

## Experiences of health and social care in Sheffield

### Key insights from December – January 2025

Between December 2024 and January 2025, we gathered insights from 326 individuals accessing health and social care services across Sheffield. Key highlights include feedback on care and treatment provided at GP practices and hospital services. We heard about the need for greater flexibility when booking GP appointments, as well as the challenges people face when traveling to different healthcare settings. Additionally, we received feedback related to mental health services and heard about the frustrations individuals experience when trying to navigate Adult Social Care.

### Positive experiences of GP services

This period, 248 people shared their experiences of over 35 GP practices across the city. 201 patients shared positive sentiments mostly relating to friendly, helpful staff and their clear explanations of care and treatments. Many felt they were heard during appointments and were well supported by staff.



“Dr took time to discuss, caring, informed and patient”

### Patients would like more flexibility when booking GP appointments

We've heard from many patients who want more flexibility when booking GP appointments. Some carers shared that they often struggle to find appointment times that fit around their caring responsibilities. Many would like to see more understanding and options when booking, so they can continue their important role without missing out on their own health needs.

We have continued to hear about patient experiences of using the online system Anima. Many people told us they struggle to use Anima and find it difficult to navigate. When patients have phoned to make an appointment instead, some say they have been told to use Anima, leaving many frustrated and not able to access care.

Autistic patients also reported challenges when trying to access GP appointments. A common issue is the lack of flexible communication options. Some GP practices don't offer online booking and rely only on

“I was listened to and my thoughts were accepted.”

“Bring back the humanity of it and stop hiding behind technology.”

I now am avoiding seeking medical advice because of the systems in place.”

phone calls which can be stressful or overwhelming for people who find phone conversations difficult.

## Travel and access issues

We often hear from patients struggling to access healthcare services due to travel challenges. This highlights the need for more flexible healthcare options, such as video calls with GPs and hospital consultants, phone appointments, and home visits.

Some people can't afford travel costs or live in areas with poor public transport. Others are too unwell, housebound, or have mobility issues that make attending appointments difficult. As a result, some patients miss out on essential healthcare, such as cervical screenings (smear tests) and other screenings.

We also heard when GP practices offer appointments at partner sites, they're not asking people whether it's possible for them to travel to the other site. Additionally collecting prescriptions can also be challenging if medication is not in stock; some people report having to travel across the city to obtain it.

Hospital visits can be expensive, especially for those using taxis and living on the outskirts of the city. Many people who are eligible, are not aware of the non-emergency Patient Transport Service provided by Yorkshire Ambulance Service (YAS), and stated more patient awareness of the service was needed.

Blood tests are another issue. Patients often have to travel to hospitals or drive-through sites. Many would much prefer to have testing carried out at their local GP surgery or within their local community.

## Hospital Care

31 patients, family members and carers shared their experiences of hospital care with around half (15 people) describing positive experiences of friendly staff and good care. Highlights related to receiving high quality care across various departments, such as MSK, hearing services, Jessops, orthopaedics, surgery, A&E, and endoscopy, as well as patient feedback on hospital catering during their stay.

"Mobility is an issue, getting there was difficult and unnecessary."



"It costs me £30 each way if I get a taxi to hospital!"

"I'm housebound (...) am unable to get a smear test at home despite being very overdue one."



"Everything was checked & double checked, carefully explained, but with kindness & reassurance."

Some patients transferred to the discharge lounge reported they sometimes experienced delays in receiving their medication, and due to the lengthy waits sometimes pain relief medication was starting to wear off.

It was reported to us that some hospital staff were not wearing their name badges which made it hard for patients and carers to determine who they were speaking with around the hospital and wards. It was also noted that consistent displays of staff uniform guides on wards would be helpful for patients and carers to be able to recognise staff more easily.



## Lack of continence pads

We continue to hear concerns about continence pads, with many reporting that the allocated amount is not enough. As a result, families and carers often have to buy extra to ensure their relatives are changed regularly. People have also noted that the provided pads are often poor quality.

In one case, a care home ran out of pads entirely after a virus outbreak led to increased use. A concerned relative, who had to purchase pads themselves, raised the issue with staff and they agreed to order more supplies.

## Mental health services

The Sheffield Specialist Psychotherapy Service at Fitzwilliam's was praised for its compassionate and effective care. Patients reported being treated with dignity, felt supported when discussing sensitive topics, and felt genuinely cared for by staff.

Views were shared about the Decisions Unit and that the environment was not very supportive or welcoming. One person stated they experienced little staff engagement after arrival at the unit and they didn't receive a clear explanation of what would happen. Furthermore, we heard assessments were often delayed or offered late at night which was not suitable. We also heard the reclining chairs were not appropriate for use as a bed and whilst food was provided at the unit, people were expected to see to themselves when they often felt too unwell to do so.

People with Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) stated they often faced significant challenges accessing appropriate mental health services. Despite GPs making urgent referrals, some patients with BPD find they do not meet the criteria for community



"This is the opposite of a helpful environment for recovering your mental health."



mental health care. Additionally, individuals with PTSD reported experiencing delays receiving suitable care. In one case, a patient was referred to talking therapies by their GP but found out they weren't eligible. They were then referred to Single Point of Access (SPA) but discovered the referral was not received.

"It's almost as though its built not to work so people are unable to access it."

## Adult Social Care

Professionals and members of the public told us navigating Adult Social Care systems can be very challenging. The lack of clear guidance and accessible information often leads to confusion about not knowing where to start and who to contact. We heard straightforward tools, such as simple flowcharts to try and understand the process would be really helpful.

In some cases, people contacting Adult Social Care reported the support they received was often too short and it was very difficult to get continuous support to help support their long-term needs.

## NHS Dentistry

We regularly contact dentists across Sheffield to get an accurate picture of which practices are accepting new NHS patients so we can signpost people to them. After we called round in January, we discovered five practices across the city were able to offer appointments to new adult NHS patients.



### Impact from our last briefing (Oct- Nov 2024)

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals and South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board have responded to our [last briefing](#) outlining how they plan to address areas for improvement. Their comments are in blue below.

#### Response from Sheffield Teaching Hospitals

Uncomfortable waits in busy A&E Department including queues outside with a lack of seating- we have recently been experiencing very high patient numbers to see leading to very long waits to be seen and treated. Patients are triaged and seen in priority order and where appropriate, we are offering patients alternative options. The A&E team are liaising with Estates to look at potential options to provide additional outside benching whilst ensuring sufficient pavement space for wheelchair access.

Long waits for appointments with no communication from the hospital- All teams should be contacting patients upon receipt of referral to confirm the referral has been received and provide indicative waiting times. To support teams to put this into practice we are running masterclasses to ensure all services are communicating with patients about anticipated waiting times.

**B Road restrictions-** Almost 2 years ago the Trust took the decision to make B Road a pedestrian only area, with vehicular access only being for emergencies. We acknowledge the impact this has had on surrounding areas and the Trust has recently had a traffic flow survey undertaken and are developing an action plan to address the recommendations from this survey. For patients with reduced mobility or additional support needs, you can arrange in advance of your appointment for a volunteer to meet you and help you to your appointment. To arrange this, call the volunteers team on 0114 2715735 or email [sth.volunteer@nhs.net](mailto:sth.volunteer@nhs.net) no earlier than within 2 weeks of your appointment. Please provide details of your arrival time, the department you will be visiting, where you will be entering the hospital, and any support needs you have. The volunteering team will try and arrange support for you and if they cannot they will provide details of alternative support available.

## **Response from South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board**

Patients struggled to find information on locally available COVID-19 booster brands. Confirmation of the vaccines to be used in the spring 2025 campaign should be available soon, however individuals will not be able to choose between the vaccines available through the national programme as has been the case in previous years. The only time a specific vaccine type is recommended/restricted is due to the licensing of the product e.g. some vaccines are specifically licensed for children and young people. Anybody who has had a previous allergic reaction to COVID-19 vaccines or a history of anaphylaxis to other medicines and vaccines should be referred to an appropriate specialist, and if the vaccine is recommended, should then be given in a hospital setting under clinical supervision.

This summary of key issues is a snapshot of what we are hearing about. We want to reflect the experiences of people who share their stories with us, and we hope that it can help services, and commissioners of services, by indicating potential areas of focus. It is based on:

- Experiences that members of the public share with us through our information and advice service
- Feedback shared by voluntary sector partners who support clients in Sheffield
- Stories shared through Care Opinion

**Want to share your own experience? Get in touch**

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