

# How residents view and use Same Day Urgent Care services Taunton, 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 Taunton. 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 North Sedgemoor. 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 Taunton. We visited both public spaces (for example, Taunton Library) and closed spaces (for example, talking cafes).

Our visits took place between 9 and 31 March 2023.

## Who we spoke to

We had in-depth discussions with 19 people in Taunton.

- 14 of our participants were female and five were male.
- Most of our participants were of White British ethnic origin.
- The majority of our participants fell into the 50 to 64 age category.



# Key messages

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

- There was a lack of knowledge and awareness among participants of where to access SDUC services in Taunton. In particular, few could recall the NHS 111 call service to MIUs.
- 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.
- Participants displayed mixed levels of confidence in terms of how they feel about sourcing SDUC-related information.
- Participants shared both positive and negative SDUC experiences with us. Negative experiences centred around a lack of face-to-face appointments, while positive experiences centred around the speediness of service.
- All but one participant said they feel confident using the wider healthcare team for a same-day concern, particularly pharmacists.
- It appears that the GP appointment booking system varies across practices in Taunton.
- All participants said that they feel good about the distances they need to travel to get their GP practice/nearest Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department.

# 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 A&E department.

Eight out of the 19 participants recalled that GP practices offer SDUC services. While most of these participants said you can expect to receive some sort of help or advice on the same day from the GP, one participant did comment: "If you ring the surgery they will probably fob you off or send you from pillar to post."

Four participants mentioned that you can call the NHS 111 call service, two said you can visit an MIU such as Bridgwater MIU, three said they couldn't think of anywhere other than A&E and a few participants did not answer this question.

### 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 think they would need to see a healthcare professional on the same day if they thought they were dying or if they were in pain. The life-threatening symptoms mentioned include chest pains/heart concerns, breathlessness, signs of stroke, unexpected high fever, (possible) breaks, bad falls and acute mental health issues.

Some participants also mentioned that they think they should be seen on the same day even if it's not life threatening. This includes any unusual symptoms, anything that doesn't get better after seeing a pharmacist, toothaches, and blood in areas. One participant said that they suffer with depression and as a result they would want to be seen on the same day if they felt worried or if they had any degree of pain.

### Finding information on SDUC

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

The responses to this question were mixed. Those that said they felt confident finding the information they need to access SDUC services said they use the internet (NHS website) and the TV to source their information. They noted that this might be difficult for those who aren't 'tech savvy'. They also said they use their common sense or have knowledge because they work in health and/or social care or have gained knowledge from experiences over the years.

Those that said they do not feel confident finding the information they need to access SDUC services said that they find the information confusing, particularly around when to use the NHS 111 call service. One participant shared how they didn't think they could call 111 for antibiotics but was told by their friend that they could. Another said there is information around calling 999 and 111 but thinks that most people would just dial 999 anyway. Another participant shared that they didn't know whether to call 111 or 999 when their relative was in a potentially life-threatening situation.



Putting adverts on TV these days is not so effective, as people can whizz past the adds. It would be better directing advertisements to areas such as public transport and GP waiting rooms.



There is enough information but it's whether people use the information correctly or *choose* to use the information correctly. If you go to A&E you know you are going to be seen.



There is enough information out there, but it is an ongoing thing to properly educate people.



## 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.

We received mixed responses when we asked participants to share their experiences of using SDUC services with us.

### Negative experiences

#### Participants reported a lack of face-to-face same day GP appointments

One participant told us that their child recently had a rash all over their body that looked like eczema. They contacted their GP practice for advice and were asked to send pictures. The health professionals thought it might be fungal infection and recommended that the patient buy medication including anti-fungal wash. This made the condition worse. The practice asked for more pictures, but later requested that the child come into the practice. The participant found out their child had an allergy but it "wastes time, money and medication." They felt this could have been avoided had they had a face-to-face appointment initially.



I don't like talking on the phone and I have depression. My GP did not offer me a face-to-face appointment. I feel that they could have helped me had they seen me in person.



Another participant said they had an appointment with a nurse to examine a mole on their back. The nurse said they need to book in to see a doctor. The participant wanted a face-to-face appointment so the doctor could examine the mole but was frustrated to be told they could only have a telephone appointment in two weeks' time.

#### Participants felt not listened to

One parent told us they called NHS 111 for their child recently, who was suffering from kidney stone pain. NHS 111 booked in an appointment for their child at Musgrove Hospital. The child had a scan, stayed overnight and were then dismissed. The parent said: "They have sent my child home because they think their pain is psychological."



Last year I fell and injured my head. I called 111 at 10pm. They called back at 3am to tell me I was in the queue. I was in contact with a health professional at 6.30am. Eventually I was diagnosed with a fractured skull. There was no suggestion by a health professional to go to A&E. I find it concerning that I was left to get better by myself with a head injury.



## Positive experiences

Participants who shared positive SDUC experiences tended to praise the speediness and efficiency of the service they received.



My leg was crushed at work a few years ago. The ambulance was called and staff at Musgrove were brilliant.



My child recently called the paramedics for my grandchild. They came and dealt with the matter quickly.



Two years ago I broke my wrist and went to Bridgwater MIU on New Years Eve. They were very good there and sent me to Musgrove Hospital because it was a severe break. I then went back the day after New Years Day for an operation.



My husband had a minor operation on his face, but the next day he had a post-op infection. I called 111 and they said go straight to Musgrove. There was no queue and he was treated right away.



## Confidence in using the wider healthcare team

All but one participant said they felt confident using the wider healthcare team for a same day concern. Some participants said they felt confident so long as they had something that the wider healthcare team could deal with. The responses participants gave were largely centred around good experiences at their local pharmacy.

However, participants acknowledged that while they feel confident in pharmacists' ability, they don't know (or others don't know) what type of conditions pharmacists deal with.



It would be good to have a list of things or conditions to help you know what to go to the pharmacy for.



When my partner had an insect bite on their elbow their whole arm swelled. Our pharmacist gave us antihistamines to treat this and it went down in 48 hours. Others would have gone straight to A&E.



I know they do a lot of things at the pharmacy. They do more things than people think. There needs to be a push to educate those that don't visit the pharmacy. When you're in there you learn what they do, but more external marketing is needed.



## 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.

Participants gave a variety of responses around how their GP appointments booking system works which suggests that this varies across GP practices in Taunton.

About one third of participants said you can book appointments in advance, one third said you can't and one third said they don't know.

Most said that the system works by calling the practice in the morning and getting a call back the same day, sometimes the next day. A few said they have a system where they fill in an online form and then hear back the same or following day. While most participants said this online form system works well, one shared with us their concerns about accessibility when they said: "This is very frustrating for people who can't put their feelings into written words."

## Transport to SDUC services

We asked people how they feel 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.

All participants said that they feel good about the distances they need to travel to get to their GP practice or nearest A&E department. Participants feel the same regardless of whether they get to these services by foot, car or public transport. One participant said that Taunton residents are lucky because they have the biggest hospital in the county just down the road.

## 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.
- If all medical practices in Taunton do in fact offer routine appointments, advertise this directly to patients. This will help manage the flow of patients as many patients are either: 1) Unsure if their practice offers routine appointments or; 2) Under the impression that they are not offered.

## 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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