

# COVID-19 Insight Report

With COVID-19 we have had to change the way we work. This has meant that all staff have been working from home since March 2020 and all face-to-face meetings have either been cancelled altogether or have moved on to an online platform.

We saw a drop in members of the public feeding back to us via our usual channels, such as phone calls, emails or social media. With non-urgent treatments being canceled and health and social care services moving to online support as much as possible, we were anticipating a decrease in people sharing their experiences of health and social care.

To make sure we were still hearing from members of the public during COVID-19, we joined forces with [Healthwatch Bath and North East Somerset](#) and [Healthwatch Wiltshire](#) (BSW) and shared a survey across the 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 was it for people to find, understand, act upon and keep up-to-date with information about COVID-19 and how the pandemic has impacted their mental health.

In addition to this [we shared news items on the Advice and Information section of our website](#), on how people could manage aspects of their health and wellbeing, during COVID-19. This ranged from advice on:

- end of life care,
- domestic abuse,
- mental health support
- shielding,
- dental care,
- where to get bereavement support and
- general information on COVID-19

All pages were updated in line with government guidance and everything we have shared during this period has been a mix of national and local news and information.

We also [shared regular local and national news items](#) from the BSW Clinical Commissioning Group, public health information and Healthwatch England messaging consistently across all of media channels.

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## COVID-19 Survey

We launched the survey in April and shared this across social media, including our monthly e-bulletin and via three adverts we took out on Facebook, the latter being the most effective way to expand our reach and gather more feedback. In total the three adverts reached **26,266 people** and **1,196 people** clicked the link to [the article on our website about the survey](#). Our Volunteer Support Officer also shared this in the weekly newsletter going out to volunteers, inviting them to participate and share amongst their networks. In total we received 175 responses, the majority of whom (138/ 79%) disclosed that they identified as female.

## Key findings of survey

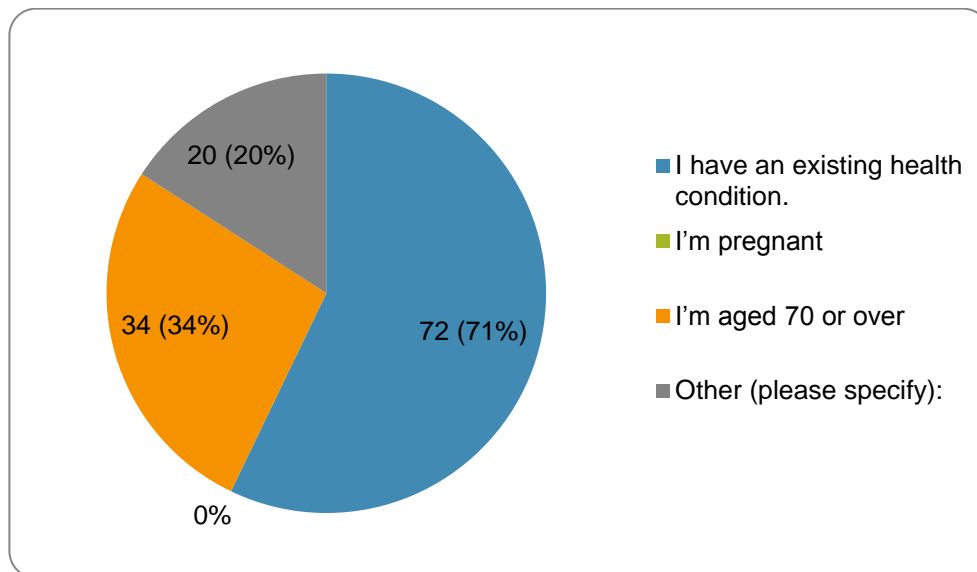
- The majority of people - 144 (82%) - who responded to this survey told us that the COVID-19 pandemic had affected their mental health and wellbeing, with 43 (25%) people saying that it has had a 'significant impact'. Most people sought help from family and friends.
- A higher proportion of people found getting, understanding, acting on and keeping up-to-date with information about COVID-19 either 'very easy' or 'easy'. The number of people finding it 'difficult' or 'very difficult', however, increased when it came to acting on and keeping up-to-date with changes.
- The topics people found most difficult getting information about were: Changes to the health care services they usually access (e.g. GP practice, pharmacy, hospital outpatient appointments, community nursing visits), testing for COVID-19 and looking after their mental health and wellbeing.
- There was positive feedback about phone and video consultations, with people saying it was quick and efficient. Conversely others felt this was not as effective as a face-to-face appointment.
- There was palpable anxiety from cancer patients and those whose loved ones had cancer about the impact that cancelled and delayed appointments will have, with one person commenting that "More deaths will be from lack [of] cancer care"
- Most people were able to get the medication that they needed, with over 60% saying they found this 'easy' or 'very easy'
- For those that had received support from a local voluntary or community organisation, their experience of this had been positive and they were grateful for the help they had been given.

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## What else did we hear?

We asked 43 questions in total and there was an opportunity for respondents to expand on some of the answers they answered in the free text boxes. It should be noted that not everybody answered every question.

Just over half of the respondents (99/ 57%) told us that they considered themselves to be in the high risk category, with this being broken down in the following way:



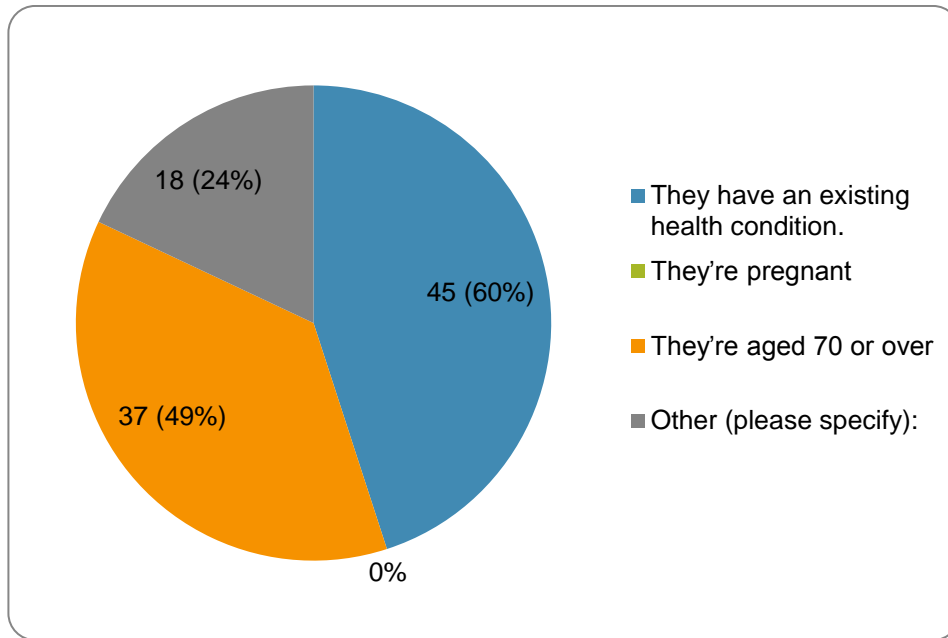
\*Please note that we received 101 responses to the follow up question and people were asked to tick all that applied. The above percentages are therefore calculated out of 101.

In the 'other' section some said that they were overweight, were key workers or their partners were, had multiple health conditions or came from a Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) background.



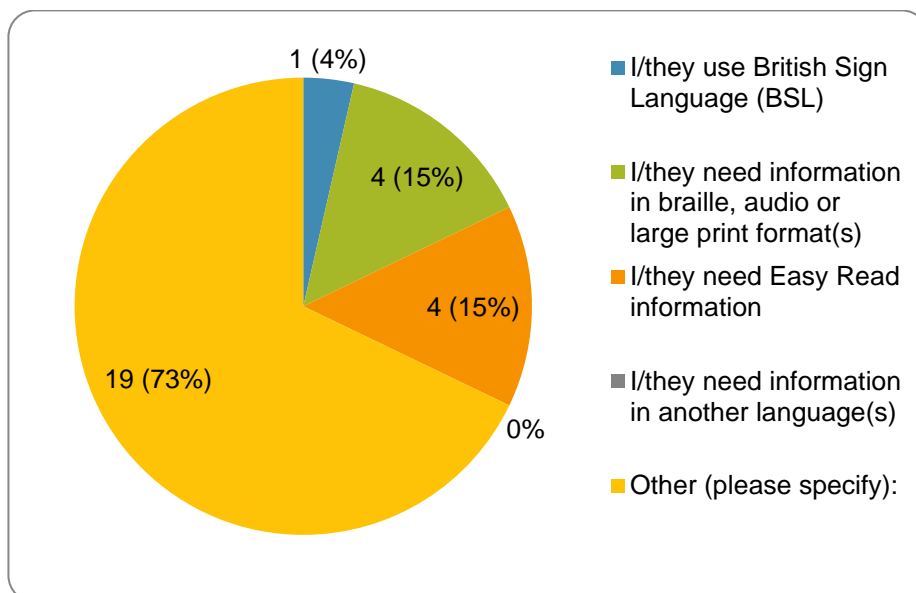
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38 (22%) people told us they had received a letter advising them to shield and 72 (41%) people told us that they care for, support or live with someone, or more than one person, who is considered to be at high risk from COVID-19, 31 (18%) of whom who had been advised to shield. A breakdown of conditions for this cohort of people is:



\*Please note that we received 75 responses to the follow up question and people were asked to tick all that applied. The above percentages are therefore calculated out of 75.

24 (14%) people told us that they, or the person they care for or support, have additional communication needs:



\*Please note that we received 26 responses to the follow up question and people were asked to tick all that applied. The above percentages are therefore calculated out of 26.

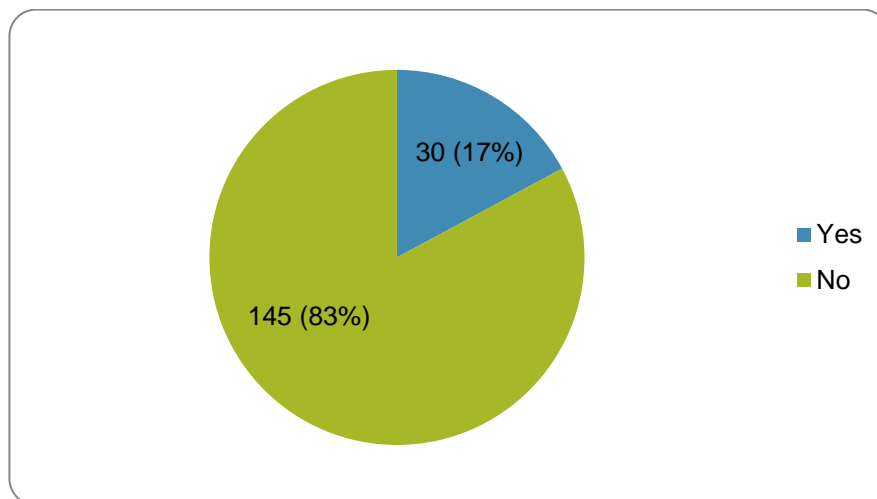
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In the 'other' category eight people had Autistic Spectrum Disorder, one had a learning disability, two had dementia, one person was deaf, one lacked capacity and the remaining comments did not specify a diagnosis.

When asked "Have you been able to find information and advice in the format(s) or language(s) needed?" 27 people responded to this question. 18 (67%) of those said 'yes' (33%) and nine said 'no'.

## Working with or supporting people affected by COVID-19

30 (17%) of people told us that they worked with or supported people affected by the disease:



In the free text box we received an additional 23 comments, with 13 people telling us they are key workers and the other ten saying that they were volunteers.

*"I work in care but at present we do not have any COVID patients."*

*"I have supported some people in my community that are shielding. I have helped people find delivery slots for their shopping."*

*"I am a nurse and I am nursing covid patients"*

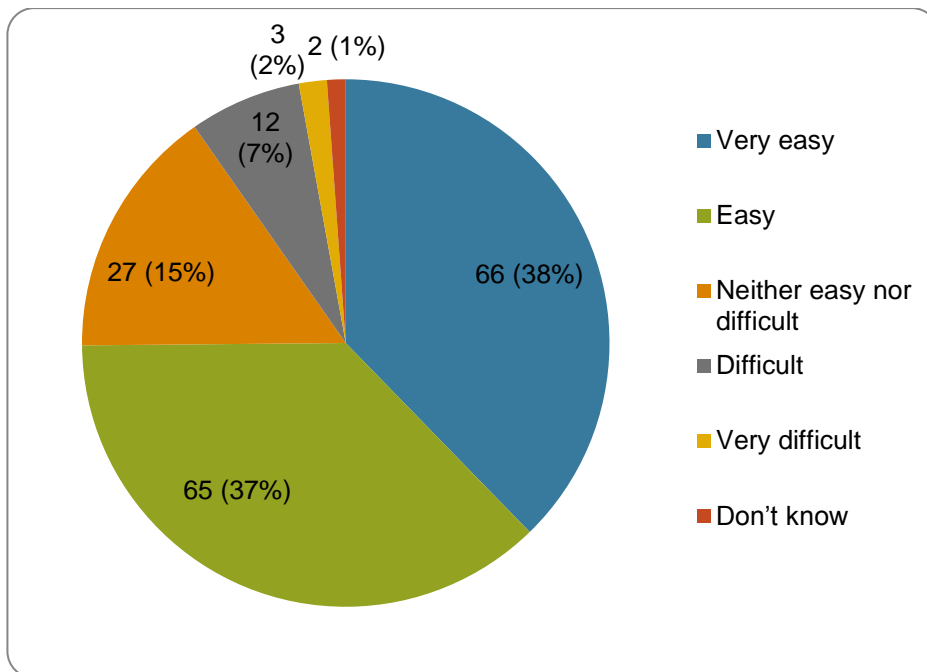
*"I have joined several volunteering sectors but no one ever contacted me"*

*"A telephone call every week to a lady who suffers from mental health"*

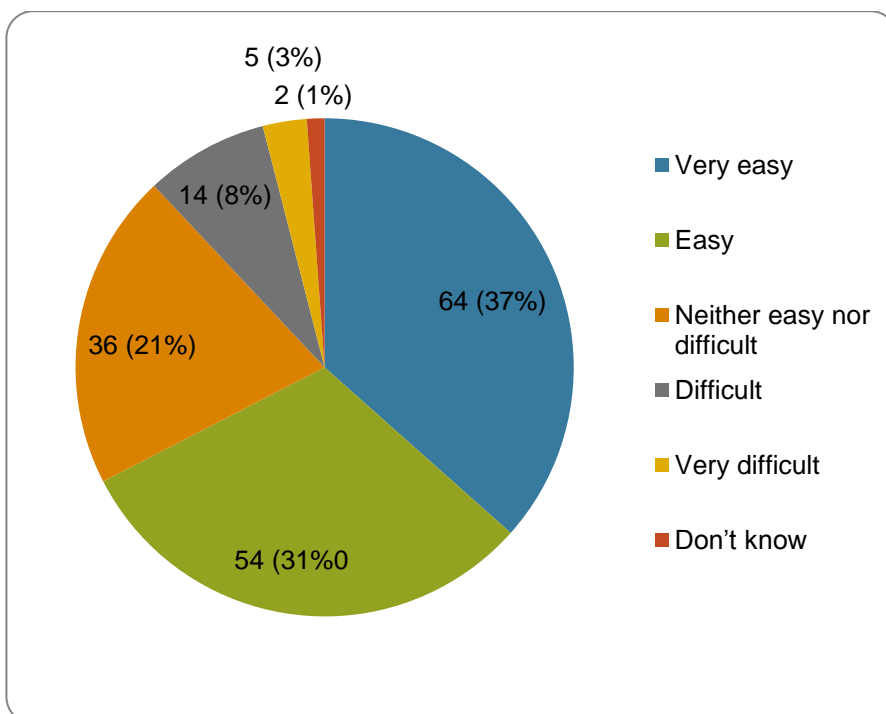
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## Getting information about COVID-19

How easy have you found it to find the information you need about how to keep yourself and others safe during the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?

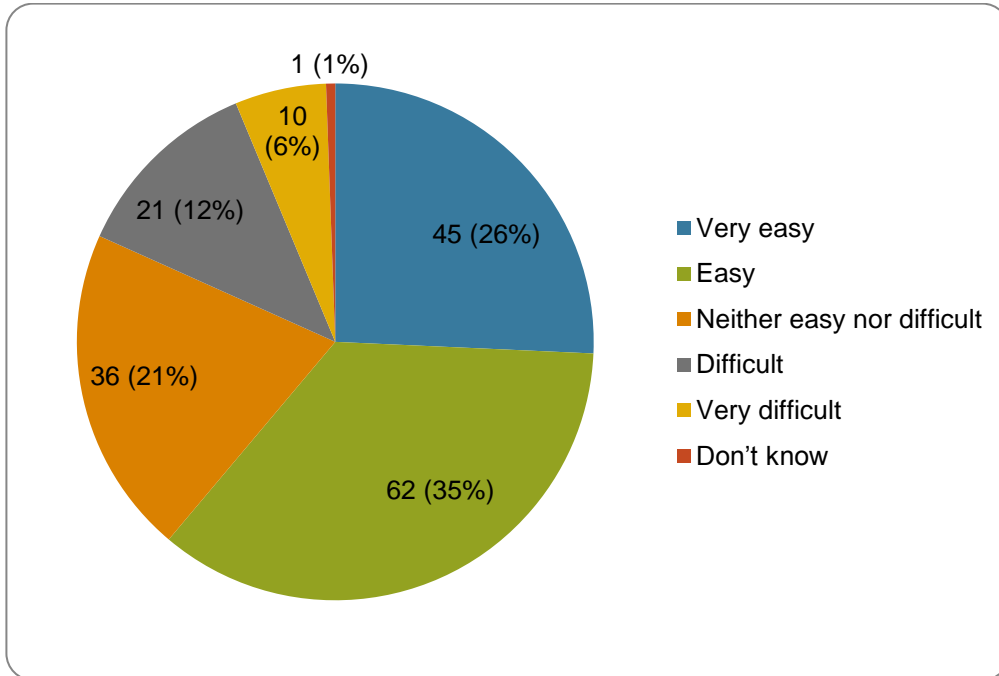


How easy have you found it to understand information about how to keep yourself and others safe during the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?

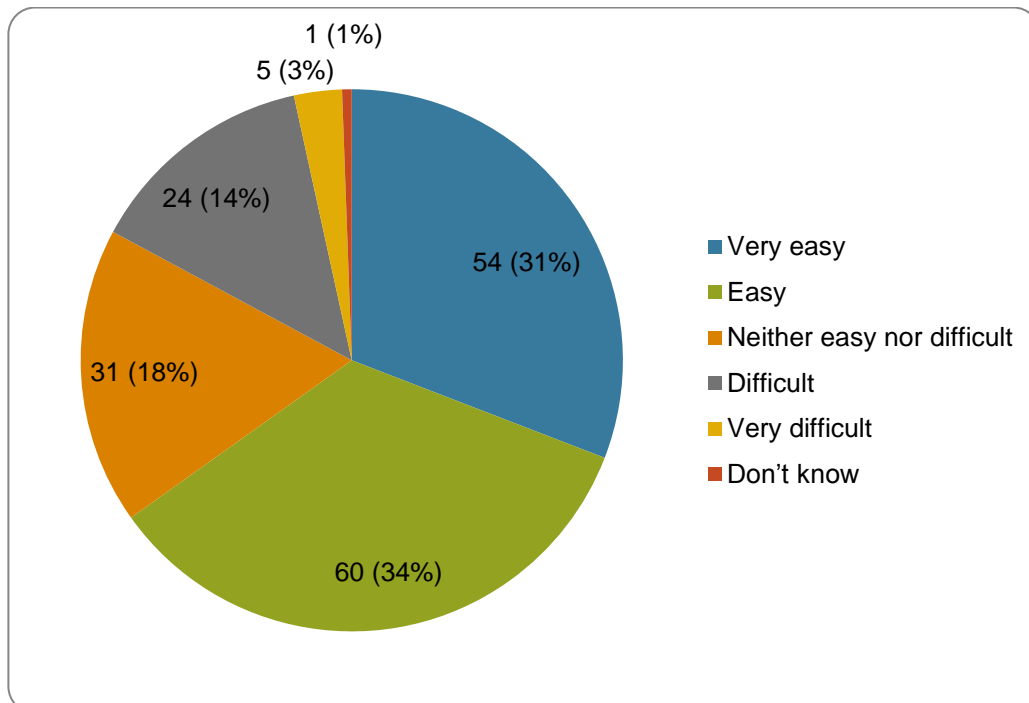


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How easy have you found it to act on information about how to keep yourself and others safe during the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?



How easy have you found it to keep up to date with the changes to information about how to keep yourself and others safe during the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic?



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## Which topics, if any, have you found it difficult to get clear information or advice about?

None, I have all the information I need	37%	62
Looking after my physical health	12%	20
Managing existing physical health conditions	11%	19
Changes to the health care services I usually access (e.g. GP practice, pharmacy, hospital outpatient appointments, community nursing visits)	33%	55
Changes to maternity services	0%	0
Accessing repeat prescription medications	16%	26
Looking after my mental health or wellbeing	21%	35
Managing existing mental health conditions	11%	18
Changes to the social care support I usually access (e.g. care visits at home, residential, nursing or respite care homes)	4%	7
Advice for family carers	8%	14
Advance care planning and end of life care	1%	1
Visiting friends and/or family in hospital or care homes	5%	8
Accessing help in my local community (e.g. getting groceries or picking up medication)	10%	16
How to volunteer in my local community	4%	6
What to do if you think someone in your household has COVID-19/coronavirus	4%	7
Testing for COVID-19/coronavirus	22%	36
Symptoms of COVID-19/coronavirus	7%	11
Shielding people who are at very high risk of severe illness from COVID-19/coronavirus	16%	26
Self-isolation	12%	20
Social distancing	6%	10
Help for people who do not use the internet	5%	9
Other (please specify):	7%	11

\*Please note that respondents had the option of selecting more than one answer so the figures below do not add up to 100%. Eight people skipped this question.



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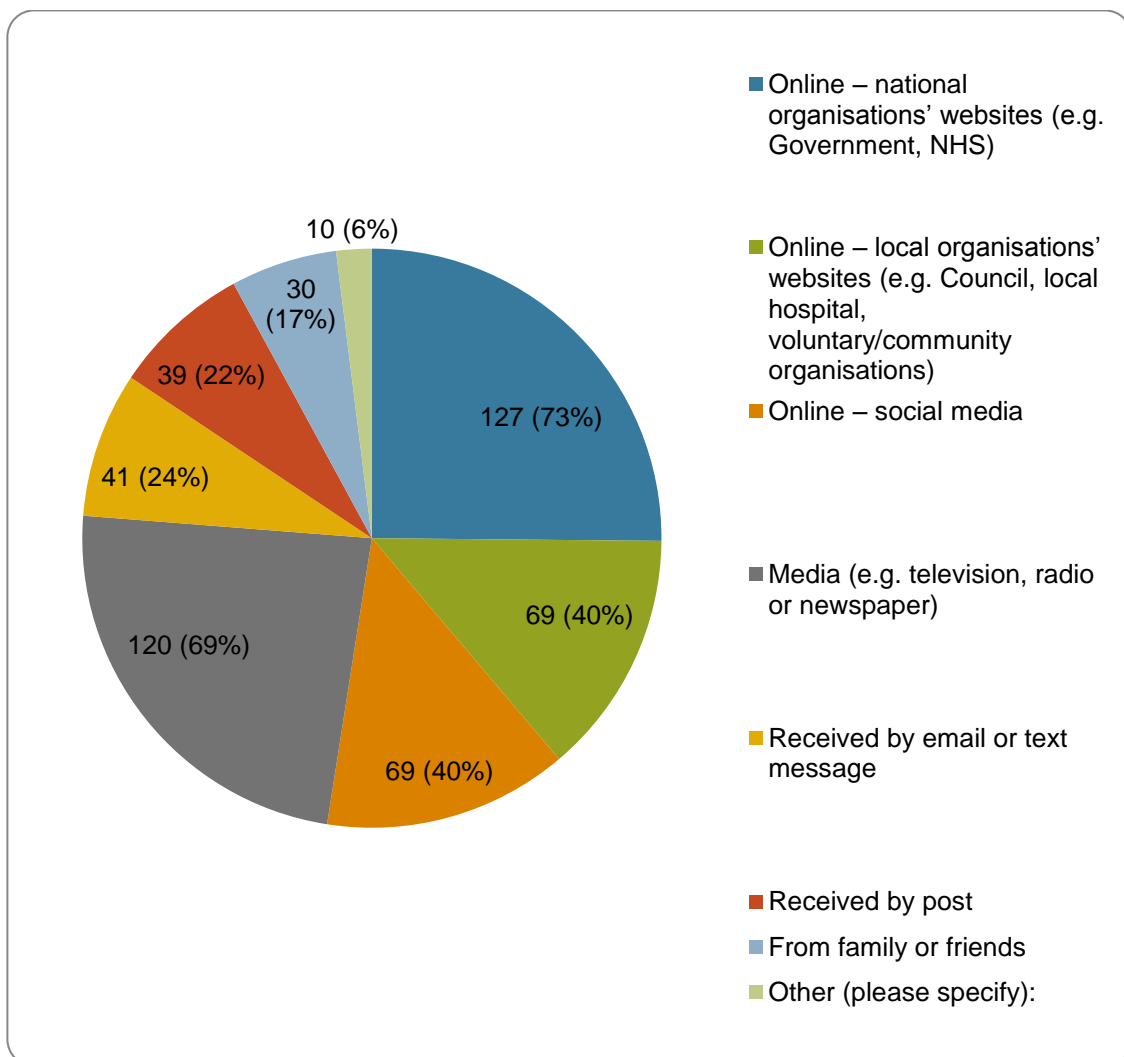
We received 11 additional comments and heard:

*“Initially information was clear. As we progress through the information is harder to understand. With information confusing.”*

*“Supporting people with learning disabilities”*

*” Very difficult to get grocery deliveries. There's no way to tell supermarkets I'm highly vulnerable and they haven't contacted me yet.”*

When asked where people had got their information from the majority of people said online and via a variety of different sources. Again respondents were given the option of selecting more than one answer. The top source of information for 127 (73%) was online, such as the Government and NHS websites. A breakdown of all sources can be seen below:



\*Please note that we received 174 responses to this question and people were given the option to select more than one answer.

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We received an additional nine comments and heard:

*“Learning disabilities team, social worker”*

*“Swindon Parkinson’s Services”*

*“Contacted MP”*

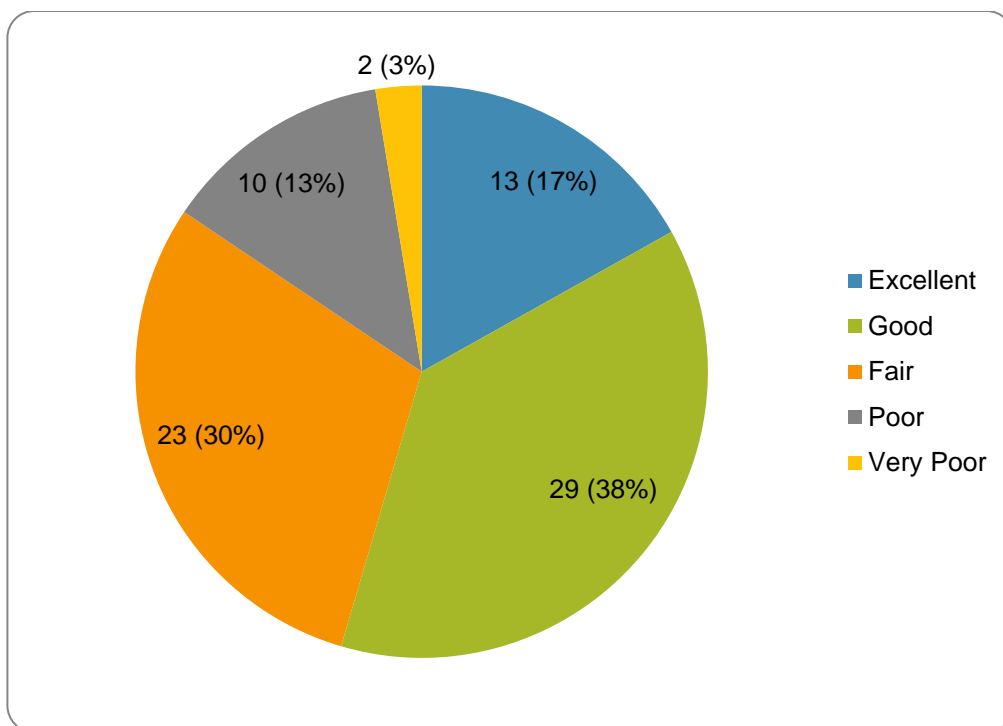
*“COVID-19 symptom tracker”*

When asked which sources of information people found especially helpful we received 50 additional comments: the Government (11) and NHS (9) websites, news (15) and Swindon Borough Council (6) featured the most in these comments.

## Using services

95 (54%) people told us that since the COVID-19 pandemic began that they, or the person they care for used healthcare services, such as GP or hospitals, with 75 out the 95 (79%) saying they had experienced changes in care.

When asked how they rated the communication by services we heard:



\*Please note that the percentages above are based on the 77 people who responded to this question.

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We received **58** additional comments about people's experiences of these changes - **19** of these were negative or expressed concern, **18** positive, **nine** were mixed sentiments and the rest were neutral. We heard:

*"I only found out that my hospital test at great Western hospital was cancelled after going on their website. If I hadn't checked I would have done a special diet for a week, an unpleasant bowel preparation and turned up for the appointment. I had another test at the hospital in Bath, they rang me to tell me we'll in advance. I have no idea when I will be rescheduled for either. I understand why but I'm extremely worried about the delay."*

*"I understand the need for it. Physiotherapy was difficult due to inability to have manual treatment for musculoskeletal pain. Fortunately I am comfortable using the phone. The oncologist was very good so I didn't feel disadvantaged by lack of face to face. My other telephone appointments didn't have appointment times so I found that more stressful. It was having to stay alert for calls and keep the phone line clear that was more stressful. Having appointment times, even if approximate would be helpful. I find myself avoiding contact with friends on a day I'm expecting a call which increases sense of isolation and if the call ends up being late in the day I worry it might have been forgotten."*

*"We received conflicting letters, text messages and telephone messages cancelling appointment, new appointment, reinstating appt., recancelling 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 lock down etc. It would have worked better to stick to a single means of communication instead of the walk in and wait clinic, I was able to phone up and a doctor called me back within an hour for an online consultation. I got a next day physio appointment by phone"*

*"No more face-to-face appointments. Email address and phone number of physio given to us. Prompt reply to email and new exercises given via email to print out."*

*"Receptionist rang early in the morning to see if I was well—then she rang near the appointment time to tell me I could go down as no one was in the waiting room, I was worried about waiting room but it seemed it was one in ,one out system so you never met ....very well organised"*

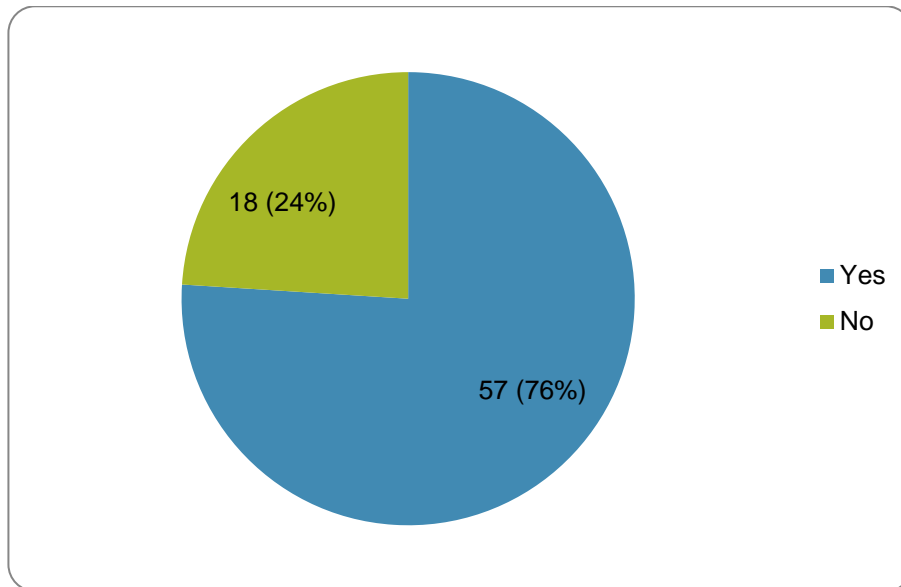
*"Chemist was extremely rude and unhelpful, doctors was brilliant and explained everything so I was fully aware before my visit. Hospital was also very good"*

*"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."*

## Telephone consultations

When asked "Have you/ the person you care for been offered a video consultation or telephone appointment instead of a face to face appointment?", 75 people responded, and said:

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\*Please note that the percentages above are based on 75 people who responded to this question.

We received **65** additional comments in the free text box about people's experiences of what video and telephone consultations were like. **13** were positive and **six** were mixed sentiments. **Nine** of these were negative and were mainly focused on the frustration of cancelled appointments, the unsuitability of video consultations and poor communication. The rest were neutral.

We were told:

*“My mother was in GWH and contacted the virus in hospital. She recovered. But the discharge planning was the worst I have seen. I had to push and push them to plan a safe discharge from hospital.”*

*“Outpatient GWH appointment. Phone consultation was good and saved 2 [hours] total travel time”*

*“GP appointments and GWH appointments for my husband. The doctor's concerned have been very helpful but my husband should now have a scan as a follow-up to his chemotherapy & that cannot be done over the phone. It is frightening to think he probably won't get one, it is due in the next week or so & we have heard nothing.”*

*“Poor really. GP was kind but how can they really truly and successful do their job via video call. My son will have a salt add assessment via video call. I know he won't interact.”*

*“Great western hospital very good”*

*“Outpatient GWH. Poor due to communication”*

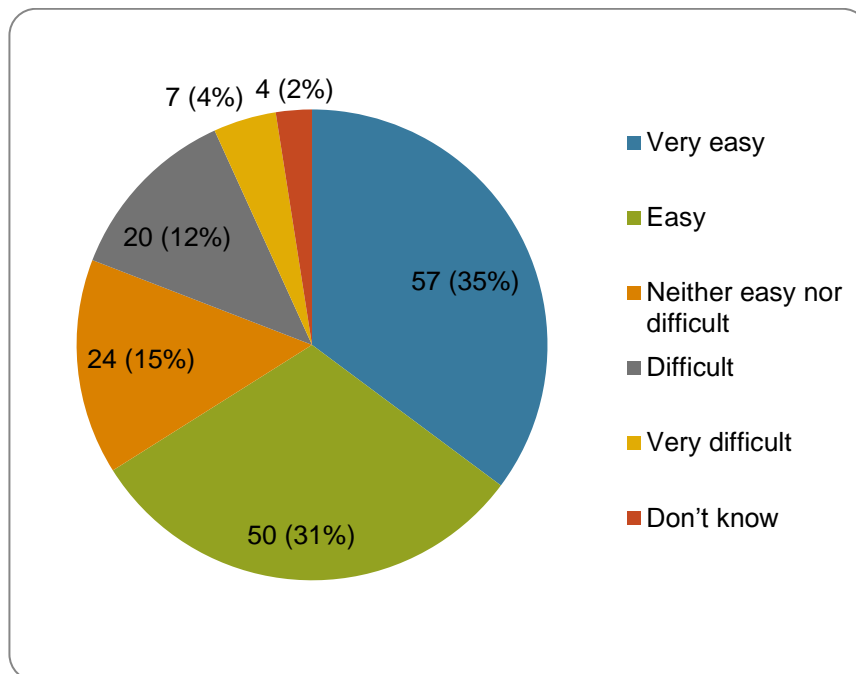
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*“GP, Genetics and outpatient at GWH. I felt safer than if I had to go to the surgery or the hospital. Service was as usual, professional and friendly.”*

## Getting medication

We asked people “Have you/ the person you care for been able to access any medication required?” 132 people (75%) said yes to this question, 12 (7%) said no, 13 (7%) said not applicable and 18 skipped the question altogether.

We followed this up by asking people “How easy have you found it to access your/ their medication?” The majority of respondents did not have any difficulty getting their medication and we were told:



We received an additional 89 comments in the free text box. 45 were positive, 28 negative or expressing concern, ten mixed and the remaining comments were neutral. We heard:

*“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”*

*“I expected to have difficulty but Lloyd’s reacted and delivered”*

*“I have had to go to the pharmacy to get it, which puts me at risk. I tried an online service but it was unreliable”*

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*“Local GP very well organised. No disruption to supplies, “business as usual”*”

*“The POD services was impossible to get through to even for emergency reasons on phone. Email requests were not being worked on as per time scales, which meant electronics prescriptions weren't reaching the pharmacy & then to arrange a volunteer to pick up that was very draining emotionally.”*

*“We have had difficulty phoning the pharmacy to order repeat prescriptions and trying to arrange deliveries. Once the pharmacy delivered medication within two hours of the GP prescribing it, which was fantastic, but a week later, they reluctantly agreed to deliver the medication the same day, but didn't and my partner had to go and collect it in the late afternoon. It is a relief now to know that Swindon Borough Council can arrange collection of prescriptions”*

*“Nearly impossible to get through to POD. Have to use on line at Victoria Cross. This adds delay because when pharmacy receive prescriptions they have to send to POD for authorisation. [Getting it on time] is critical for PD meds.”*

*“It is almost impossible to get through to the P.O.D telephone line to order a repeat prescription. On one occasion I was 58th in a queue.”*

*“Local pharmacy and GWH Boots pharmacy both very organised just a real pain to have to wait outside. Not their fault.”*

*“POD - I have only had a short wait on the phone on the 2 occasions I needed to speak to them. Hospital - sent script to me so I had to find someone to take it to the pharmacy & collect it (not a major hardship)”*

We have been getting a lot of feedback about Prescription Ordering Direct (POD) during the pandemic, with lots of issues cited around getting through. The service can also be very efficient and we have had lots of positive feedback about staff, hearing that they are knowledgeable and helpful - despite the long waiting times. Some of the issues we have heard have been escalated to the Clinical Commissioning Group.

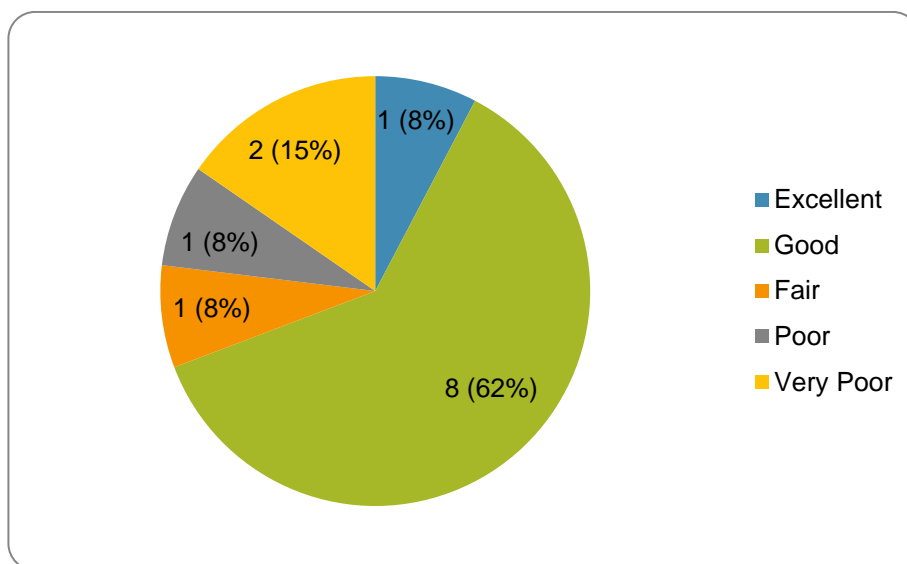


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## Using social care

18 (10%) out of the 175 respondents had used social care services during the pandemic.

12 out of the 18 people who answered yes to this question said there had been changes to the service they used as a result of this. When asked “How would you rate the communication received about the changes?”, we were told by 13 people :



\*Please note that the percentages above are based on 13 people who responded to this question.

In the additional comments, of which there were 22, we heard:

*“Care home manager has been amazing in communication and implementing changes.”*

*“Early Help Hub has been excellent. But the first referral to MASH was closed without me knowing so I had to contact them again to get the Early Help Hub to assist me.”*

*“Social worker tried to do my care plan assessment over the phone but realised that it is too complex and long established to be able to do this after a forty five minute telephone conversation. I was left feeling frightened and very distressed regarding the future of my car package”*

*“More telephone consults bit still a few well planned and protected home visits”*

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

*“No real changes to care but difficulty in carers getting masks etc”*

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*“Was told at the beginning that most of my hours would be dropped but they are managing to give me most of my hours still”*

## Support from voluntary groups in Swindon

20 (11%) people had received additional support from local voluntary or support groups. These were all varied:

- Swindon Borough Council
- Parish councils
- Mind
- Volunteers
- Parkinson’s UK Swindon and District Branch

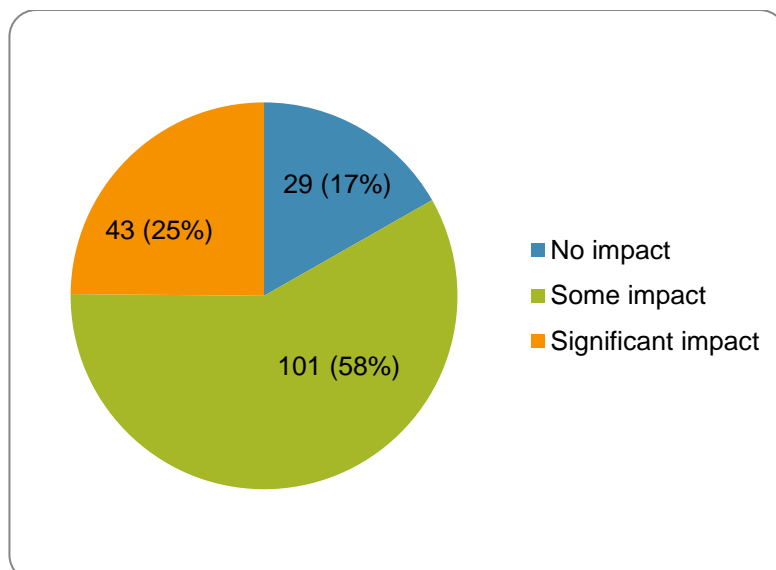
They received help with shopping and collecting medication, as well as getting phone calls to check on their wellbeing. We heard that:

*“The service was very prompt and the food supplied most acceptable.”*

*“Very positive. Nice to see the community spirit.”*

## Mental Health

We asked people “How much of an impact has the COVID-19/coronavirus pandemic had on your/ their mental health or wellbeing?” 173 people answered this questions and we were told:



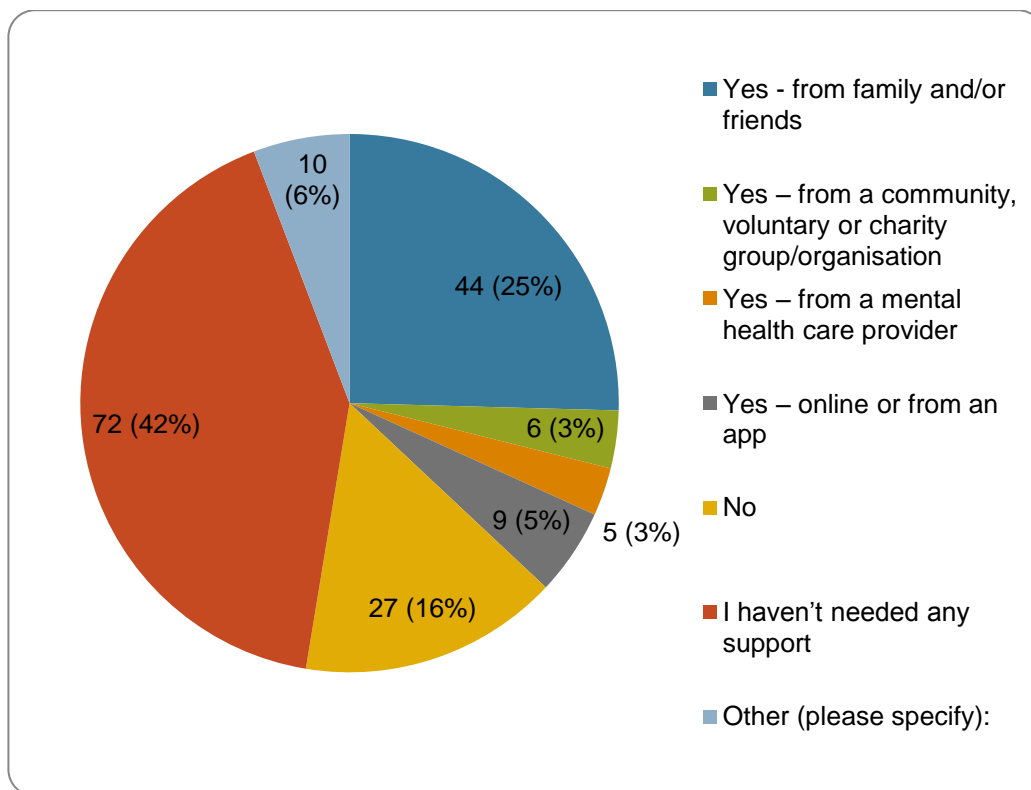


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The majority of respondents felt their mental health and/or wellbeing had been impacted by the pandemic.

The ramifications of the pandemic are not fully known at this stage but we are hearing that more people are access mental health services or seeking advice from Citizens Advice Bureau. We will continue to monitor the feedback we get about this closely.

We went on to ask “Have you been able to access support for your mental health or wellbeing during this time?” and were told:



\*The figures are based on 173 people responding to this question

The majority of people who felt they needed support received this from family and friends

We received an additional 52 comments when we asked people to tell us more about the support received. People said:

*“I have had phone call support from Swindon carers centre, checking that I am coping, being a listening ear when I am not. They ring about once a week to see how I am doing. Also get email support in a newsletter and support from their social media page. Friends and family offer a listening ear, drop flowers and shop on the doorstep. And I have been involved in singing groups on line.”*

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*“General advice and with discussion some medicine to help me relax on the worst days.”*

*“Support from learning disability team, helpful but limited in what they can do”*

*“Joined online groups to help others now using skills to make PPE for NHS staff, keeps me focused and doing more art and craft work to keep me happier.”*

*“Have only received support from the family but this is only via video calls once a week as they all live away from us.”*

*“WHAT SUPPORT!!!!!!”*

*“We talk to each other and friends. Our son has had support from ARC (autism resource centre)”*

We received a further 77 comments at the end of the survey when we asked if there was anything else the respondents would like to tell us. Some concerns were raised within these comments, as well as a deep sense of gratitude towards the NHS and other local services:

*“I have had prompt and thorough assessment for the change in my cancer which was considered urgent. They had to use extra precautions and use PPE but this was done in an empathetic way and they still were caring and supportive.”*

*“Not knowing when Oncology appointments & scans will be reinstated is making us very anxious. Also not being able to have physiotherapy has had an impact on my husband's recovery.”*

*“The government keep telling us that Shielded people would get help But where is this help??? I have not had any contact at all.”*

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## Conclusion

- For many of the respondents phone and video consultations have worked well. There are clear efficiencies in using technology in carrying out some, if not all appointments. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the digitalisation of services which is a positive for those who are able to access appointments in this way. Consideration needs to be given to those who are digitally excluded. As this was an online survey we would not have gathered the views of many, if any, of those people that do not have access to the internet.
- The impact of COVID-19 on people's mental health and wellbeing cannot be understated. We are hearing that more mental health services are getting more referrals as the fall-out from the pandemic continues.
- Communication about changes to services could perhaps have been improved upon. We are aware though that services had to adapt rapidly to the unfolding event and have done their best under challenging circumstances to keep patients informed and safe.

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- People were able to get information about COVID-19 easily, but for some this became more confusing to navigate and understand as things progressed.

## What will we do with this information?

We will share this report with our stakeholders across Swindon including the council, the Clinical Commissioning Group, NHS services and our voluntary sector colleagues, to highlight what has worked well during the pandemic and what could be improved upon.

## Thank you

We would like to thank all of the people who took part in this survey to share their views with us.

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## Community Pot Projects

Our work to engage with members of the public about their experiences of COVID-19 does not stop here. We have awarded five organisations funding from our community pot to engage with members, with whom we might not usually have the opportunity to work. These were:

- Harbour Project (Asylum Seekers and Refugees)
- Swindon and Gloucestershire Mind
- Parkinson's UK Swindon & District
- Swindon SEND Families Voice
- Swindon Interactive Arts Service (supporting adults with learning disabilities)

The engagement work for all of these projects started during the pandemic and further intelligence has been gathered about people's experiences of health and social care during this period.

The final reports for the work we have done with Parkinson's UK Swindon & District Branch and Swindon SEND Families Voices have now been published and can be read here:

<https://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2020-07-14/parkinsons-uk-swindon-district-branch-survey-report>

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<https://www.healthwatchswindon.org.uk/report/2020-08-05/swindon-send-families-voice-survey-report>

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## Because We All Care Campaign

We have joined forces with the [Care Quality Commission](#) and have launched [the Because We All Care Campaign](#), encouraging people to keep sharing their experiences and inviting our local stakeholders to support the campaign.

With all but the most urgent inspection of services on hold during COVID-19, it is vital that members of the public are able to share their views with us about what is working well and what can be improved upon.