

Healthcare

Overview

Disabled people face significant health disparities, with a high level of unmet needs compared to non-disabled people. There are national challenges around the impact of COVID-19 and underfunding of the NHS which shape the experiences of Deaf and disabled people in Lewisham. Some challenges respondents faced include: the length of waiting lists the impact of COVID-19 on people's mental health; discrimination faced by Deaf BSL signers, and the mixed impact of an expansion in telehealth.

Recommendations from the report

There were a number of areas in the report involving healthcare-related recommendations.

These recommendations include:

- Providing a commissioned service for Deaf BSL signers. This would include provision of reliable and consistent interpreters for Deaf BSL signers accessing healthcare, as well as making related telephone calls and understanding letters and emails.
- Community navigators supporting Deaf and disabled people with any issues affecting their lives in Lewisham, including access to healthcare.
- The development of an Independent Living Strategy. This would necessitate taking healthcare into account, both concerning standard GP and hospital provisions, and 'continuing healthcare' NHS care funding.
- The development of a Borough Access Strategy with a strand exploring healthcare.

Recommendations for this strategy include: increasing the appointments available through local GP services to reduce waiting times; ensuring all patients have face-to-face appointments which better meet their access needs; increasing the local provision of mental health services; provision of a 24/7 remote interpreting service for Deaf BSL signers in the model of BSL Health Access, and co-designed by Deaf BSL signers accessing healthcare.

Extension: Healthcare

Evidence and reflections

There is significant evidence for health disparities amongst disabled people. Research has shown that disabled people are:

- Twice as likely to have unmet needs due to long waiting lists.
- Three times more likely to have unmet needs due to the cost of prescription medication.
- Five times more likely to have unmet needs for mental health due to cost (Sakellariou and Rotarou, 2017).

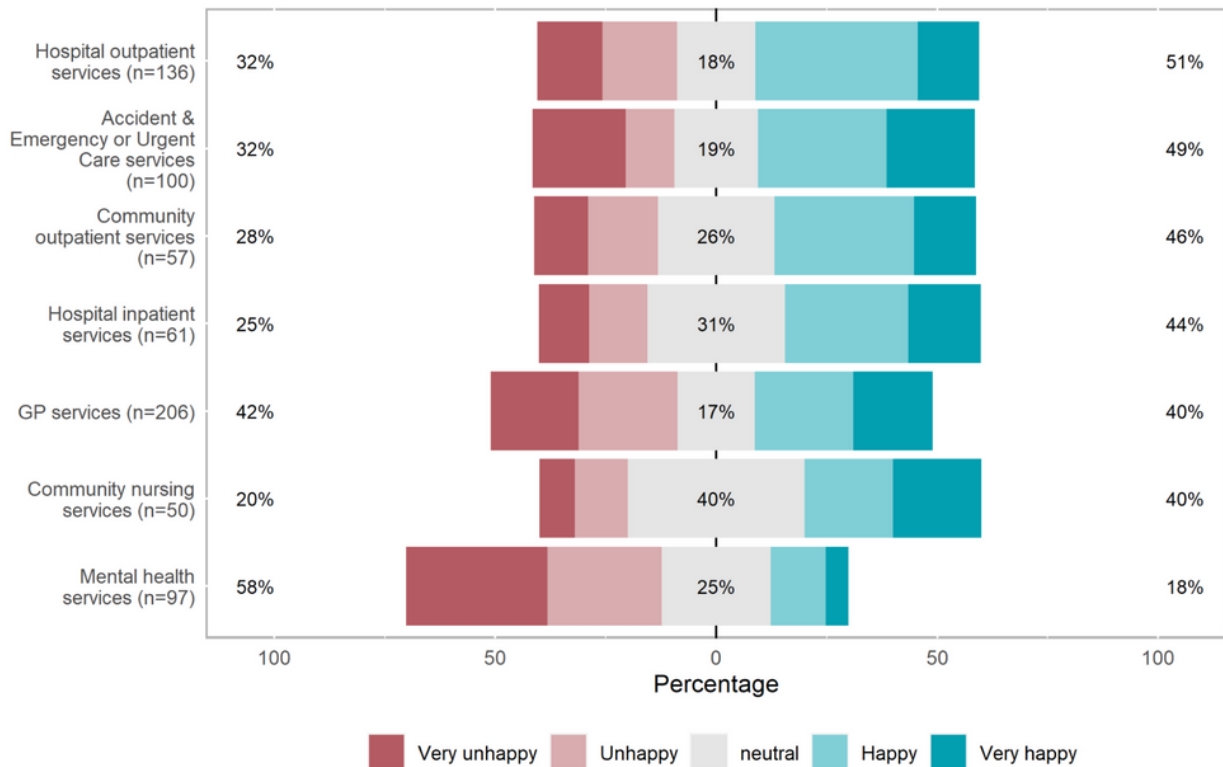


...I can’t even begin to stress how much waiting lists need to be improved. I’m lucky to be alive.



Our findings agreed with these disparities. Survey respondents faced overwhelming barriers in accessing healthcare, with only 1/3 believing that being Deaf or disabled had not affected their access to healthcare.

Satisfaction with health services
All Respondents



Extension: Healthcare

High levels of dissatisfaction with healthcare were reported across the board. Satisfaction was highest with hospital outpatient services at 51%, whereas satisfaction was at its lowest with mental health services at 18%.

There were a range of issues raised by respondents which impacted on their access to healthcare. Many of these issues affect Deaf and disabled people nationally - nonetheless, we can begin by addressing these issues in a local manner.

Below are some of the most pressing issues faced by respondents, along with relevant quotes:

- Inaccessible service provision from GP surgeries. This involves GP appointments needing to be made by telephone or online, using technology that isn't accessible for everyone.
- Difficulties contacting GP services about appointments, prescriptions, etc.

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...GP uses NHS app and Patient Access. Neither of these work properly for me so access is hard and needs someone else's intervention.

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..I have had several problems with my GP. Prescriptions haven't been authorised, I have been unable to get appointments when I have needed them, and things have been missed when I have been able to contact them, resulting in me becoming even more unwell.

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- No provision of face-to-face appointments as a reasonable adjustment for people for whom telephone calls are not accessible.
- Length of waiting lists.

Lack of high-quality interpreter support for Deaf BSL signers.

One responder noted, “...There didn't appear to be any consideration for those whom were hearing impaired, and how they would make contact to access services. It would seem that the expectation was for telephone contact, and that the Deaf had to seek assistance from family/friend or buddy to assist. The available communication tools weren't suitable for those that were Deaf to independently access the services, NHS or otherwise.”

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...The NHS video is not Deaf-friendly, as the picture of the GP is too small to lipread. Total neglect of the needs of Deaf/deafened/hard of hearing people who can't use the phone safely, as we can't hear well enough.

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Mental health services

Dissatisfaction was significantly higher with mental health services than with any other aspect, at 58% dissatisfaction. This was very clear in the survey responses as well, where people felt they were, "...not able to get mental health help," and needed, "...better support for people with mental health issues.

Specific issues reported included:

- Multiple respondents discussing difficulties accessing mental health care during COVID-19. Many felt abandoned by services at the time.
- The environment in the Borough as a whole.
- Time-limited support and the recommendation to seek private treatment.
- Waiting lists.
- A lack of immediate access to mental health services. One respondent recommends a mental health walk-in clinic.
- The expansion of the Freedom Pass scheme. This would aid people with mental health problems in their recovery.

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..Things have improved over the last ten years, particularly around staff and their attitudes to mental health, but there is still a long way to go to remove discrimination and stigma.

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...Lewisham is not a very pleasant place to live as someone with mental health conditions, as the standard of living and the environment isn't very nice. I don't like going out because there's so much litter.

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...I was supported by IAPT mental health services, but after the allotted number of sessions I was discharged with no further sessions available with them. There was the suggestion of going private, but honestly, choosing and paying for a private counsellor feels beyond me.

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I've been waiting for therapy for three years.

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