

# healthwatch County Durham

News update - January 2021

---

## Happy New Year!

Happy New Year from all of us here at Healthwatch County Durham, we hope you had a relaxing festive break and wish you a happy and healthy 2021! Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences of health and social care services with us over the last year.

Our signposting and information service is open Monday-Thursday 9am until 5pm, and Fridays 9am until 4.30pm. Please call us on our freephone number **0800 304 7039** or email us at [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net) if you need any help with health and/or social care services in County Durham.

If you have any feedback on services you can share it with us as we are able to challenge and influence how care is provided. We are particularly keen to hear about people's experiences of:

- The diagnosis and treatment for cancer and other conditions
  - Getting help from your GP
    - Home care services
- Young people's mental health services



Happy New Year from all of us at Healthwatch County Durham and best wishes for a happy and healthy 2021!

**healthwatch**  
County Durham

## Supporting Local Foodbanks

Every year we collect for our local foodbanks, and 2020 was no different - well it was - so we had to think outside of the box so we could still support our local communities at a time, when it was needed more than ever.

The result was an impressive bulk bought mixture, of staple food items such as tinned vegetables, fish and meat, and festive treats such as Christmas puddings, luxury biscuits and selection boxes.

A very big thank you to our colleagues, board members, family and friends for their generous donations!



### Are you involved with a local foodbank?

2020 had an impact on so many people, in so many ways. We are looking at how we can reach out to more vulnerable members of our communities, and how we can work collectively with organisations, such as foodbanks and community hubs, to provide advice and support where it is most needed.

If you would like to know more, please contact Emily at [emily.hunter@pcp.uk.net](mailto:emily.hunter@pcp.uk.net)

---

## Young Carers Neighbourhood Charter

Healthwatch County Durham is delighted to have been re-accredited with the Young Carer's Neighbourhood Charter. The charter is awarded by [Family Action](#), an organisation that supports young carers in collaboration with [The Bridge Young Carers Service](#).

A young carer is a young person under 18 years of age who helps to look after a family member who is disabled, physically or mentally ill or has a substance misuse problem.

Caring can involve physical or emotional care, or being responsible for someone's safety and wellbeing. The level of responsibility assumed by a young carer is often inappropriate to their age and beyond the level of simply helping out at home as part of the process of growing up.

By signing up to the charter Healthwatch County Durham has pledged to support young carers by continuing to raise awareness about what a young carer is and the challenges that they may face. Staff and Board members are kept updated on this work and we hope to share information with our volunteers in the New Year.



---

## Spotlight on Signposting

We have taken many signposting calls from the public asking for information on how to get an appointment with a dentist. If you need to access dental treatment the latest advice from NHS England will be of interest to you:

Dental practices should be open for face to face care unless there are specific

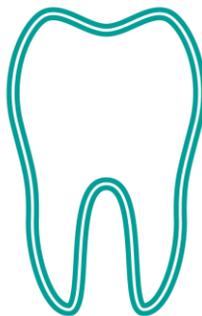
circumstances which prevent this. In addition:

- Patients with urgent care needs should be prioritised
- Patients requiring an urgent appointment should be offered the next available slot, whether or not they have been treated on the NHS previously at the practice
- There is an expectation that priority must be given to patients in pain, irrespective of whether they are new patients or not to a practice over the provision of routine dental care

The nature of the treatments involved means adhering to strict infection control procedures between appointments, which reduces the number of patients that are able to be treated on a daily basis. The other impact is on those patients wishing to resume their routine dental check-ups and treatments. Practices have been asked to prioritise those patients in urgent or emergency dental need. Therefore, patients requiring routine dental care such as check-ups and scale and polish will experience longer waiting times.

If you have an urgent dental issue you should telephone your dental practice (or any NHS practice if you don't have a regular dentist) for advice on what to do next. You will be triaged first over the telephone and, if you need face to face care, you will be given an appointment and asked to attend as long as you do not have any COVID-19 symptoms. If you require treatment you will be given clear instructions by the dental practice on what you need to do prior to your face-to-face appointment and when you get to the practice.

If the dental practitioner decides the issue is not deemed urgent, you may be given advice on how to self-manage your dental problem and advised to make contact again if the situation changes.



If you would like any advice or support regarding health or social care services:

 Call us on 0800 3047039

✉ Email us at [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net)

📞 Text us on 07756 654218

---

## Join our Board Meetings!

In line with government guidance, the Healthwatch County Durham Board and team are continuing to meet remotely, to try and minimise the spread of COVID-19. Listening to the views and experiences of the public remains a top priority for us, to help the people of County Durham get the most out of local health and social care services.



If you would like to attend one of our online Board meetings, please email us at [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net) or call us on 0800 3047039 and we will send you a meeting invitation. Alternatively, you can email us any experiences or questions relating to health and/or social care services that you would like to be taken to the board.

---

## National Lockdown

**Statement from LA7 Leaders: National lockdown required to slow the spread of Covid-19:**

"It remains essential that we all continue to follow the national public health guidance and stay at home as much as possible, keep your distance from others if you do need to leave your home, wash your hands regularly, wear a face covering when required and get tested if you have symptoms. It is important to keep homes well ventilated as well by opening windows periodically....Our communities have already endured so much hardship and it is difficult to once again accept the situation we are in, but we must

take a pro-active approach as introducing further measures targeted at the prevention of further spread of the virus is much better than having to act to cure the problem at a later date. A national lockdown period will provide clear and consistent guidance requiring people in all parts of the country to remain at home except for essential reasons and significantly limit the opportunities for the virus to spread from person to person"

To read the full statement please see [here](#).

Keep up to date with the latest government guidance [here](#), and to find out what you can and cannot do.



## Primary Care is Ready!

Last month the NHS began the monumental task of vaccinating priority groups in the fight against COVID-19.

The vaccine is currently being offered in some hospitals and hundreds of local vaccination centres run by GPs. It's being given to:

- some people aged 80 and over who already have a hospital appointment in the next few weeks
- people who live or work in care homes
- health care workers at high risk

The vaccine will be offered more widely, and at other locations, as soon as possible. The order in which people will be offered the vaccine is based on advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

You will be contacted when it is your turn to be vaccinated. Please do not call your GP practice, pharmacy or 111 for a vaccination before then.

Information about the COVID19 vaccination is continually being updated and is subject to change. Only trust information from reliable sources. Find out more about the vaccine rollout from the NHS [here](#).

If you or a family member have already had the vaccine, we would love to hear about your experience. Please call us on 0800 304 7039 or email us at [healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net) to share your story with us.



## NHS 111: How do I book a timeslot at A&E?

The NHS wants to make it easier and safer for patients to get the right treatment when they need it, without waiting a long time to be seen in A&E. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, crowded waiting rooms are also putting patients and hospital staff at risk of catching COVID-19.

The NHS has introduced a new system called NHS 111 First. If you have an urgent, but

**not life-threatening health problem** you can now contact NHS 111 First to find out if you need to go to A&E. NHS 111 can book you an appointment at your local A&E or emergency department. This means you will have an allocated time to attend hospital and be treated, so you don't have to wait a long time to be seen and can also help services avoid becoming overcrowded. Your NHS 111 advisor or clinician could also make you a direct appointment with a GP, Pharmacist or Urgent Treatment Centre. They may also be able to give you the advice you need without using another service.

If your condition is not life-threatening, NHS 111 may direct you to a more appropriate service or one that can see you sooner. You may also be asked to wait at home until the emergency department is ready to see you, avoiding a long wait in A&E for you and helping to prevent overcrowding. If you need an urgent face-to-face assessment or treatment, NHS 111 should be able to arrange this immediately for you. No one who turns up in A&E should be turned away or asked to call NHS 111

**You can contact NHS 111 either online or by phone 24hours a day, 7 days a week.  
The service is free to use, including from a mobile phone:**

 **Call 111**

 **Visit [NHS 111 online](#)**



## Keeping People Connected



County Durham  
Clinical Commissioning Group

# Keeping Connected

Supporting adults with learning disabilities and autism across County Durham to keep safe, well and connected



Keep up to date with the latest government guidance and receive regular support from our friendly team

Daily activities and ideas to do at home



We can keep in touch and support you to socialise safely online

Find out about services and support



Find answers to questions, problems and any worries you have



Search 'Bridge Creative' on Facebook

Or call 01388 449410 Monday - Saturday 10am-4pm

Or email [hello@bridgecreative.org](mailto:hello@bridgecreative.org)



Keeping People Connected is a free service offering regular, ongoing support to adults with learning disabilities and/or autism across County Durham, via phone, email, text, post and social media.

The service helps people to keep up to date with the latest government guidance ensuring people understand the current restrictions and shielding advice, provides emotional support and supports people to connect with others whilst at home.

They also run daily group video calls which they can support people to access, including friendly group chats, exercise, dance, quizzes, art and craft sessions and more.

The service operates Monday-Saturday, 10am-4:30pm. You can self-refer by calling 01388 449410 to speak with a member of the team if you are worried, concerned, need support or just want to chat.

---

## Facing a winter through the Coronavirus Pandemic

A useful guide from the [Mental Health Foundation](#):

- 1. Reach out for help as early as possible** - especially with things like debt or finances, or with your mental health.
- 2. Have a routine and set short term goals** - plan for today, tomorrow, the next week. If you have big, difficult tasks on your plate, try breaking them up into chains of smaller, more manageable jobs.
- 3. Build in more breaks and exercise into your schedule** - our research has told us that walking and time in nature were the two things that most helped the nation cope with the stresses of pandemic.
- 4. Look at your sleeping habits** - sleep is essential for our mental health and if you are having trouble because of worry, there are things you can do to improve your sleep, from relaxation, to not watching TV in bed.
- 5. Find the positives from lockdown** - it could be the things you did, the challenges you overcame. Ask yourself what was helpful then, and what can you take from that now. If you can't go out or feel isolated, perhaps it's a good time to find an online book group, exercise class or even choir. If you can volunteer in your community, you can boost your mental health as well as helping others.
- 6. Plan your finances this winter** - including making sure you are getting any benefits you are entitled to and getting help with any debt concerns you may have.
- 7. Stay Connected** - whether that's work colleagues, friends or family - stay connected

with your family and friends even if you can't see them. Make a special effort to keep in touch with people you know are on their own and who may be struggling themselves - or who might be shielding and unable to join the fun outside.

**8. Find time for your needs** - it can be easy to serve other people at work or at home, or to fill our diaries with commitments and activities that crowd out our own needs. Whether it's booking leave from work, shutting the bathroom door for a shower or bath away from the kids, or getting out for a run alone - find something that works for you and make it happen.

**9. Make friends with the cold, dark days** - if you think of winter as one of the regular seasons, perhaps it could be a time for reflection and doing more things like reading, relaxing, getting warm and cosy and recharging our batteries. When the days are darker and we can't take our mood energy boosts from socialising in the sun, it may make sense to replace this with another energy-boosting activity like exercise or a hobby. Going out when it's dark and cold might seem unappealing, but taking a break from our screens, and getting some natural light during the day can really help our mood.

**10. Give yourself a reward** - it is important to celebrate small wins - event if that's just in your head. A win could be clearing a work task or getting through a tricky moment like a supermarket trip. It could just be getting up and dressed. A hot chocolate after a walk outside, a magazine or even a moment of peace on the sofa are all small rewards.

More tips and information on managing mental health during the pandemic can be found [here](#)



## Looking after someone? Know your rights!

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, it's been estimated that across the UK there are 13.5 million unpaid carers. Many people are unaware of their rights as a carer and, as a result, are not accessing the help and support they are entitled to. Having the right information and advice is vital to ensure that carers don't miss out on financial and practical help that they are entitled to. Here are three key steps from [Carers UK](#) to find out entitlements:

**1. Get a benefits Check-** Get a full benefits check to see what financial support you may be entitled to. The Carer's Allowance is the main carer's benefit, but this could also include tax credits, council tax discounts or help with fuel costs. You can get a personalised benefits check online. It will take about 20 minutes to complete.

See [here](#) to go to the benefits calculator.

**2. Find out about practical support-** Caring for a loved one can be very physically and mentally demanding, so it's important to find out about what practical support is available. This could be anything from equipment to make caring easier or information about local support groups that can help. All carers are entitled to a carer's assessment from their local council. This could result in the carer, or the person they are caring for, being able to get additional help or support.

**3. Connect with others-**Caring can be very isolating, but there are lots of different ways that you can connect with people in similar situations. You can find local support groups for you to attend in person, or benefit from the wealth of online forums.

To find out more about your rights, tailored to your situation, take a look at [Upfront](#) - Carers UK's online tool, or read their [Carers' Rights Guide](#) for more information.



## NHS to pilot potentially revolutionary blood test that detects more than 50 cancers

An innovative blood test that may spot more than 50 types of cancer will be piloted by the NHS in a world-leading programme. The Galleri blood test, developed by GRAIL, can detect early stage cancers through a simple blood test, and will be piloted with 165,000 patients in a world-first deal struck by NHS England.

Research on patients with signs of cancer has already found that the test, which checks for molecular changes, can identify many types that are difficult to diagnose early, such as head and neck, ovarian, pancreatic, oesophageal and some blood cancers.

If the NHS programme shows the test also works as expected for people without symptoms it will be rolled out to become routinely available.

The test could help meet the NHS Long Term Plan goal of increasing the proportion of cancers caught early, which can be the key to reducing cancer mortality. Patients whose condition is diagnosed at 'stage one' typically have between five and 10 times the chance of surviving compared with those found at 'stage four'.

NHS Chief Executive Sir Simon Stevens said: "While the good news is that cancer survival is now at a record high, over a thousand people every day are newly diagnosed with cancer. Early detection - particularly for hard-to-treat conditions like ovarian and pancreatic cancer - has the potential to save many lives. This promising blood test could

therefore be a game-changer in cancer care, helping thousands more people to get successful treatment. This trial again confirms that the NHS is at the forefront of cutting edge treatments and technology.”

In England, around half of cancers are currently diagnosed at stage one or two but the NHS Long Term Plan is aiming to increase that to three quarters by 2028.

The GRAIL pilot, which is due to start in mid-2021, will involve 165,000 people. That will include 140,000 participants aged 50 to 79 who have no symptoms but will have annual blood tests for three years.

People will be identified through NHS records and approached to take part. Anyone with a positive test will be referred for investigation in the NHS.

Another 25,000 people with possible cancer symptoms will also be offered testing to speed up their diagnosis after being referred to hospital in the normal way.

Results of these studies would be expected by 2023, and if outcomes are positive, then they would be expanded to involve around one million participants across 2024 and 2025.

**For more information please see [here](#)**



## Get Involved:

### Have you used the Community Equipment Service?

If you have used the Community Equipment Service in the last 18 months, County Durham and Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), are interested in listening to your views as they are carrying out a review to improve it.

This service provides a diverse range of practical pieces of equipment to those people who need it as part of their recovery from periods of illness or injury, as well as for those with longer term needs (who may need changes to their home environment). To help look at what people need from this service in the future, they want to listen to the views and experiences of people who have used this service (as well as their family/carers). They are also gathering the views of frontline staff who are involved in ensuring people get the equipment they need as part of their recovery.

By understanding people's experiences and their expectations for how a community equipment service could best operate in the future, it will be possible to develop and improve the service and enable it to continue to operate in the safest possible way for all concerned.

If you have used the Community Equipment Service currently run by Medequip please complete the online survey using the links below (there is one survey for adults that have used the service and another to complete if your child has used the service):

[Community Equipment Service - adult survey](#)

[Community Equipment Service - children's survey](#)

If you are a member of the public but have not used the service, they are interested in your views as well. Please complete the survey below:

[Community Equipment Service - public survey](#)

**People will have the opportunity to share their comments until 22nd January 2021.**

---

## Have your say on proposals to strengthen integrated care:

NHS England and NHS Improvement have published proposals about how to [build better integrated care systems across England](#) to most effectively join up health and care locally around people's needs. They are asking patients, the public, NHS staff and other partners to give their views on the proposals. Have your say by completing the online survey [here](#),

or

contacting [england.legislation@nhs.net](mailto:england.legislation@nhs.net) by Friday, 8th January 2021.



---

## Do you have ideas about how technology could help us age healthily? Tell UCL and together we can make a difference:

We're all growing older - and with that comes joy and a few gripes! At University College London (UCL), scientists and engineers are developing technologies that help people to live longer, healthier lives. But to make these as useful as possible, they need your help.

They've launched a new online platform, Age Innovation Hub, to hear your ideas about technology that could help us age healthily and hear any age-related issues you have that technology could help solve. They'll then develop new research to help with the needs and problems found.

This your chance to shape the future of innovation! Get involved at [ageinnovationhub.crowdcity.com](https://ageinnovationhub.crowdcity.com)

---



## Contact us:

Healthwatch County Durham  
Whitfield House  
St Johns Road  
Meadowfield Industrial Estate  
Durham  
DH7 8XL

Freephone: 0800 3047039

Text: 07756 654218

Email:

[healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net](mailto:healthwatchcountydurham@pcp.uk.net)



[Facebook](#)



[Twitter](#)



[Website](#)



[YouTube](#)



[LinkedIn](#)