



Welcome to our monthly update. It's the end of May and we're heading into an unusual summer. At this time of year, we would normally be out and about talking to people in the community at local events and venues. While we may not be able to meet you in person, we are still working hard to gather and share public feedback about health and social care in Somerset, to help services develop and improve.



Living with dementia during lockdown

Coronavirus has thrown up many new health and social care challenges for patients, carers and those who provide services. We are all having to adapt, but it can be particularly difficult when caring for people who are most vulnerable.

During Mental Health Awareness Week (18-24 May), we shared 89-year-old Bernard's story, to highlight the care and support needs of people living with dementia and their families, and the particular pressures of life under lockdown due to coronavirus. Bernard has lived in a care home for several years due to his advancing dementia but, following a fall in February and a stay in hospital,

his family had to urgently find a new specialist dementia care home, just as the country went into lockdown. Bernard's story is an example of services working well to support the patient and the family under difficult circumstances. [Read more...](#)

Has your access to health and care been affected by coronavirus?



We are currently gathering local people's experiences of using health and social care services during the virus outbreak, to help local NHS and social care providers understand how to adapt and improve. You can share your story with us by [completing our short online survey](#), or you can [contact us](#).



Are you 'Caring behind closed doors'?

Millions of people are providing care unpaid every day. During this national crisis, many carers have had to provide more care for their elderly, sick or disabled family or friends.

A new report by Carers UK, [Caring Behind Closed Doors](#), found 70% of carers are providing more care than before. Over a third are providing that care because of the closure or reduction of local services. Carers were already under pressure before, but now over half (55%) say they feel overwhelmed and are worried they are going to burn out in the next few weeks.

During Carers Week (7-14 June) we want to highlight some of the challenges faced by family carers, raise awareness of their needs, and help local services understand how to provide better support. We are also interested to hear about the challenges of caring while living in lockdown.

If you provide care for a family member or friend who cannot cope without your support due to illness, disability, a mental health issue or an addiction, share your story with us to help influence positive change. [Contact us...](#)

Supporting our local community

The Healthwatch Somerset team is continuing to work with local organisations to help local people get the care they need during the COVID-19 outbreak.



We are working with Somerset Sight, Re-engage and the Village Agents to support local people who may be isolated and vulnerable. Through befriending calls and welfare checks we are also able to identify if people need additional support so that we can guide them to the appropriate help. This is also a good opportunity to gain insight about the health and social care needs of people we might not usually hear from.

We are also continuing our work to support SPARK Somerset with their Coronavirus Helpers initiative - liaising with local support groups to identify volunteer training needs and linking people together, and we are supporting the Burnham-on-Sea Corona Volunteers with volunteer recruitment and support.

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.

Healthwatch Somerset is the county's independent health and social care champion. We exist to ensure that people are at the heart of care. Our dedicated team of staff and volunteers listen to what people like about local health and care services, and what could be improved. These views are then shared with the decision-making organisations in the county, so together we can make a real difference.



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