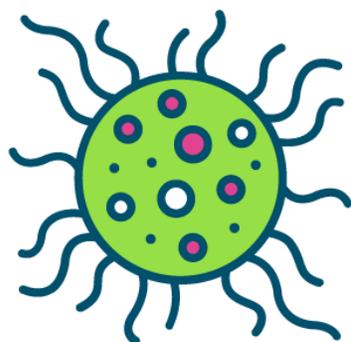**Welcome to our April update.** This month the Healthwatch Somerset team have been busy keeping connected with our local community and volunteers and working hard to reach out and support local people and services during the coronavirus pandemic.

Share your stories and help services adapt to the coronavirus

We launched a new online survey this month, asking local people to share their experiences of accessing health and social care during the coronavirus pandemic.

We are working closely with those in charge of health and care services in Somerset, providing real-time feedback to help them understand and respond to current challenges in a timely way. We will provide ongoing insight through our survey to help them learn and develop effective services and support going forward.

Complete our online survey and tell us what's working well and what could be improved: smartsurvey.co.uk/s/CoronavirusHWS/. We will share all the feedback we gather (without sharing your personal details) with local NHS and councils to help improve services.

Our priorities for the year ahead

We have announced several new projects for the year ahead.

In addition to looking at the impact of coronavirus, we are planning to investigate some common themes raised by local people while also reflecting national and local NHS and social care priorities. Projects will focus on the following broad themes.

- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

- Access to Primary Care (such GP's, pharmacy, and dentistry).

- Supported discharge process for patients with continuing health care needs (Pathway 3).

- Accessing transport to health and social care services.

- Waiting times from GP referral to treatment.

We will develop these projects throughout the year and let you know how and when you can get involved. Social distancing means we will need to be creative about the ways we reach people, but there are plenty of ways to share your experiences through online surveys, social media and over the phone.

Find out more about our plans...

What's your experience of mental health support?

For Mental Health Awareness Week (18-24 May), we want to share your stories. Please get in touch and tell us how local services have helped you manage your mental health or how things could have been done differently. Your story can be anonymous if you would prefer.

If you are an unpaid carer, we'd like to hear your story

Do you provide care, unpaid, for a friend or family member who cannot cope without your support due to illness, disability, a mental health issue or an addiction? We would like to share local carers experiences of living through this virus outbreak during Carers Week (7-14 June).

We want to raise awareness of carers needs and to help local services understand how to provide better care and support for carers across Somerset. If you'd like to share your story with us, please get in touch.

Supporting our local community through COVID-19

The effects of COVID-19 are impacting all aspects of life in the UK. The Healthwatch Somerset team are adapting and finding new ways to contribute and engage with our health and social care services and users. We have been helping local people by responding to enquiries and requests for information, by sharing up-to-date advice about local services, and by simply listening and talking. We are also working with other voluntary organisations.

Working with Spark Somerset and Corona Helpers

Our Engagement Officer, Tanya Camberwell, is working closely with Spark Somerset to support those affected by COVID-19 and the imposed restrictions.

In addition to providing information and training to the voluntary sector, Spark runs the Volunteer Service. It has created the Corona helpers website to match the huge numbers of new volunteers with groups that are helping people and those who need assistance.

Read more about Tanya's work to support Spark Somerset...

Information and advice about local support

You can contact us for information and advice about how to get the care you need locally. Here is some up to date information that you might find helpful.

- **Urgent dental care**
  New NHS centres are being set up in Bridgwater, Taunton, and Weston-super-Mare, for patients who need urgent dental treatment while their own surgeries are closed due to coronavirus. To be assessed and referred, patients need to contact their own surgery or, out of hours, call NHS 111. If you live in Somerset and you do not have a dentist, call 0300 123 7691 or email dentist4u@sompar.nhs.uk

- **Mental health support**
  If you, or someone you know is in distress, Somerset Mindline is now open 24/7. You can talk to them confidentially or find out about local mental health support - phone 01823 276 892.   Look after your wellbeing while staying informed.

- **Somerset County Council**
  The Council's website provides information about a range of local help and support services. If you can't find the information you need online and you need help urgently, you can call the Somerset Coronavirus Helpline: 0300 7906275.

- **Health advice and information about coronavirus**
  Read the latest advice from NHS England and from NHS 111 to check if you have coronavirus symptoms.

We're here to help make health and care better for local people, so please get in touch, share your stories, and share our news.