

How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services Frome, 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 Frome. 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 Frome. 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 Frome at both public spaces (for example, Frome Library and Frome Community Hospital) and closed spaces (for example, parent and baby groups and a talking café).

Our visits took place between 28 November to 9 December 2022.



Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 24 people in Frome.

- 19 of our participants were female and five were male.
- 22 of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of participants fell into the 26-35 and 56+ age categories.

Key messages

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

- There is a lack of knowledge and awareness among participants of where to access SDUC services in Frome.
- Participants have a good understanding of what conditions/ailments should be classed as urgent.
- The definition of urgent varies according to the individuals affected. For instance, any unexplained change in a baby could be considered urgent.
- The majority of participants who said they feel confident finding information related to SDUC use the internet.
- Participant experiences regarding the quality of care/service was largely positive.
- Where more than one SDUC service had to be used, participants shared mixed experiences.
- The majority of participants feel confident seeing the wider healthcare team for SDUC conditions.
- There is an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards the GP appointment booking system, which does not seem to offer routine appointments.
- Participants gave mixed responses to how they feel about the distance to travel to SDUC services. Complaints centred around bus links to Bath Royal United Hospital (RUH).

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.

Twelve out of the 24 participants recalled that GP practices offer SDUC services. Five mentioned MIUs, four commented the pharmacy, two stated the 111 call service and one noted health visitors. One third (eight) of the participants could not recall any SDUC service apart from A&E, suggesting that awareness of SDUC services could be improved.

One participant shared with us that they had tried to see their GP for an eye infection. They explained that they were given a five-day wait by the GP practice for an appointment. Eventually, they decided to call the opticians, who asked them to come in that day. Had this participant known to see the opticians straight away, or had they been signposted there by their GP, they may have been seen quicker.

One participant told us that they know about the various SDUC services on offer because they have relatives who work in the NHS.



There's no point going to the GP if you haven't gone to the pharmacist and no point going to A&E if you haven't been to see your GP.



What conditions require SDUC?

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

Answers tended to vary according to what group we visited. Participants at parent and baby groups tended to consider any unexplained change in their baby as a need to be seen the same day. Examples of changes mentioned include feeding issues, unusual faeces and unexplained rashes.

Outside of this group, participants listed breakages, falls, blood pressure concerns, sudden onset of illness, vomiting or diarrhoea as requiring SDUC.

It is clear that participants are confident in defining what is considered urgent, and what is not.

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. Nineteen out of 24 people answered this question. Five participants said 'no' and commented that while there is information out there, "you have to go searching for it".



There is a line that you have to cross to need to be seen on the same day.



I use the computer at home. My son lives with me and helps me. I don't find Frome Medical Practices website easy to navigate.



Out of the 13 people that said they felt confident, the majority said that they use the internet (particularly the NHS website) to find the information they need. Participants also mentioned support groups as a source of SDUC information, including a carer's group and a pain management group. One participant commented, "the information is there if you look for it".

Maybe I don't know enough information, because I tend to ring the GP or A&E for information.

One person said they were not sure, but they know that if they ask they will be signposted to the appropriate service.

Even if I don't know the information I will be signposted. I once got a bad cat scratch. I called my GP surgery at 4pm and they signposted me straight to Frome MIU, where I received a tetanus jab.

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 (GP, pharmacist, advanced nurse practitioner etc.) as opposed to A&E for a same day concern.

Participants shared both positive and negative experiences of using SDUC services.

Experiences regarding the quality of care/service were largely positive. These include being treated seriously.

If the GP feels it is urgent, they will arrange to see you face-to-face.

I have a serious heart condition and my GP is very diligent.

While pregnant I had deep vein thrombosis. I called the GP and saw them the same day, and they sent me for a scan at RUH in Bath that same day.

One participant also shared that they have had numerous positive experiences with the ambulance services.

I work in a care home and ambulances come straight away. I don't understand why in the news there are articles saying people are waiting 11 hours for ambulances.

Where more than one SDUC service had to be used, participants shared mixed experiences. One participant recalled a positive experience after discovering a lump in their neck.

My GP said I need to go to A&E at the RUH in Bath. They booked me in and when I arrived, staff at the A&E Department said they were expecting me. I thought this was excellent.

Another participant shared the good service they had when their husband had bell's palsy.

I phoned the GP practice for my husband and the doctor called straight back. The doctor sent emails to Musgrove park Hospital and booked him in.

However, another participant shared an experience where they felt they were being passed around various SDUC services. They described how they had a tear in their retina, but Frome Medical Centre couldn't detect it. They went home and were signposted to the opticians. The opticians then directed them to Frome MIU. The MIU told them to go back to opticians. The following morning they were sent to Bath RUH where they were told they needed immediate treatment or risk going blind.







Accessibility and cost of living

One participant shared with us that they are on benefits and need treatment for a fungal nail infection but they cannot afford to pay for it. It is concerning that a treatable condition could soon require urgent care.

This same participant said that they can't access an NHS dentist in Frome and instead have to use their money from benefits to travel to Bath when they require dental care.







Confidence in using the wider healthcare team

The majority (15) of participants said that they feel confident using the wider health care team. Four said they don't feel confident and five said they are not sure. Comments by those that said they feel confident:

 <p>I already do that and I self-treat when I can.</p> 	 <p>I see the advanced nurse practitioner and they are very helpful.</p> 	 <p>Yes and I see the pharmacist often.</p> 
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Interestingly, one participant said they have got used to going to the pharmacy because of the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be interesting to explore whether there has been a cultural shift towards the wider healthcare team because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Out of the four that said they don't feel confident, comments included:

 <p>We shouldn't feel like we have to use them. It's only because the Government have cut back on resources.</p> 	
 <p>I don't find pharmacists to be useful.</p> 	 <p>I don't like to use pharmacies because there is no privacy when talking at the reception desk.</p> 

Those that were not sure if they felt confident elaborated by saying they were confident so long as they could be seen face-to-face, or so long as physical intervention was not required. Other comments include that they were not familiar with using the pharmacy and that they have had misdiagnoses from GPs before.



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.



We were told that Frome Medical Practice doesn't tend to offer routine appointments. Instead, you have to call at or after 8am to try and book a same day appointment. We found that participants had an overwhelmingly negative attitude towards booking GP appointments in Frome. Only two people felt positively towards it. The majority of people we spoke to felt that if you called at one minute past 8am you wouldn't be seen, and that you could expect to wait for an hour or more on the phone with no guarantee of receiving an appointment that day.

One participant shared that they set an alarm to wake up in the night to give themselves the best chance of booking an appointment online, and says it has come to this point because there are not enough GPs.



Another participant shared that the way the booking system is set up is difficult for people with long-term conditions. They mentioned that the number of people commenting on a Facebook group that they are not able to get an appointment is unbelievable. This participant said that what is needed is for people with long-term conditions to be able to book in advance, rather than try to fight for a same day appointment.

 You have to call at 8am on the day or let it go. 

 If you call the doctors at 8.10am all appointments for the day are gone. 

 I rang up to find i was number 86 in queue. When the receptionist answered, I was told someone would ring me back. Being on hold for one to one and a half hours to be told you will be called back is not ok. 



 One minute past eight and the day is gone. 

 To get a same day appointment you would have to be bleeding to death on the phone at 8.30am and be lucky enough to be one of the first five people. There are not enough same day appointments. 

A false sense of urgency?

Rather than a shortage of same day appointments, is there a shortage of routine appointments? Could patients be better prioritised according to severity of symptoms, rather than lumping everyone into the same category?

We heard from participants that they wouldn't mind being seen the next day, or in a few days if their condition is not serious.

 If you don't offer routine appointments then everything becomes urgent. 



Transport to SDUC services

We asked people what they think about the distances they need to travel to their GP practice, A&E etc. We also asked them whether they could drive and have their own means of transport.



Approximately half of the participants said they felt positively about the distances they needed to travel to SDUC services. The remaining participants said it was either 'OK' or 'difficult' to travel to these places.

Those that felt positive about the distance said they could easily walk to the medical practice, and could easily drive to the MIUs (Frome and Trowbridge) and A&E (Bath). Nearly all of those who said they felt good about it also said they could drive.

Out of those that said they find the distances difficult, five said that this is because they do not drive, and getting to Bath A&E by public transport is very difficult.

 **There is no direct bus from where I live. The buses to RUH in Bath would take two to three hours.** 

 **There is no longer a bus route direct to RUH.** 

 **Parents on a Facebook group are reaching out for other parents to help get their child to RUH as there are no taxis, buses or trains.** 

Recommendations

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

- Consider altering the GP appointment booking system to allow people to book a routine appointment in the first instance, and then a same day appointment if urgent. Inspiration can be taken from booking systems available in areas of West Mendip. This should reduce the amount of traffic on the phone lines each morning.
- 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.
- More support for parents, especially first-time parents, as to what they need to do when they notice a change in their baby. In particular, advice on what changes require urgent care.
- Continue to promote offline sources of information related to SDUC services for those unable to access the internet.
- Consider reinstating the direct bus link between Frome and the RUH in Bath.
- Consider whether some appointments that typically take place at the RUH could actually take place at Frome MIU.

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?



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