Hospitals in Cheshire East include:**

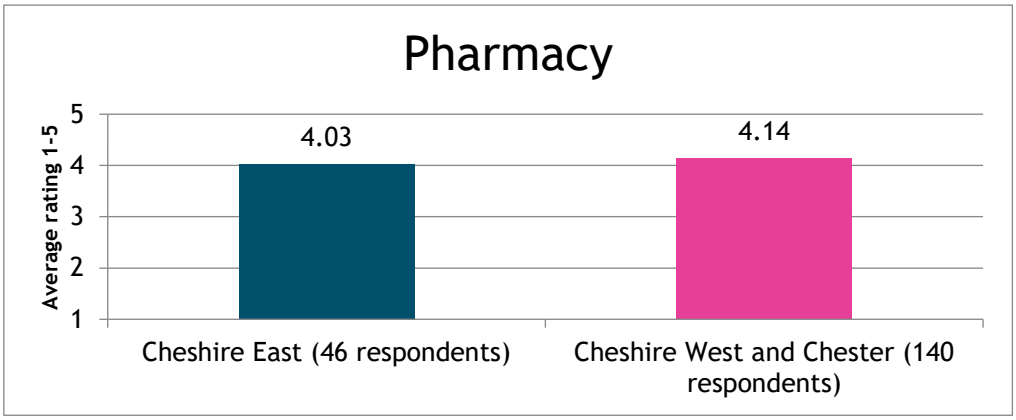
- *"Clear concise information given."*
- *"Received text messages which is good. and recorded phone messages which is excellent."*
- *"I have had no communication from North Staffs Hospital with regard to an outpatient appointment which I would normally have attended late March/early April. I have not made contact with them as I don't feel at this point that it is urgent for me."*

**In Cheshire West and Chester, 57% of people who have received communications about accessing Hospital and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 12% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments from people in Cheshire West and Chester about communication from Hospitals include:**

- *"They are all following the rules and are going above expectations to make sure we are safe."*
- *"Hospital appts as normal but with either face-to-face or telephone added to appointment letter."*
- *"They all let me know my various appointments were to be cancelled."*
- *"I have been kept informed about cancelled/postponed appointments in a timely manner, either by post or by phone."*
- *"Clear instruction from all departments, although I had a chest infection and had a CAT scan in February, still not had result."*
- *"Apart from having an already existent appointment I received a phone call to confirm that the appointment would still take place."*
- *"I didn't know what the protocol was at hospitals should I need to attend in an emergency."*
- *"Local information has been very limited but it hasn't really impacted me."*
- *"I had to attend an appointment for a blood test within the women and children's department after receiving a letter. The letter stated that I would be in the hospital for two hours due to the nature of the test. When I arrived in the department, I was sent over to the outpatients department for the blood tests meaning I was having to be in more than one area in the hospital unnecessarily. I happened to ask if I was to stay over in the outpatient department for the two hours, only to be told that due to the pandemic they would only need to take blood once and I could go home. This was not the information I was given in my letter."*

## Pharmacy




**In Cheshire East, 67% of people who have received communications about accessing Pharmacies and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 10% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about communication from Pharmacies in Cheshire East include:**

- *"Staff were helpful and we could obtain information there."*
- *"Pharmacy needs better signs, etc."*
- *"The pharmacy left messages about opening hours pinned to their back door. If you came at the wrong time you had to come back later."*

**In Cheshire West and Chester, 66% of people who have received communications about accessing Pharmacies and opted to give a rating, rated their experience as 'good' or 'excellent' (4 or 5 out of 5), whilst 8% thought it was 'Poor' or 'Very Poor' (1 or 2 out of 5).**

**Example comments about communication from Pharmacies in Cheshire West and Chester include:**

- *"Good except had to get someone else to collect a prescription as they were too busy to deliver."*
- *"The arrangements were clearly posted in the window and in a call to confirm my prescription was ready the assistant did talk through the procedures in place."*
- *"Pharmacy asked users to submit prescription request using their online service in order to reduce public attendance at the pharmacy. Website failed to work, resulting in wasted visits for a prescription which was not ready. One repeat prescription took 9 days and three visits to obtain all items. Website was still showing prescription request 'pending approval' 5 weeks after it was collected."*
- *"Warned you that service hours were reduced and precautions were set up."*
- *"Pharmacy clearly overwhelmed."*
- *"Although pharmacy services were good there was a lack of information regarding how to get prescriptions and what social distancing measures were in place."*

## Dentists

There were also comments regarding communication by dentists.

Comments in Cheshire East include:

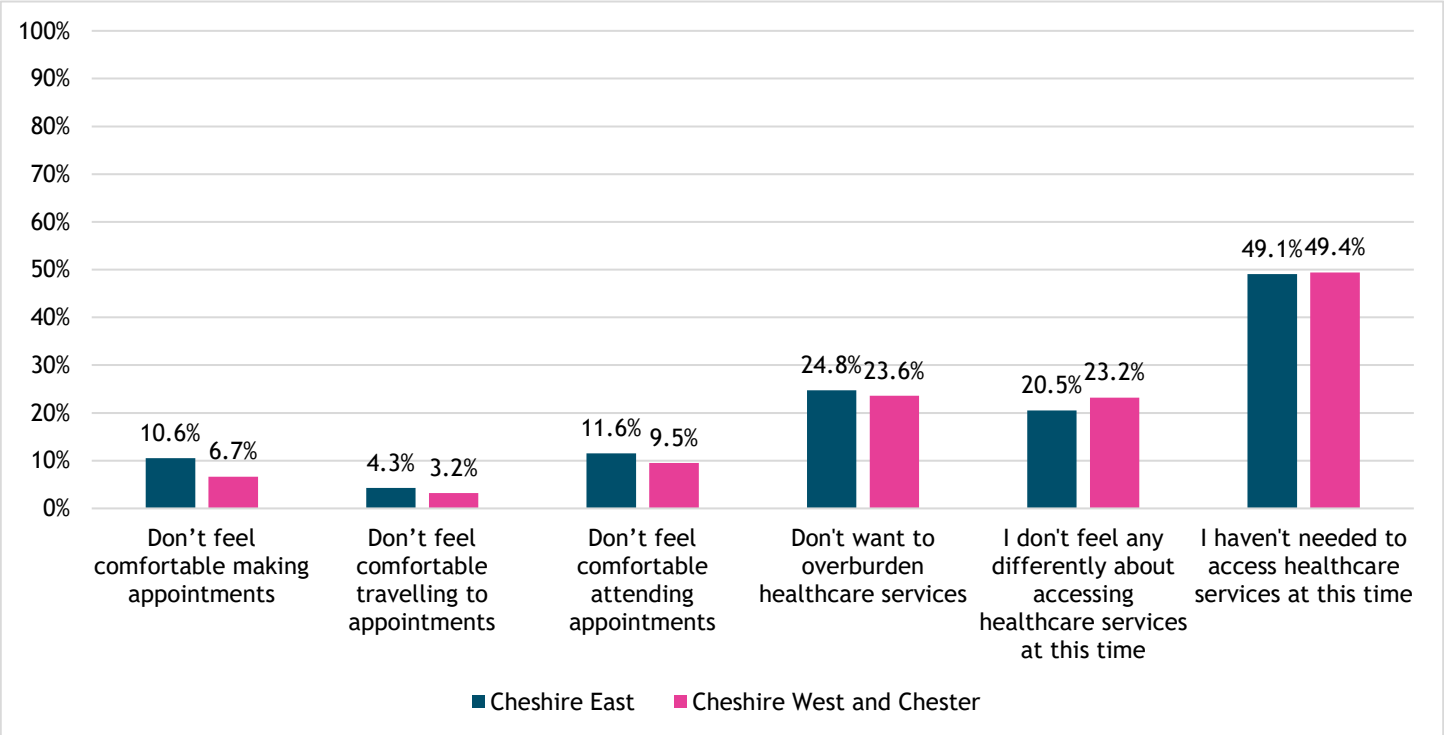
- *"I had to initiate service check to find orthotics was still closed despite existing appointment."*
- *"Up to date texts on services offered and opening times."*
- *"Regular updates received from the various services."*
- *"Not had any communication from services."*

Comments in Cheshire West and Chester include:

- *"It was impossible to find services such as emergency dentists."*
- *"Dentists were a disaster that just didn't need to happen."*
- *"I only received information from my dentist and opticians, nothing from my GP surgery."*
- *"Dentist would not have closed if had option."*
- *"Dentists closed. Now can open but can't treat as problem with PPE."*
- *"There has been plenty of information locally about access to these services. Even though unable to attend Dentist, their communication has been good."*

## Have you not accessed healthcare services because of any of the following?

This question is designed to ascertain how people feel about accessing healthcare services, amid the perception earlier in the pandemic that less people were seeking healthcare. It is based on 1,042 responses, of which 493 are from Cheshire East residents and 526 are from Cheshire West and Chester residents.



- **48.2% of the total respondents to this question across Cheshire have not needed to access healthcare services during the pandemic.**
- **Nearly half of all respondents across Cheshire (45.9%) do not feel comfortable either making, travelling to, or attending appointments, or feel that they would be overburdening healthcare services if they did. This represents a significant difference compared to what would be expected prior to the Coronavirus pandemic.**
- **21.4% of respondents across Cheshire do not feel any differently about accessing healthcare services currently.**

Below is a summary of what people told us when they were asked to elaborate on their response:

## Cheshire East

124 Cheshire East residents opted to elaborate on their choice, of whom 30 (24%) had not needed to access healthcare and 31 (25%) did not feel any differently about accessing these services:

- *"I have no difficulties as I believe that everything that is in place is acceptable and sensible."*
- *"My access has been via telephone. I would happily attend for an appt but this was not offered. I have coped without."*
- *"I know every precaution will be taken for my safety."*

A further 28 (23%), however, reported they did not feel comfortable attending appointments due mostly to the concern about catching the virus, particularly if they were carers or classed as vulnerable, but also due to a lack of trust or communication about procedures and a desire for continuity of care:

- *"I need continuity of care so appointments with a doctor, whose name you are not told, is just not productive and causes more problems long term."*
- *"I need to have blood taken but have not yet felt confident to go in to the GP surgery."*
- *"Government advice; Stay Home, Protect the NHS, Save lives*
  *Social distancing rules in place*
  *Nationwide lockdown*
  *Fear of catching the virus outside*
  *Reduced healthcare services*
  *Confusing information from the UK Government and Healthcare organisations*
  *Politicised Healthcare system*
  *Communication breakdown between healthcare organisations*
  *Low paid healthcare workers*
  *Unskilled and incompetent healthcare workers dealing with the pandemic*
  *Inadequate safety measures*
  *Lack of PPE for the healthcare workers."*

- *"Not heard any communication from services as to what new procedure is and what services are still available at the moment. Concern over not fully knowing how virus is transmitted either so feel I would be putting myself in unsafe environment."*
- *"I have been concerned about sitting in the waiting room with others, both staff and patients. People are not being cautious about what they could spread to others. I want to minimise my contact with other people as much as is possible during this time."*

22 (18%) respondents had not accessed healthcare as they did not want to overburden the system. Many of them talked about coping with pain or managing their situation:

- *"We have struggled with our son's mental health and put off calling until we were desperate."*
- *"I have not pursued the hospital appt because I know they are busy, and quite frankly I am keeping well away from hospitals at the moment. However, this is no excuse for paucity of communication."*
- *"I assumed the appointment and operation had been delayed (and the department was dealing with urgent cases only). I didn't want to phone the department again when I partly knew the answer to my query, and the department would be inundated with phone calls from other patients."*
- *"My issue is an ongoing skin condition; it will not do me any major physical harm if it does not improve as it only impacts my confidence and causes minor pain."*
- *"Have a referral for an endoscopy for diverticulitis, only got it week of lockdown, after waiting 5 weeks to get it after GP appt. I've not progressed it as others more important at moment. Not fearful of visiting hospital just don't want to overburden. Will ring up in a few weeks to go on extended waiting list"*
- *"Feel like the situation I had, where I would have normally seen a nurse wasn't important in the grand scheme of things and that I would just cope with the situation for as long as possible."*

A service being unavailable was also cited as a reason for not attending by 9 (7%) people; this was particularly true, but not limited to, dental and optician appointments.

- *"My health worries I am trying to manage at home (MH) but my father-in-law does need further investigations as his appointment was cancelled."*
- *"The quality of healthcare has deteriorated so much that there is no point in making appointments as the services required can't be delivered effectively over the telephone. This has led to me being taken to hospital in an ambulance to receive treatment and assessment."*
- *"I need to go to the dentist (lost filling and loose bridge) but cannot get an appointment."*
- *"None of the options is relevant for me, I have been denied the opportunity to access the service that I need. I understand the need to prevent transmission, but it seems to be accepted now that there is a detrimental impact on health by people avoiding treatment."*
- *"Appointments face to face not available."*
- *"Couldn't make an appointment at opticians."*

A further 7 (6%) respondents were not comfortable travelling to appointments:

- *"Because of the danger of contracting the disease as a potentially vulnerable person."*
- *"Nervous of catching the Coronavirus."*

- *"I haven't actually needed anything other than my out patients' appointment but I would not be comfortable travelling to an appointment as I am in the 'shielding' group."*
- *"Besides going to work, I tried to avoid going out as much as possible to reduce the risk of contracting the virus as much as possible."*

4 people (3%) were concerned being uncomfortable making an appointment:

- *"Surgeries feel very unfriendly at the moment. After other patient's experiences (my son's appt changed, then told he'd have a phone call which didn't materialise) I feel we're not wanted just now."*
- *"Made to feel a nuisance by Receptionist at my first attempt and then couldn't get though at any other time after that first attempt so gave up."*

## Cheshire West and Chester

There were 139 responses from Cheshire West and Chester residents elaborating on their answer choice, 38 people (27%) felt no different about accessing health services:

- *"Because I have Terminal Cancer and do not wish to be exposed, but when I needed to have my bloods done, I rang the Victoria Infirmary and asked when was the best time to come so that I was not in contact with anyone. They were very good."*
- *"Worn protective equipment and so have staff, plus no choice to attend as required the medications and input."*
- *"Telephone consultation took up less GP time than an appointment. In the long run this has decreased the burden on the surgery."*
- *"Advice is to use services."*
- *"My practice has always been completely empty when I've been to collect prescriptions - their reception triage over the phone and you have to be really ill before they will let you book an appointment."*
- *"If I need healthcare then I access it and it has been made clear that services have continued and we should not put off medical attention."*
- *"So far my experience has been positive."*

36 people (26%) cited not wanting to overburden the system as a reason not to access health care, some commenting that their condition was minor and could be eased by self-help measures:

- *"I waited longer than normal before accessing my GP as I didn't want to divert them from more important issues. I haven't contacted my dentist yet even though I have mild tooth ache."*
- *"I attempted to self-medicate with my back pain for 2 days before attempting to ring the GP surgery for advice."*
- *"Was very aware of the pressure the NHS has been under and didn't want to burden them further."*
- *"I have been told that if I start to actually vomit then I need to attend Accident and Emergency, however, I feel it is neither an accident nor an emergency when others are worse off, if pain relief and not eating works to stave off gallbladder attacks then I will manage as best I can so that the NHS can help others in a worse situation than I am, until surgery recommences."*
- *"None of the options are appropriate in our case but we are getting to the stage we will need to access services but it is difficult to know where to start now. Had the GP surgery been in contact and provided us some advice should my father's health*

*deteriorate then we would feel much happier about the next steps but I feel as though my father has been totally ignored and it will be very difficult all round as he will resist any help initially as he is a very proud man. His GP will be well aware of his character and independence. The nearest answer will be we didn't want overburden the healthcare services as we were coping initially but with a 99-year-old man in lockdown with health issues this is changing."*

- *"I have avoided going to GP as I haven't been acutely unwell, rather a long-standing arthritic condition. It can wait until Pandemic is over. Health staff are very busy at the best of times, never mind when there is Pandemic."*

A further 27 (19%) did not require access to health services:

- *"It is possible to get health advice for minor health problems online or at pharmacy."*
- *"I have remained healthy."*
- *"I'd only access healthcare services if genuinely necessary."*
- *"I have enjoyed a less stressful time in lock down."*

27 people (19%) did not feel comfortable attending appointments at this time due to the possibility of catching Covid-19:

- *"Because of Covid do not want to catch or possibly pass anything on and more important cases to see at surgery."*
- *"Don't feel safe going outside. People not socially distancing properly. Don't feel I would be safe attending the doctor's surgery. No PPE or enough cleaning in place of door handles etc and other hard surfaces."*
- *"I needed to ring but asked only for advice. I was told that I could have a telephone appointment but felt that it wasn't urgent when others are seriously ill. I was given it anyway and a prescription given without seeing me. Given the current situation that was the best for me. I would not want to take the risk of travelling anywhere or attending surgeries where I may pick up the virus and take it home to my vulnerable Husband."*
- *"Need hearing aid service: but unhappy to travel to hospital or attend OPD."*

17 respondents (12%) were unable to access the service they required:

- *"I self-treated my arthritis & spinal stenosis. Now it's got worse thanks to public health blocking my access to my swim, I don't see the point of seeing primary care about it. They're not going to provide the steroid jabs that provided some relief and I avoid opioids, so there's no point. My dementia sufferer caree is getting access for basic treatment for a co-morbidity, but is likewise deteriorating rapidly in what function he had left as he needed his disabled swim for stroke re-hab."*
- *"I have my repeat prescriptions delivered by echo. I have only needed my spinal injections but understand why these can't go ahead at the moment."*
- *"Contacted Dentist as usual, but informed that due to Covid they weren't taking any appointments."*
- *"The healthcare services that my father normally attends have been closed/services cancelled."*
- *"The only reason I have not accessed healthcare services of late is because all of my appointments etc. have been cancelled due to Covid-19."*
- *"A lot of my planned appointments for scans etc. have been cancelled and consultant appointments."*

10 respondents (7%) did not feel comfortable travelling to appointments:

- *"I don't want to risk catching Covid-19."*
- *"Covid-19 causing problems with staff shortages and others might need them more. Plus, every visit I makes increases my network of contacts i.e. R0 potentially rises."*
- *"I have a water infection now was supposed to go for a cystoscopy in April but put it off because scared of travelling and the hospital with Covid-19 patients in it."*

5 people (4%) did not feel comfortable making appointments:

- *"Cannot make appointments with relevant service as they are all remote voice calls only, and I have hearing loss so can't access voice calls."*
- *"Thought that I shouldn't be doing so - that I would be considered foolish."*
- *"Because of the receptionists."*

## Access to Care

We asked people to tell us about their experiences of care and they type of care that they are currently receiving. 73 people across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester provided responses to the Care section of our survey. Below is a sample of their qualitative responses and the richness of views, experience and individual stories they provide.

The following is a detailed breakdown of the responses we have received.

## Experiences of care during the coronavirus pandemic

We asked people to tell us if their experiences of care had been affected by the coronavirus pandemic. The majority of comments related to care that was provided at home, whether by care workers or by family and friends, with a small number commenting on Personal Assistants and some feedback with regards to Care Homes. Primarily, changes commented upon related to care services being postponed or delays in implementation of care packages or assessment. Where care had been provided, people commonly described it as having been a good service. The below provides further details of the experiences people told us about:

## Across Cheshire

Respondents who received care told us about changes and experiences relating to assistance with care at home, Care Homes and Personal Assistants.

Respondents told us about **assistance at home**, in particular in relation to visits from carers being stopped or reduced, and also about the excellent care they had received even with reduced visits. Example comments were:

- *"Have had to do shopping on my own rather than with support, which has been hard, especially with queues etc. I'm autistic."*
- *"My helper has stopped coming since the lockdown. She helps me clean as I am disabled."*
- *"My father-in-law hasn't been able to go out with his carer to get his weekly shopping but we have just been providing it for him instead."*
- *"I have a disabled son and I have received all the care he needs, except when self-isolating when we sent the staff home. His social worker, care provider, and other medical support have been regularly in touch to ensure that not only he but that the whole family are coping and/or need any extra assistance. The care provider checked to see if they needed to supply any PPE as it was available. Declined as we already had it."*
- *Since the outbreak of Covid-19, my care has stopped as my carers are also in lockdown."*
- *"Care providers reduced but a number of carers visiting mum and have provided an excellent service."*

There were also concerns about packages of care not being implemented, or being ended, due to the lockdown:

- *"My mum was due to have a social care package put in place after a 3-week hospital admission in December but this was put on hold and has only just been actioned this week. We have needed to pay for private care in the meantime."*

Respondents to this question told us about their experiences of **Care Homes**. All referred to a relative or friend that they had in a Care Home and all comments related to accessibility and being unable to visit:

- *"Not visiting my sister-in-law at Care Home, which makes total sense at this time for all concerned as she receives excellent care."*
- *"Unable to visit grandmother who suffers with dementia in her Care Home."*

There were a number of comments relating to **Personal Assistants** and related to accessibility of the PA service and changes to its delivery, and also having to rely more upon **friends and family** for caring support:

- *"His PA cannot come in at present due to him shielding so I am providing all his care unpaid."*
- *"No PAs due to risk of infection. Relying on parents 100%."*
- *"I have asked for my PA not to come to my home, my PA is supporting me remotely with shopping etc, as they have another job at a Care Home and I didn't want to put me or them at risk. So currently being supported by family for personal care on a temporary basis."*
- *"PA is not now working with my son, I don't expect that to happen until we are further away from the danger of Covid-19."*
- *"My carer is my wife, she is also her father's carer who is also shielding in his house alone. I was very worried that she was put in a position where she was shopping and caring for both of us in different households and this was/is causing her extreme stress."*

Comments also related to **other areas of care**, with some respondents commenting that nothing had changed for them regarding their care during the pandemic. People also talked about how other services had stopped, such as health services and weekly support groups:

- *"Weekly visits have stopped. Support groups aren't meeting."*
- *"Delayed response from GP about support."*

## Communication regarding care services during the pandemic

Below are some example comments as to what respondents thought of the communication that they had received from their care provider:

- *"Speed of change and lack of information from government."*
- *"I received a phone call explaining what was going on and they involved me in the decision-making process of next steps."*
- *"I work for adult social care so have been fully updated on on-going changes. I have been able to pass this information to clients and their families."*

# Conclusion

## Access to Healthcare

The main theme running through our survey findings is one of people generally satisfied with the healthcare services they are receiving. However, the comments view service changes as better than having services withdrawn as a result of Coronavirus, and do not suggest that current service delivery is preferable to how it was before the pandemic. In most cases, people do not seem to be overly negative or critical about the changes to services, and there is a broad acknowledgement that the situation is difficult to manage and that services are doing the best that they can for people. This is demonstrated by over 80% of people rating their experiences of accessing their GP Practice, Hospital or Pharmacy as 'Good' or 'Excellent'. As lockdown restrictions and social distancing measures are eased, it will be interesting to note whether this is a sentiment that continues or changes as people begin to expect things to return more to how they were prior to the pandemic.

Perhaps the most notable finding from our survey so far is that nearly half of all respondents across Cheshire do not feel comfortable either making, travelling to, or attending appointments, or feel that they would be overburdening healthcare services if they did. Only just over 1 in 5 people told us that they did not feel any differently about accessing services. This represents a significant difference compared to what would be expected prior to the Coronavirus pandemic. Throughout the survey, we have noted that the amount of people who say that they do not want to overburden healthcare services has decreased slightly from around 28% to 24%, which may be as a result of the NHS Help Us Help You campaign, or a general perception due to the gradual easing of lockdown restrictions.

The most common differences people experienced in accessing healthcare due to Coronavirus was people's GP appointments taking place over the telephone or by video call, increased waiting times for prescriptions, and being unable to find the over the counter medication required in shops and pharmacies. Communication around changes of services due to COVID-19 was mixed according to our respondents, in some cases it was clear what changes were being made either due to signage, online information, or the service contacting individuals, but in other cases people reported no contact or unclear information.

Feelings around telephone and online appointments have so far been mixed in the sense of some people find them incredibly convenient and others do not like the lack of face-to-face contact. In response to comments we have received, we will add a question into our survey specifically asking what people think of telephone and online appointments. Working with the Integrated Care Partnerships and the CCG in its commissioning, primary care and quality scrutiny functions, this will ensure that our survey findings can remain relevant and people continue to have their voices heard as services begin to change, adapt and return to a new 'normal'.

## Access to Care

Many people's responses broadly talk about delays or reductions in care across Cheshire during the Coronavirus pandemic. People talk about postponements in the implementation of care packages and assessments, and in some cases, concerns were raised about care packages not being implemented at all or being brought to an end due to the effects of the pandemic.

There was an appreciation that a change in visits from Personal Assistants is an understandable measure during the pandemic to reduce potential spread and infection. However, some respondents who receive care or assistance at home talked about visits from Carers and Personal Assistants being stopped or reduced, which has led to difficulties. Some people reported struggling to do things such as cleaning or shopping by themselves, creating risks in having to leave the house. Where care had been provided, people commonly described it as having been a 'good' or 'excellent' service.

Others have had to rely more upon friends and family to fill the role of caring support, which has created concerns for people having to go out for shopping and prescriptions, and the impact that has upon them or the person they are helping if they are supposed to be shielding.

All respondents who commented upon Care Homes talked about not being able to visit their relative or friend, which again was deemed to be an understandable measure. Based upon information we have received, there would be scope to do a specific piece of work targeting Care Homes to find out about the experience of residents, relatives, and staff during the pandemic. We are discussing with partners, Healthwatch England, and the Care Quality Commission how we can best move this forward.

The survey is ongoing and people are continuously providing information that we are able to regularly feed back to partners. We can see from our responses so far that there is still more work to do in making sure that our survey respondents represent the full diversity of the people of Cheshire. We will work together with partners, including individual Care Communities, to ensure that as wide a range of people as possible have the opportunity to respond to the survey.