



COVID related Public Feedback for Kent

**Monthly Summary report
October 2020**



Background

Throughout October, Healthwatch Kent have worked with the Kent User Forums to gather direct feedback from 186 people about their experiences of the Covid 19 pandemic and life under social distancing. We have combined this with anecdotal feedback from 14 organisations who support a wide range of Kent residents including people living with mental health, physical disability, sight loss and impairment, carers and those suffering domestic abuse.

Its purpose is to enable decision makers and planners to understand how people are coping during the COVID epidemic.

Methodology

We have been gathering feedback through a number of routes:

1. The number of calls to our Helpline has steadily increased since March
2. People also share their experiences with us via our website, email or text
3. We've been running a series of social media campaigns to capture feedback
4. The Kent Forums have been proactively gathering feedback from the communities they represent
5. Regularly talking to community groups and voluntary organisations to understand how their clients and members are coping

Since March, Healthwatch staff and volunteers have been building relationships with voluntary organisations and community groups. This has enabled us to hear from communities who may find it harder to share their feedback such as people living with Dementia.

What do we do with the feedback?

Every month, we bring together all the feedback from the multiple sources into one report. This is then shared with decision makers to provide a timely snapshot of how people are coping.

What are we trying to achieve?

This report aims to summarise and reflect the changing experiences of people living and working in Kent during the Covid 19 pandemic.

Our aim is that the feedback is used to support emergency and recovery planning across the health and social care system in Kent.

Things to remember when reading this report

- The comments in italics are direct quotes from people. They are peoples' personal views, not the view of Healthwatch Kent or the Forums. Other comments are anecdotal pieces of feedback from organisations
- This is a snapshot of feedback over a month – it is not intended to replace an organisations own responsibility to gather feedback from the public
- Wherever possible we are raising issues and sharing feedback directly with relevant organisations.
- You may read some worrying stories. Some of these have come directly from the public and if they have given us contact details, we are following up with them and escalating if necessary. However, not everyone will give us contact details. Where organisations have shared concerns with us, they are following their own safeguarding and escalation protocols.
- The previous months reports are available on our website

Thanks to everyone who contributed!

What are the headlines?

This is a long report with a wealth of information. We would encourage you to take the time to read all the feedback. However, there is a contents section to enable you to focus your attention.

The headlines from this month are:

- People are struggling to access a dentist
- Many people struggled to get a flu vaccine
- Many children with special educational needs returned to school but many told us they have not had the support put in place that they require.
- Voluntary organisations and support groups reported that they are seeing an increase in demand for their services, which include befriending calls, help in the home and help with daily tasks.

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SECTION 1. (Page 4) **THE IMPACT OF LOCKDOWN;** issues such as finance, government guidance, isolation and access to food.

SECTION 2. (Page 9) **MENTAL HEALTH & WELLBEING;** issues such as the domestic environment, general mental health and wellbeing, secondary mental health services and the wellbeing of staff.

SECTION 3. (Page 15) **ACCESS TO MEDICATION & PHYSICAL HEALTH;** issues such as access to primary care, access to medication, ongoing healthcare, and dental treatment.

SECTION 4. (Page 25) **CARE & SUPPORT PACKAGES;** issues such as care homes, care packages.

SECTION 5. (Page 27) **EDUCATION, TRANSPORT & HOUSING;** issues such as education, transport, housing

SECTION 6. (Page 31) **TESTING;** issues such as access to tests, covid experiences, track and trace.

Our Action Plan (Page 36)



SECTION 1. The impact of lockdown

There were 10 themes within this topic area:

1. Government guidance
2. Rule of Six
3. Shielding
4. Facemasks
5. Social distance
6. Access to food
7. Finance
8. Domestic issues
9. Increase of cases in local areas
10. Planning for the future

GOVERNMENT GUIDANCE

- We heard many stories from people who are struggling to understand the current government guidance, including people who struggled to understand the difference between levels 1-5 and the medium/high/very high categories.
- *"I've had to print off the details of the 3 levels and give a copy to my elderly parents and parents-in-law. They don't use computers or social media so they won't understand the different levels of restrictions. They would get the basic message from the news but this is just another example of how the messages have not been communicated throughout this pandemic. The government should have the restrictions printed on a leaflet and get pharmacies to put it in medication bags, or get supermarkets to include it in the deliveries for the vulnerable people who are still afraid to leave their house"*
- KCC Community Wardens across the county told us that residents have asked their advice on the current guidance as they are struggling to understand what is going on. Many residents have raised questions about the facemask guidance and the exemptions from wearing masks. Clarification on the rule of 6 has also been required, with many people concerned about young people still gathering in large groups.



RULE OF SIX

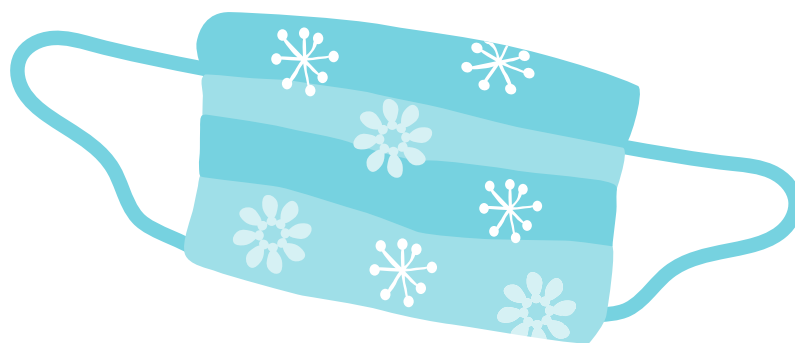
- *“please consider children under 12, and SEN children, to be exempt from the rule of 6”*

SHIELDING

- *“I work in frontline health care and I had a call from my asthma nurse in the surgery to say that the government no longer counts chronic asthma as grounds to shield. Now I have to chose between risking my health (my son also has chronic asthma) or quit my job. Either way I don't get a penny of help because the government decided chronic lung conditions don't count”*
- KCC Community Wardens told us that they have noticed deteriorating mental health, particularly in those who endured a longer lockdown due to their shielding status. Many people are struggling with elevated levels of anxiety and are concerned about how to reintegrate into society and the workplace.

FACEMASKS

- We continue to hear lots of feedback around issues with facemasks, with many people supporting the guidance to wear facemasks when out in public places and in shops.
- *“I am the only one who wears a mask when I do the school run. Granted the parents stand outside, but all the mums stand there in a big group talking. Way more than 6 people in a group! They need to promote mask wearing again, it seems to have been forgotten about. We all have a responsibility to look after each other”*
- *“I had to pick up a prescription from Boots for my husband. I'm 80% deaf in both ears and suffer from profound tinnitus so I really struggle, especially with facial coverings as I normally lipread. The young lady behind the plastic shield was clearly getting irate with me as I couldn't understand what she was saying. I explained my hearing issues to her, but I had a queue of people behind me and she just got angry and agitated with me. Today I've purchased some badges online for deaf/hard of hearing and a lanyard that I will wear in the future but it's a real struggle for deaf people that can't lipread anymore or see facial expressions. I wish people could be more understanding”*
- Kent Community Wardens in Thanet told us that they received multiple reports of members of the public who are not wearing masks, in particular they see a lot of the older generation not complying with facemask rules.



People who can't wear a mask

- *"I can't wear a mask; I have asthma and another disability. I refrain from going out unless it's urgent or if I'm in my garden or a wide open space. I was in intensive care years ago for asthma and have had CPAP. They had to medically calm me down because I can't cope with anything on my face. Don't tarnish all those that can't wear a mask with the same brush. I do accept that if you can't wear a mask then you shouldn't be going out and about and putting other people at risk".*
- *"There must be some proof that I can show that proves my exemption from wearing a mask? An NHS certificate or something? The manager of a pub I went to at the weekend wouldn't let me in the door because I wasn't wearing a mask. He reduced me to shaking and crying and humiliated me. I have Aspergers and can't wear a mask but he wouldn't listen, said I had to wear a mask when entering his premises and could only take it off when I was sitting at a table having a drink. My weekend with my friends was ruined and my self esteem is shot"*

SOCIAL DISTANCE

- *"There's no such thing as "hands, face, space" in Canterbury. All the students are milling around the town and it's so busy. People come out of a shop and whip off their mask and cough as soon as they inhale fresh air. The whole point is to not cough when other people are close by, it spreads droplets in the air!"*
- *"I had the misfortune of going to a large shopping centre the other week and I left almost immediately. I deliberately took a day of work and went midweek so that I could avoid weekend shoppers, but it was still so busy. Everyone was queuing to get into the stores, so the outside areas were rammed. Lots of young adults and teenagers walking around with masks under their chins or no masks at all. I won't be going back for the rest of this year"*
- *"I'm getting fed up with the students from the university continuously breaking the rules. They are old enough to take responsibility for themselves and others. I feel it is selfish of them to have these house parties as the rates are getting higher within the student population and it's obvious that they aren't taking it seriously. Maybe they should have some of their funding revoked for not adhering to the rules, or the university themselves need to punish them"*
- *"We had one of those fairs in Folkestone a few weeks ago and now they've moved on somewhere else. I'm surprised that the District Councils give them a permit given the current restrictions. It's total madness to mix together in such close proximity. I don't worry about coronavirus but I wouldn't go out of my way to use rides that have been up and down the country and used by thousands. That's just my personal view but on the flip side it's a business that still needs to earn money and people still need some fun in this gloom in which we are living"*

ACCESS TO FOOD

Meals on Wheels

- An Age UK centre in East Kent told us that they are averaging 52 meals per week however they have the capacity to cope with 100. The centre envisages that there will be more requests for meals as winter gets closer.
- A community hub told us that there has been about a 15% increase in the meals delivered, and they have had enquiries from the general public, as well through the normal referral routes.

Supermarkets

- *"I just went into Tesco and they have a worker standing in the toilet roll aisle, the pasta aisle and in the beans/chopped tomato aisle and they are handing out the products to people, to monitor how much they are taking. It's sad that it's come to this. The stockpilers ruin it for everybody"*
- *"Since the end of March my husband and I have been shielding and we haven't visited a supermarket. We've been doing online deliveries, and the delivery men are very good and understand to keep their distance from us. The only issue is that you can only do a shop every 7 days so if the first shop has some items missing then it makes the next 7 days a problem. It would be very useful if the supermarkets made more slots available to vulnerable people and allowed us 2 slots per week, and a reduction in the minimum value of the basket. Right now it's £40 minimum spend but if I shopped twice a week then a £25 minimum would be ideal"*
- *"If people have coronavirus and aren't allowed to get out of the house, can't they be given some priority access to supermarket delivery slots, instead of them going out of the house to get emergency supplies? We need to make sure that people stay indoors and don't take unnecessary risks by popping out for fresh food or medicine. People who have no support network or friends who can shop for them need to be able to have quick access to food"*
- An organisation who supports carers told us that carers are find shopping very challenging because they have to take the cared for person with them. If they have Dementia, then it can be difficult as they don't understand the need for social distancing or the one way systems.



FINANCE

- KCC Community Wardens told us that people are struggling to get their banking done in person because of the reduced hours that banks are open.
- *“When lockdown started and they announced mortgage holidays, I thought it would give us a bit of breathing space; the mortgage companies are now adding the missed payments including all the interest and adding it to the loan. So they are charging all their customers interest on the interest for the entire duration of the loan. This can’t be what the Chancellor intended when he announced mortgage holidays. I can’t afford this!”*
- KCC Community Wardens in Swale told us that have heard increasing concerns around finances. The increased food and utility costs due to Covid mean people are struggling to cover the costs.
- A community hub told us that there were 8 recent cases where people needed financial support because of delays to their Benefit payments.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us that a number of families are struggling financially so they were supported with food and clothes.
- A voluntary service in East Kent told us about the restricted mobility of some of their clients who relied on volunteers to taxi them to banks/building societies to manage their finances and obtain cash. They feel they are being deprived of transportation due to the Covid 19 regulations. This has led to some volunteers placing themselves at risk when shopping or getting cash by taking clients credit cards along with card details. Others shop first then obtain the cash or cheques on delivery of the goods. The organisation told us that these practices are well intentioned but are unacceptable on behalf of both client and volunteer.
- *“I’m finally paying off old credit card debt at 50 years old and thanks to Covid, I’m not spending as much. It’s been a good but forced, opportunity to stop me spending money on petrol, coffee shop lunches, work clothes, and planning holidays. I’m using my spare money to pay off the credit card debt. I’ve been working from home and staying safe as much as possible, so I think this lockdown has been a blessing for my finances, in a way”*



DOMESTIC ISSUES

- An organisation supporting people who are homeless and vulnerable told us that they continue to hear experiences of modern slavery.
- *“The strain on relationships has really been tested during this period. My partner and I have had multiple arguments about what we can or can’t do safely. My son had a friend stay overnight, I wasn’t too fussed about it because he’s stayed before but I didn’t think I was doing anything wrong. My partner went ballistic with me saying that he shouldn’t have people visit and certainly not stay over, said I was irresponsible for letting it happen. I haven’t seen anything official about having people stay over so I don’t see the problem. My partner blames me and said it’ll be my fault if any of us get covid because I don’t seem to care about looking after the household”*
- KCC Community Wardens across Kent told us about the difficulties that people are facing in their homes and the tensions between neighbours; they told us of neighbours lighting bonfires, annoyances accentuated because of prolonged exposure at home, noise disturbances, breaches of social distancing etc.
- KCC Community Wardens also told us that there has been a large increase in the number of households who have bought a new pet, particularly puppies, during lockdown. This has led to some noise disturbances within homes.
- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us that two family relationships within their client group have broken down. Both mums are struggling to get support as no legal aid is on offer. One of the cases included domestic violence and mum and children are being moved by the housing association for their safety.
- A voluntary organisation who are making wellbeing calls to their clients told us that they have identified clients who are too nervous to communicate when receiving their call, due to the increase of spam callers in the area.
- An organisation supporting people who are vulnerable told us that their helpline has received 24 safeguarding calls, with 17 of them related to domestic abuse. This is an increasing concern coming through which has occurred since mid-September. The organisation told us that potentially this could be due to the threat of a 2nd national lockdown.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

- “lots of us NHS workers were encouraged by third party companies to write a will at the start of the pandemic, in case we died during or as a result of the pandemic. We got it done for free. At 28 years old I probably wouldn’t have considered writing a will, but the messages from our managers were clear; this pandemic was going to hit us hard”

SECTION 2. Mental health & wellbeing

There were 3 themes within this topic area:

1. Mental health

2. Impact of isolation

3. Impact on workforce

MENTAL HEALTH

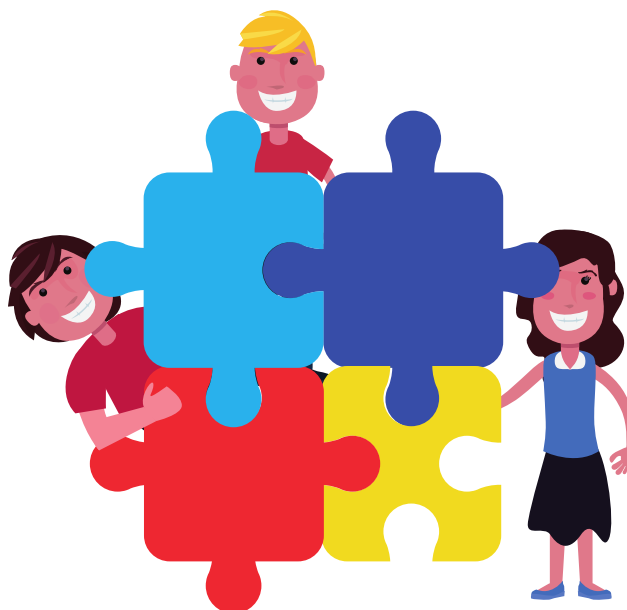
- *“The only appointment I could get with my GP was on the phone. I was trying to explain to him that my mental health was declining after I recently had my baby. The call lasted all of 2 minutes and he sent a prescription to the chemist, there was no face to face appointment or follow up or other support. I was prescribed a mild antidepressant without even being seen by a professional”*
- *“My mental health has suffered so much in the past few months. At the beginning of lockdown I couldn't cope with going to a supermarket and I even had a full blown panic attack in Asda, it was terrifying. I started shopping at 8pm on a Thursday when I knew that everyone would be at home and clapping for the NHS, the shops were practically empty. Since the clapping ended I have struggled to leave the house again. I just can't cope with so many people all in one place and all touching the packets of food and putting them back on the shelves”*
- *“I feel as though the world has forgotten about any other illness except coronavirus and nothing else matters. I've been on furlough now for 5 months, I spend nearly every day at home by myself and further potential lockdowns threaten to restrict me further by not seeing people and feeling alone. I've been feeling depressed and suicidal for the past few months and I imagine I'm not the only one. I understand the severity of the virus to some people but I admit that I've started to ignore the rules somewhat and people probably judge me for it but honestly I'm trying to put my health first. How many people have had their mental health suffer because of this? I know people with terminal illnesses, and it makes me so angry that they can't make the most of their last days because the world has closed down. Nothing else matters except covid and that makes me sad”*
- A mental health support group told us that one service user has admitted to hoarding since lockdown, due to the lack of services helping him.
- A mental health support group spoke to a service user who said “I have had trouble staying connected with people via zoom because of the technology, but my wife has helped me get connected. I do miss the face to face contact but this zoom support group helps me stay connected”
- KCC Community Wardens told us that they are aware of a rise in people mis-using drugs, they believe it could be related to anxiety levels.
- An organisation who supports carers told us that mental health support for carers still has a slow response from services. The organisation told us that 18 cases had to be escalated because of risk and that 25 cases need help but are mid to low risk and there is no help at the moment.
- An organisation supporting people who are vulnerable told us that a client called their helpline and was suicidal because they had been without any central heating for a week. The problem has now been fixed, but the organisation told us that small things could potentially be pushing people to breaking point.
- *“We don't have any family so it is just my husband and I, and our new baby. Aside from us and doctors, the only people who had physical contact with my new baby are my ex-husband (he lives alone so is in our support bubble) and one of my female friends. I suffer badly with post natal depression so it's been really hard. My baby son hasn't met any other children yet, so that could prove a problem later on”*

Counselling & Talking Therapies

- *“I am finding things really difficult at the moment and would like more support from XXX, but they are only speaking to me once a month. I feel more regular appointments would help me feel a lot better”*
- A mental health support group told us about the digital service that is currently offered by XXXX. One service user said she doesn't really feel as though she is benefiting from the therapy sessions as she isn't able to give it her all due to it being in a larger group and finding it hard to initially trust people. She said that due to it being through video, other people's facial expressions and body language can be misleading and there is sometimes a delay. She also pointed out that there could be people in the background of others attending the virtual sessions who she doesn't want to hear what she is talking about, as a result of this she feels the sessions lack confidentiality.
- A mental health support group told us that XXXXX told the service user that they would not be able to access counselling because they were not presenting at that moment with suicidal thoughts.
- A mental health support group told us that a client was often able to pop into the local Samaritans office for a chat and had got so used to being able to do that face to face. During Covid this has not been possible. The client was encouraged when in crisis to still phone them when needed.

Autism

- A mental health support group told us that one of their service users has been waiting months for a referral to get an ASC diagnosis/support from the GP.
- *“The mental health support I need has been mixed up for over a year now. I had an autism assessment last year. I was told that the assessment I had at the Maudsley hospital has still not been received by the psychiatric team, which means they still cannot refer me on for psychological therapy. I have been receiving IAPT talking therapy, however, this is not for Autism”*



CMHT

- A mental health support group told us that a service user left a message with the staff at XXXXX for someone to phone them back about their care. They have yet to get a call back and it's been two weeks now.
- A different mental health support group said that one of their service users reported that they have found the staff at XXXXX very helpful, especially during lockdown. They've had to contact them many times over the past few months and have found them caring and responsive.
- We also heard that a service user has been waiting for a psychology appointment for a couple of months now. When asked when the appointment is coming, XXXXX reportedly kept saying "you'll get your appointment next week," but no appointment has come thus far.
- A service user told a mental health support group that she has been up and down with her mental health recently and says that her care co-ordinator from XXX has been amazing. They have been, and continue to be, supportive towards her.
- We heard about a service user was being seen by XXXXX and they got their file mixed up with another service user. They found this extremely unprofessional and worrying.
- One service user told us that after attending A&E following suicidal thoughts, the clinicians emailed the CMHT to let them know, and said that someone would contact the service user. They didn't and she rung them herself. Her CPN had left earlier in the year and she found out that she now has a new one.
- A mental health support group told us that a service user was on the waiting list at XXXXX for psychological services for several months. They were removed from the list and discharged without any other support offered and no communication from XXXXX.

MIMHS

- "I've been having trouble with my mental health after a breakdown last year and find it hard being with my baby. My key worker got in touch this week just to check in about how I am. She was so helpful and knew I have been struggling so has referred me to lots of services"

Addiction Support

- An addiction support group told us that they completed a survey with their service users and found that there was a slight reduction in alcohol consumption and a slight reduction in drug use over lockdown. They did note, however, that there was also a decrease in service user's emotional wellbeing.

IMPACT OF ISOLATION

- KCC Community Wardens told us that their clients feel a deep sense of social isolation, particularly because they are unable to meet people at community groups.
- A dementia support group told us that isolation has contributed to the progression of Dementia in almost all their clients. Loneliness and isolation has been particularly tough on people with Dementia and their carers.
- An organisation supporting people to live independently told us that the second wave has caused an increase in anxiety amongst their clients. Five clients have spoken of their fears. There are concerns around the lack of information, "what has been put in place to support the vulnerable, shielding or isolating?" The Track and Trace app has already put one person in the group into isolation.
- *"There is no way that I would leave my elderly mum and dad in their house on Christmas day. They can barely cook for themselves, I do a lot of batch cooking for them and put it in their freezer. There is no way that they could manage to enjoy Christmas day with just the two of them at home, so I'll be breaking this rule of 6 and bring them to my house with the rest of the family. I think the loneliness and isolation this Christmas is going to be the end of some people"*
- An organisation who works with people in rural locations told us that the community in general are down, as a result of the latest Covid-19 news. A coffee club in the hall had only just started (3 weeks) but has had to close down again until further notice.
- A KCC Community Warden in Thanet told us that some elderly residents are feeling lonely and have lost their self-confidence to go outside. For a lot of them, they have been self-isolating for the past 6 months with no clubs or activities to go to and nothing to look forward to. They are not frightened of catching the virus, just afraid at the thought of going outside again.
- KCC Community Wardens told us that although some organisations are still running befriender schemes, many other schemes that involved house visits have slowed or ceased altogether. Some schemes continue to run but are telephone based, which is quite restrictive for those living with hearing needs.

New mothers

- *"I'm a military wife, alone and with a baby with no family close by, so I do the best that I can without any support. We haven't been able to see any of our relatives, none of the grandparents have met the new baby, he's not that new now at 8 months old! It's lonely enough being a military wife, but when you are alone at home with a baby, it's very isolating"*
- *"My baby arrived on April 2nd and we came home and didn't leave the house for 6 weeks, we had no visits from friends or family. It was mostly our choice but depressing nonetheless. Definitely felt isolated. My husband was working so he wasn't home"*
- *"I spent the majority of my maternity leave home schooling my 6 year old and juggling everything else during the day. I never got to spend the quality time with my new baby that we both needed. A bit extra maternity leave would be ideal for mums who have been robbed of usual maternity activities, such as baby classes, meeting other new mums, playdates etc"*

Frailty

- *“We have approached flu season, and elderly and vulnerable are more susceptible initially, especially to pneumonia. It doesn't mean that everything must go back into a lockdown. Social isolation is killing a lot more elderly, from poor appetites due to loneliness and heartache, reduction in medication and accidents and falls because family cannot assist”*
- KCC Community Wardens in Maidstone told us that some residents have been quite worried about going back into lockdown as they have only just found the confidence to go back outside again. Many of the residents do not feel as fit as they used to be, and they are now reluctant to start walking again and being mobile enough.
- An Age UK centre in East Kent told us that they have noticed a marked decline in people's spirits. The continued bad news about Covid combined with signs that winter is around the corner is having a very negative effect. There is a growing sense of dependence emerging, they are receiving unusual requests asking for help, such as making the bed.
- KCC Community Wardens told us that some clients are now displaying mobility issues, which have been exacerbated during lockdown due to the lack of physical exercise and being unable to leave their home. The Wardens have noted a rise in the requests for mobility aides

IMPACT ON THE WORKFORCE

- *“I woke up yesterday with a fever and the worst headache I've ever experienced. I managed to get a test and got the results this morning; positive for covid. I feel horrendous. I was due to start a new job next week so now I need to call in sick and tell them I have covid. I'm really worried that they will tell me not to bother even starting the job”*
- *“My workplace has only just requested that staff return to the workplace and asked us to hand back our equipment such as headphones, mobiles, office chairs etc. They are expecting us to move back into the office and now the second wave is upon us”*
- *“I work in a secondary school and I'm finding it all very stressful at the moment. I started a new role as assistant head in August so not only have I been trying to teach safely, I've also become a member of senior management, it's been a real baptism of fire to do this during covid. The stress is unbelievable, but I get a real sense of all the teachers pulling together to support each other. Two teachers have gone off with stress related illness”*
- *“I've been working from home since March now and I don't think my company are making any plans to reopen the office until next March. I told my manager that I've used a lot more heating and electricity since I've been at home. He told me to make a claim to HMRC at the end of the tax year and my tax code will be amended and I should receive a payment to offset my utility bills. It's not going to be much, but the cost of working at home has been unexpected”*
- *“My daughter is in year 7 in XXXX. Parents were emailed on the last day of half term (1 week half term) to say that the year group are not to return next week. They are keeping some year groups at home as a way to create a mini circuit breaker. She has been set online tasks through the school portal which means that I will now have to stay at home. I will have to ask my line manager to set me some tasks that I can do from home, as I had moved back into the office”*

SECTION 3. Access to medication & physical health

There were 8 themes within this topic area:

1. Access to primary care
2. Access to medication
3. 111 service
4. Hospital treatment/care
5. Dentists
6. Maternity and health visiting services
7. Healthy lifestyle
8. Flu vaccine

ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

- *"I'm still waiting to see a doctor face to face about my bad shoulder and arm. When I've had telephone appointments, the doctor just tells me that he'll send another prescription for painkillers to my pharmacist. I've yet to be examined, so I don't know if I have a problem or if I need an orthopaedic referral. Do I have to wait until the end of the pandemic until I get a real appointment? I don't know how long I can keep taking painkillers for"*
- *"My mum was turned away when she contacted her GP surgery and was told to go to the local hospital if it was life and death, otherwise she wouldn't be seen. She went to her local pharmacy, but had to treat herself. I'd also like to point out the local hospital A&E department was overwhelmed because other practices were advising the same so people were going to the hospital as it's the only way they were going to get seen. It turns out it wasn't a minor issue that my mum had"*
- *"I've not heard of anyone who's been able to have a face to face GP appointment. We have to message ours online and send a photo of whatever is wrong. I've not heard of anyone in the practice say that it led to an actual appointment. Also, our surgery isn't doing the flu jab this year. Will it ever go back to what it was? I doubt it"*
- *"The GP system is a joke at the moment. My partner was discharged from William Harvey a couple of days ago, he was in for his heart. The hospital asked him to contact the GP for further investigation and treatment and the GP on the phone told him sorry, we won't see you or investigate anything until covid is over. My partner said it's getting worse, but the GP just said that is what the hospital is for. He's been left high and dry"*
- *"My GP has been fantastic. I don't see a doctor very often but I had to seek medical advice during lockdown. I got a consultation (over the phone) on the same day, the GP wanted to see me in person so booked for the next week, and then I was referred to the appropriate professional. I actually thought it was a quicker process than at any other time that I've had to seek medical advice, and that was a good few years ago"*
- *A mental health support group told us about a service user who went to her GP about her mental health. She was referred straight away to the Community Mental Health team. She felt as though her GP was really supportive, understanding and acted accordingly.*

- *"My GP closed their doors at the start of Covid-19 and they sent everyone to the pharmacies instead. I work in a pharmacy and we have been crazy busy with scripts coming in by the 100's with notes from GPs requesting we check patient's blood pressure and inform them of the result. They won't do face to face but expect us to"*
- We heard from a client who called her GP on a few occasions to get a telephone appointment for her medication review. She was unable to get an appointment straight away and had to wait 4 weeks. As a result of this, her medication was stopped until they reviewed her meds.
- *"My GP surgery still aren't doing face to face appointments; I've even had 3 telephone appointments cancelled for my 5 year old"*
- *"There isn't the aftercare after you are discharged from the CMHT, these things aren't curable you have to learn to manage your condition and there isn't any help there to help stop you relapsing"*
- *"The services are being cut back and also having to cope with Covid19 so I have to take this into account when I'm thinking of complaining about GP services. If you complain about someone officially it damages your relationship with them because you have to work with them to have treatment"*
- A service user from a mental health support group missed a call from their GP as the GP had said they would phone in the afternoon and then phoned in the morning, so the client missed the call. They had to rebook the phone appointment and waited for a week for the GP to phone again.
- Our helpline heard from a client; *"After being in a call queue for over two hours I managed to get a telephone appointment booked in for early afternoon with XXXXX. I waited and waited with no call. I then spent another hour and ten minutes in a call queue to simply chase up my Doctor to call back to be told it wasn't on the doctors system. I rarely call my surgery but it seems that every time I do there are problems. I appreciate the NHS is under incredible pressure but if you can't even get an appointment without first being in a call queue for a 3.5hrs, how are you supposed to get the help you need?"*
- Our helpline also spoke to another client; *"My husband underwent a surgical procedure under general anaesthetic last week. He is now suffering complications and called the GP surgery this morning for a consultation as he was in extreme pain. He was told a GP would telephone him between 9 and 12noon. No call came so we called the practise. It was shut for lunch. Called out of hours number and told we were through to emergency service only and to call the practise again at 2pm. Finally called to be told GP had called in sick this morning and to wait for a call this afternoon. After 4.30pm GP called and told my husband to go to A&E, 8 hours after his first call"*
- Another caller to our helpline told us; *"Throughout September I've had to try to speak to a GP several times about serious problems around chest pain, new drug prescription, at my lowest ebb, depressed, in pain, anxious and afraid of having a heart attack. I learnt that the best thing to do was phone the surgery, which is always engaged, so you have to constantly close the call and re-dial. Then wait with the engaged tone till you are answered. It feels as though staff are hiding behind the covid problems, using the system as a reason for it all, not necessarily using their own initiative to help. There should be a phone answering system that catches your call straightaway and tells you that you are in a queue, with the option of telling you what number you are at in the queue! The technology has been around for a long time. It's unfair that getting through with a chance of making an appointment, even a telephone one, depends on constant redialling with no idea of whether you will get help"*

- KCC Community Wardens told us that residents find it difficult to accept that they must have a telephone appointment with their GP – they prefer face to face contact. This is putting some residents off phoning GPs and getting the treatment they need.
- An organisation who supports carers told us that carers were struggling to get a GP to visit. They had one situation when the cared for person was at the end of their life and was in extreme pain for extended periods. The Carer was calling the surgery begging for someone to come out and administer pain relief.

Routing checks/screening

- *“My baby is 12 weeks old next week and I’ve tried to get an appointment booked for his 12 week jabs, but the GP clinic don’t have any appointments until the start of November! He will be 16 weeks old by then, so how do I go about booking the next lot of jabs (due at 16 weeks)! Surely babies must have priority for appointments when jabs are due at specific times!”*
- *“The Government keep saying that the NHS are still open for business, but they definitely aren’t. I’ve just had to buy my own blood pressure monitor as the GP won’t do it, and I can’t get a prescription for my high blood pressure until I give him a reading. I had a telephone consultation a while ago but without an examination how do they know I’m ok?”*
- *“I’ve still not had my b12 injection that I was due in January. It is deemed a critical injection by the WHO, and not getting it is dangerous. I’ve heard some practices are trying to stop injections and move people to supplements, but not everyone can absorb b12 through diet or supplements”*
- A mental health support group told us that one of their service users was unwell and needed urgent blood tests to be taken; they had an appointment at their GP surgery for this. They received a message late in the evening the day before the appointment to say that the appointment was cancelled, no further date was given. The service user was later told that the test labs at the hospital are being used for covid at the moment and not for formal blood tests.
- KCC Community Wardens told us that residents in Canterbury & Dover reported that they have had trouble getting appointments to access their annual diabetes check-up.

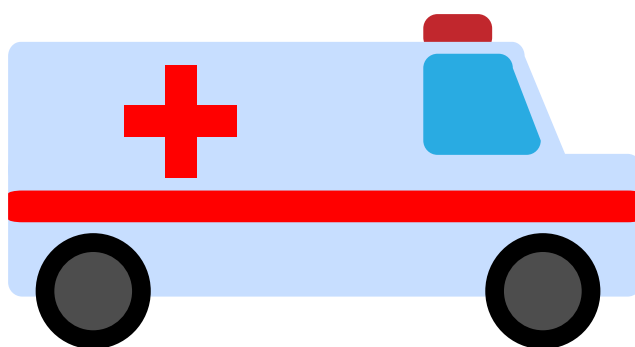


ACCESS TO MEDICATION

- *"I get repeat prescriptions using Health-era app. Every time this year that I have tried to get a repeat prescription I have encountered problems. The app hasn't updated so I've no idea if my request has gone through. There was global outage in July of the app. Finally this time it took my surgery a week to sign off on the request. Given that you can only request a week in advance this means you run out of medicine. I've had to get my surgery to send urgent requests to my allotted pharmacy on three occasions this year. It's all over the Gravesham area and it is problems with the app and GP surgeries. Surgeries are changing over to this method of getting repeat scripts and the system is getting overwhelmed. I'm only ever prescribed 56 days supply of medication which I take every day. It's been a problem all year. Not everyone can use the app, and it will make those who cannot dependent on someone else to sort out their repeat meds. It needs sorting ASAP. To have hassle every couple of months is ridiculous"*
- A mental health support group told us that a service user reported that the GP sent the wrong prescription strength for multiple medications. They don't know how long they've been sending the wrong medication as it was only when their daughter noticed when looking through the medication. This has now been resolved.

111

- *"I had chest tightness last week and called 111. I was told to expect a call back within 12 hours, it has been a week now and had no call back yet!"*
- *"I was experiencing suicidal thoughts. It was out of hours so I called 111. The guy on the phone was really good and got a paramedic out to me. The paramedic recommended that I go in for a check up and took me to A&E they were really good to me there and it really helped. Suicidal thoughts are an ongoing part of my mental health-schizophrenia and I know I can call 111 if I feel out of sorts at night"*

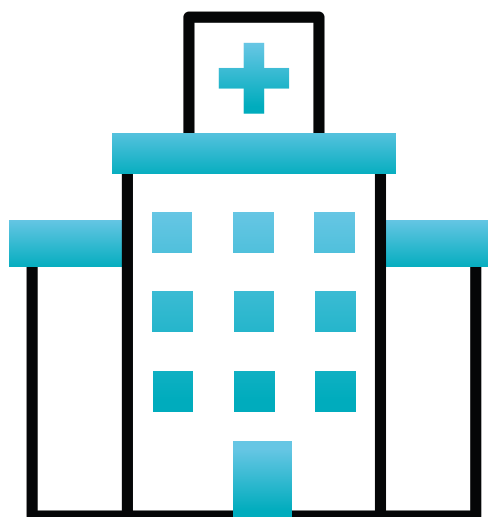


HOSPITAL TREATMENT

- *"I have a pre-cancerous condition and I've had my surgery cancelled twice this year. I've not had any follow up appointment. I have a phone call with my nurse this month and that will be a year that I will have been left without any check up. If you suspect you have cancer you can go to the GP for an appointment and have a referral, but it won't go any further than that at the moment"*
- *"My 3 year old has broken his leg and will be in hospital for the next two weeks. I will be staying in hospital with him but the parents' room in the children's ward is closed due to covid, so I have nowhere to heat or store food. I have to provide my own meals and I can't afford to go to the cafeteria every day. The hospital don't make it easy for parents to stay on the ward with their children if they close off the room with the kettle and microwave!"*
- *"My husband has been waiting for a year for a foot operation. He went in on New Years Eve but it was cancelled. Another date was scheduled for 31st March but that was cancelled due to lockdown. Now we have no idea when it will take place"*
- KCC Community Wardens in Canterbury & Dover told us that they are aware that residents have turned up for hospital appointments only to be told that the appointment was changed to a phone consultation, and the patient has not been informed of this.
- An Age UK centre in East Kent told us that they received a call from a carer; a lady had just been discharged from hospital following a stroke. It was a weekend and no follow up had been arranged.
- Our helpline took a call from one client who was referred to gynaecology last year. Due to the pandemic, their appointment took place over the phone but the client has still not seen a gynaecologist or had any investigations. The client has been told that they need an MRI but that MRIs are at a premium due to the virus. The client is frustrated with the delays.

Minor Injuries

- A mental health support group told us that a client had fall at home. She was taken to XXXXX hospital and admitted to minor Injuries and was informed that she needed to wait to see a Dr. She eventually saw a Doctor at 12.30am with no x-rays offered and informed she had a soft tissue injury. The client is a widow, lives alone and had to arrange a taxi home at 1.30am in the morning.



A&E

- Our helpline spoke to a lady; *"I was experiencing heart palpitations, confusion, dizziness and head throbbing. I called 111 and they advised that I go to A&E. I have severe anxiety and being without my mother (who is also legally my carer) causes me immense distress. The professional from 111 advised me that if I made the hospital aware of this they would not separate us and I could have her with me. We explained my anxiety to the nurse and that my mother is my carer and that it would cause me distress to be separated from her. The nurse was blunt, saying that 'everyone says that' and that all hospitals across the country are legally obligated to only admit the patient with no exceptions for carers. I began to have a panic attack, and the nurse tutted at us and said that it was my issue to work out whether I was severe enough to be at A&E. I felt ashamed, hurt and rejected by the very people that are supposed to care for me. I do not think I can ever handle a situation like that again, and my anxiety around hospitals and my symptoms has irreparably worsened"*
- The helpline also took another call; *"My son and I attended paediatric A&E. The benches were bolted to the wall and seats could not be moved, every second seat had been taped off so that distancing could be adhered to. With so few seats and so many children, there was no space for everyone. Naturally, parents did not want to leave their children to sit on the chair alone so children were sitting on parents laps on the chairs and other children and parents had to sit on the floor. The waiting room was becoming increasingly busy and impossible to safely distance from other patients, many of whom were sitting on the floor. I myself sat on the floor for over an hour at one point. After 2 hours we were taken into a cubicle for assessment, unfortunately there were spatters of blood on the floor from a previous patient which had obviously not been cleaned. Around 8pm the nursing shift changed and 3 of the nurses used the only patient toilet in the waiting room to get changed in. They had to tiptoe around the families sitting on the floor to access the patient toilet to change out of their scrubs. Is there no other place for staff to change, rather than using the patient conveniences?"*

Referrals

- Our helpline took a call; *"After an eye test on 13 March 2020 a referral to the NHS for a cataract operation should have been made. On 7th August I discovered the referral had never happened and the referral was then made by my GP. In the meantime, my eyesight had deteriorated considerably and after another eye test on 5 October I was informed of the long wait to see a consultant on the NHS. Faced with the realistic prospect of not being able to see anything with badly affected eye, by the time any appointment came through I felt the only option was to see a consultant privately, self-funding. I have now seen a consultant and am on the waiting list which is about 6 to 8 weeks"*

Visiting

- A dementia group told us that carers of people with Dementia were not always being permitted to accompany the person with Dementia. One family reported that the Lead Nurse for Dementia 'reluctantly let them in' when their loved one was dying. Other carers reported the same nurse saying *"what do you expect me to do about it"*. The family wanted to put in a formal complaint but didn't have the strength to do so.

Discharge

- An organisation supporting carers told us that hospital discharge was much better than previously, and that the integrated care teams were working well.

DENTISTS

- Our helpline heard 22 calls this month regarding difficulty accessing dentists in Kent. We received 4 calls from Dover & Deal, 2 calls from Thanet, 5 calls from Canterbury/Whitstable/Herne Bay, 6 calls from West Kent and 1 call from North Kent, with an additional 4 callers who didn't give a location. We heard that one client's dentist has recently closed and they have called 15 dentists, none of which are taking on NHS patients. Another client told us that their dentist now has a two year waiting list for treatment.
- *"I just had a call to confirm my dental appointment next week but now there's an additional £7 charge per person for PPE. Not for the dentist's PPE, but for ME to wear. I asked if I could bring my own and I was told no! I have to use theirs, which is a disposable face shield, a pair of latex gloves and a disposable face mask. Why is it so expensive? It's already £57 just to sit in the chair for a check up"*
- *"With my maternity exemption card I get free dental care for a year. I called 10 dentists within the Tunbridge Wells area and every single one of them said that they were not accepting NHS patients. I had put my postcode in the NHS Service finder and it told me that all the numbers that I tried were NHS dentists"*
- Our helpline heard from one client; *"The entire central filling of my back left molar came out leaving very sharp edges which were cutting my tongue. On contacting the dentist I was asked to send a photo to which I had to reply that my phone wouldn't go that far back in my mouth. BUT the dentist did see me that night and refilled the entire tooth"*
- Our helpline heard a story: *"I am extremely upset and frustrated that I am unable to get an NHS appointment for dentistry. I have recently moved to the area and have tried over 50 dentists to find an NHS dentist, however I have been told that none are taking on NHS patients but if I need to be seen I can pay privately. I am pregnant and should not be expected to pay privately and should be able to get a local dentist. I am extremely upset and concerned as I am unable to pay the fee for a private dentist but need to be seen and have no option but to live with the pain and not be seen"*
- Another client who called our helpline said; *"Frustratingly it seems that our dental practice is not making routine appointments, and you can only get seen or checked when there is a severe problem. I had to wait until my tooth had caused tremendous pain for me to be seen. My appointment was stressful, I was told sternly that I had not attended a routine appointment since the end of 2018 - I explained that covid had not allowed me to attend! Throughout the appointment, the dentist kept making reference to private treatment. He advised that I required root canal treatment, on the NHS it would only be 60% successful but if were to choose to pay an extra £450 for private treatment it would be 90% successful. This made me think that the NHS care that I would receive would be substandard. I have paid £70 towards the total cost of the treatment for root canal and multiple fillings - I do feel like I would like a second opinion just because of the way he was plugging the private dental options"*
- An Age UK centre in the South of Kent told us that a lady rang asking for a home dental visit, she had not seen the dental team because she had moved house and was bed ridden. The centre helped fill in the vast amount of paperwork and the lady was assessed on the phone and a visit was arranged.

- Our helpline also heard from a couple who had recently retired to Kent. No local practices will enrol them and one of them is disabled. They are concerned that they might have to go privately for treatment, and they cannot afford this. Another client told us that their partner was hit in the mouth whilst at work, causing damage to their front teeth. Their 2 front teeth have since fallen out and they are unable to eat or speak properly. They have been unable to get an appointment at the dentist and have been told that the work could cost approximately £6000 privately, money that they do not have.
- Once client called our helpline and told us that their family had recently moved to Sevenoaks and have been unable to register with a dentist. All of them are now overdue check-ups and the children may need fillings. The client told us that they have called every dentist in the area without success and that when giving them costings, it looks to be in excess of £500 for the family's initial appointments plus additional treatment. Neither parent is currently working so they cannot afford this.

MATERNITY

- *"My due date is 5 days away and both my boyfriend and I have a cold. We're self isolating because we were told to isolate for 2 weeks before the baby is born. We're panicking that he won't be able to come to hospital if he's still ill when the baby comes. My pregnancy has been horrible with lots of scares and visits to hospital and he's not been able to come to any appointment. I will be gutted if a cold spoils the birth. I asked the midwife and she said she was unsure but she told us to keep shielding anyway"*
- *"I just wanted to say a massive thank you to all the staff at Pembury Hospital. We had a long labour, the midwife was with us throughout and offered incredible support and more importantly impeccable humour. We couldn't be more grateful for the support we received throughout our stay, even though things were scary we were reassured and looked after"*

HEALTH VISITORS

- *"We emailed the health visiting team and had to push that we were concerned about the baby's weight. We had to wait a long time for the appointment, but got there in the end. The health visitor said that they're only making appointments to see babies that need weighing due to mum's being concerned about weight gain/loss"*
- *"My baby is 6 months old and I've never seen a health visitor"*
- *"My baby is 8.5months old and hasn't been weighed since March. I toyed with the idea of buying a set of scales myself, but they're so expensive and I never thought that it would last this long without any health visitor involvement"*



HEALTHY LIFESTYLE

- *“One of my new year resolutions at the start of 2020 was to get healthy, so I joined a local gym. It didn't last long because the gym was closed down at lockdown. It's opened up again but I don't feel very safe going back, the whole point of gyms is to sweat it out and I feel that covid will spread with body fluids. The instructor told me that a healthy BMI is made in the kitchen and not the gym. We go to gyms to learn about exercise and teach our bodies how to get fit, but why are there no places to go to learn about eating? Weight loss groups aren't about eating healthy, the diets can be restrictive and point you in the direction of rather unhealthy foods (“drink diet coke instead of full fat”, it's still artificial sugars!). Schools teach healthy eating now, but what about the generations who didn't get that in their school curriculum? Where do I go to learn about the best way to eat?”*
- *KCC Community Wardens in the Canterbury & Dover area told us that some residents have informed them that they are unable to access the “One You” lifestyle advisors that previously supported them. Some residents said that they don't want to use the phone to access the service and other residents said that they don't have access to Zoom.*
- *“I'm a smoker and I drink lots of fizzy drinks and coffee. I tested positive on September 22nd, but I didn't get severe symptoms or hospitalised thankfully, just minor symptoms overall. I had chest pain and a racing heart rate. It has made my outlook on life so different, the only positive thing from a miserable situation. Getting covid has forced me to make lifestyle changes. I'm down to one cigarette per day, and I only smoke half of it and I'm drinking more water and fresh fruit juice and have cut right back on the fizzy drinks. I still have a coffee in the morning, to prevent the caffeine withdrawal. I want to give my body a strong fighting chance against this awful virus. I've been wanting to quit smoking for a while now and this journey with covid is what decided it was time. It's made my outlook on life so different”*
- *“Lockdown has been really productive for me, it's given me the opportunity to focus on myself without the stresses of work and usual everyday activities. I'm exercising a bit more, I've lost some weight, I'm drinking much less alcohol and I'm reducing my antidepressants. It feels like I've been in a dark tunnel and I can see the light again. I hope that when I start back at work then I'll be a stronger person. This “rejuvenation” has been long overdue, but it would've meant taking a few months sick leave from work. I feel that lockdown has saved my life”*

FLU VACCINE

- *“How have we got to the stage where patients who don't own a car but are told their flu jabs are being carried out in a car park. This is 2020 for goodness sake, how about hiring a church hall or something similar?”*
- *“I've just had a letter in the post offering me a flu jab at my GP surgery but I don't have any medical conditions that would make me eligible for it. The only reason I can think of is because my BMI is very high. I'm embarrassed to go if this is the case. I don't want to discuss it with my family or even the practice for fear of being judged”*
- *“I had my flu jab at XXXXX today. I was very impressed, safe, quick and very professional. Well done to all the staff and nurses. I'll be back in 2 weeks for my pneumonia jab!”*
- *“I want to praise NHS staff and volunteers at XXXXX, powering through huge numbers of flu vaccinations this morning...superb planning and systems in place....the system worked like clockwork”*
- *“I got my flu vaccine this week, I'm not usually too fussed about getting it but I thought it made sense this year. I know the flu vaccine won't protect me from getting covid, but it will help to avoid unnecessary doctors visits. It will hopefully stop my immune system being weaker and then catching covid”*

- *"I booked my flu jab on the phone with the GP. I was offered several slots.*
- *Turned up and was met by a lady at the door who was wearing a mask.*
- *There was a one way system into building with arrows on the floor for where to go. I had to stand on a dot on the floor in the waiting room. Other people were on other dots. The Dr appeared in full PPE and called me into his room. Had the jab and left. It was all very quick. He even took the time to show concern that I was back in the workplace and offered to write to my employer as I am in the extremely vulnerable category"*
- *"Our original flu jab appointment, arranged by XXXXX, was for the 20th Oct at the (drive/walk in) car park. This was changed to Saturday 24th Oct. My wife was happy to attend the car park as it was just within walking distance of our home. There she found it well ordered and walk ins were attended to in one of the gazebos they had erected. Yes, it worked but she wonders what it would have been like if it was wet and cold and having to remove clothing for the administering the jab"*
- *"I suffer with motor neurone disease, and my husband had a major stroke 5 years ago. Our surgery offered a drive through service which was ideal for us"*

Unable to get a flu vaccine

- *"The government are now pushing adverts about getting flu jabs, and why it's so important for our health over the winter. It's a shame that our GP doesn't have any in stock and they directed me to my local pharmacy, who also don't have any in stock"*
- *"I've got type 1 diabetes and I'm unable to get the flu vaccine at all at my practice. My GP said they don't have enough stock and neither do my local pharmacies"*
- *"I had my flu jab booked today but they rang me 10 mins before I left the house to say that I wasn't eligible any more, despite them sending me a text to say I needed to book it. I tried to tell them that I get it at the surgery every year but they weren't having any of it and said I definitely can't have it this year. I understand that there are people that need it more, but I've always been told that I'm eligible. I wondered if they're running low on stock and are prioritising the most vulnerable. It wouldn't bother me if this was true, but they shouldn't tell me that I'm no longer eligible"*
- *"Whilst having a regular blood test to check medication levels in my blood, I made an enquiry to book a flu jab. The nurse told me that because I paid for it last year at a pharmacy I would now need to pay for it for life. My medication affects the white blood cell count and can lower the immune system. The nurse did not seem interested in this and said I would still need to pay. This has caused me some stress and anxiety"*
- *Our helpline took a call: "Despite being on vulnerable list and being told I would be notified of flu jab appointments nothing received. Phone to surgery revealed no appt for over 65s. Local chemists all run out of vaccine"*
- *Our helpline staff also heard: "At the age of 64, and with high blood pressure, my husband thought it sensible to book a flu jab, only to be told that there are no supplies available anywhere, even if you pay. The surgery said they hoped to have some by the end of October. I work for a charity supporting people with disabilities and even our frontline staff can't get vaccinated. We have been told by KCC they must be vaccinated and we have to make every effort to encourage them to do so. So, completely pointless to exhort people to get a jab as they can't until at least November"*
- *"The surgery sent me a letter with an email address to contact and arrange a flu vaccine. I have sent three emails but complete radio silence from the NHS. Everyone else I know has successfully got their vaccination but no news for mine"*

- Our helpline staff heard a story: *"I need to have my flu jab at home as I am housebound. I did not get last year's flu jab until February this year as the district nurses were not doing it and my medical practice had taken it on. So I'm on the list for a flu jab at home again this year. I have primary progressive MS and I'm not classed as clinically vulnerable. I'm not holding out much hope of getting my flu jab this year I don't feel that I can complain with all that's going on"*
- Our helpline received a call from one client who said, *"My husband and I use different GP practices. My husband suffers from a heart condition and falls within a covid19 shielding category. Even though I am younger than him and in good health I contacted my GP practice today to ask whether I could book an appointment for a flu jab. According to the NHS website anyone living with a person in the shielding category can have a flu jab. After having waited patiently for almost an hour on the phone, my GP practice refused my request citing that their own patients come first"*

SECTION 4. Care & support packages

There were 6 themes within this topic area:

1. Care homes

2. Support services

3. Care at home

4. Equipment

5. Impact on Carers

6. Impact on young Carers

CARE HOMES

- *"We as a family feel that my mums care home has let her down and are not taking into consideration the effect lockdown can have on people with dementia. We have had to change mum's care home"*
- An organisation who supports carers told us that as care homes also went into lockdown, any pre-planned respite was cancelled and any carer in crisis could not access a care home during the lock down period.

SUPPORT SERVICES

- An Age UK volunteer helped a carer during a doorstep talk. The client's husband had been diagnosed with dementia last October but had had no contact with their GP. The client had nobody to talk to about the dementia.
- A voluntary organisation in Thanet told us that there has been an increase in clients applying for assistance, approximately 4 per week. They are struggling to maintain their number of volunteers, as many of them had to shield at the start of the pandemic and have not returned.
- A dementia support group told us that none of Alzheimer's Society support groups are currently operating - no peer support, no singing, no Dementia Cafe, no Carer's Group. They are doing welfare and companion calls instead but it's not filling the gap.
- A voluntary service in East Kent told us that some clients have moved home during lockdown, but have not been able to have any support from volunteers to help unpack and get settled into their new homes.

CARE AT HOME

- *“I receive weekly support from XXXXX. A support worker is meant to come round and support me with daily living skills on set days and times. I used to get a rota so I knew when they were coming. I have not received a rota for weeks. A support worker was supposed to come round this morning. I rang their office at 11am to find out where they were and I was told they would not be coming until the afternoon. This has thrown my entire day out as I was expecting them this morning. I am finding it very stressful at the moment as I am waiting in for them to arrive and they don't turn up when they are supposed to. I have asked for a rota several times and have not been provided with one. I have a support worker to help me complete daily living task that I find difficult to do on my own due to mental health”*

EQUIPMENT

- *“My daughter has run out of batteries for her hearing aid, and usually I go to the RVH in Folkestone and collect some at the reception desk. I went this morning with the brown book to collect another 2 packets but I was told at the door that the reception desk are no longer giving them out and I had "to call the number". I asked what number it was and the person at the door said "the main number you call for your batteries and stuff. Didn't they tell you this at your last appointment?". I told them that I didn't know what number that they meant and that actually we hadn't had an appointment for some 18 months. The person at the door went to the reception and gave me a piece of paper with the phone number for the Audiology department. I ended up having to buy batteries in Boots just to tide my daughter over”*

IMPACT ON CARERS

- A dementia support group told us that carers of people with Dementia are getting no respite. Day Centres are closed, all face to face support groups are cancelled and lockdown is making the progression of the illness worse. Things got a little bit better when they could get out and see people again for a while, but now restrictions are getting tighter and the evenings are drawing in, they have noticed a significant impact on their carers.
- An organisation supporting carers told us that they feel that within mental health, a bigger gap is growing and more people need services. They told us that they believe that only emergencies are being dealt with.
- A different organisation who supports carers told us that social services were not really completing home visits, and were doing all assessments via video calls or telephone. The carers felt that although they understood this, that they were not always listened to.
- They also told us that due to day centres being closed and sitting services being stopped or limited, it has placed additional pressure on carers. As a result carers have reported a decline in their own physical and mental wellbeing.

IMPACT ON YOUNG CARERS

- An organisation who support carers told us that a team at KCC are closing cases when younger people who are carers do not want to engage on the phone. These young people do not want to talk on the phone in their homes and are uncomfortable having these kinds of discussions due to lack of privacy at home.
- Imago told us that during lockdown the level of caring had increased and there are few opportunities for respite. Imago have been providing online workshops on a bi-weekly basis since the start of lockdown that were directed at those young carers who have particularly struggled during lockdown.
- An organisation supporting young carers told us that families with young carers have struggled financially, and they have seen an increase in the number of referrals to foodbanks and requests for financial support.

SECTION 5. Education, Transport & Housing

There were 4 themes within this topic area:

1. Education

2. Housing

3. Transport

4. Technology

EDUCATION

- *"If Kent becomes high risk then my child will not be going to school"*
- KCC Community Wardens told us that in some areas, parents are unhappy with the information given to them by the schools. One particular school informed parents of a covid case within the school, but the parents are aware of 4 cases within the school. Many parents are refusing to send their child in.
- An organisation who supports young carers told us that they support 72 young carers and the cared for, who are experiencing high levels of anxiety and uncertainty on returning to school. Young carers have reported that they are fearful of catching Covid-19 and giving it to the cared for.

Nursery Settings

- An organisation supporting vulnerable families told us that they have supported a family whose pre-school aged child is at risk of being excluded from nursery, over behaviour, before any solutions have been put in place to try and manage the situation. The behaviour is believed to have been learnt from their disabled sibling. With the closure of the local specialist nursery, there is a gap in support and provision for this child to access if they are excluded.

Special Needs

- An organisation supporting families with special needs told us that the biggest issues this month have been anxieties from children who were starting secondary school in year 7. Schools have not been providing the support which is documented in their EHCP, but no discussion was received prior to returning to school, so the children struggled and behaviour increased which led to behaviour sanctions. In one case, there was a short term exclusion.
- The same organisation told us that they are helping families by reviewing draft EHC plans and discussing them with parents over video calls. They report that the draft EHCPs are very poor with little or no information in 2 or 3 need sections. One parent was advised (by authorities) to agree to the draft plan and then amend it the following year at the annual review, as there was a lack of information in reports carried out in assessment due to COVID. At least two of the other drafts had plenty of evidence and strategies in the reports which could be lifted, but for some reason they had been overlooked and parents had struggled to get information from SEN officer as to why etc..
- They also told us that they supported a family with a year 7 child who was a school refuser. Poor paperwork transition has resulted in the parent receiving a fine for non-attendance.
- We also heard that since returning to school in September, one primary age child with high anxiety has not been supported in school; the school have not been helping and are avoiding providing sensory circuits or any extra strategies.

Parents in difficult situations

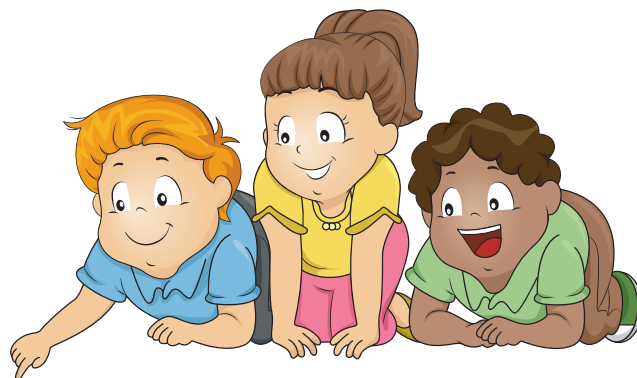
- *"We've withdrawn our son from school and will home educate rather than be fined. His school have multiple Covid cases in staff and pupils, but only the confirmed close contacts are being told to isolate, not the whole bubble. The year group is a bubble, but the detention group is a mixture of bubbles, which blows the bubble theory. I asked the school why they are mixing the detention bubble and they said the government guidance only covers collective worship and assemblies as separate bubbles. Schools are now just interpreting the guidance to suit themselves and I don't want my son at risk"*
- *"I'm really struggling now that schools are back, I get this huge feeling of dread when I open my eyes in the morning and I don't want to get up. My 8 year old son is autistic and is currently not attending school due to extreme high anxiety and bullying issues. He can't leave the house due to the anxiety, he can't even get himself a drink/food and I have to be in the same room as him in the house. He can't sleep and is still awake at 1am. He struggles with aggression, meltdowns and his anxiety causes him to need to be in control of everything including his younger sister. It's taking its toll. We have no family nearby. I've lost all my usual respite of going to church, seeing friends etc and they've stopped texting and calling. The school don't support us and aren't in touch anymore. I just can't see an end to this and I'm struggling"*
- *"We are in a family of 7 and my oldest son is an adult and lives with us, he has autism, and he just tested positive. My husband has COPD and I am diabetic and overweight, I feel that we are at huge risk and I am worried how we will cope when we (inevitably) get it. Another one of my kids has a fever with an ear infection, I'm keeping her off school but I won't test her because it's likely that it's covid. Another of my sons has headaches with ear infection. It's a worry when both parents are vulnerable, and we have kids to look after who are already sick. How do we get support?"*

Isolating year groups

- *“My daughters class were sent home from school this week because someone in the class tested positive. The class have to isolate for 2 weeks, including the teacher. What I don't understand is why siblings don't isolate; what if the kids isolating at home have contact with their siblings and the sibling takes the virus into school? The school said I need to keep my isolated daughter away from her siblings for 2 weeks, which is difficult to do when she shares a bedroom with one of them!”*
- *“In the second week of school starting my youngest had to self isolate due to a case in her bubble. By the end of the two week isolation period she was glad to get back to school. Then my middle child had to self isolate due to a case in his bubble (different school). So this past month has been like a tag team against me and trying to home-school again!”*
- *“I rang 119 after being told someone my son plays with in school tested positive. I was told there is no need to isolate and no need to test unless symptoms appear and that likely track and trace won't contact me but if they do then to follow their advice. I thought that if someone was positive, and they had close contact with my son, then my son should isolate?”*
- *“I'm a single mum with 4 kids. My daughter was sent home from school because one of her classmates tested positive so she has to self isolate for 2 weeks. Her siblings still have to go to school. How am I meant to do the school run with the 3 kids and leave an 8 year old at home by herself??? It's not safe, it's not practical and I can't possibly do the right thing here! I told the school that I would have to keep the other 3 off because I refuse to leave one at home alone and the school said I would be liable for a fine”*

Future planning

- *“My child goes to XXX school and we were sent an online questionnaire this week. It asked us what devices we had at home, how many we had, how many kids we had that would access the devices, and also asked us if we had an internet connection and a printer. The school are clearly putting a plan in place to deal with a second school shut down. I don't agree with it, but at least they're thinking ahead. Kids suffered badly with the first shut down and schools were completely unprepared for teaching remotely. I'm just glad that XXX is preparing for this eventuality and have some kind of plan in the works. I haven't heard of any other school doing this, which just proves that free schools and academies are preparing a back up plan, and local authority schools have no plan in place”*



HOUSING

- *“two of the workmen that my landlord sent round to do work in my flat have tested positive, both of them. The landlord never told me this, it was the NEXT workman that was sent to finish the job that told me. I'm annoyed that my landlord didn't have the decency to tell me”*
- A mental health support group told us that one service user has been living in his van due to mould in his flat which the council have not assisted with. His mental and physical health is in a bad way due to living circumstances.
- An organisation supporting people who are homeless and vulnerable told us that they have seen an increase in rough sleepers since the start of September. There is usually an increase in referrals at this time of the year due to the weather; in September they had 13 referrals, this week they had 27.
- The same organisation told us of a case where a worker was put onto a zero hour contract due to covid. They were then not working or earning any money and their landlord evicted them and they are now rough sleeping.

TRANSPORT

- KCC Community Wardens told us that due to more people working from home, permit on street parking has been a worry for many people. So many people are working from home so there are no spaces available.
- Our helpline heard from one client who attends dialysis 3 times a week at hospital. Often the vehicle sent to collect her has too many people on it, so no-one is socially distanced (an ambulance with 4 patients and 2 staff or 1 car with 2 patients are expected to sit in the back together). The client rarely sees the staff clean the seats after patients, use hand gel or wear face masks properly ie covering both nose and mouth. The client refuses to go with the crew and makes them call their controller to arrange different transport for her. She has been told by the transport controller that they are considered as a "medical transport unit" and therefore the covid-19 rules for distancing don't apply

TECHNOLOGY

- KCC Community Wardens in Sevenoaks highlighted that many people do not have a smartphone, and they may require prompts within the community to inform them of changes in guidance or bus stand closures, or diversion or routes.
- KCC Community Wardens told us that although many initiatives are being developed, many older and vulnerable people are often disproportionately excluded because they don't have compatible devices, have poor digital knowledge, lack confidence, don't have an internet connection. For many people, technology is actually a barrier to social inclusion if this is the sole avenue to community engagement.
- An addiction support group told us that they previously provided phones to service users which worked well, however they will now be providing tablets as this works better for engaging with groups. They also told us that *"Some people can't engage by phone, even when we gave them a phone. They need to be seen face to face"*.
- An organisation who supports young carers told us that they have found young carers to have higher levels of digital isolation.

SECTION 6. Testing

There were 4 themes within this topic area:

- 1. Accessing tests**
- 2. Track & Trace**
- 3. Covid experiences & symptoms**
- 4. Future Covid vaccines**

ACCESSING TESTS

- *"I got a test kit for my son, but I have been having trouble registering the test on the website. It won't let me register the test so I can't post it off. Until I can get it registered and sent off, I can't get results back and send him back to school"*
- *"I booked a test on Monday night, got one for Tuesday morning. I was offered one 4 miles or 14 miles away. It's an excellent, fast service and friendly staff but I'm still waiting for results (50 hours in) which is causing some stress here as I'm pretty sure it'll be negative"*
- *"The 3-symptom test rules are all about rationing the tests and they are missing cases. They are missing the opportunity to calm this pandemic"*
- *"I've been so cautious and only had a small group of friends to see during lockdown. I went out with my friend to a coffee shop and I accidentally took a drink of her coffee, thinking it was my cup. We also studied together that afternoon for a few hours, without masks on. She called me a couple of days later saying that she had a fever and a sore throat, she tested positive for covid the next day. I have zero symptoms so I don't qualify to get a test, but I've been in self isolation since she called me to say that she had symptoms. I don't know how to get good advice; 119 told me to isolate because my friend is positive and I had close contact, but I'm concerned that I need to get a test as it was VERY close contact. I keep being told not to have a test as I have no symptoms"*
- *"On Monday I had to order home test kits, and I tried to do it for 5 people (my 3 kids and my partner and myself) as we are all displaying symptoms. The website would only let me order 3 at a time so I ordered 3 for the children first and was informed that they would be delivered by 8pm on Tuesday. It wouldn't let me order any more until the 3 had been delivered and then sent off, so my partner and I can't get tested for days. As it happens, the 3 tests didn't arrive on Tuesday, they arrived by 8pm on Wednesday. Tests have now been done and posted off. Now that they are posted, I can go back on the website and order 2 more for my partner and myself. It's just nonsense that 5 people displaying symptoms can all get tested, some of us have to wait!"*
- *A client contacted our helpline and told us "After registering a 38.4 temperature during a recent hospital visit I was advised to contact 111. After a long and detailed conversation I was told to book a covid-19 test which I did that evening. I was informed by the 111 member that even if my test was negative it could be a false reading and I should continue to self isolate for 10 days. Have I misunderstood the 111 advice?"*

- Our helpline took a call from another client who was very unwell with a very high temperature. Their partner was in normal health, and as a precaution the client used the NHS app to request 2 tests. The client received the results and had in fact tested negative however, their partner's results was "unreadable sample". Their partner was advised to get another test and to remain in isolation. It turned out that the client's initial high temperature was due to an infection, and received antibiotics to clear it up. They would never have known about their partner's questionable result if they had only requested one test. They feel that the first test was now unnecessary as the cause was due to a treatable infection, and now having 2 tests for their partner could have been avoided.
- *"I'm so confused by the government, NHS 111, and test & trace advice that I've read and been given. I've had lots of conflicting information on when I should test; I was told I didn't need a test as it was likely that I just had a cold but I was worried and got tested and it came out positive. I've since been told that I can stop self-isolating by test & trace in a phone call, 8 days after my test, and then I have been told I need to keep isolating for at least 10 days but preferably 14 days! It is so worrying as I don't know what advice is actually correct. I am erring on the side of caution and isolating for longer anyway, but it's exhausting trying to understand the conflicting information when you're already unwell"*

TEST & TRACE APP

- *"I got a notification from my SERCO app that said I had possible exposure, but then nothing happened when I tried to open the notification. Apparently it's a common glitch with the app, and the notification should be ignored. If you have close contact with someone who has since tested positive then you receive a message from the app telling you what to do, and the message will not disappear. The "glitch" notification is just going to scare a lot of people who don't understand how this app is meant to work. Not many people do understand it to be honest".*
- *"I just received an email telling me to download the app, it's not even from the NHS even though they're using the NHS logo. I won't be gathering anything from Serco, they just gather your data and sell it onto another company"*
- *"My daughter is at Uni and lives with a few other girls who tested positive and received their results on Sunday/Monday. Only 1 of them has received a text from test & trace (Thursday), the rest haven't been alerted. It's completely useless at contacting people in a timely manner"*
- *"I haven't been out since March and I've been lucky enough to be able to work from home, but now my boyfriend has covid. I'm trying to keep positive. I really don't think track and trace works at all because I'm sitting in the same house as my boyfriend, and the app says there's no cases in the area! It's been 5 days and the app hasn't alerted to me that someone in my house has covid"*
- *"I won't be downloading it. I refuse to be officially locked in because some random person bought some teabags in the same shop as me and then declared that they had covid. Who really is going to put themselves at risk of fines? No chance"*

Professionals using the App

- *"I work in the NHS in community settings and I was told to disable and switch off the covid app when I'm at work. I understand that teachers, doctors, police and the fire brigade have been told to do the same. Defeats the purpose of being alerted to someone who tests positive and protecting yourself. It's not the smartest app, the Bluetooth has a range of 10m. If I visit a patient at home and their next door neighbour is also at home and within 10m of my phone, I will get an alert if the neighbour tests positive. I'll potentially have to isolate just because I visited someone's neighbour, which isn't the direct contact that they tell us about. That's why we have been told to switch off the app, because it's crap"*
- *"The police have been told not to download the app onto their private phones; if these citizens have been told not to download it then why do the rest of the country?"*
- *"I've downloaded it and am using it to check in if I go to pubs/restaurants who have the QR code. My job however as a housing officer means I visit residents in their homes several times a week (one day last week I saw 16 residents from 12 different households), so because the app doesn't track your location as normal GPS would, I am not overly impressed with it or have much confidence in its effectiveness"*

Incompatibility

- *"I had to delete the app from my phone, the other functions on the phone didn't work properly. As soon as I deleted the app, the phone went back to normal. Too many bugs in the app"*
- *"My phone is an iphone6S, my husband has a 5C. Some people can't afford more up-to-date phones. The NHS app should be able to work on all phones"*
- *"My Samsung s3 android phone is not optimal apparently, so the app won't load to it"*
- *"I don't have a "smart" phone, just a normal basic handset, so I won't be downloading the app. By choice I don't want a smart phone, or any of the intrusive and monitoring apps that come with it"*
- *"I downloaded the app and was fine as I have an iPhone 7. However other members of my family that wanted to also download have an iPhone 6 so it was not compatible! I do not understand why we can't get anything right. I really want to do the right thing but what is the point when the test, track and trace is not fit for purpose. I have now deleted the app."*
- Our helpline heard from one client: *"No use encouraging Test and Trace on a Phone that is not capable of receiving it!"*



QR Code/Checking In

- *"I have a shop in Ashford and I downloaded and printed off a QR code. The first person who came into the shop to use it then took her mask off as her phone used facial recognition to unlock. What's the point!!!!"*
- *"I've just been to hospital and asked at reception where I can scan my phone with the NHS app and was told that they don't have a code. They don't have a track and trace feature at the hospital, or a manual sign in sheet. This has been an absolute disgrace, thousands of people from all walks of life are using these public places and no one is required to sign in. I tried using the app yesterday at a store and it didn't recognise the bar code. I haven't been able to use the app once since I downloaded it"*
- *"I have the app and it's not exactly rocket science to use it. I checked in at the gym, no big deal. Everyone needs to get on board with this"*
- *"The SERCO app is a load of rubbish. I went to a coffee shop on Monday and scanned in, I was there for half an hour and no one else was in the shop apart from my sister and I. I had a notification today that someone has tested positive and now I have to isolate. I wasn't near anyone else!"*
- *"I was in Waitrose yesterday and the coffee shop were insisting that people had to scan the QR code to get access to the seating area. All these little old ladies were turning up for their tea and coffee and couldn't understand how to download an app that scans the QR code! Waitrose were just turning them away, insisting that they must get the app to come into the coffee shop. Can a venue legally turn you away solely because you can't scan their QR code? It's just discriminating all those old ladies that either don't have a phone, or don't have a modern phone that accommodate the app"*
- *"I don't like the way that this app works. If I scan in somewhere at 9am and am only on the premises for 15 minutes and come in close contact with only 1 person, and then someone goes into the same premises at 4pm and then they test positive, I will get a notification to self isolate. The app registers when you enter a location, but not when you leave. How is it meant to know how long I stayed at the location for? Could be 15 mins, could be 3 hours!"*

COVID EXPERIENCES

- *"I've had 14 weeks of loss of smell and taste. Some days are harder than others. My GP told me there is nothing they can do at this time, just to report if it gets any worse. He said it's a bit like PTSD, take it one day at a time and try not to think about the idea that it could be permanent. Flavours are completely gone. The joys of being able to smell a certain scent, like my wedding perfume or favourite candle, shampoo, lotions, anything. If there is a gas leak or something potentially dangerous, I worry. I desperately miss all of my favourite family foods and homemade cooking. These senses give you joy and I keep saying it sounds ridiculous, but when I tell others what I am going through I feel they don't understand. I'm hopeful that I'll get through this new normal"*
- *"I feel like a lot of the symptoms of covid are headache, cough, nausea, heart palpitations, body aches and pains and I have also been experiencing very weird dreams; scary ones enough that wake me in the night. I just want it to be over"*
- *"I had covid in June and I was on steroids to help. I've been experiencing some serious hair loss since then, to the point that I'm worried about going out and people seeing large bald patches. My hair has been falling out in clumps and I'm considering having my hair cut off, so that it doesn't look quite so bad"*

- *"I had a positive covid result, I had a cough and fever with fatigue. My cough worsened and I felt that my heart rate was fast. I also had bilateral pneumonia. It's been a month since my symptoms started and I'm still coughing so much that I'm pulling muscles in my chest. I had to go back to work after my 2 weeks because I can't afford to take time off, but I'm still not feeling over it yet"*
- *"I am a retired nurse and I thought that my immune system had seen everything and was strong. I was so wrong and even though I practiced social distancing and wore a mask, I still got Covid in July and I still have symptoms now (Long Covid).I've lost a lot of my hair and I had Covid Toe (just one toe). My first test early July was negative even though I had fever and fatigue. I went to visit my sister in Norfolk because my test was negative. I was hospitalised 9 days later with shortness of breath and inflammation around my heart and lungs. I tested positive when I was admitted to hospital. We are all still learning about Covid every day, but in the meantime people should try to do everything they can to avoid getting it, by wearing masks and distancing"*
- *"My symptoms started at the end of September and I had a positive result at the start of October. I have mostly cold symptoms and severe low back pain, like my spine is on fire. Since hearing I'm positive I've had so much anxiety. I don't know if I'm having shortness of breath because of a symptom or if it's just the anxiety. I want to get better so bad and since my symptoms are light, I took a long walk yesterday. Just going for a walk gave me increased chest pain, mostly in the left of my ribcage and tightness in my upper back. I've been taking deep breaths and coughing a few times a day but it doesn't seem to move anything. I'm at day 9 now"*
- *"One of the diabetic nurses in our local GP surgery got tested as her husband made an off the cuff remark about not smelling something. The whole family tested positive (4 of them) and that was the only sign. There are many of us who could be positive and also completely asymptomatic. It would be beneficial for all healthcare workers to be tested regularly even if they don't experience symptoms"*
- *"I tested positive in July, I lost my sense of taste, smell and had a cough for days. I also developed a really bad headache and some shortness of breath. After my isolation period ended I was still short of breath and fatigued, but I also developed a rash on both my legs and an unrelenting earache. My GP still hasn't been doing face to face appointments, but he can't explain the earache and gave me antibiotics. He hasn't looked at the rash either, but advised a basic emollient. It feels like my thighs are on fire, like needles stabbing me. An emollient isn't going to do anything to help. Not much support from the GP at all"*

FUTURE COVID VACCINES

- *"if they come out with a vaccine then I will not be asking to have it. Not enough time has been allowed to thoroughly test it. I will take my chances and live as healthy a life as possible"*

OUR ACTION PLAN

Throughout our report we have identified areas where we can act and follow up on some of the problems people have faced. This is to ensure that the feedback we receive reaches the right people and can continue to be used to drive change and improvement to health and social care services within our community.

- We will be presenting the feedback we have heard regarding parent rooms in children's hospital wards being closed, to local hospitals and discussing the policy and guidance around these issues
- Based on the negative feedback we received regarding the Occupational Therapy services in Thanet, we will be exploring whether this can be improved
- We are going to share our insights regarding the Track & Trace app with local hospitals and confirm that it is being used properly and is accessible within hospital receptions

Thank You



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