

Covid-19 Insight Report

**A summary of our findings in
BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire**

March-July 2020



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Report summary

What is this report about?

The coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic has meant that health and care services have had to rapidly change and adapt their services. This report looks at what local people thought about information, health and care services, community support and their wellbeing during this time across Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire (BSW).

What did we do?

- Face-to-face engagement was not possible at this time, so we gathered information by running an online survey, in collaboration with Healthwatch Swindon and Healthwatch BaNES (Bath and North East Somerset).
- Each Healthwatch produced an individual report for their area.
- We analysed the survey results to identify any similarities and differences between the areas across BSW.

What were the key findings?

- Most people could find and understand the information they needed about Covid-19 but acting and keeping up to date with changes was more difficult.
- There was a need for clear information about changes to services, testing and looking after health and wellbeing.
- Virtual appointments had worked well for many people, but there were some circumstances and individuals where these were difficult or not possible.
- Access to dental services and information about reopening and what was available was a concern to people.
- There was understanding of the pressures on services. Appreciation was given of the commitment, dedication and kindness of health and care workers.
- The pandemic has affected many people's mental health and wellbeing.
- Community groups, voluntary organisations and volunteers have been a valuable source of support to local people.
- Although there were many similarities in people's experiences across BSW, there were also some variations. These are detailed in this report.

Conclusions and recommendations

The report draws conclusions from the views and experiences that have been shared with us and makes recommendations based on these. We recognise that services had to adapt rapidly. The recommendations suggest ways to improve local people's experiences of health and care services, based on what they have told us.

Introduction and background

The way health and social care services operate has been affected by coronavirus (Covid-19) with non-urgent treatment postponed, face-to-face appointments reduced and homes and services limiting public access.

For local Healthwatch organisations, the outbreak has also resulted in changes to our work, with much of our planned public engagement and visits to services paused and a greater focus on providing advice to the public and supporting the local response to Covid-19.

But our work to understand people's experiences has not stopped. With a fast-moving and changing response to Covid-19, information about the issues the public are facing is valuable. It is also important that health and social care services understand the impact these changes are having more broadly – especially when they concern people's safety or will have implications once services begin the return to normal.

To ensure we continued to hear from members of the public Healthwatch BaNES, Healthwatch Swindon and Healthwatch Wiltshire collaborated and shared a survey across the BSW area. We invited people to let us know their experiences of care during this period, as well as asking an array of other questions, such as how easy people found getting information about Covid-19 and how the pandemic has impacted their mental health.

This report looks at the key results of the survey finding across BSW and considers any similarities and differences across this area.

Additionally, each individual Healthwatch has produced a more detailed report for their own area covering the advice and information services and the feedback from local people about their experiences during the pandemic.

These reports can be found here:

healthwatchbathnes.co.uk

healthwatchswindon.org.uk

healthwatchwiltshire.co.uk

Who did we hear from?

There was a total of 464 survey responses across BSW:

- BaNES 45
- Swindon 175
- Wiltshire 242

The majority of our respondents were female, and most respondents were white British. More detailed demographic information is included in the individual reports for each area.

Respondents from each area who considered themselves at high risk and whether they received shielding letters.

Respondents who considered themselves high risk



Respondents who received shielding letters



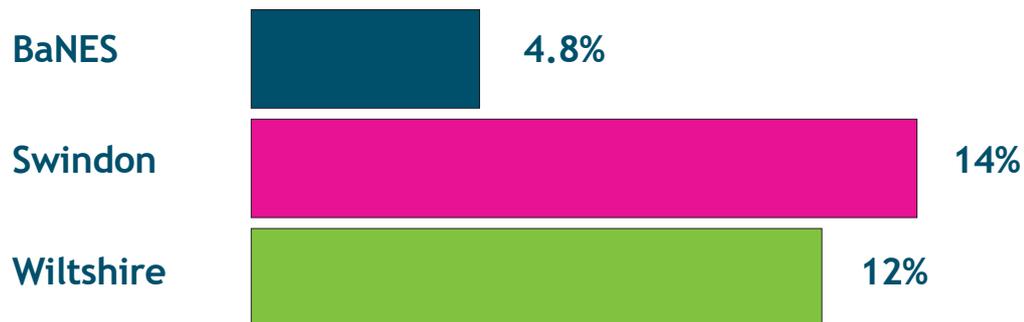
Respondents who cared for someone who considered themselves high risk



Respondents who cared for someone who had received a shielding letter



Respondents who cared for someone with additional communication needs

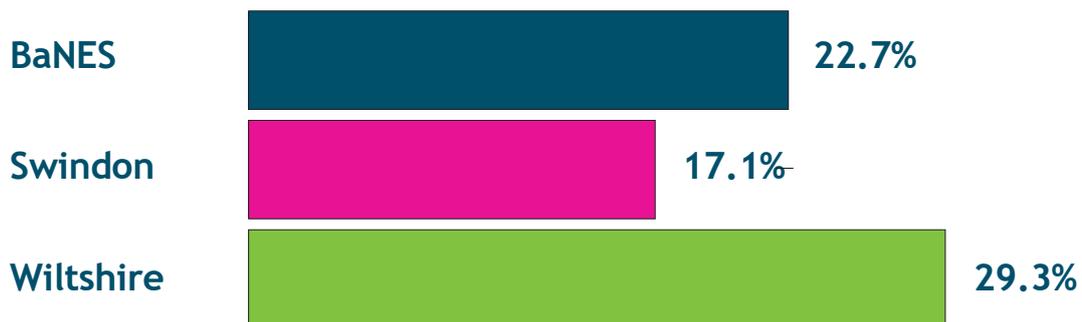


Respondents who were unable to find information in the format needed



Are you currently, or have you recently been working or volunteering to support people affected by Covid-19?

Yes



No



Information provision about Covid-19

Across BSW, the majority said that they were able to find and understand information they needed. A minority, around **9%**, of respondents said they found it difficult or very difficult, to find information with little variance between the areas of BSW.

A higher percentage of people said that it was harder to act on information with **17.7%** of those in BaNES, **17.7%** in Swindon and **14.2%** in Wiltshire, reporting this as difficult or very difficult.

17.7% of those in BaNES, **16.6%** in Swindon and **20.9 %** in Wiltshire, reported keeping up to date with changes in information as difficult or very difficult.

Topics people had found it difficult to get information about

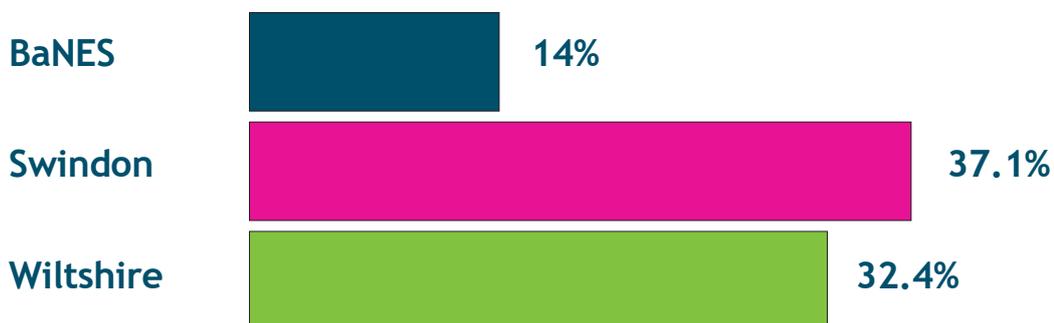
We asked people whether they had been able to get the information they needed and a lower percentage of those in BaNES (**14%**) said that they had, compared with Swindon (**37%**) and Wiltshire (**32%**).

Across BSW the common topics that people found it difficult to get information about were changes to their usual health care services, testing for Covid-19 and looking after mental health or wellbeing.

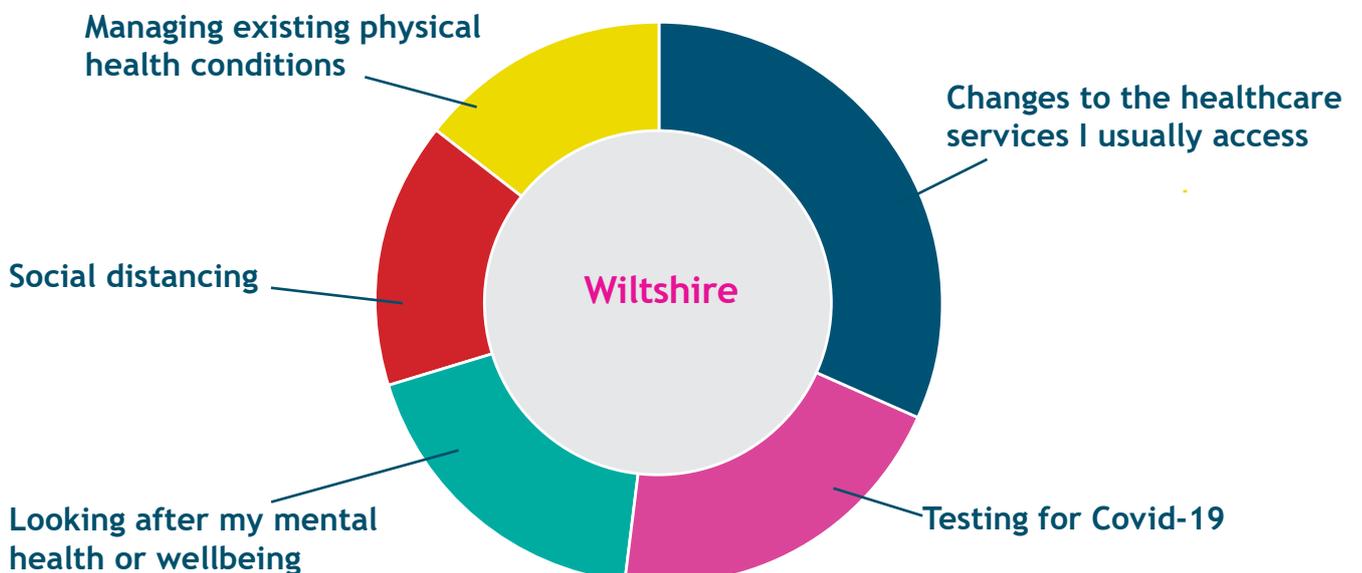
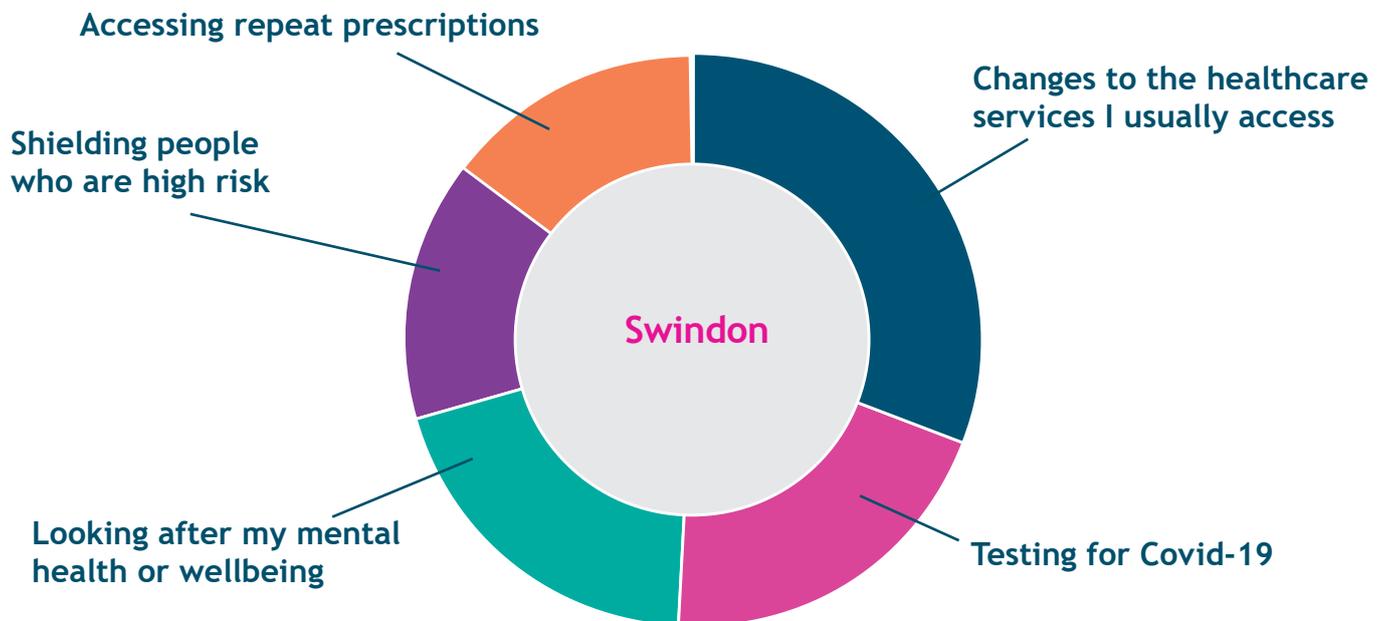
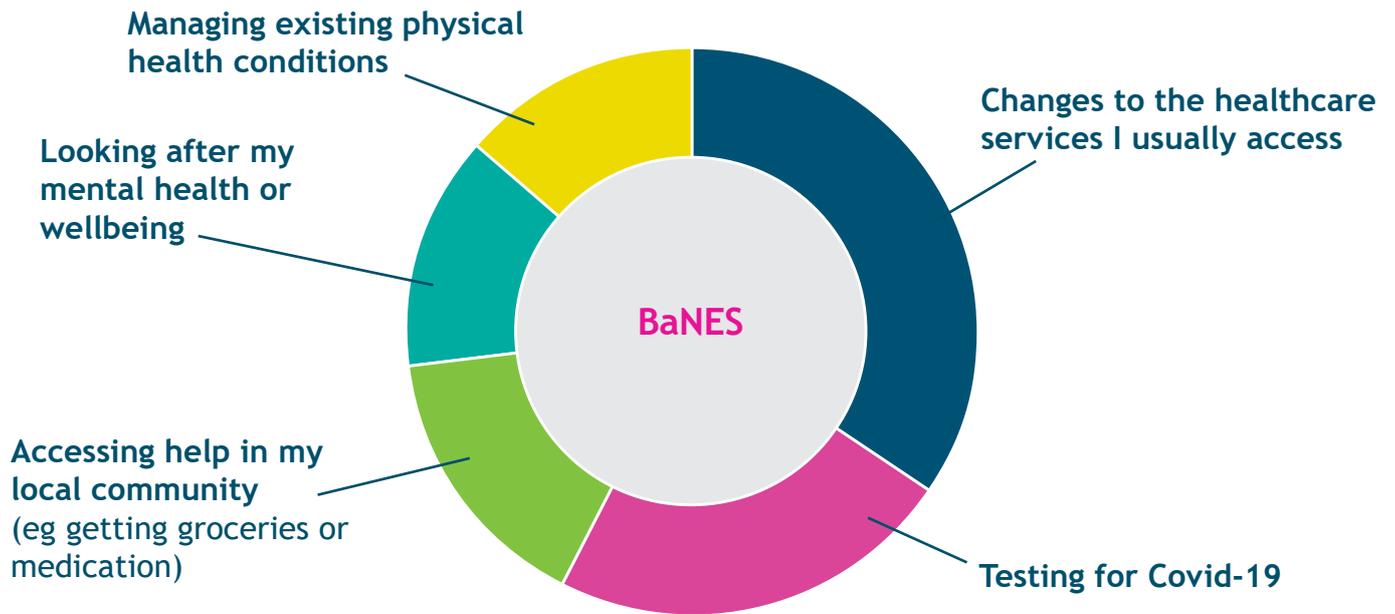
Information about accessing help in the local community was reported to be difficult by a higher percentage of people in BaNES (**18.6%**) than Swindon (**9.6%**) and Wiltshire (**11.4%**). More people in Wiltshire (**51.5%**) mentioned local organisations as a source of information and advice than in BaNES (**44.4%**) and Swindon (**39%**).

We also asked if people had found any sources of information particularly useful and sources such as Government websites and Public Health England were mentioned. There were also 14 mentions of Wiltshire Council information being useful and four of Swindon Borough Council.

I have all the information I need



Top five topics reported to be difficult to get clear information or advice about

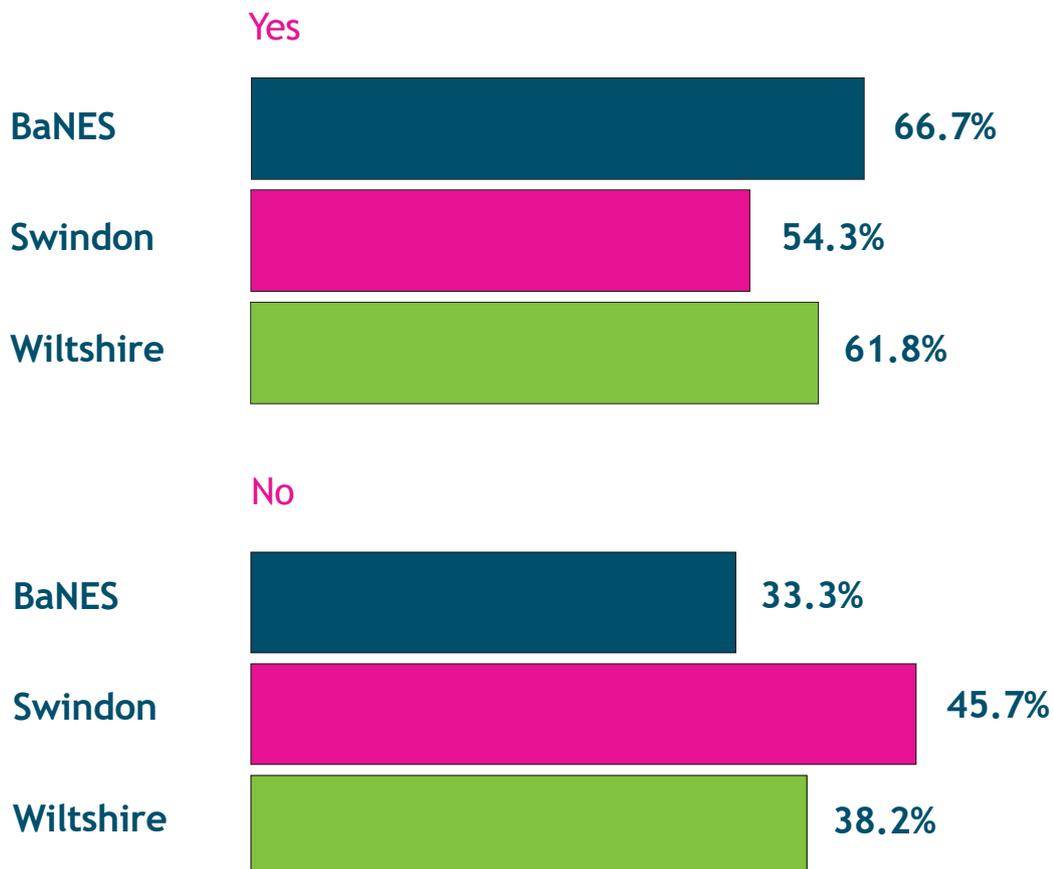


Experience of health and care services

Healthcare services

We asked respondents if they had used healthcare services since the pandemic.

Since the pandemic began, have you, or the person you care for, used any healthcare services (eg GP, hospitals, dentist)?



80% of those in Wiltshire and Swindon, and 100% of those in BaNES experienced changes to healthcare due to the pandemic.

We asked respondents who had used services if they had been offered a video consultation or telephone appointment instead of a face-to-face appointment. Most of them said that they had with the percentage who were offered these being slightly higher in Swindon and BaNES, than in Wiltshire.

Have you, or the person you care for, been offered a video or phone consultation instead of a face-to-face appointment?

Yes



No



There were a few negative comments, but overall the majority of people who had appointments over the phone or by video were positive about them.

Appointment was held over the telephone. Extremely detailed. Not at all rushed. Very precise. Given plenty of time to explain the issue and given lots of support and received the help that was needed.
Healthwatch Wiltshire

Whilst a telephone consult is greatly appreciated, a video consult would have been better as there was so much questions asked and as a non medical person for the other person to explain was difficult making both parties very frustrated. Delayed the treatment, making the issue blow out and had to get to A&E, though the person was clinically extremely vulnerable category and was shielding.
Healthwatch Swindon

Excellent, prompt video calls when necessary.
Healthwatch Wiltshire

Communication seemed tiered in terms of priority, well managed and efficient. The system in place was very well organised and informed us clearly.
Healthwatch BaNES

Orthopaedic consultation, it was a very good consult, I was rung at exactly the correct time and felt I was listened to and we were able to develop a workable solution together.
Healthwatch Wiltshire

Some people reported difficulties with diagnosis over the phone, delays in hospital treatment and the impact of this:

The process is working very slowly. The people are great – very professional – but it’s taking a very long time to be processed. Finding an operational X-Ray service took a long time and then there has been a wait of nearly a month before my appointment. (I was prepared to travel anywhere for it.) I have been told that if I need a hip replacement (which I believe I do) then there will be a further delay of many months. This is having a severe impact on me and my family. I have gone from being fit and active to being effectively disabled during the lockdown period.

Healthwatch Wiltshire

Everything stopped and normal care stopped, elective surgery my hip replacement was cancelled 2 days before and everyone had no support. Now it will take ages to get back. The Nightingale Hospitals should be used and RUH should look after the community.

Healthwatch BaNES

Communication about the changes to services

The feedback about communication about the changes to healthcare services was similar across BSW. It was:

- Rated as **excellent** or **very good** by **53.3%** of those in BaNES, **54.6%** in Swindon and **55.5%** in Wiltshire.
- Rated as **fair** by **30%** of those in BaNES, **29.9%** in Swindon and **29.4%** in Wiltshire.
- Rated as **poor** or **very poor** by **16.6%** of those in BaNES, **15.6%** in Swindon and **15.1%** in Wiltshire.

Clearly communicated. Clearly carried out. Simple. Friendly!

Healthwatch Wiltshire

Very clear instructions following a phone call consultation about attending the surgery. Staff very helpful and considerate, showing me what to do at every step. Guiding me to hand wash before going through to the waiting area. Doors opened for me so that I didn’t have to touch handles, nurse very professional and put me at ease in what is an anxious time to have to attend the surgery.

Healthwatch BaNES

We received conflicting letters, text messages and telephone messages cancelling appointment, new appointment, reinstating appt, re-cancelling appt, reinstating, etc till we didn’t know WHAT we were supposed to be doing. We appreciate it must have been difficult for staff to manage the changes however it was additional stress for someone who wasn’t very well and for the person who was caring for him at what was a difficult time adjusting to lockdown, etc. It would have worked better to stick to a single means of communication.

Healthwatch Swindon

Dentists

We have heard about routine dental treatment being postponed and that people were having difficulties accessing treatment and information about how they could get emergency treatment.

As dentists have begun to reopen we have heard feedback that people have had difficulty accessing dental services and that there is a lack of clarity about what services are now available for NHS patients.

Appointment cancelled due to dentist self-isolated and now all dentists closed for foreseeable future.

Healthwatch BaNES

I cracked a tooth and half of it has fallen out. I have spoken to my dentist who is wonderful, but he isn't allowed to treat me and isn't able to tell me where I can get treatment.

Healthwatch Wiltshire

No dental service available. Telephone consultation.

Healthwatch Swindon

It was very difficult to get information about where to get emergency dental care before my dentist reopened.

Healthwatch Wiltshire

Zero dental treatment available even though it is part of the NHS!

Healthwatch Wiltshire

GP and Dental Services advice was "Go to Emergency Department at local hospital."

Healthwatch Swindon

Accessing medication

In our survey we asked people if they had been able to get the medication they required. Of the 173 respondents who this was applicable to, most said that they had.

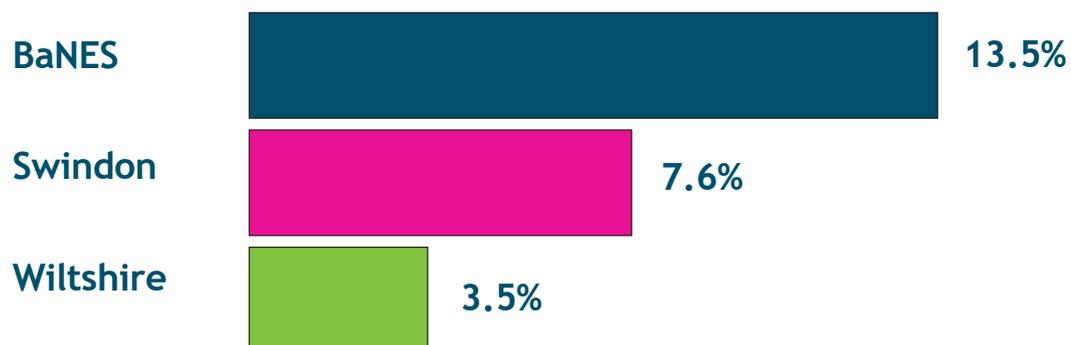
However, a higher percentage of people from BaNES reported difficulty getting medication than in Swindon and Wiltshire.

Have you, or the person you care for, been able to access any medication required?

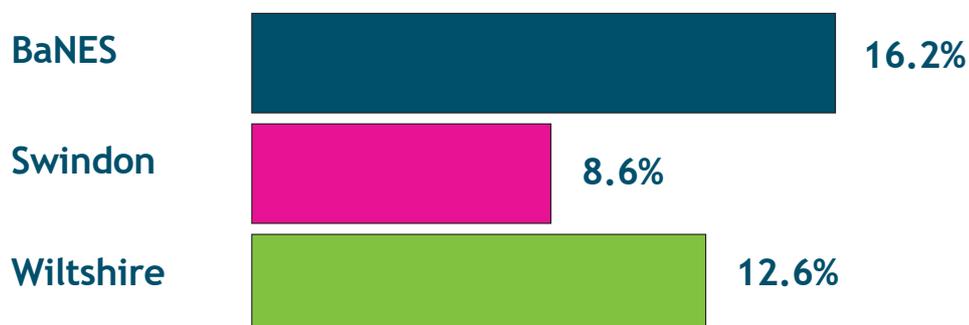
Yes



No



Not applicable



There was mixed feedback about the Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) service, with some people saying it was a good service and others reporting difficulty getting through on the phone.

Meant to be in self-isolation but have to go into Bath to collect medication.

Healthwatch BaNES

Phoning the POD number for several days at a time many times every day and not getting through to them so medication run out.

Healthwatch BaNES

Online ordering and local volunteer collection works well.

Healthwatch Wiltshire

Some medications have been hard to get for my Mum, rosuvastatin, slozem, monomax, dixarit or its generic equivalent. At various times, one or more of the above have not been available.

Healthwatch Wiltshire

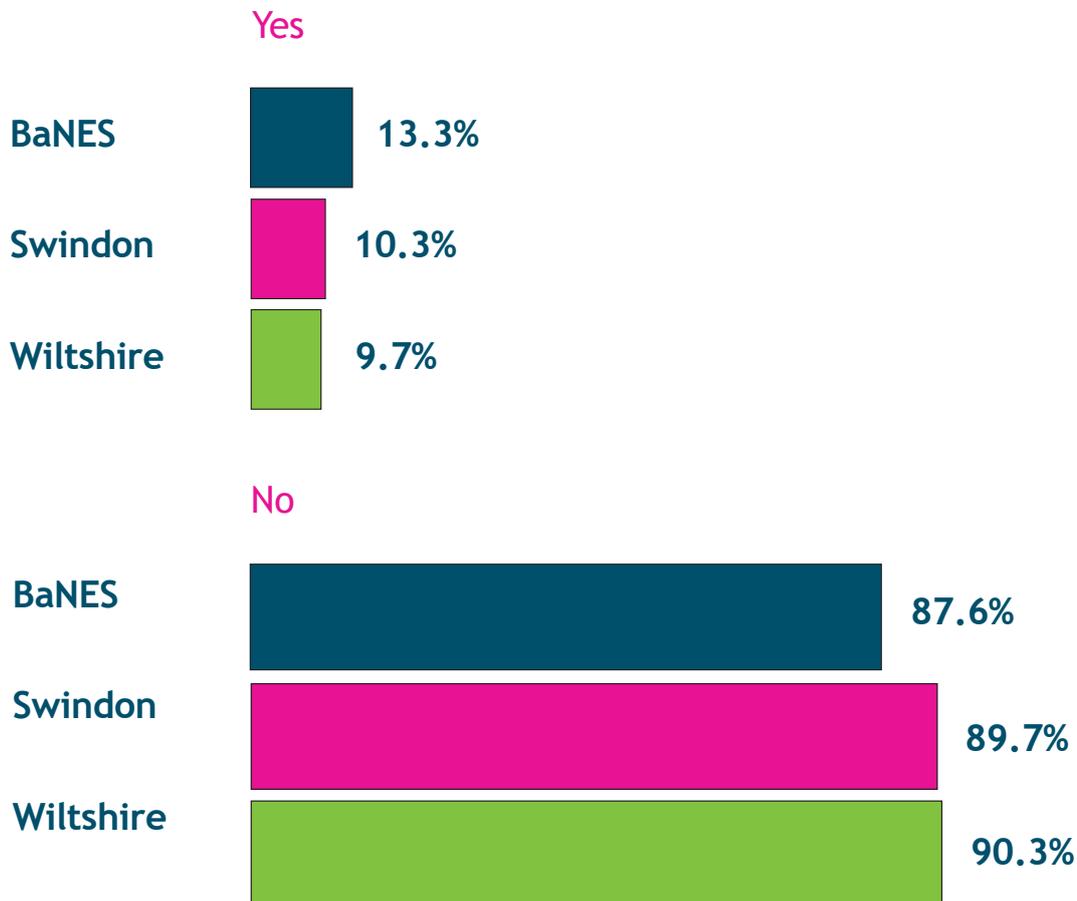
My 87 year old mother has used a phone service to get a batch of prescriptions made up. These have been sent to our local pharmacy and when requested they have made up 1 of the prescriptions and had the medication delivered to the house

Healthwatch Swindon

Social care

We asked respondents if they had used social care services since the pandemic:

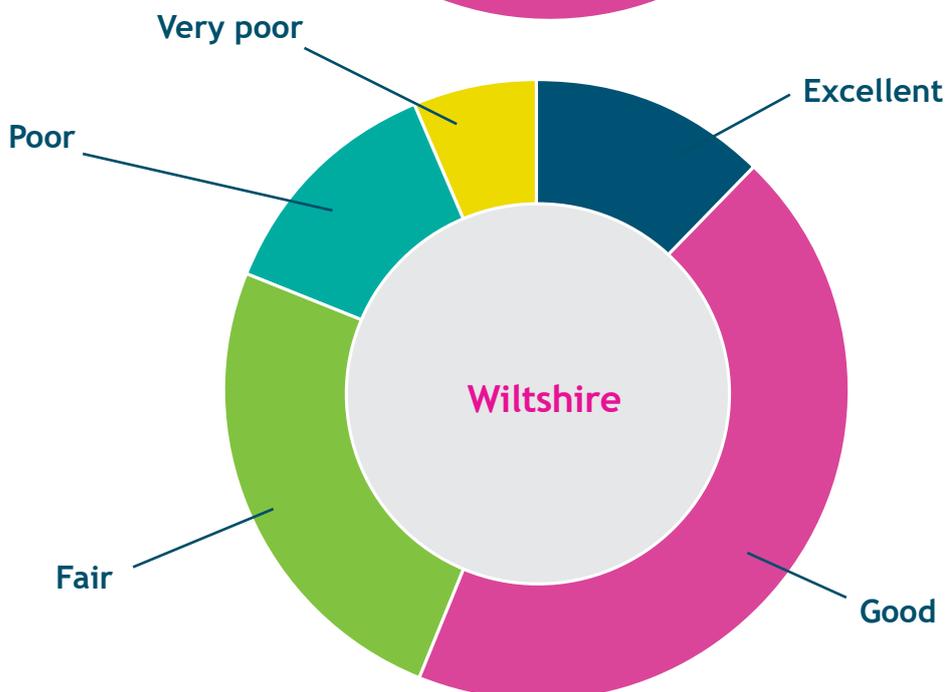
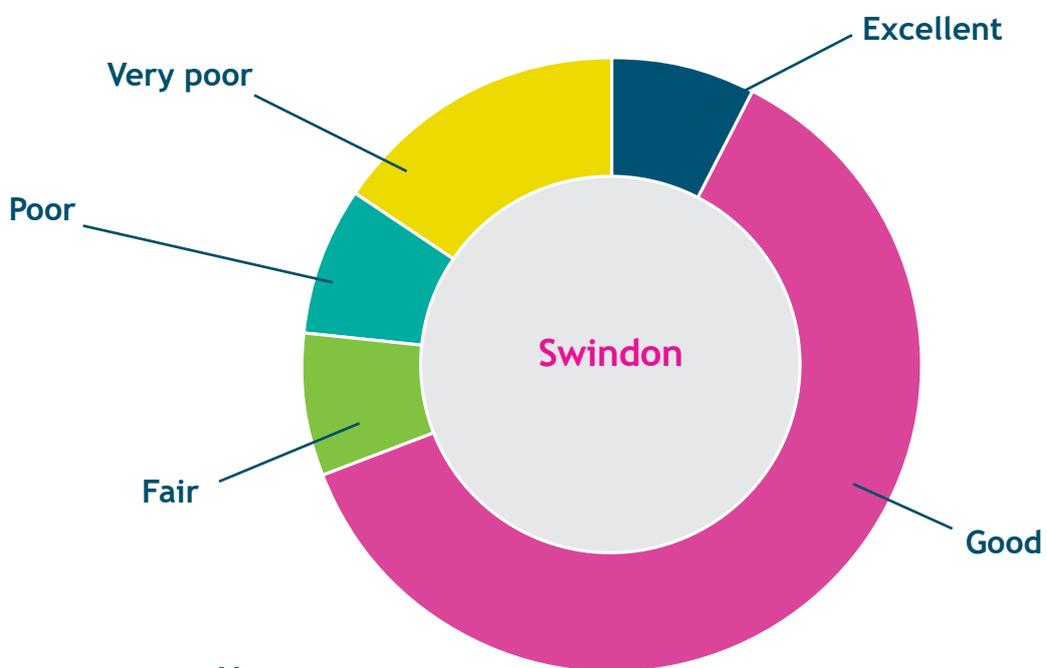
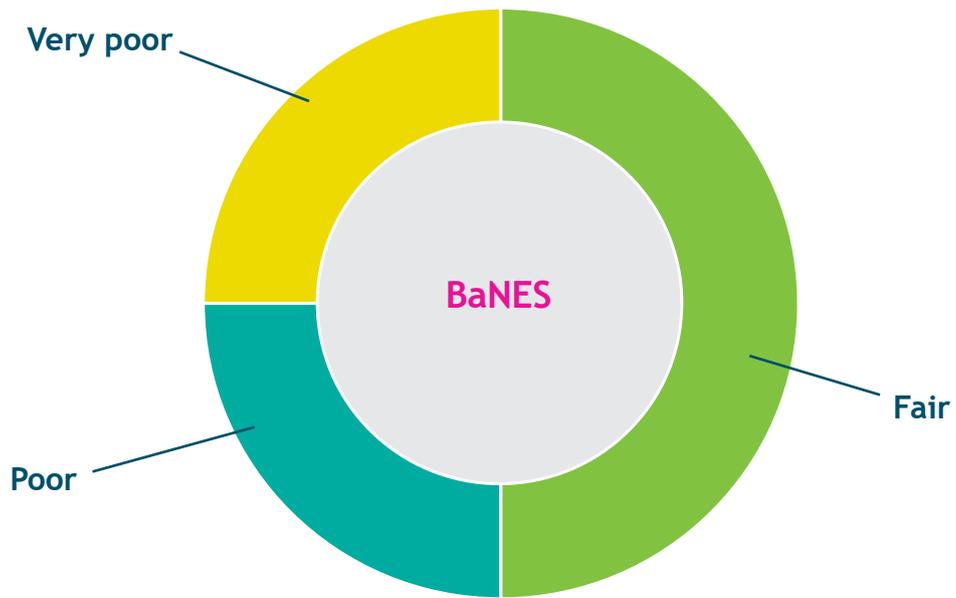
Since the pandemic began, have you, or the person you care for used any social care services? (For example residential care, care at home, social worker.)



Of those who had used social care services across BSW, about two thirds said that they experienced changes to due to the pandemic with little variation across the area.

However, when we asked people how they rated the communication they had received about the care, there were differences in the responses across BSW. (It should be noted that these percentages are based on a relatively low number of people who had used social care services.)

How would you rate the communication received about the changes?



We heard from people using a range of different social care services including supported living, care homes, social worker and care at home. The feedback we have received suggests there is variation in people's experiences.

We also heard from adults who organise their own care either privately or through direct payments, who highlighted some of the difficulties they were facing. These particularly concerned a lack of information early in the pandemic, and the difficulties this caused with employment of carers or personal assistants at this time. We have been told about the impact on unpaid carers when the usual care and support provided for their loved one has been stopped or reduced.

Less staff and carers, more people going without care.

Healthwatch BaNES

The lack of day centre, is a major impact on my and my mother's life.

Healthwatch Wiltshire

Cut their hours, DON'T keep your timetables, disorganised.

Healthwatch BaNES

Regular updates to relatives about changes via letter, telephone calls, email and social media.

Healthwatch Swindon

Minimal contact, wearing of masks and gloves when necessary.

Healthwatch Swindon

The PA [personal assistant] stopped working when lockdown was introduced. This meant only 5 hours commissioned service continued. This increased the support I had to provide whilst continuing to work full time.

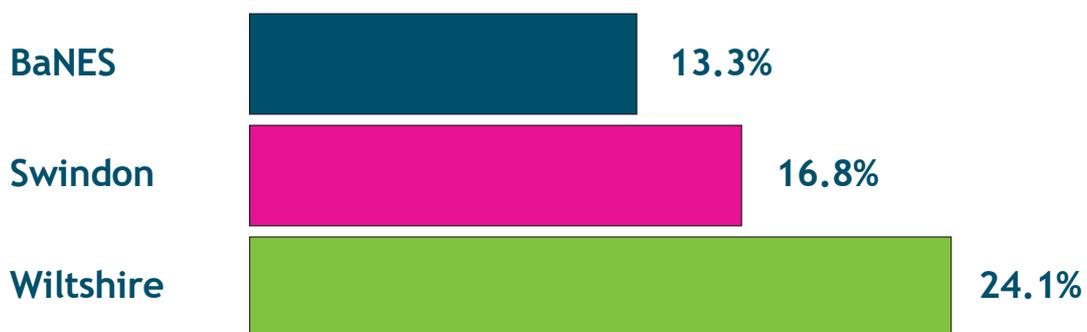
Healthwatch Wiltshire

Mental health and wellbeing

We asked people about the impact of Covid-19 on their mental health and wellbeing and about three quarters of our respondents said that it had had some impact. The percentage of those who said that it had significant impact was higher in BaNES and Swindon, than in Wiltshire.

How much of an impact has the Covid-19 pandemic had on your/their mental health or wellbeing?

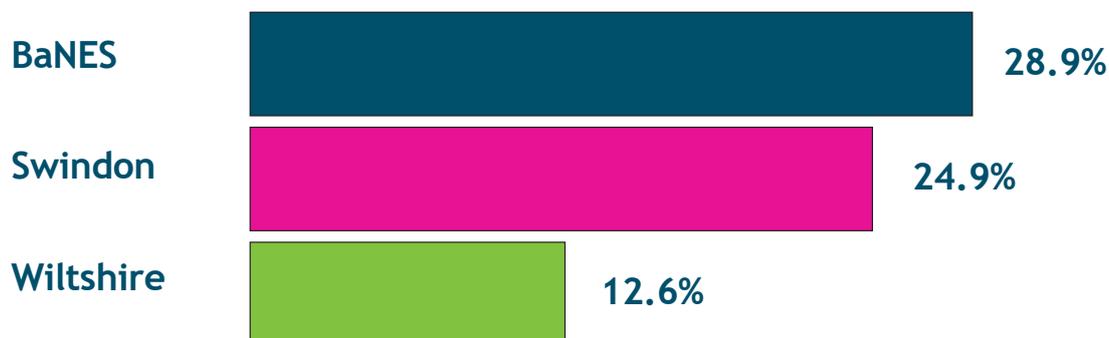
No impact



Some impact



Significant impact

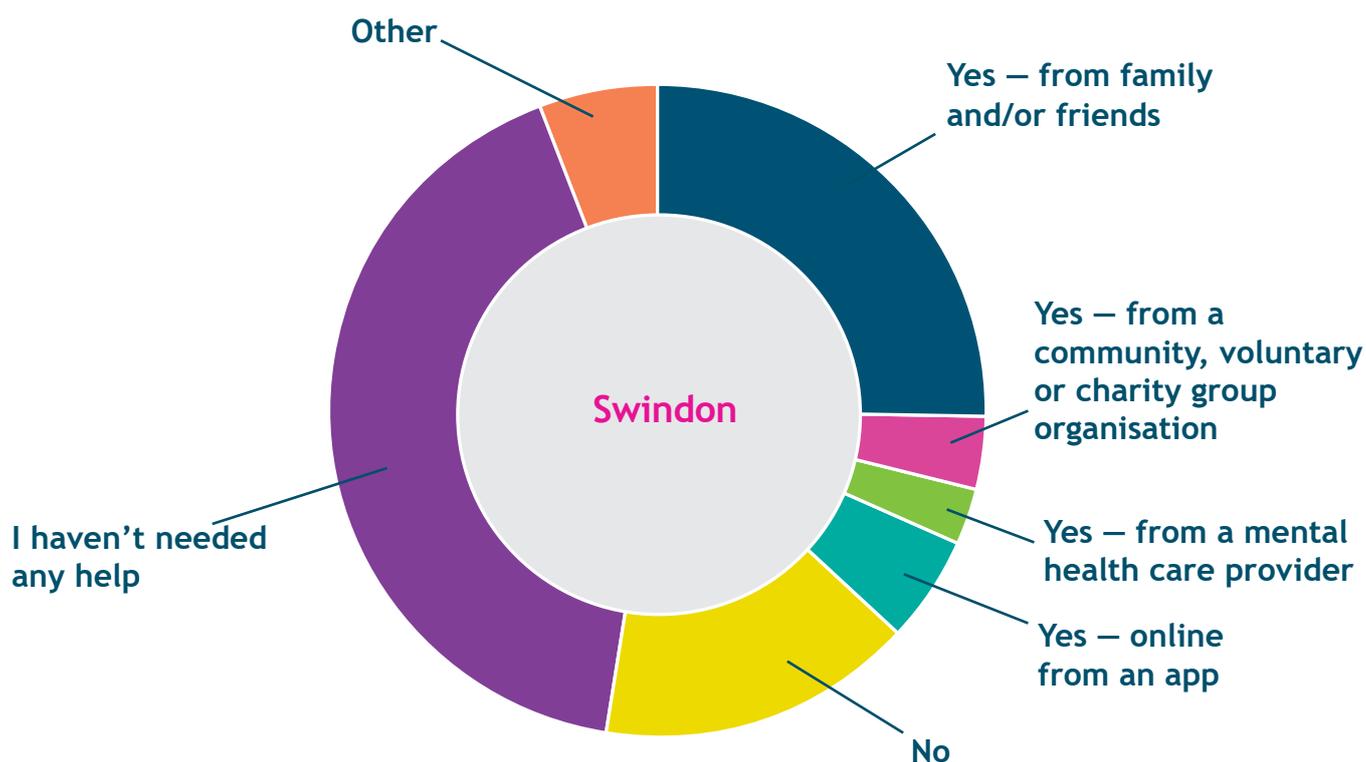
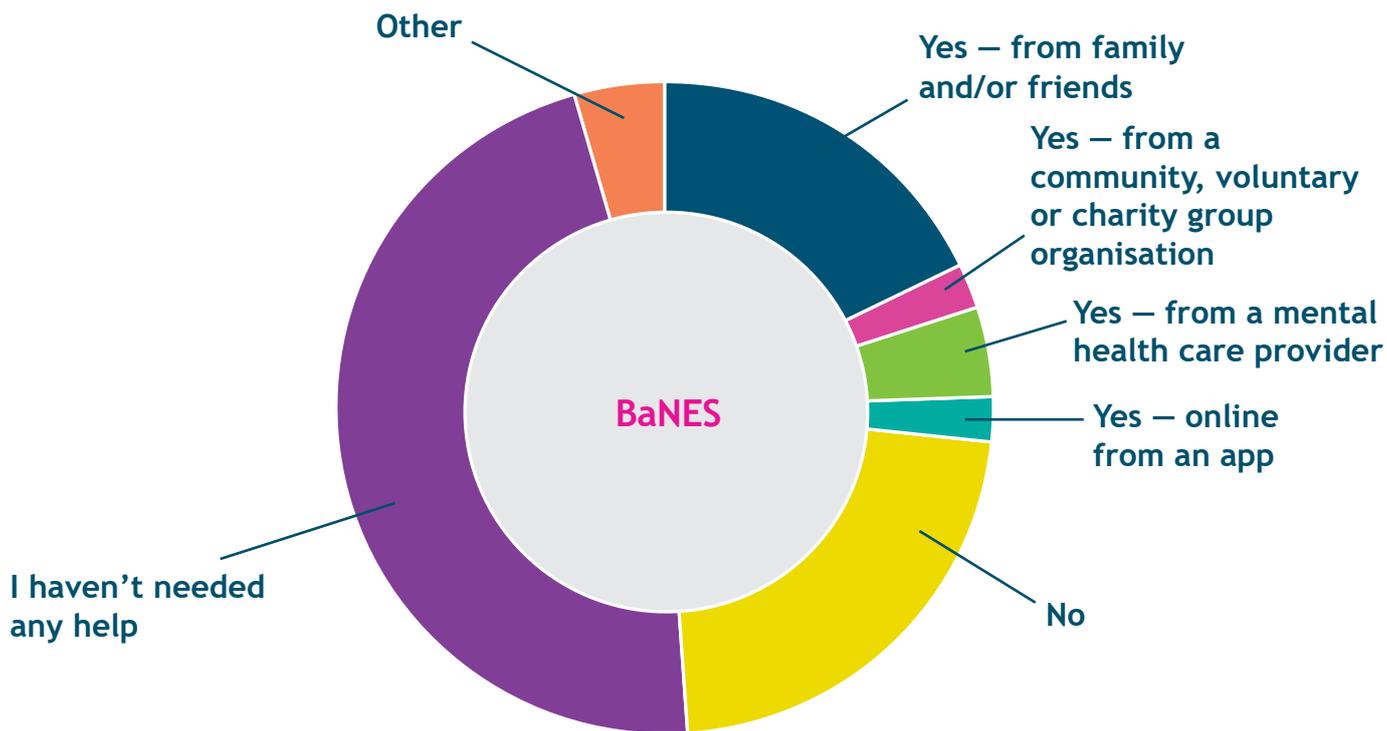


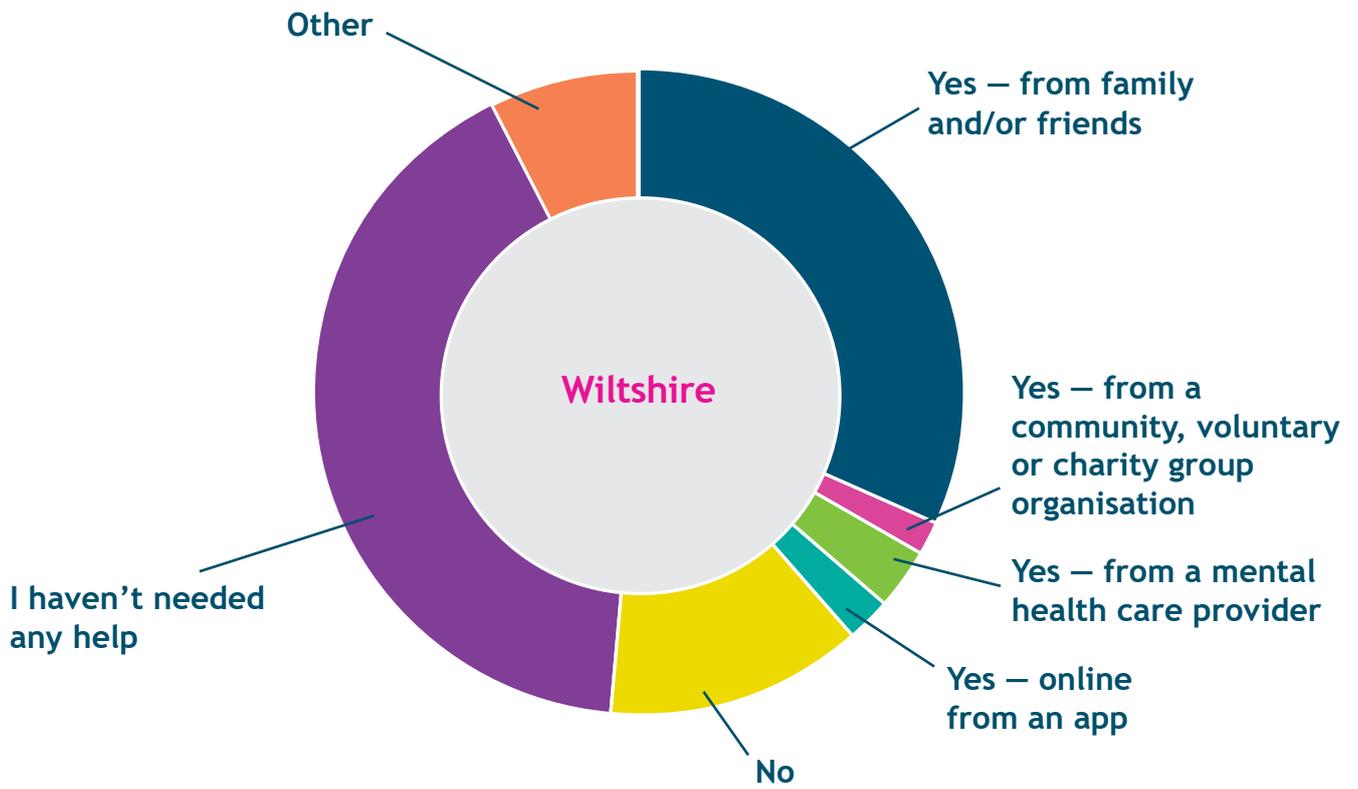
When we asked if people had been able to access support for their mental health and wellbeing a higher percentage of people from BaNES (22%) said that they had not been able to access support with their mental health as compared with those from Swindon (15.6%) and Wiltshire (12.9%).

The percentage of respondents who said that they had accessed support from family and friends also varied across BSW with 17.8% of those from BaNES, 25.4% from Swindon and 31.8% from Wiltshire reporting this.

A breakdown of what we were told about access to support for each area is shown in the following charts.

Have you been able to access support for your mental health or wellbeing during this time?





Our family set up a daily check in to a WhatsApp group so we all knew that we were well. A daily phone call from my son was invaluable and keeping in touch with family and friends by phone, internet or letter has been wonderful. *Healthwatch Wiltshire*

I had phone calls with my usual psychologist, as well as a charity I've been involved with for 2 years for various mental health conditions. *Healthwatch Wiltshire*

Talking to family and friends that you miss and using Zoom/Skype has been good for mental health and wellbeing. *Healthwatch Swindon*

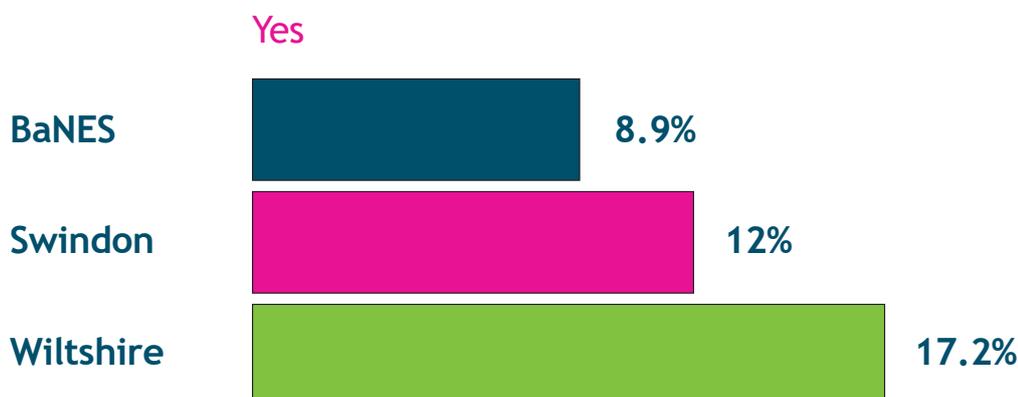
Messaging, calls, distanced visits. I was widowed in January and now living alone. My appointment to arrange possible anti-depressants with my GP was cancelled in first week of lockdown. *Healthwatch Swindon*

I use a mindfulness meditation app and yoga YouTube. *Healthwatch BaNES*

Community groups

In our survey we asked if people had received any additional support from local voluntary and community groups and there was some variation in the percentages of those people who said they had used them across BSW.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic began, have you, or the person you care for, received any support from local voluntary or community groups? (For example Age UK, or a local Covid-19 voluntary response group.)



We received a lot of positive feedback about experiences of the support offered by these groups and most people said that they had found them very useful. There was one negative comment about the provisions supplied by one group and a few comments that some people were not covered by groups due to where they lived, and the distance volunteers may need to travel. One of these people said that they were subsequently referred to the NHS Responder Service which was able to help them.

Several different types of support were mentioned including wellbeing calls, advice and information, befriending, collecting prescriptions and delivering medication and shopping, and virtual music, art and poetry sessions.

We heard about the range of local and national organisations and groups who were providing support including Barnardo's, Wiltshire Council Wellbeing Hub, Swindon Council Hub, Swindon Parkinson's, Alzheimer's Support, Swindon and Gloucestershire Mind, Bluebell in BaNES, Somerset and Wessex Eating Disorders Association (SWEDA), Wiltshire Parent Carer Council NHS Responders, many local Covid support groups, and church groups.

The benefits that some of the volunteering and support provided to isolated people was mentioned, and it was suggested that it would be of value to continue this after the pandemic.

The service was very prompt and the food supplied most acceptable. *Healthwatch Swindon*

Zoom contact for my teenager instead of his usual clubs. Means such a lot to my child.
Healthwatch Wiltshire

It was excellent. A really efficient and helpful service. It is good to see younger people involved with volunteering and befriending isolated people. I hope that this continues after the pandemic is over.
Healthwatch Wiltshire

Just being able to chat to someone who knows my situation and being able to laugh about it to lighten the load, also to discuss my mother's worsening condition and the support available to me.
Healthwatch Wiltshire

If I had someone else to [do] it for me I would use them out of 3 deliveries only one was about right I also had a [phone] call stating they had other items donated and would get eg, shampoo soaps, etc, etc never received.
Healthwatch BaNES

Very good, very quick and friendly, just very helpful.
Healthwatch BaNES

Advice, information and signposting. Online exercise classes on Swindon Parkinson's website.
Healthwatch Swindon

It was tremendously helpful as it was early in the pandemic at a time when we were not meant to be travelling.
Healthwatch Swindon

Conclusions and recommendations

Our conclusions are based on the views and experiences that have been shared with us and our recommendations suggest ways to improve local people's experiences of health and care services, based on what they have told us.

- Most people could find and understand the information they needed about Covid-19 but acting on and keeping up to date with this was more difficult. As there are further changes that may be locally based, it will be important that there is prompt and clear messaging about this.
- We were told that it was difficult to access information in some areas. Consideration should be given about the best way of providing and disseminating information about changes to healthcare services and testing.
- Phone and video appointments had worked well for many people and it is positive that this allowed people to be able to have appointments. The use of these should be evaluated to ensure that their benefits can be utilised.
- There were a number of people who told us that virtual appointments did not work for them for a variety of reasons, and we are aware of other groups who are digitally excluded. Careful consideration will need to be given, and actions taken, to ensure that these groups are able to access services and are not disadvantaged.
- Some people did not attend appointments due to fear of either overburdening the system or of the virus. Healthcare services will need to provide information to people about the process of assessing the need for a face-to-face appointment and what they can expect when they attend. This could support people who may have serious conditions that need attention to have the confidence to request and attend appointments.
- Access to dental services should be monitored across the BSW area and consideration should be given as to how clear and consistent information can be provided as to what services are available.
- It is clear that Covid-19 has had an impact on mental health and wellbeing. Consistent mental health support should be provided for those already known to mental health services and those referred to them for the first time.
- We were told by many people that friends and family were a source of support with their mental health and wellbeing. Consideration should be given as to how people can get advice and information on supporting those around them. This might be through raising awareness of how people can ask others for support, providing information on the ways people can support their loved ones, and helping them understand when to get professional support. This might be particularly valuable in BaNES.
- There needs to be clear communication about any changes to social care services. The impact of changes on unpaid carers needs to be recognised. Consideration needs to be given as to how carers can be supported and be provided with respite.
- Most people who completed our survey were white British. Given the increasing evidence that Covid-19 has had on people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Groups, Healthwatch across BSW, working with other organisations, should undertake some more targeted

engagement to reach different ethnic groups, as well as other minority groups, and understand their experiences. Information should also be provided to these groups regarding health and care services during the pandemic.

- We were told by many people about how valuable community and voluntary organisations and volunteers were to them. They told us that this helped with practical tasks and had benefits for their wellbeing and mental health. Consideration should be given as to how these groups can be supported to continue to provide these services.

Response

 Tracey Cox, Chief Executive of BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire CCG 

In these unprecedented times of Covid-19 we have had to make many changes to the way we provide services.

Various organisations across Bath and North East Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire have been undertaking surveys to seek people's views on the impact Covid-19 has had on their lives and this will help us to understand what is positive about the interim changes we have had to make and what we need to improve for example, many consultations taking place by telephone, online or via video, instead of face-to-face.

The CCG will be working with Healthwatch Wiltshire, along with other partners and relevant providers of services to review the

 **We need to ensure shaping services for the future reduce the inequity gap** 

information gathered from this survey, the CCG's Citizens Panel (Our Health Our Future) and other surveys to plan health services for the local population, ensuring our plans reflect what interim changes can remain or where further changes are needed, however, we do need to ensure shaping services for the future do reduce the widening inequity gap which has been highlighted during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Get in touch with your local Healthwatch

healthwatch
Bath and North East
Somerset

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