

News update - October 2026



In this edition, we're looking at the introduction of a two-week period of leave for anyone experiencing a miscarriage and we're also covering World Suicide Prevention Day which took place last month.

Also this month, we're supporting Northern Cancer Alliance's new initiative to support cancer screening and also details on Durham County Council who are wanting participants with lived experience to take part in refreshing their autism strategy.

As always, thank you for your continued support — your feedback helps us make a real impact. ❤️

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health and social
care in your area.

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County Durham

PODCAST



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Veteran Support in Care Homes



Healthwatch County Durham recently spoke with staff from eight local care homes to explore how veterans are identified, recognised and supported in residential care.

We found a strong commitment to person-centred care, with many homes already celebrating veterans through remembrance events and opportunities to share their experiences. However, veteran status was not always formally recorded, few staff had received veteran-specific training, and links with specialist veteran organisations were limited.

As a result, we recommended improving veteran identification processes, increasing staff training and creating more veteran-focused activities. Working alongside Veterans for Veterans in Care and East Durham Veterans Trust, we are helping care homes become more veteran-aware and better support residents who have served.

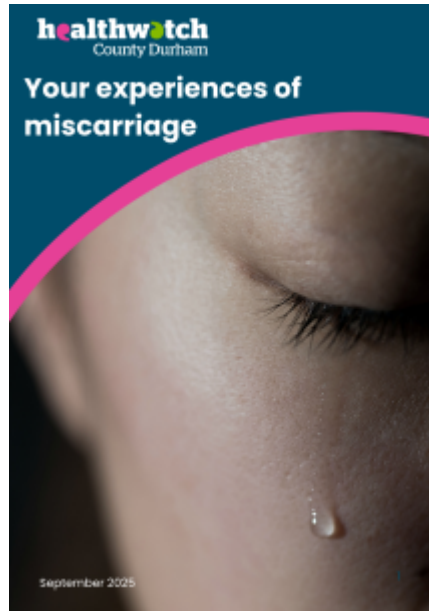
The work has also attracted national interest, with findings shared at a presentation attended by more than 150 Care Quality Commission (CQC) inspectors and managers, helping to raise awareness of the importance of veteran-aware care.

Thanks to all the volunteers who helped shape this work and our staff team who supported them.

New bereavement leave recognises impact of pregnancy loss

“No one should have to fight for time to grieve” – that’s the word from the Government who have announced that, from April 2027, women and their partners who experience pregnancy loss before 24 weeks will be entitled to up to two weeks of unpaid bereavement leave.

The new entitlement will also cover partners, other biological parents and intended parents in surrogacy arrangements.



Our report '*Your experiences of miscarriage*', published in September 2025, highlights the profound and sometimes lasting effects miscarriage can have.

Nearly all respondents reported long-term mental or physical effects, three-quarters did not feel adequately supported by healthcare professionals and we also found that partners could be affected by pregnancy loss, but their experiences and support needs were often overlooked.

These findings provide important local impact, highlighting why recognising pregnancy loss and giving people time away from work may matter.

The new entitlement will be unpaid, individual experiences and support needs will vary, and some employers may have policies already in place.

The new 2-week standard requirement will apply to all workers when it comes into law next April.

Click below to read our report from September 2025 into miscarriage experiences.

Your Experiences of Miscarriage

Join a drop-in
session today

Get confidential
support now

Victims' Voice
DURHAM CIC

Supporting women and child
victim-survivors of domestic
abuse in County Durham

Practical & Emotional Support

We provide:

- Drop-in sessions for women at accessible venues across County Durham.
- Regular virtual online drop-in sessions for women.
- Empowerment and recovery group programmes for women.
- Workshops on domestic abuse, coercive control and post-separation abuse.
- Signposting and referrals to other support services.



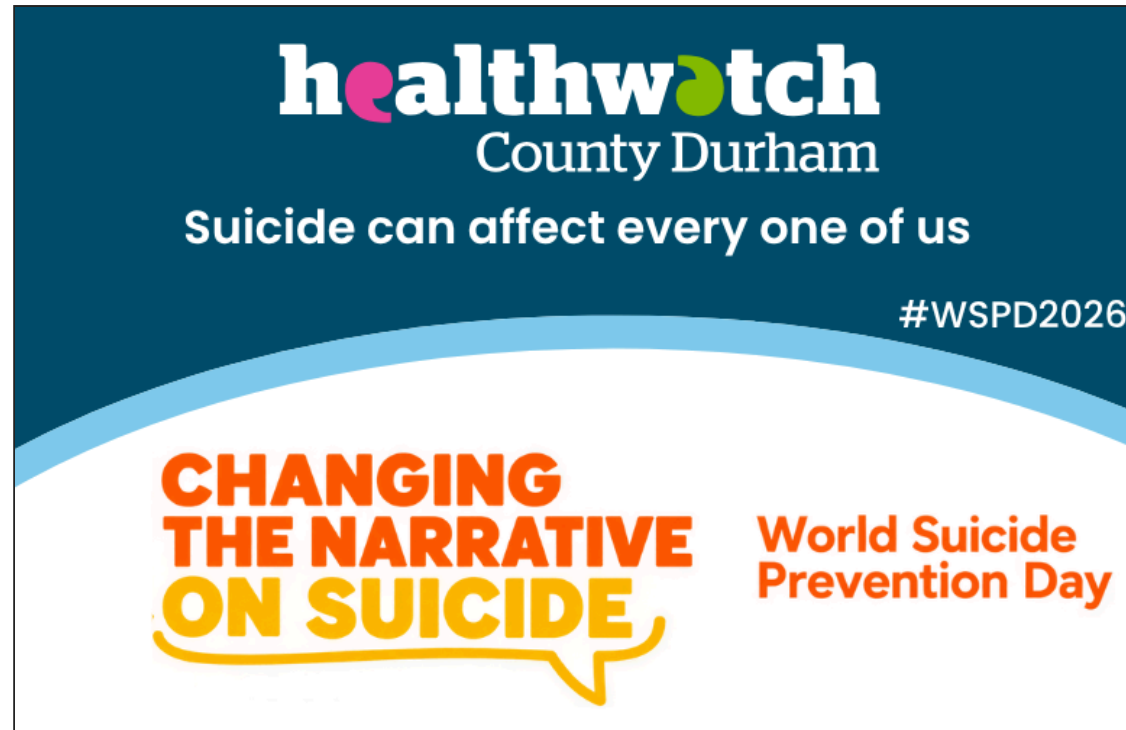
Find Strength, Find Support, Find Your Voice.

You're not
alone. We're
here to help.



www.victimsvoice.co.uk

World Suicide Prevention Day 2026



World Suicide Prevention Day took place on 10 September, but suicide prevention is something we should talk about all year round.

In County Durham, around 74 people die by suicide each year, with around 75% of those deaths being men. Every loss has a devastating impact on families, friends, colleagues and communities.

This year's theme, "Changing the Narrative", encourages us to move away from stigma and silence and towards openness, understanding and support. Having a conversation about suicide can feel difficult, but talking openly can help someone feel less alone and encourage them to seek help.

Earlier this year, for Men's Health Week, we highlighted a range of groups, activities and sports available across County Durham to help men connect with others and support their wellbeing. You can read the article on our website.

The County Durham Together Partnership is also recruiting Suicide Prevention Community Champions to help raise awareness, encourage conversations and promote support in local communities.

If you're struggling, you do not have to face it alone. Samaritans are available 24/7 on 116 123. In an emergency, call 999 or visit A&E. For urgent mental health support, contact NHS 111 and select the mental health option.

♥ Remember: you don't need to wait for a crisis to ask for help. Support is available, and reaching out is a sign of strength.

Trust extends review of historic breast services

County Durham and Darlington NHS Foundation Trust (CDDFT) has agreed to extend its look-back into historic breast services, completing its current reviews covering January 2023 to February 2025 before reviewing patients treated in 2022 and working backwards year by year towards 2015.



The decision follows serious failings identified in the Trust's breast services, including cases of missed or delayed cancer diagnoses and unnecessary mastectomies, which

came to light through investigations and reviews in 2025.

At an extraordinary public Board meeting on Thursday 24 September, the Trust considered patient and public views, the experiences of women affected and independent clinical advice before agreeing to review each year separately and consider the findings before deciding whether to go further.

The Trust says its current breast service has undergone significant changes, including new specialist surgeons, stronger clinical leadership and oversight, and improvements to diagnostic and treatment processes; it also reports improvements in several patient outcome measures.

Patients do not need to contact the Trust simply because they previously received breast care during the period, and anyone whose care needs reviewing will be contacted directly; patients can also choose not to take part.

Anyone concerned about previous breast care can contact CDDFT's dedicated patient support team on **0191 333 2126** or email cddft.breastservices@nhs.net; support will remain available throughout the look-back.

Events & What's Happening

Coming Up in October

See where our team are this month across the county!



Our engagement team are always out and about listening to your experiences of health and social care services attending community hubs, events and more. Here's where you might see us this month:

- All Saints Church Cafe, Companionship Group, Newton Hall, [DH1 5LT](#). Friday 2nd October, 1:30pm – 3:00pm
- Bullion Hall, Chester-le-Street, [DH2 2DW](#). Thursday 8th October, 11.30am – 2.30pm
- TCR Hub, Neurodevelopment Family Support drop-in, Barnard Castle, [DL12 8TD](#), Tuesday 13th October, 9:30am – 11:30am
- St. Michael's & All Angels Church, Breathing Spaces, Witton Gilbert, [DH7 6SX](#), Tuesday 13th October, 1pm – 3pm
- Peterlee Leisure Centre, Neurodevelopment Family Support drop-in, [SR8 1AF](#), Thursday 22nd October, 12:30pm – 2:30pm
- The Glebe Centre, East Durham Veterans, Murton, [SR7 7NH](#), Friday 23rd October, 10am – 1pm

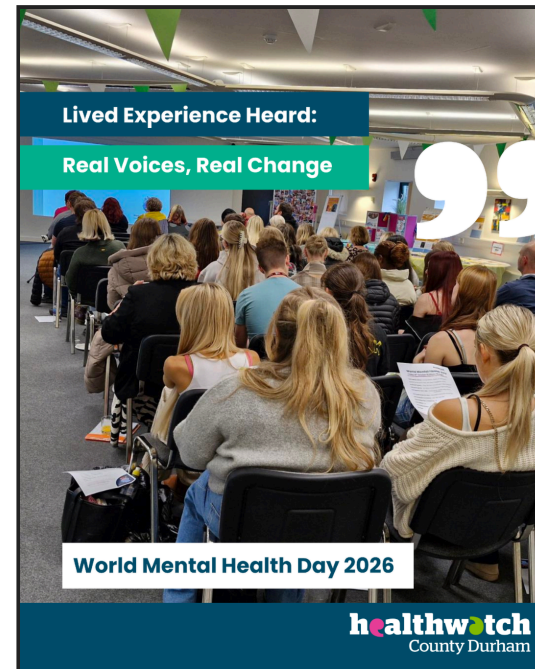
- The Venue, Wear Together, Stanley, [DH9 6AH](#), Thursday 29th October, 12.30pm – 2.30pm
- East Durham Trust, Hart Gables LGBT, [SR8 5DP](#), Friday 30th October, 1pm – 3pm

World Mental Health Day 2026

World Mental Health Day takes place every year on 10th October.

It reminds us why good mental health is so important, and how we can prioritise it in our lives and communities. It's also a moment to talk openly and listen to what others are experiencing.

The theme for 2026 is “Lived experiences heard: real voices, real change” (World Federation for Mental Health).



At Healthwatch County Durham, we've worked to hear voices from our area who have been affected by mental health and the care they receive when accessing services.

Our *Mental Health Transformation Evaluation* published in February explored the experiences of people using and delivering community mental health services,

highlighting the importance of accessible, joined up and person-centred support.

And in May, we examined people's experiences of mental health support, highlighting the value of listening to lived experience and providing consistent, ongoing care in a joint report with the local Healthwatch teams across the Tees Valley.

This World Mental Health Day, we will continue to listen and support better mental health together.



**Every family has the right
to live a happy, healthy
and active life.**



JUST LAUNCHED

Scan to
sign up



Our friendly programme is for families who:

- Live, attend a school or have a GP in **County Durham**
- Have a child aged 4 to 17

Families receive support for one year, starting with ten weekly sessions, focused on health, weight and well-being. Contact us to discuss the next steps with our team.



Email us your name and contact details at:

morelife.countydurham@nhs.net

Call us on
0191 380 1144

Help Shape Durham Autism Strategy



The poster is for the Durham All-Age Autism Strategy Working Group. It features the Durham County Council logo and the Inclusion North logo at the top. The text asks if the reader is autistic or has an autistic family member and encourages them to have their say. It mentions that the group will help shape the council's plans to make life better for autistic people in County Durham. It also states that online meetings will be held via Microsoft Teams. There is an illustration of three people talking. The meeting dates are listed as Wednesday 14th October and Wednesday 11th November, both from 1.30-3.30pm online. A sign-up email is provided at the bottom.

Durham All-Age Autism Strategy Working Group

Are you autistic or do you have an autistic family member?

Have your say!

Help shape Durham County Council's plans to make life better for autistic people in County Durham.

Join our online Working Group meetings via Microsoft Teams.

Meeting dates:
Wednesday **14th October**, 1.30-3.30pm (online)
Wednesday **11th November**, 1.30-3.30pm (online)

To sign up, please email:
Lisa.tallant@inclusionnorth.org

Durham County Council is refreshing its All-Age Autism Strategy and is inviting autistic people, family carers and anyone with lived experience of autism to help shape its future direction.

As part of the process, two online discussion sessions will be held supported by Inclusion North this autumn, providing an opportunity for people to share their experiences, discuss what is working well, identify gaps in support and help develop priorities for the years ahead.

The council is keen to ensure that lived experience is at the heart of decision-making and wants the strategy to reflect the diverse needs of autistic people and families across County Durham.

The online working group meetings will take place via Microsoft Teams on

Wednesday 14th October and Wednesday 11th November, from 1.30pm to 3.30pm.

Anyone interested in taking part can sign up by emailing

Lisa.Tallant@inclusionnorth.org.

Please see the attached poster for full details and information on how to get involved.

New Cancer Support Covering County Durham

Healthwatch County Durham is helping to raise awareness of two initiatives that aim to support people affected by cancer and encourage greater uptake of cancer screening.

A new online resource, Menopause, Cancer & Me, developed by the Northern Cancer Alliance that has been launched to support women experiencing menopause symptoms during or after cancer treatment.



It includes guidance on menopause symptoms after cancer, lifestyle and wellbeing advice, treatment options that may be discussed with healthcare professionals, and prompts to help start conversations about care.

The resource has been created in response to feedback from women who often feel unsure about what is happening to their bodies and struggle to find information that reflects the realities of cancer treatment - designed to complement, rather than replace, clinical care.



Alongside this, the Northern Cancer Alliance is looking for people whose cancer was detected through lung cancer screening to share their experiences as part of a regional awareness campaign. By highlighting real-life stories, the campaign hopes to encourage more people to take up screening invitations.

People who wish to take part may be asked to share a photograph or record a short video explaining their experience of screening and why they are pleased they attended.

[Click here to visit their website](#)



 **Just For Women**
SUPPORT FOR ALL

STRONGER TOGETHER WORKSHOP

ABOUT THIS WORKSHOP

A gentle, informative session designed to help women understand breast health, recognise early signs and feel confident carrying out regular self-checks. The workshop offers clear guidance, emotional reassurance and a safe space for questions — empowering women with knowledge, confidence and community.

- Breast Cancer Workshops
- One-to-one Counselling & Support
- Events
- Offering sessions free of charge for women living with or recovering from breast cancer.

Share your experience with us

Our work starts with your story. You can share your feedback with us at any time — anonymously if you prefer.

- **Telephone:** 0300 180 0025
- **Email:** info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk
- **Website:** www.healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

If we're not available straight away, please leave your details and a member of the team will get back to you.

Thank you for reading!

Next month's edition will be in your inbox soon





Contact us:

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Call: 0300 180 0025 between the hours of 09:00
- 17:00 Monday to Friday

Email: info@healthwatchcountydurham.co.uk

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our [complaints process](#)



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