healthwatch Cheshire West

healthwatch Cheshire East

Healthwatch Cheshire Citizens Focus Panel

Survey 6 – January 2022

Mental Health

Introduction

Healthwatch Cheshire, consisting of Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West, are helping to plan, shape and improve local health and care services. We're gaining feedback and starting discussions to influence decision making, using your voice to encourage those who run health and care services to act on what matters to you.

Healthwatch Cheshire's Citizens Focus Panel enables us to get feedback on current topical issues from a set group of Cheshire residents on a regular basis. Our panel is made up of a wide range of people from all across Cheshire and continues to grow; we're always looking for new volunteers to join us.

Healthwatch Cheshire have received comments on people's experiences regarding mental health, including long waits for support and referrals to services. Healthwatch want to gain insight into the effects of the pandemic on people's mental health following on from our previous survey "Your Health and Wellbeing During Coronavirus (COVID-19)" where we asked people about their mental health, support and concerns. Therefore, the aim of this survey is to collect views and experiences of services, support available and concerns at this stage of the pandemic.

The findings of this report will be shared with those that plan and deliver services. This includes, NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group, Cheshire East Council, Cheshire West and Chester Council and local NHS Foundation Trusts, as well as our colleagues at Healthwatch England, the Care Quality Commission, and voluntary and community sector organisations. The Citizens Focus Panel aims to help our local health and care partners to deliver, evaluate and plan mental health services. We sent our survey out to 170 panel members during January 2022 and received 56 responses.

To view previous reports, please visit:

healthwatchcwac.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

healthwatchcheshireeast.org.uk/what-we-do/our-reports

Summary of findings

We asked all **56** of the respondents to our survey how they manage their mental health. Most respondents told us they relied on their friends and family. Many people told us they would like to see easier access to counselling sessions and longer courses available for those who need it, in addition to more mental health support at a community based level.

33.9% of respondents rated their mental health as generally very good, whilst **25%** of total respondents said their mental health has got significantly worse during the pandemic and **59%** said their mental health has stayed the same. Individuals told us that they feel their mental health impacts their life regarding sleeping, socialising, concentration, working and confidence.

Respondents were asked how they feel the COVID-19 pandemic is currently affecting their mental health and wellbeing. **23** respondents said that they worry about the health of their friends and family, **18** respondents worry about their own health and **17** respondents are concerned about the effects of new COVID variants.

25 respondents to our survey have received an official mental health diagnosis. The majority of these people received their diagnosis over a year ago. These respondents informed us that referrals had been made to Cheshire & Wirral Partnership (CWP) and to charities for talking therapies, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy. Some had been referred to CWP services such as Vale House Resource Centre, Community Mental Health Team and Memory Clinic and others were unsure if a referral had been made or not. Individuals have told us they would like to see their GPs face-to-face and that there is concern that medications are overprescribed rather than offering signposting to support groups.

Survey Results

Who are you filling this survey in for?

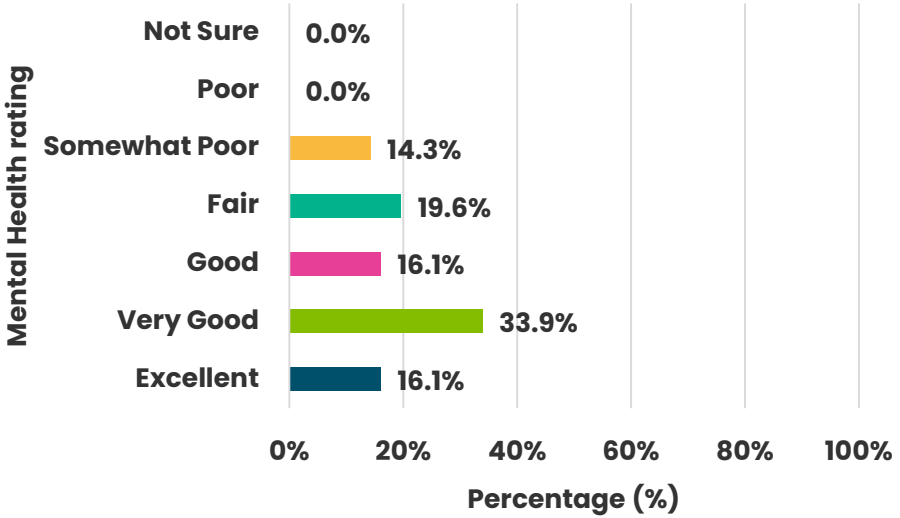
Answered: 56 Skipped: 0

Of the 56 respondents:

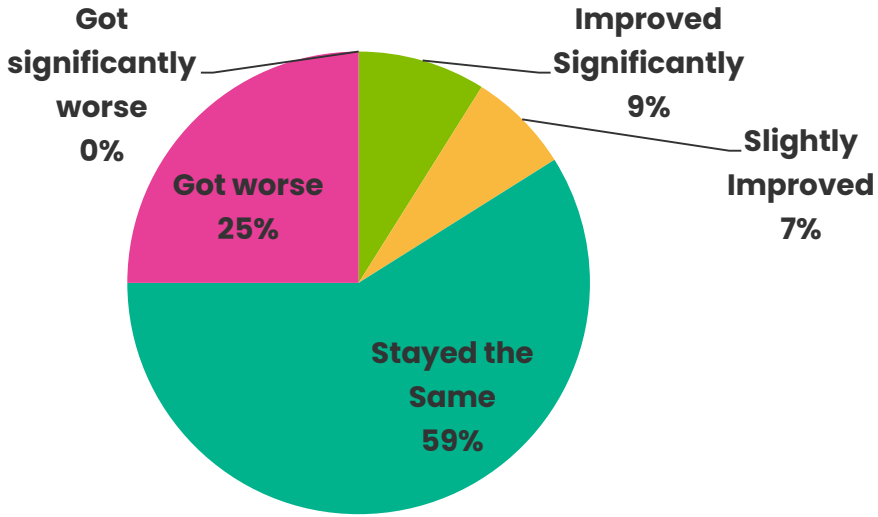
- **47** respondents completed the survey about their own experiences.
- **4** respondents completed the survey on behalf of their child 18 years or older.
- **3** respondents completed the survey on behalf of other family members.
- **2** respondents completed the survey to summarise individuals' general experiences fed into their support or community group meetings.

How would you rate your/their mental health currently?

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0



How has your mental health changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?



- We asked the respondents how they would currently rate their mental health and how it has changed since the pandemic.
- We received a mixed response, ranging from somewhat poor to excellent mental health, with the majority of respondents feeling their overall mental health had remained the same during the pandemic. However, the following slide details some specific concerns people still hold.

Do you feel that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic is currently affecting your/their mental health and wellbeing? [Please tick all that apply]

Answered: 56 Skipped: 0

Answer Choices	Responses
I feel socially isolated	7
I am concerned about others observing social distancing	13
I am concerned about the effects of new variants	17
I am fearful of increased restrictions/lockdowns having to be implemented	8
I am fearful of the removal of restrictions/lockdowns	11
I worry about my own health	18
I worry about the health of friends and family members	23
I worry about my job or financial security	5
Relationships with people I share a house with	1
I have cancelled plans due to the risk of the new variants	9
I do not feel COVID has affected my mental health	14

- We asked respondents how they feel the COVID-19 pandemic is currently affecting their mental health and wellbeing.
- The majority of respondents said they worry about the health of their friends and family, their own health and the effects of the new variants.

Do you feel that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic is currently affecting your/their mental health and wellbeing? Continued.

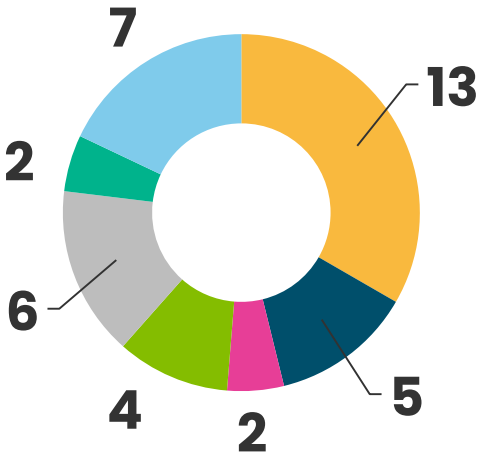
Other comments included:

- *"I have spoken to friends and family but did not want to worry or upset them so kept things back."*
- *"I have long-COVID, this has severely affected my physical and mental health."*
- *"I don't feel confident about travelling abroad to see my siblings."*
- *"Loneliness which has resulted in binge drinking."*
- *"It has revealed a hidden anxiety. I am stressed about family members testing positive, disappointed about restricted contact with family members."*
- *"It makes me think twice about going out and socialising nowadays which is not like me. I no longer fancy using the train."*
- *"Lack of support for Fibromyalgia diagnosis in 2019."*
- *"COVID restrictions and adaptations have had a significant impact on people with a visual impairment."*
- *"I resent the blame of failed infrastructure on the pandemic."*
- *"Post-natal depression."*

Have you/they accessed support for your mental health and wellbeing? (Please tick all that apply)

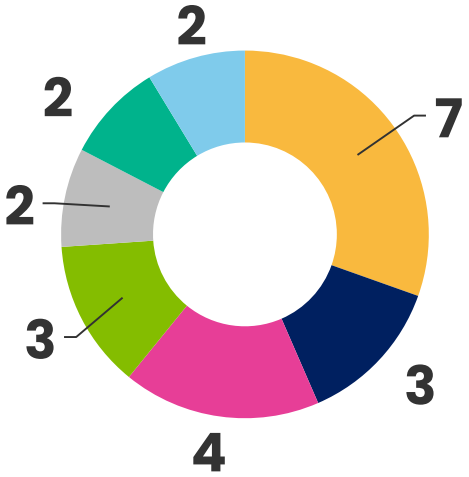
Answered: 55 Skipped: 1

I have accessed support this way during the pandemic



- Friends & Family
- Community, Voluntary or Charity group/organisation
- Mental Health Care Provider
- GP
- Online/App
- Haven't been able to access support

I am currently accessing support this way



Would you like to tell us more about your answer to the previous question?

Answered: 40 Skipped: 16

Below are a variety of responses regarding accessing support for mental health and wellbeing:

- *" I am personally a senior mental health professional and find it very difficult to find suitable people to support me."*
- *"My daughter told me that she was struggling. She then sought help from her GP, we did not find it helpful as they don't offer face-to-face appointments. Eventually she had a crisis with her friends, they took her to the hospital where she was then referred to CAMHS."*
- *" I do not feel like I need to access mental health services."*
- *"I am socially isolated and struggle with alcohol, I am reluctant to go out."*
- *"I live with an individual who suffers with dementia and find this very difficult on the bad days."*
- *"I pay for a counsellor as the waiting list for talk therapies is taking more than 3-months."*
- A service told Healthwatch that elderly villagers have voiced their concerns during the pandemic and have asked for help and advice.

Do you feel like your/their mental health has an impact on your/their life, if so how do you feel it impacts?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 17

Below are a variety of responses as to how people feel mental health impacts everyday life:

- *"I have experienced episodes of depression and anxiety as an adult. I receive help from my GP regarding insomnia otherwise I manage things myself with the support of my partner."*
- *"I find it harder to attend my AA meetings."*
- *"Both my husband and I know very little regarding mental health. We are there for our daughter but find it very mentally and emotionally draining."*
- *"Some days my husband does not recognise me and I find this distressing."*
- *"I am now totally resilient."*
- *"I find it hard to sleep and focus. I am awful to be around. I have to hide it at work and out in the public."*
- *"My daughter's anxiety has affected her ability to progress with her driving lessons."*
- *"I suffer with agoraphobia and this prevents me from doing much in social activity or working."*
- *"No idea"*
- *"Several elderly villagers have lost their confidence and will not leave their homes. Some have fallen and ended up in hospital. Several now require social care due to this."*
- *"Good mental health is necessary to cope with personal and work difficulties."*
- Several comments regarding loneliness, anxiety, loss of social-time and loss of confidence.

What types of mental health support would you like to see made available?

Answered: 42 Skipped: 14

Below are a variety of responses as what mental health support people would like to see:

- We received comments about quicker referral, easier access and more support for men.
- *"More proactive health methods than reactive help."*
- We received multiple comments about Counselling such as CBT in person, group and online including making the course longer than 6 weeks.
- *"More personal therapeutic help rather than systematised tick boxes."*
- *"Follow-up visits after initial crisis event has passed."*
- *"The support is there, it is the waiting time that is of concern. More staff to be employed."*
- *"At the moment care support is limited and only if you pay."*
- *"Better understanding that age is not a reason to delay treatment, or to assume the elderly are less active just because they are over 60."*
- *"More community mental health teams.*
- *"Home assessments."*
- *"I am on medication and it seems impossible to talk to someone about if there are alternative treatments I can try."*
- *"Increased community activity."*
- *"Improved self-guidance."*
- *"Improved support in schools and colleges."*

Do you have any other comments regarding mental health services you would like to share?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 17

Below are any other comments people would like to share regarding mental health:

- *"Not enough professionals in the business."*
- *"The mental health support in CWAC has improved. However, there does not appear to be much support in Northwich, the majority seems to be Chester."*
- *"Conspicuous by its unavailability and non-adaptability and lack of multidisciplinary collaboration, especially essential with post-COVID syndromes and young person pandemic responses."*
- *"More support especially one-to-one and counselling."*
- *"GPs should be seeing patients face-to-face."*
- We received multiple comments saying that adolescents and children need more support following the impact of pandemic.
- *"Dementia is left behind and any help is costly."*
- *"It feels like unless you are in severe distress or suicidal there is little scope for gaining support other than counselling, even if everyday activities are restricted."*
- *"Services such as ALIVE are useful to facilitate social interaction for people."*
- *"I despair that things will never get better under this government."*
- *"Concern that GPs overprescribe medication rather than offering support groups."*
- *"I think that work needs to be done around men feeling able to access mental health support."*

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Healthwatch Cheshire Feedback Centre can be found at:

www.healthwatchcheshire.org.uk

Or contact us on :

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