



News update - February 2021

Finding out about your experiences of receiving support from homecare services since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic

Last year we asked the public to vote on the services that they thought Healthwatch County Durham should look at in more detail. Homecare services in County Durham was one of the priorities selected and we are pleased to be able to give service users an opportunity to share their views and experiences.

If you receive care and support in your own home we would really like to hear from you and/or your family about the support you have received since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. To speak to us please:

 Call us on 0800 3047039

➔  Text/ call us on 07756 654218

(Please leave a voicemail if we miss you, and we will call you back)

Or

Complete our short survey [here](#)

 Email us at healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net

Review of GP services in County Durham

During the course of 2018/19 the Adults Wellbeing and Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Durham County Council, was engaged in a number of applications to review, merge or close General Practitioner (GP) branch services across County Durham. As part of these consultations, members received representations from patients, GP practice staff and councillors regarding the potential cumulative impact of these proposed changes and decided to undertake a review of the provision of and access to GP services across County Durham.

The review considered a wide range of user feedback, including evidence from three Healthwatch County Durham survey reports. Key recommendations put forward by Healthwatch County Durham include:

- Having easy to read and well managed notice boards and publicity materials
- Assessing and reviewing the accessibility of reception areas
- Reviewing the practices' appointments system
- Assessing the effectiveness of its telephony system
- Undertaking a review of practice websites to ensure that all information detailed is up to date and relevant.

When patients were surveyed, it became clear they were unaware of the Care Navigation initiative. Healthwatch County Durham identified issues around the communication of the rationale for and benefits of care navigation to patients.

The review recommended that the Clinical Commissioning Group address the issues identified.



To read the review in full please
see [here](#)

Healthwatch County Durham link up with 'NatWest' to provide awareness around Scams and Fraud

A joint effort between Healthwatch County Durham and Tim Viggars of NatWest has enabled a better understanding of scam prevention. Tim's role in the bank is working with communities in financial support and education, in areas such as financial basics, technology training and support and scam prevention.

The presentation held in December 2020 was popular as it gave people the necessary information to avoid falling victim to scams.

"Since the lockdown began we have seen an increase of attempts by the criminals involved as well as a refining of methods. In 2019 over £1.2bn was lost to scams in the UK alone, with only 53% of the victims being aged over 55. We are starting to see more and more how anyone can fall for a scam, particularly if they get caught at a vulnerable time. Now, many people are more vulnerable than ever".

The session covered the following;

- How victims are targeted
- The techniques used
- Specific Coronavirus scams
- How different types of scams work
- What data the fraudsters are looking for and what they do with it
- How to protect ourselves
- Detailed information on Impersonation Scams, Investment Scams and Romance Scams.

The session will be re-run in the near future! For more information/ to log your interest contact Claire Sisterson (HWCD Volunteer Supporter) at claire.sisterson@pcp.uk.net or call 07756 654223

COVID-19 vaccine programme - What are your thoughts?

The NHS is doing everything it can to deliver COVID-19 vaccines in County Durham, but there might be things that can be improved. Please spare a few moments to tell us what you think about the COVID-19 vaccine.

We want to know:

- What you think about the vaccine programme
- Whether you would be willing to have the vaccine if you have not already and if you have already had the vaccine
- What you think about information on the vaccination programme.

Your feedback is confidential but can help services spot issues affecting care for you and your loved ones.

You can access our survey [here](#)

Or

You can contact us directly to arrange a time with a member of the team to go through the survey with you/ discuss your thoughts over the telephone:

 Call us on **0800 3047039**

 Text us on **07756 654218**

 Email us at healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net

The closing date for the survey is 26th February 2021

Are you a Carer?

We know carers have played a vital role supporting their loved ones during COVID-19. Your insights can now help services to understand what is working and what could be improved as they work hard to provide the best possible care for your loved one's during these difficult times.

It can be scary to speak up about your loved one's care- Healthwatch is completely independent from the NHS or other care services, and we keep everything you share with us in strictest confidence. By sharing your experiences with us, you can help improve care in County Durham while protecting your loved one's health and wellbeing. You can tell us about your experiences of caring in this short, confidential [survey](#)

Alternatively, you can call our freephone number **0800 304 7039** or email us at healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net to share your experiences with us directly.

[#BecauseWeAllCare](#)



Carers Access to Covid-19 Vaccine

New Covid-19 vaccination advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) published on 30th December 2020 now includes Carers, both paid and unpaid, on the vaccination priority list. The advice recommends that carers who are

in receipt of Carer's Allowance or are the main carer of an elderly or disabled person whose welfare may be at risk if the carer contracted Covid-19 should be included in Priority 6 alongside people with underlying conditions.

You can find more information regarding the priority groups by clicking [here](#) to read the updated advice.

Do you need help getting to your vaccine appointment?

If you have received an appointment for your COVID 19 vaccine but need to access transport to get there, you can ask your GP practice about organising travel arrangements. Your practice should be able to follow this up through the NHS and pre-book transport for you. Your GP or the NHS will confirm this once it is arranged.

If you are travelling by pre-booked transport, please be ready for collection well in advance of your appointment time, to ensure you get to the hub in time and keep to the timescale of your appointment.

All transport that is provided are suppliers that are registered with the NHS and have undergone their criteria.

If you need any further assistance, please call us on **0800 304 7039** and we will try to help you. If you have any positive stories of local taxi/ transport services helping residents attend appointments, we would love to hear them! You can share them with us at healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net or call our freephone number.



Be aware of vaccine scams!

Fraudsters have been targeting vulnerable individuals, as reports of vaccination scams across the county have emerged. NHS trusts and GP surgeries are urging people to be cautious about any information they receive and give out, whether this be via a phone call, text or email.

Remember:

- You will never receive calls from the NHS asking for money / or to press a number on your keypad to make an appointment.
- All COVID-19 vaccinations are free of charge.
- The NHS will **never** ask for any bank details as proof of identification.
- Genuine callers who are booking vaccinations will not ask for any other personal details other than asking you to confirm your name, and certainly will not ask for any money.
- Look out for spelling mistakes on websites or texts as these are often the only obvious indicators that they are fake.

Take a look at this [article from Which?](#) that looks at what fake texts look like and explores COVID-19 scams in more detail.

If you receive an unprompted link on a text, or are asked for lots of personal details including your bank details, it's almost certainly a scam.

If you are unsure, call your GP or speak to a friend/ family member and don't ever feel rushed into making any quick decisions.



**COVID-19 VACCINE
FACT CHECK**

 NHS

-  The COVID-19 vaccine will always be available free of charge.
-  The NHS will never ask you to share bank details to confirm your identity.

Over 50s Alcohol Helpline

Prior to the pandemic older adults were drinking more than any other age group, however a recent survey found that since the first lockdown over 1 in 2 of the over 50s population in the UK (51%) are drinking at a level that could cause them health problems now, or in the future. Nearly a quarter (23.2%) are classed as high risk or dependent drinkers.

If you feel you have become dependent on alcohol, or know someone who has, the Drink Wise Age Well Over 50's Alcohol Helpline is here to help. Their free, confidential helpline is staffed by expert alcohol advisors who are available to support people aged over 50 and their families, who are worried about their own, or a loved one's drinking.

Freephone 0808 801 0750 Monday to Friday 12pm to 8pm and 10am to 4pm at weekends, or see [here](#) to pre book a telephone call-back or a video chat appointment with one of their alcohol advisors at a time which is convenient for you!



"A lot of older drinkers are drinking isolated at home so a helpline is one way they can get in contact with people."

John Nelson, in recovery for alcohol issues

Need to talk?
Give our over 50s alcohol helpline a call
0808 8010750

Every Call Counts

Every Call Counts is a new FREE befriending service allowing you to enjoy a conversation with fantastic befriending staff and volunteers. Every Call Counts aims to promote healthier living, independence and reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Befrienders offer practical support through a weekly phone call to help build

confidence and access community resources or activities where available. The service, delivered by the Pioneering Care Partnership, is for those 18+ who are living in the County Durham area.

For more information please call 01325 329934



Virtual Autism Support Hub

Recent events have had a huge impact on the way the [North East Autism Society](#) have been able to deliver their support services. However, they are committed to supporting families across the North East in these uncertain times.

They are hosting a number of Zoom webinars over the next few months:

- Introduction to Autism (Part 1)
- Introduction to Autism (Part 2)
- Emotional Wellbeing (Part 1)
- Emotional Wellbeing (Part 2)

Places on these webinars are limited and must be pre-booked. If you are interested please contact Rebecca.welch@ne-as.org.uk or call 0191 410 9974

They are also hosting virtual support groups which are an informal, friendly space where parents, carers and family members are welcome to join to receive support from their team and meet others. **Places are also limited in these groups and must be pre-booked by emailing kerrie.highcock@ne-as.org.uk or calling 0191 410 9974**

You can also contact the North East Autism Society via telephone and email for family development support:

☎ Support line **0191 410 9974 ext 2004**

✉ Text support **07825 585 313**

✉ Email support: kerrie.highcock@ne-as.org.uk or rebecca.welch@ne-as.org.uk

The Family Development team will be on hand Monday to Friday 9-5 to offer free advice, resources and to signpost.



MS Society- Local Groups

Are you living with Multiple Sclerosis or caring for someone how does? Your local MS Society Group in Stanhope and Weardale can offer you support to help you manage with your condition. Ways in which they can help include:

- Emotional support
- Help with finances including Grants
- Information about MS and local services
- Signposting to specialist services and information

For more information please contact them at stanhope@mssociety.org.uk or call them on 01388 528999



Rollercoaster Support Group

Are you a parent or carer supporting a child or young person with any kind of emotional or mental health difficulty?

The Rollercoaster Support Group offers practical advice and support, training opportunities and regular meetings.

Contact can be made with the team by calling them on **07377 213**

952, emailing support@rollercoasterfs.co.uk or following them on their [Facebook page](#)



Every Mind Matters: Simple ways to look after your mental health

Public Health England's [Every Mind Matters](#) campaign helps people take simple steps to achieve better mental health. Take the [quiz](#) to get your free NHS-approved mind plan, designed to help you feel more in control, deal with stress and anxiety, boost your mood and improve your sleep. You can also access practical tips and support from the [Every Mind Matters COVID-19 hub](#)



Get Involved:

Help with the fight against COVID-19

Could you be part of it and play your part in protecting your community? Durham Community Action are seeking to establish a bank of volunteers to support local COVID vaccination clinics across the county.

You will help healthcare staff to ensure that patients are supported in accessing their vaccination in their immediate aftercare. This is an exciting opportunity to play your part in protecting the community and saving lives.

The main aim of the role will be to ensure patients are where they are supposed to be and are ready for their vaccine, as well as providing reassurance. The role will focus on patient welfare, taking direction from staff and to be responsible for flow management of patients within and outside Vaccination Centres and allocated car parks.

It is important to stress at this point that after a successful application process volunteers will be added to a volunteer bank and it is envisaged that they will be notified as and when shifts become available at their local centre, which are expected to become busy once fully operational. For more information, please see [here](#)

Shotley Bridge Consultations

County Durham CCG are preparing for public conversations in relation to the services at Shotley Bridge Community Hospital and they want to talk with you about the potential services that could be delivered in the future. People can still contact them and share their views by telephone on **0191 389 8609** and paper copies of materials are available upon request once the engagement begins.

Please complete the following survey [here](#) to tell them which of the topics you wish to participate in discussing. They will then be able to arrange an appropriate number of sessions depending on the levels of interest received. The deadline is Thursday 11 February.

Experts by Experience Needed

NHS-led Provider Collaboratives team is looking for experts by experience to share their views on new approaches to commissioning care for:

- people with complex emotional needs and/or a history of trauma
- women and their families accessing perinatal mental health services

Successful applicants will play a vital role in keeping people who use these services at the centre of our focus and defining the approach to commissioning care.

More information about these roles and the application process is available on the [NHS Involvement Hub](#)



Nepacs Training Sessions

Nepacs - a long standing north east charity which supports prisoners' families - delivers a range of services to support children and families impacted by imprisonment at prisons, court and in the community. To help raise awareness of the needs of prisoners' families and how agencies can support them, they deliver Hidden Sentence training to professionals from health, local authorities, education, criminal justice and the voluntary sector:

Hidden Sentence awareness session, lasting 2.5 hours via Zoom:

- Wednesday 24 March 2021 - 9.30am-12noon

Listening support skills virtual training sessions, lasting 2.5 hours via Zoom:

- Wednesday 3 February 2021 - 9.30am-12noon
- Tuesday 16 March 2021 - 9.30am-12noon

To book a place on any of the above virtual awareness sessions please see [here](#). If you would like to commission the training or any awareness sessions for your organisation please contact Nepacs training team on 0191 332 3810 or email training@nepacs.co.uk



Contact us:

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