

How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services Central Mendip, Somerset

July 2024



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* **Note:** This report was produced in July 2023 but published in July 2024, along with a series of related reports.

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About us

Healthwatch Somerset is the county's health and social care champion. We are part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country. We're here to listen to your experiences of using local health and care services and to hear about the issues that really matter to you. As an independent statutory body, we have the power to make sure that NHS leaders and other decision-makers listen to your feedback and use it to improve standards of care.

Evolving Communities is a community interest company. We specialise in gathering and reporting people's views and experiences of health and care services to help drive and guide positive change. We achieve this at a national, regional and local level by delivering local Healthwatch services, Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnerships, and a range of consultancy projects for the NHS, local authorities, Integrated Care Systems, and health and social care service providers.

Evolving Communities worked in partnership with Healthwatch Somerset to deliver this project independently for the Somerset Integrated Care Board (ICB).

Background

In 2022, we were asked by the Somerset ICB to review how Same Day Urgent Care (SDUC) is provided in West Somerset. This request followed the closure of the Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) in Minehead in March 2022. We produced a [report](#) highlighting the opinions the public had towards SDUC services in West Somerset.

The Somerset ICB then asked us to gather the views of people living across the county. We did this by creating a countywide survey and by engaging with local people at community groups, libraries and other public spaces in Bridgwater, West Mendip, Frome, North Sedgemoor, Central Mendip, Taunton Dean, Yeovil, South Somerset West, South Somerset East, Chard, Ilminster and Crewkerne.

This report presents the views of people we spoke to in Central Mendip. You can view the outcome of our other engagement visits by viewing our [series of reports](#), including the results of our countywide survey.

The aim of this particular engagement was to understand people's views on SDUC services at the local level. This report will be used in conjunction with the series of reports to help inform SDUC strategy in Somerset going forwards.

Defining Same Day Urgent Care

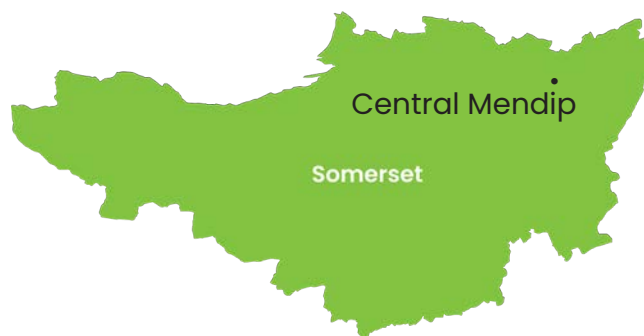
SDUC is defined as any form of unplanned healthcare that is required on the same day as the patient becomes aware of the health need. It can include minor or major injuries or any form of acute illness.



What we did

We contacted our various partners in health and social care and set up a series of visits to community groups and public spaces in Central Mendip. Together with the Somerset ICB we created a set of eight questions that we used for 1:1 interviews (see Appendix).

We spent approximately four days in Central Mendip covering the areas of Leigh-on-Mendip, Ashwick, Oakhill, Coleford, Radstock and Stoke Saint Michael. We visited both public spaces (for example, Radstock Community Library and Ashwick and Oakhill Village Hall) and closed spaces (for example, parent and baby groups and other social groups).



Our visits took place between 21 and 30 March 2023.

Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 51 people in Central Mendip. Nineteen of these people said they are registered with a medical practice in either Frome, Shepton Mallet or Glastonbury but travelled to Central Mendip to attend a social group. Their views have been excluded from the analysis of this report.

- 24 of our 32 participants were female and eight were male. (This reflects our attendance at two parent and baby groups).
- Most of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of our participants fell into the 25 to 49 and 65 to 79 age categories.

Key messages

We collected lots of information about people's use and views of SDUC, and we identified several key messages.

- Awareness of SDUC services among participants was poor. Just under half recalled the GP practice, but very few mentioned MIU and pharmacy and none mentioned a dentist or optician.
- Participants were unsure what Paulton Memorial Hospital is used for and whether it is, or isn't, an MIU.
- The majority of participants said they think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day if they were experiencing life-threatening symptoms. For children, they said a rash or fever.
- Participants displayed mixed levels of confidence in terms of how they feel about sourcing SDUC-related information.
- Participants mostly shared very positive SDUC experiences with us and were particularly happy about the SDUC experiences they had at their local GP practice.
- Participants were largely confident using the wider healthcare team, but not for serious conditions. Participants felt mixed about using the pharmacy for SDUC concerns.
- People told us that GP turnover in Central Mendip is high, and this disrupts continuity of care.
- People told us that accessing Bath RUH is particularly difficult if you live in the Coleford area and don't drive.

What people told us

Knowledge of SDUC services



We wanted to find out how much people know about SDUC services in their area, under what circumstances they think they would require SDUC, and whether they think there is enough information out there.



Awareness of SDUC services

We asked people whether they could think of any other healthcare service that offers SDUC services, other than the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department.

Fifteen out of the 37 participants recalled that GP practices offer SDUC services. Seven mentioned the NHS 111 call service, seven commented Paulton Memorial hospital, two stated Frome Minor Injuries Unit (MIU), two said Shepton Mallet MIU, one noted Glastonbury MIU and another said they could visit any one of the local MIUs. Two participants said the pharmacy, while a few said they can't think of any services that offer SDUC other than A&E.



We were told that GP practices in the area are often able to see you on the same day, particularly if you are a child.



 **Children can be squeezed in easily at the GP.** 



 **Our kids are always seen on the same day at the GP.** 

We were told that you can visit MIUs in Central Mendip on the same day, but this depends on whether or not an MIU is open at the time you need it.

We also had discussions with two separate groups of participants who shared their confusion around Paulton Memorial Hospital and what it can be used for.

 **I would go to Paulton but I don't think they do X-rays?** 

 **There is no local MIU - maybe there is at Paulton? But it is nurse-led and there is never a doctor.** 

 **There is Paulton Hospital but we don't know what goes on there.** 

What conditions require SDUC?

We asked people under what circumstances they think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day.

The majority of participants said they would expect to be seen on the same day if they are suffering from one or more of the following symptoms: pain, chest pains/suspected heart attack, uncontrollable bleeding, severe head injury/headache, serious burns, and broken bones.

Participants with young children or grandchildren said that they would want their child/grandchild to be seen on the same day if they have a high temperature (that doesn't go down with Calpol), a rash (that doesn't disappear when glass is pressed on it), or anything else they may be concerned about.

Others mentioned poor mental health and requiring medication as reasons to be seen on the same day.

Finding information on SDUC

We asked people whether they feel confident finding the information they need to access various SDUC services.

The response to this question was mixed. Most participants felt confident about finding information on A&E and their medical practice but felt less confident about when to call NHS 111, when to use a pharmacist, and how to access mental health and support. Participants who said there is enough information out there tended to be those with access to the internet/TV.

One participant mentioned that they like to use the NHS direct GP website for triage advice, and that they like to use the tool that lets you enter your symptoms for self-diagnosis. Some participants said they receive good communication from their GP practice (text messages and Facebook notifications) while others said they are lucky because they have relatives who work at local health services who can advise them.



There is enough information out there but you have to go looking for it. This requires time, which is not possible if a child gets sick quite quickly.



One participant told us that they use a text advice service for parents called Chat Health. This service, run by Somerset County Council, allows parents to send messages about and pictures of their child's symptoms straight to a health visitor. They can help to diagnose young children or signpost their parents to the appropriate service. While it is not meant to be used as an emergency service, it could help to prevent a child's condition develop into something more serious. We attended two parent and baby groups and no other participant mentioned this service, suggesting awareness of it is low.

One participant commented that while information is out there in terms of who to call and what to do, the services cannot cope.



I've seen the THINK FAST stroke advertisement, but if no one can get to you quickly what's the point? You wonder whether today will be a strike day.



One participant, who used to work in emergency services, said they don't think people have enough information regarding SDUC. They explained that while some people would come into A&E with severe chest pains, others would come in with mild headaches.

Another participant said there is not enough information out there telling you how to access the mental health crisis team, and that more guidance would have prevented their condition from deteriorating over the years. Two other participants also said there is a lack of mental health services information in Central Mendip.

Experience of using SDUC services

We asked people to share their experiences of using SDUC services with us, and to tell us whether they would feel confident seeing the wider healthcare team (for example, GP, pharmacist, advanced nurse practitioner) as opposed to A&E for a same day concern.

The SDUC experiences participants shared with us in Central Mendip were overwhelmingly positive. It is in stark contrast to much of the feedback we received in other areas of Somerset. People were particularly happy about the SDUC experiences they had at their local GP practice. It is worth investigating whether the GP-to-patient ratio in Central Mendip is different to other areas in the county.

Oakhill Medical Practice

Tailored and personalised care

I have a suppressed immune system and when I got COVID-19, I was prescribed immune support medication from my doctor. My doctor was sick but still helped me. This medication was prescribed to my pharmacy, and my pharmacist offered to drop it to my door as I was house-bound. They go above and beyond for us.

Thorough care

I was at my GP practice for a phlebotomy appointment when I mentioned to the nurse that I have breath abnormality concerns. The GP examined me immediately and I was referred for a mammogram which took place within a week.

I rang the medical practice for my eldest boy whose breathing was raspy. He was seen and received medication on the same day. Ninety per cent of the time they have medication there or if not I get it the next day. I rate the GP practice ten out of ten.

Hope House Medical Practice

Thorough care:

My youngest child had meningitis. It was because of the GP that we got this diagnosis. The doctor pushed for extra help and I don't know what we would have done if it weren't for that doctor.

My son had an ear infection. Our doctor wanted to see him that day even after he perked up and the leaking stopped to make sure he wasn't suffering from a perforated ear.

Somerton House Surgery

Participants also shared mostly positive SDUC experiences that occurred outside the GP practice, such as using MIUs or the A&E department.

I couldn't be more looked after if I were royal. From reception to the top, I can't fault any of them.

A&E are brilliant. Last April I fell and fractured two bones. I was taken by car to RUH and had a rod put in.

I went straight to Bath RUH and then on to St Martins before coming home. I stayed 3/4 days at St Martins. I can't fault them and their nurses are brilliant.

I've had great experiences using St Martins Hospital.



In October just gone my friend's partner showed signs of a heart attack. They rang 999, an air ambulance and two police cars arrived within minutes. Paramedics quickly carried out CPR.



My daughter broke a bone and went to Bath RUH. She was in and out within three hours, which is not bad!



Confidence in using the wider healthcare team

Participants were largely confident using the wider healthcare team, but not for serious conditions. Seven participants said they like to use the pharmacy.



I suffer from cystitis and take medication from the pharmacy.



I have conjunctivitis and the pharmacy helps me.



It's a good place to go if you don't want to bother a doctor.



Chemists are great, almost better than seeing a doctor.



Pharmacists are up-to-date medical wise.



Pharmacies are great for medications.



I had a verruca on my foot, the doctors saw and then chemists advised.



However, others shared that they avoid going to the pharmacy. Reasons include:

- The local pharmacy is very busy.
- They may go to the pharmacy to save the doctor a visit to be told to go to the medical practice.
- They often have to go to the medical practice to get a prescription which they feel a pharmacist could have produced.
- There is a lack of privacy at the pharmacy desk.
- They don't agree with pharmacists taking up the duties of a doctor.

GP practices and appointments

We asked people how their appointment booking system works at their GP practice, and whether they are able to access appointments for non-urgent conditions in a reasonable timescale such as between two to 14 days.

Below are examples of some of the medical practices that our participants are registered with, and this is what they told us about their GP booking system.

Oakhill Medical Practice

We were told that the booking system involves calling the practice first thing in the morning, and that they are likely to get an appointment on the same day. We were told that routine appointments are offered for non-urgent conditions, and that you are likely to be seen within a couple of weeks.

Mendip Country Practice

We were told that the booking system involves either calling the practice first thing in the morning or filling in an online form, where you will then be triaged. Quite a few people said they don't like to fill in the online form because it's too difficult and has teething problems. Most of our participants said you can book routine appointments, a few weren't sure, and a few said you can't.

Westfield Surgery

We were told that the booking system involves calling the practice first thing in the morning, and that they are likely to get an appointment on the same day. We were told that routine appointments are offered for non-urgent conditions, and that you are likely to be seen within a few days.

Hope House

We were told that the booking system involves calling the practice first thing in the morning, and that they are likely to get an appointment on the same day. We were told that routine appointments are offered for non-urgent conditions, and that you are likely to be seen within a couple of weeks.

Continuity of care

While the feedback we received for GP practices in Central Mendip was very positive, some participants raised concerns over the turnover of GPs and the use of locum GPs.



If your GP isn't in you don't get continuity of care.



We feel as if we are being passed around from doctor to doctor.



We wish it were back like when we were children, when we knew our GP.



The only thing is that doctors in Radstock don't stay long, there is a high turnover.



Transport to SDUC services

Access to Bath RUH

People told us that accessing Bath RUH is particularly difficult if you live in the Coleford area and don't drive.



Getting to A&E is a nightmare as it's on the other side of Bath. It costs £5/£6 just to park at Bath RUH. I'm on benefits now because of my health condition which makes this unaffordable.



A&E is difficult because I don't drive. It takes two hours for me to get there. You have to drive to the Park and Ride, get the bus to Bath city centre and then the bus out to the hospital.



We were told that the direct park and ride bus route has stopped for residents travelling from Midsomer Norton to RUH.

In contrast, those in the Radstock area told us it's not too difficult to access Bath RUH because the hospital is "our side of town".

Community Transport

We were told that participants value the public transport that exists in the most rural areas.

One person specifically told us they regularly use Swan Transport, a volunteer-run transport service supporting older, frail or disabled people who are on a low income with no easy access to transport. They told us it costs people approximately 50% of the cost of a regular taxi.

Another person told us that while you're never going to have an A&E in every place, it's important that patient transport links in with the services in Taunton, Bath and Bridgwater. They also added that there needs to be more voluntary patient transport, which is vital if you live "in the sticks."

Secondary care pathways

On two separate occasions, people told us that the rheumatology departments at Bath RUH and Weston-super-Mare Hospital have a dedicated phone line where rheumatology outpatients can directly book an appointment without having to go to the GP. These participants said this system should be expanded to other departments to free up space in Primary Care, and consequently urgent care.

Recommendations

We would like the Somerset ICB to consider the following recommendations, based on what people have told us:

- Use resources to create an integrated communications campaign (offline and online), that briefly lists all the SDUC services in one place. This should be used consistently throughout Somerset.
- Create an integrated communications campaign listing the types of conditions or symptoms that pharmacists can help patients with. An emphasis should be placed on promoting this outside of the pharmacy to reach those who don't normally use it.
- Provide more support for new parents. This could include promoting resources such as the Chat Health service.
- Improve mental health support and information about signposting for mental health, including acute mental health issues.
- Improve people's understanding of Paulton Memorial Hospital and what it can be used for.
- Carry out an investigation into the GP-to-patient ratio in Central Mendip and the rest of the county to see if this correlates with patient satisfaction.
- Expand community transport particularly in the Coleford area and raise awareness of existing services such as Swan Cars.

Next steps

This report was shared with the Somerset ICB in 2023, as part of a series of reports about people's views of urgent care in different areas of Somerset. This work and our findings have informed a review into how urgent care is provided in Somerset. Healthwatch Somerset will be working with the ICB to respond to the issues raised during this engagement.

Stakeholder response

Kirsty Ash, Head of Urgent and Emergency Care, NHS Somerset



Somerset ICB would like to thank the residents of Somerset who participated in this survey, which has provided information needed to help improve access to services. We would also like to thank Healthwatch for providing the team who undertook and managed the engagement process on behalf of NHS Somerset and our health and care partners.

As part of our Same Day Urgent Care improvement work, that this survey forms a core part of, the Somerset system will:

- Explore the findings to support the development of a Same Day Urgent Care communication strategy. This will include the use of different media types, supporting a number of different services across Somerset.
- Development of access to resources to support patients in self-care.
- Working to increase the awareness of Same Day Urgent Care services in West Somerset.
- Somerset ICB and partners to support the development of neighbourhood groups across Somerset with a focus on continuing to support access to Same Day Urgent Care through pilots that look at different ways of providing services based on local need.
- Somerset A&E delivery board to looking at how we might improve all elements of Same Day Urgent Care mentioned in the recommendation within this set of engagement reports.
- The development of a network of Urgent Treatment Centres based around our existing Minor Injuries Units.
- Development of a workforce plan to help further develop the Same Day Urgent Care workforce required by the Somerset system.

Considerations

It is important to note that these visits took place at a time where the public would have been aware of the impending strikes planned by NHS staff over concerns in pay and working conditions. These events may have influenced public opinion.

Thank you

Evolving Communities and Healthwatch Somerset would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views and experience through the engagement activities that were part of this project.

Thank you also to the voluntary and community sector organisations who help to support the engagement activity.

Appendix

1:1 interview questions

1. Other than the A&E department, can you recall any other health services that offer same day urgent care services?
2. Can you recall an experience using a same day urgent care service? If so, what went well/what could be improved?
3. Are you able to access appointments at the GP for non-urgent conditions in a reasonable timescale, e.g. 2-14 days?
4. Do you feel confident finding the information you need to access various same day urgent care services?
5. Under what circumstances do you think you would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day?
6. How confident would you feel in seeing the wider healthcare team for same day conditions, e.g. a pharmacist, GP, advanced nurse practitioner, instead of going to A&E?
7. How do you feel about the distances you need to travel for same day urgent care needs for a minor injury/illness? (i.e. distance to GP practice/A&E)
8. Is there anything else you would like to share with the NHS regarding same day urgent care and access?



evolvingcommunities.co.uk
01225 701851
info@evolvingcommunities.co.uk



healthwatchsomerset.co.uk
0800 999 1286
info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk

