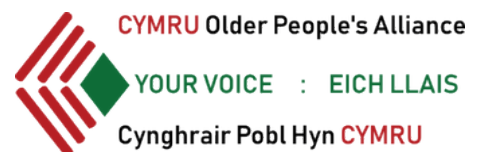


Experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter Covid-19 lockdown, and the road to recovery

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Survey Results May 2021
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Part One: About this research

During March and April 2021 Age Cymru, Cymru Older People's Alliance (COPA), Welsh Senate of Older People, Active Wales, National Pensioners Convention Wales, and Pensioners Forum Wales worked together to gather the experiences of people aged 50 or over in Wales during the winter lockdown and to understand the perspectives of older people on recovery.

The survey was completed by 1216 older people. Ages ranged from 50 to 94 and 26% of respondents were over the age of 70; 5% respondents identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual and 7% of respondents describe their ethnicity as Black, Asian or other Minority Ethnic.

Responses were received through our online, in hard copy and by telephone.

19% of respondents were part of a shielded group and 15% lived with somebody who was part of a shielded group.

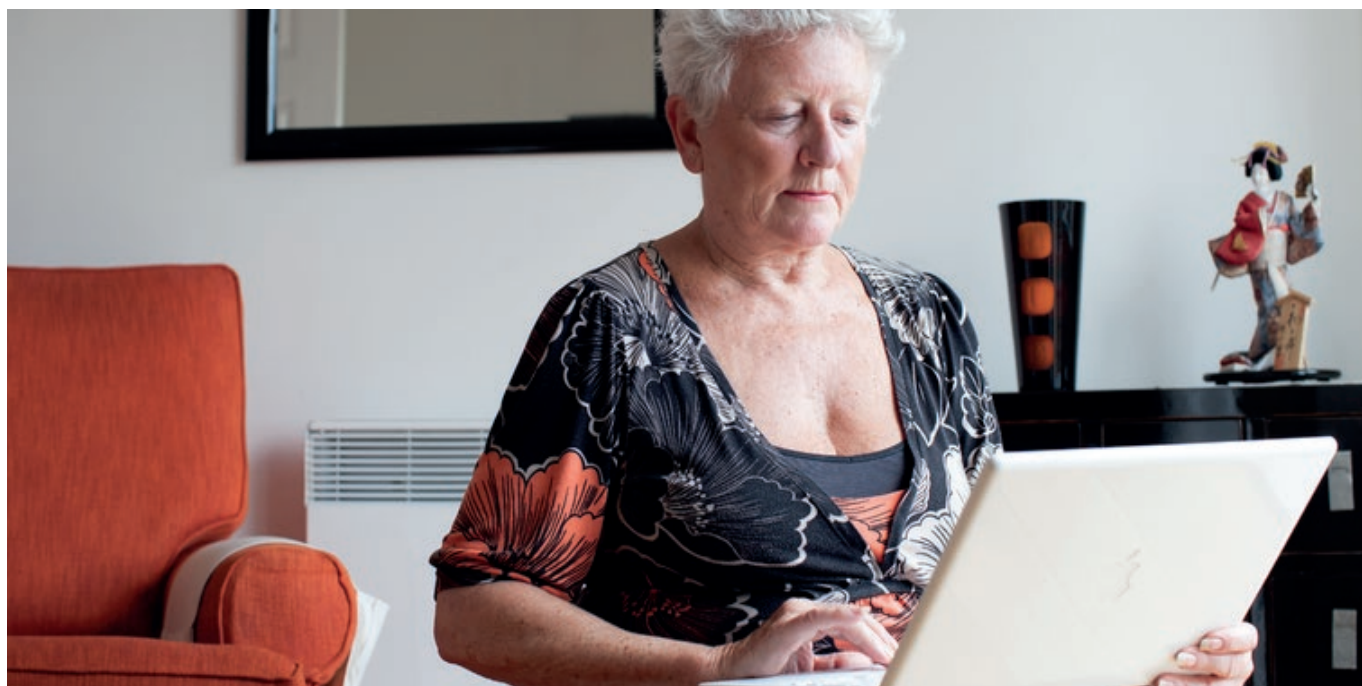
36% of respondents told us they were self-isolating and 30% told us they live alone.

23% of respondents told us they had taken on additional caring responsibilities or started looking after someone during the last year.

81% of respondents were women and 17% were men, 2 respondents identified as transgender and 1% of respondents preferred not to disclose their gender. Though the majority of respondents were female, many included details of their partners' experiences during lockdown.

We received responses from every local authority area in Wales.

We wish to thank everybody who responded to this survey and shared their views and experiences.



Part Two:

Access to information about Covid

We asked people to tell us how they kept up to date with information about Covid. TV news was the most popular source of information with 82% of people getting their information that way followed by for 64% of people sourcing information through various online methods.

2% of people told us they didn't receive regular information about the pandemic.

We asked what respondents felt could be done to improve communication around Covid-19.

43% of respondents said that they were happy with communications, but some felt that the frequent changes and different ways in which information was circulated could be unhelpful at times.

12% of respondents told us that news media outlets were not clear on the difference between rules in Wales and England, which caused confusion.

The issues are more with national media not distinguishing Welsh rules, particularly early on.

(Female, 60-64, Carmarthen)

Some responses indicated that confusing media information was contributing to increased stress and that more could be done to stop the spread of misinformation via social media.

The media deliberately 'stirs the pot' with dramatic headlines and statements that can have a really negative impact on people already struggling mentally.

(Female, 50-54, Torfaen)

20% of those who expressed an opinion felt that information provided should be simpler and clearer.

Fewer words and complexity - I'm a carer and simply don't have time to browse for information.

(Female, 65-69, Vale of Glamorgan)

People also told us they felt that written information should be provided, with some drawing attention to the need for good information to be available to vulnerable people that were shielding and that full consideration needs to be given to how information is circulated to those people that are not online in the event of a similar pandemic in the future.

Case workers/social services should have contacted clients more.

(Shielding female carer, 65-69, Powys)

Could have had more communication from social services. Haven't heard from them since May last year.

(Shielding female carer, 60-64, Wrexham)

The Welsh Government should have taken a more nuanced approach to those in shielding categories by checking on people's circumstances. This could have been done by local authorities, GPs and 3rd sector organisations.

(Shielding male, 60-64, Denbighshire)

Postal communication for those not able to access internet.

(Female, 70-74, Isle of Anglesey)

A number of people told us they would have liked to have received information from local community groups.

Local trusted people giving truthful information to some BAME communities.

(Self-isolation female carer, 80-84, Ceredigion)

While others said that having simpler information circulated in different languages would have helped them.

I would like to have any info about COVID-19 from NHS or the Council via letter with basic language so I can understand.

(Female, 80-84, Cardiff)

The majority of those that asked for information from community groups and information to be available in different languages were from Black and minority ethnic communities. There are many people in Wales whose first language is not Welsh or English and others with low literacy skills, so finding different ways of getting information to more people in Wales needs to be considered.

Part Three:

Positive experiences of lockdown

We asked people to tell us what positive experiences they had found during the pandemic.

- 46% of respondents mentioned the help they'd received from family and friends
- 16% cited the help they had received from their local community
- 38% found they had more time
- 28% said they had felt less pressure
- 32% mentioned something else including
 - New online experiences
 - Age Cymru meals
 - Support from Women Connect first

Some commented on the positive effects of organisations coming together to help older people in numerous ways.

The involvement of key partnerships of Anglesey Council, Third Sector and Older Peoples Forums with input from businesses being open to support by delivering their products has been amazing, at one stage more than 1000 people have been involved in supporting lonely people through regular chats; collecting and delivering food and medicine. Responding to plumbing, electrical and heating emergencies.
(Male, 70-74, Isle of Anglesey)

23% of those that commented in this section responded that they saw nothing positive in the pandemic.

Can't think of anything. I've had more to do with less help.
(Female carer, 60-64, Caerphilly)

Sole living is very, very hard without support you can rely on.
(Female living alone, 70-74, Vale of Glamorgan)

Part Four: Challenges of lockdown

We asked people to tell us what they found challenging in lockdown.

There are a significant number of areas that people have found more of a challenge during the winter lockdown. In this survey 87% of respondents found not seeing family and friends an issue, an increase from 78% during the first lockdown. Those finding loneliness (37%), the impact on emotional health (51%) and impact in physical health (35%) a challenge all increased.

One respondent told us she was

Fed up of being lonely.

(Female living alone, 75-79, Gwynedd)

Another talked of

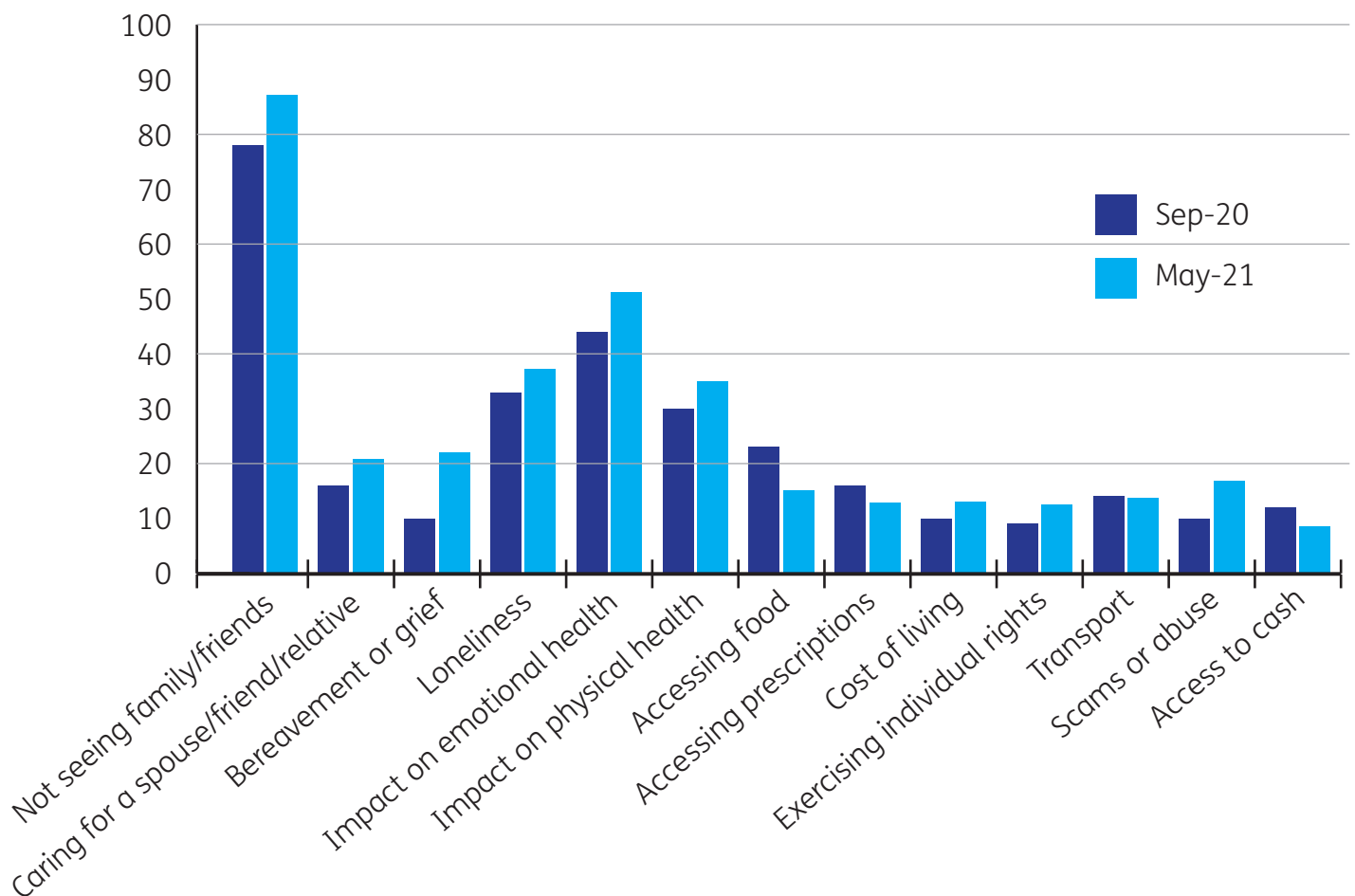
Going several days on end not speaking to anyone.

(Female living alone, 75-79, Cardiff)

Exercising from home made me feel trapped and severely affected my mental health.

(Female, 70-74, Cardiff)

Table: Challenges of lockdown



Those finding bereavement or grief a challenge more than doubled, it was an issue for 10% of people in our first survey but for 22% of those who responded in May 2021.

Losing both parents, not seeing them, not attending funerals, battling my employer, discrimination and walking away from my job of 20 years with nothing for my safety.
(Female, 50-54, Monmouthshire)

There were a range of other issues people told us about:

- These include not being able to work; missing work; losing work (some due to additional care responsibilities) or issues at work, the challenges of working from home; and struggling with home schooling whilst also working
- Two respondents told us the pandemic led to them losing their home
- A number of people told us about the impact of not being able to swim or exercise.

Closure of gyms, swimming pools, etc meaning less exercise especially in cold and wet weather.

(Male, 60-64, Gwynedd)

Cost of heating home as always at home through winter.

(Male, 65-69, Denbighshire)

Not being able to hold the usual social events - WI, film club, local village show, beer festival, whisky club, yoga classes, art classes, etc. Not being able to plan ahead, book holidays, or celebrate the little rituals of our lives, having to cancel holidays!

(Female, 70-74, Ceredigion)

If we look at the specific experience of people aged over 80, they were more likely to have found loneliness a challenge (55% compared with 37% of over 50s) but less likely to have experienced an impact on their emotion health (37% compared with 51% of over 50s). The over 80s experienced more of a challenge than over 50s in terms of access food.

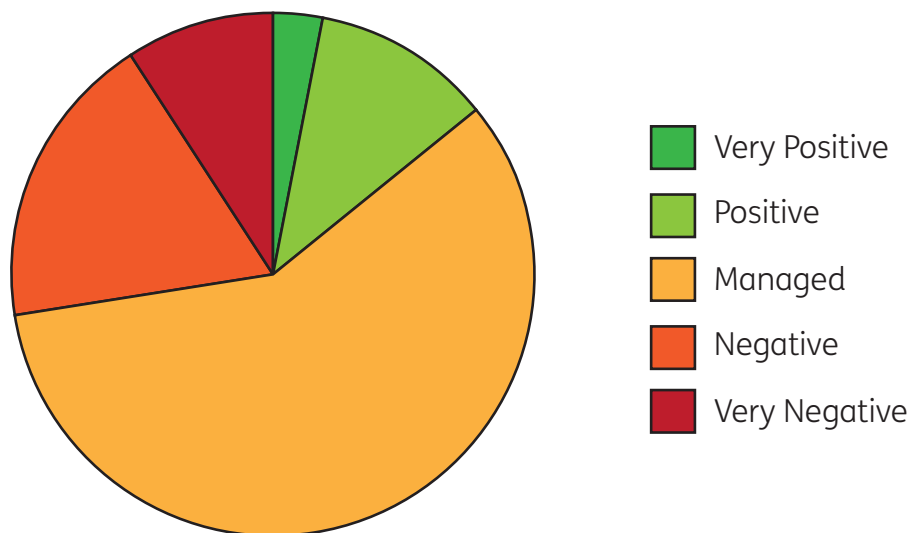


Part Five: The impact of lockdown

We asked people to tell us about the impact of lockdown on them.

59% of respondents told us they had managed through lockdown. For 14% the experience had been positive; for 27% of people the experience was negative or very negative.

Table: Impact of lockdown



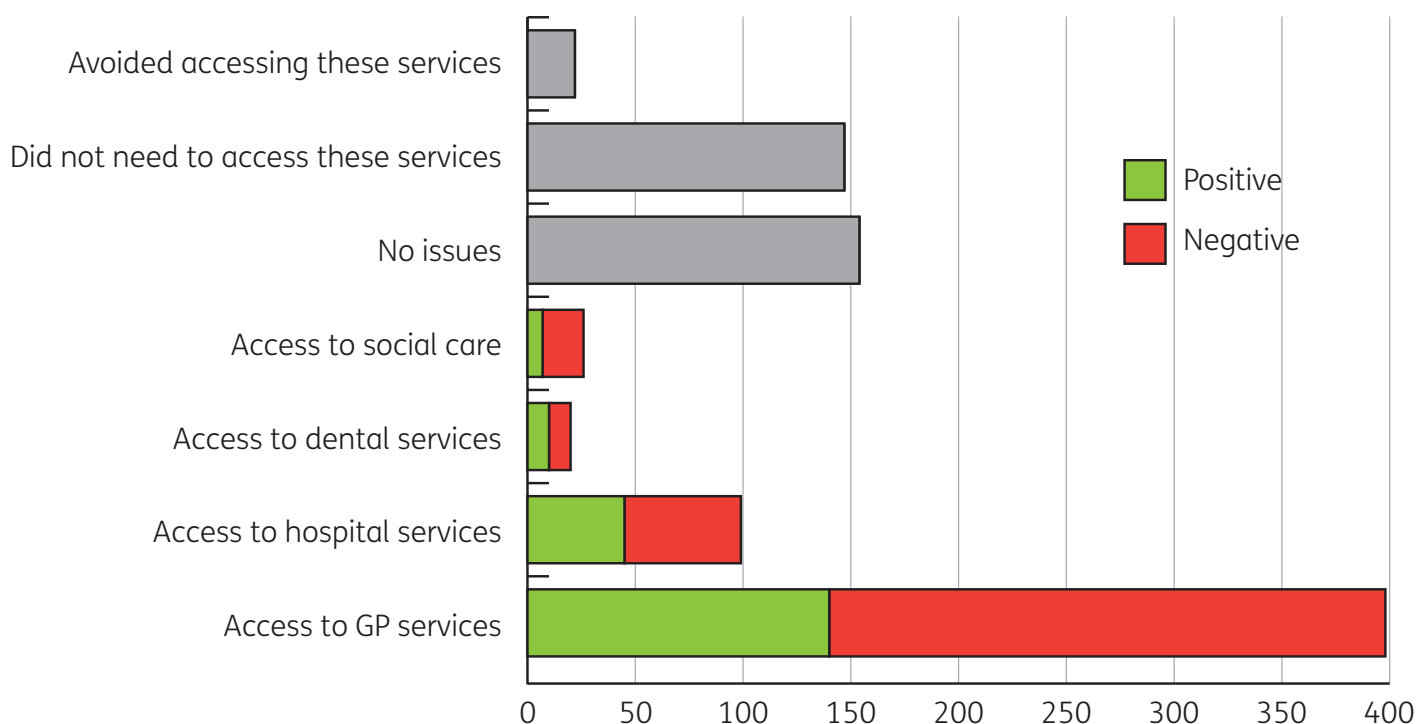
Part Six: Experiences of accessing health and care services

50% of people had a negative experience of access to health care – a reduction from 70% in our previous survey

We asked “What has been your experience of accessing health or social care during lockdown?” Of 1216 of responses 73% answered this question. Respondents were free to concentrate on areas that mattered to them. As such these responses are indications of what matters most to older people in Wales. They expressed a wide range of experiences of accessing health and social care.

Responses to this question have been categorised into different areas as shown in the graph below. These categorisations have been made only when it was clear from the response that this is what the respondent meant. Less clear responses have not been included in this analysis. As a result, this graph captures a partial but significant view of older people’s recent experiences of the coronavirus pandemic.

Table: Experiences of access to health and social care





(a) Experiences of access to GP services

GP services are the gateway to the majority of health and care services, so how easily older people are able to access these affects health outcomes. When people are discouraged from accessing these, health and care issues increase which are more costly to deal with later both in terms of loss of quality of life to the individual as well as higher level service cost to health, social care and other services. Unsurprisingly, more respondents spoke of access to GP services than any other area of health and social care.

(i) Positive experiences of access

154 stated that they had no issues accessing the care they needed and 140 said they had a good or excellent experience of accessing GP services. (total: 294)

Amongst those that had positive experiences of accessing GP services, a significant minority expressed their appreciation that they had received a good service under unprecedented circumstances.

Excellent. Despite the lockdown, our needs have been met promptly and with kindness.
(Female carer, 70-74, Isle of Anglesey)

Brilliant. So much has been put in place in terms of patient safety.
(Female carer, 60-64, Bridgend)

Our local Doctors practice has been great - in spite of restrictions, they have still provided a preventative care service.
(Self-isolating Male 70-74 Neath Port Talbot)

Our first survey during the pandemic highlighted difficulties that some older people were facing adapting to telephone consultations and the use of digital technology and this is still the case for some that responded. Many older people in Wales don't have internet access, some will lack the digital skills with which to provide information to health services electronically and some have concerns regarding sending emails containing confidential and sensitive information. As such it's important that any longer-term changes to health and care service delivery continues to offer face to face care and support for those that need it and those that want it.

I am uncomfortable with telephone appointments and clam up. I understand the necessity during the pandemic but suspect they will continue. Feel I no longer have access to medical care if I need it.
(Female, 70-74, Cardiff)

Adapting to change

There was evidence from the responses that as some of the services changes have been in place for some time, some individuals are seeing some of the benefits. Some commented that GP access has improved since the beginning of the pandemic as services have adapted and become more used to newer ways of working:

Difficult initially but improving now that the situation is less fraught.
(Female 65-69, Vale of Glamorgan)

Slightly more difficult to know how to access but less waiting when I did manage to get through.
(Female, 65-69, Cardiff)

Excellent access to GP. More efficient than prior to Covid. Strict appointments times so less waiting. Ease of using AskMyGP rather than the usual routine of pressing redial over 50 times to get through to a receptionist.
(Female, 55-59, Swansea)

These changes that have happened through necessity may well continue beyond the immediate crisis and have benefited some who struggle to physically get to the GP surgery for a variety of reasons:

Have been able to access GP via phone and have felt less 'rushed' during these contacts. I have had phone, video, email and in person contact for outpatient appointments for pre-existing conditions. I have also been seen in A and E at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd. I think services have adapted well and will change for the better.
(Female, 60-64, Conwy)

(ii) Negative experiences of access to GP services

224 said they had difficulties accessing their GP and 34 said they had not been able to see their GP at all (total: 258).

Respondents told us that access to GP surgeries was a large issue prior to the pandemic, and many told us the pandemic has made things worse. Whilst many GP surgeries have adapted to newer ways of working, getting an appointment is still a major issue. One respondent said:

Even more difficult to make appointments - our GP wants us to call at 8am to make an appointment, and the lines then are inevitably busy. This is horrible, but especially when unwell. They need to make better use of technology and allow those who are unable to use technology to call. Appointments for non-urgent matters should also be able to be booked in advance, not all appointments need to be made for the same day - I've no idea why anyone thinks that is a good idea.
(Female, 55-59, Cardiff)

Others told us how they have struggled with the changes that GP surgeries have made to access:

Very poor almost non-existent. [...] No understanding of the fact that many elderly people do not have access to or understand social media. Constantly being told to go online for info. Some GPs asking patients to send emails to explain their symptoms!! Not good enough.
(Self-isolating male, 80-84, Denbighshire)

Trying to get access to a GP for self and for the person I care for has been extremely difficult! The on-line system is inappropriate for most things - and simply tells you to contact the surgery, who tell you to access on-line! each call to the surgery takes at least 20 minutes 'on-hold' to simply get through; when you CAN access health services - they are nothing short of superb

- but getting to that point is incredibly frustrating and it feels like starting all over again each time.

(Male carer, 60-64, Caerphilly)

Concerns were raised by many regarding delays in access to GP services and how this had impacted negatively on their health, or the health of those they care for;

Tough [to access health services]. MS intervened to save my life. GPs have been shocking - 7-9 hours to get a call back. Refused to see me and missed a lung cancer diagnosis.

(Shielding female, 65-69, Merthyr Tydfil)

When I had severe back problems early in lockdown I was offered telephone consultations only. Advice was conflicting. I was left in severe pain and with limited mobility until I could access private services. Later told I had to use e.consult forms even though I said I would not use for embarrassing physical conditions or mental health issues. I cannot book an appointment with GP of my choice. Just told a GP will telephone sometime that day (who treats me as a symptom not a person).

(Female, 70-74, Cardiff)

22 responses to the survey stated that they have avoided accessing any health or social care services during the pandemic, even when they have required care. Issues with access to GP services and knowledge of how stretched health services are due to the pandemic may contribute to some not contacting their GP when they really need to.

It's impossible to get an appointment with the GP. We've also not tried to get an appointment when unwell for fear of adding to the GP's workload.

(Female carer, 55-59, Flintshire)

Others indicated that they are fearful of going to their GP because of a risk of catching the virus:

I have had my first vaccination so far at my GP and that was a horrible experience because nobody was ensuring social distancing in the waiting room and there were people without masks coughing in an enclosed space and getting up close to me. I had an anxiety attack and was extremely distressed and I am frightened about my next job. I will go and get it but I will avoid returning to the surgery if I can.

(Female carer, 55-59, Bridgend)

Reluctance to ‘bother’ the GP practice and issues with getting through to speak to a medical professional may well cause an escalation in both physical and mental health issues that will become more apparent as services open post-pandemic. Some spoke of increased reliance on emergency services in the absence of access to GP services:

Due to lack available surgery or Doctor had to call out ambulance for A&E twice.

(Female, self-isolating, 75-79, Carmarthenshire)

The responses clearly indicate that more needs to be done to ensure that everyone that needs to can access GP and other services more easily to ensure that older people are not disproportionately impacted by changes to how services have operated during the pandemic which are likely to continue after the crisis is over.

(b) Experiences of access and treatment through hospitals

45 were happy with care from hospitals and 54 had a negative experience of accessing hospital services

Many of our respondents spoke of long delays with scheduled appointments and treatment that were causing them concern and affecting their quality of life.

Health appointments have been diabolical. I’ve not seen rheumatologist for a year nor had treatment. I’ve waited over a year for orthopaedics appointment that had been cancelled numerous times. Many other appointments cancelled & postponed. A terrible impact on my worsening health conditions. Hindering my mobility. Too many services are limited or negligible. Most only offering emergency provision.

(Female shielding, living alone, 60-64, Merthyr Tydfil)

My Mum has a serious health condition and tried to get an appointment to see a consultant in October. Her appointments have been continually cancelled or just non-existent [...]. I am very concerned about her health and believe she is at risk of dying. I think that more money/resources need to be put into the NHS to deal with the alleged backlog caused allegedly by the pandemic.

(Female, 50-59, Powys)

Harder to get medical support for my pre-existing/new/ongoing medical conditions. I have relied heavily on alternative health practitioners and am now badly impacted by not having had regular physical treatments.

(Female, 60-64, Ceredigion)

Our GP has been helpful but my husband found out in lockdown he needs hip operation his mobility is getting worse [...]he is in so much pain and can’t sleep.

(Shielding female, 70-74 Blaenau Gwent)

Though there is a great deal of evidence from our survey of exacerbation of health

issues due to a lack of access, when people have received treatment they appreciate the care they receive:

Was admitted to hospital with an emergency at the height of the second wave, and was awestruck by the care of all at UHW.

(Shielding male, 70-74, Cardiff)

Very good. I had an accident at home and had to access minor injuries and the A & E where staff at all times were excellent.

(Female, 65-69, Monmouthshire)

Others reflected on how difficult access may be for those who feel unable to challenge treatment delays:

It has been very difficult to access hospital services, and if we had not able to self advocate I don't think I would have been able to access them. Not everyone is able to do this, so this is a concern that people are being overlooked for treatment that they need.

(Shielding female, 50-54, Rhondda Cynon Taff)

(c) Experience of dental care

10 responses mentioned positive experiences of dental care and 61 mentioned negative experiences with dental care

Delays in routine appointments were the main reasons cited and some were concerned that teeth were deteriorating.

I had a broken tooth and got temporary treatment from my dentist. After 6 months I am still on the waiting list for permanent treatment. The worry of this has impacted my sleep and therefore my mental health.

(Female, 65-69, Powys)

Was able to visit dentist for emergency treatment, but on going preventative hygienist work could not be done resulting in tooth loss.

(Female, 65-69, Swansea)

More recent respondents indicated this position was improving:

Dentists have been good since reopening.

(Female, 65-69, Isle of Anglesey)



(d) Experiences of access and support from Social Care

Fewer people require care and support through social care services than health and this was not mentioned by as many respondents. Seven told us of positive experiences of social care and 19 told us of difficulties. Of those that were happy, at least one already had arrangements in place before the pandemic began.

Negative experiences people told us about included a lack of respite care to allow carers to recharge and look after their loved one better.

Meetings are possible only when the professionals want them. [...] Covid is used as an excuse by social services.

(Female, 55-59, West Wales)

Mental health support for son has been good [but] social services rubbish.

(Female, 70-74, Powys)

As the 'carer' I have relied mainly on internet for information. Whilst very grateful for excellent surgery and hospital treatment for my husband, the feeling of 'going it largely alone' has been quite stressful.

I found that Drs only gave advice over the phone without seeing the patient. Carers came in but I was left coping on my own. My husband was taken into respite for me to have a break as I was worn out. Then I couldn't see him because of restrictions. In 5 days I was told he was on an end of life plan. I was shocked the following week he passed away. (line 802)

Difficult to get the right help for my 92 year old mother.

(Female carer 60-64, Flintshire)

Some respondents drew attention to how health services have continued to operate whilst social care has not operated in the same way:

Impossible to get an assessment by social services Occupational Therapy. I can't get into my bath for a shower. I've spoken to them and am on the waiting list, they aren't doing routine assessments and I've already waited a year. It feels like I will never have a shower again. I've been able to access my GP and hospital consultants by phone when needed and have seen GP and attended A&E with no issues during lockdown.

(Female 50-55, South Wales)



(e) Other issues identified

Transport issues for health and social care appointments

Respondents to our survey highlighted issues they have had with getting to medical appointments. Many people will rely on friends and family during 'normal' times. However, under lockdown people have not been able to get help from friends and family with transport to appointments as they would under 'usual' circumstances. People have concerns regarding safety of using public transport systems and this has caused an issue for some:

I have to go almost weekly to GPs for blood tests and hope my daughter in law could take me. Didn't want to use buses or taxis as I have been shielding. Cost of taxis both ways is £10 which is a lot just to have a little prick on your finger or sometimes arm.

(Female, 70-75, North Wales)

Older people with multiple health needs

Some answers to this question demonstrated the difficulties for those with multiple health and social care needs with changing systems and delays to treatment:

Very difficult. I had physiotherapy appointments cancelled a year ago. Not sure when I will get them. I am also waiting for my dental appointment to be rescheduled. I have been waiting a year for that. A follow up Lymphoedema appointment was rescheduled 6 months later and done by phone call. Trying to get my flu jab that I was called for the last 3 years due to a cancer diagnosis and was told that for 2020 I wasn't vulnerable. So why did the GP call ME in 2017, 2018 & 2019 to get the flu jab? Trying to get blood test done has taken a week in phone calls to my GP's surgery starting on Monday and finishing on Thursday. The next available appointment for me is in 3 weeks. The whole system is stretched beyond its limits. Some of my medicines are being difficult to source and I often have to wait for one item or accept a different brand.

Part Seven: Easing of lockdown

We asked older people about the things they're looking forward to as lockdown eases.

89% told us they were looking forward to seeing family and friends (this compares to 85% in the last survey)

Other people told us

Back to bit of normality.

(Shielding female with additional caring responsibilities, 50-54, Cardiff)

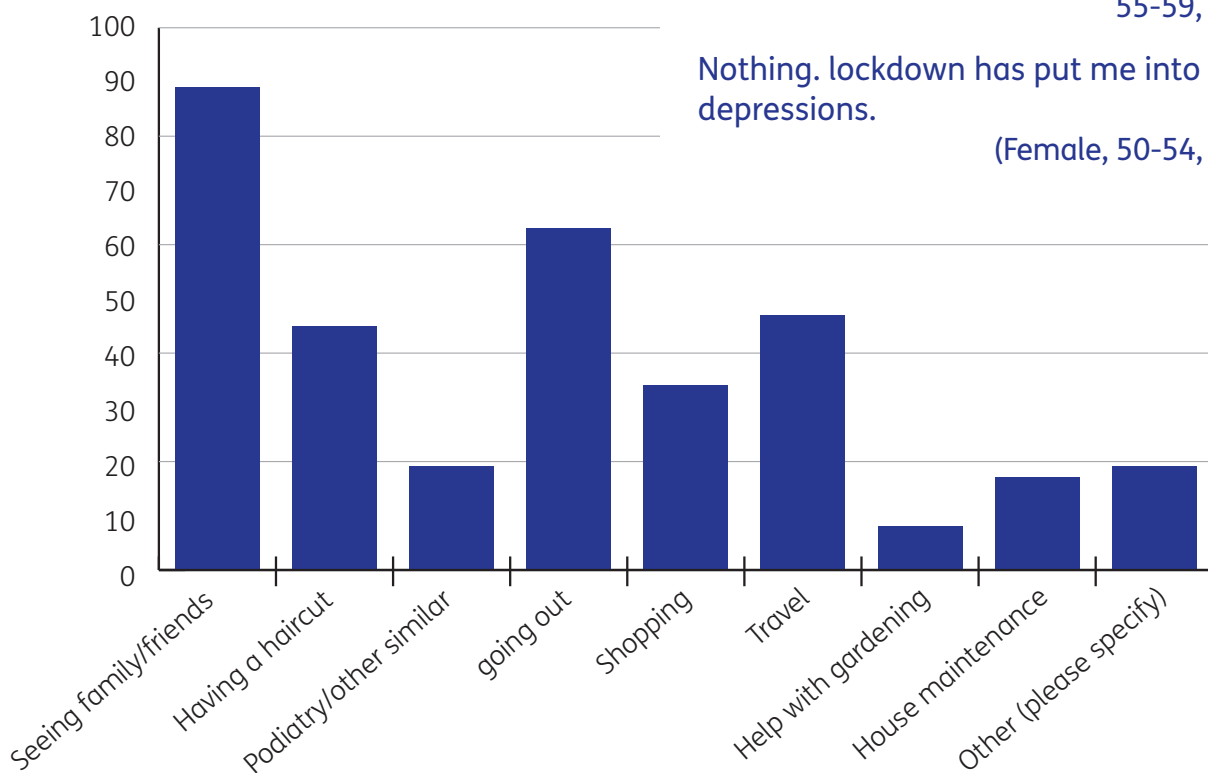
I hope I can find a new safe home before my eviction expires.

(Shielding female, 70-74, Carmarthenshire)

Being able to check out respite care for my dad, so i can have a break.

(Female, 60-64, Denbighshire)

Table: What are you looking forward to as lockdown eases?



- Seven people told us they were looking forward to going to the gym
- Nine people were looking forward to swimming
- Five people mentioned church
- Six people mentioned social interaction
- Range of answers around sports, exercise and activity

In contrast, seven people told us there was nothing they were looking forward to

Nothing. I am not looking forward to moving out of lockdown. I live a housebound life anyway because of disability in my household and during lockdown we were eventually able to have regular food deliveries and prescription deliveries. I am concerned that when lockdown is over we will struggle as service providers return to neglecting the needs of those of us who have always lived in lockdown regardless of the pandemic.

(Female with additional caring responsibilities, 55-59, Bridgend)

Nothing. lockdown has put me into deep depressions.

(Female, 50-54, Swansea)

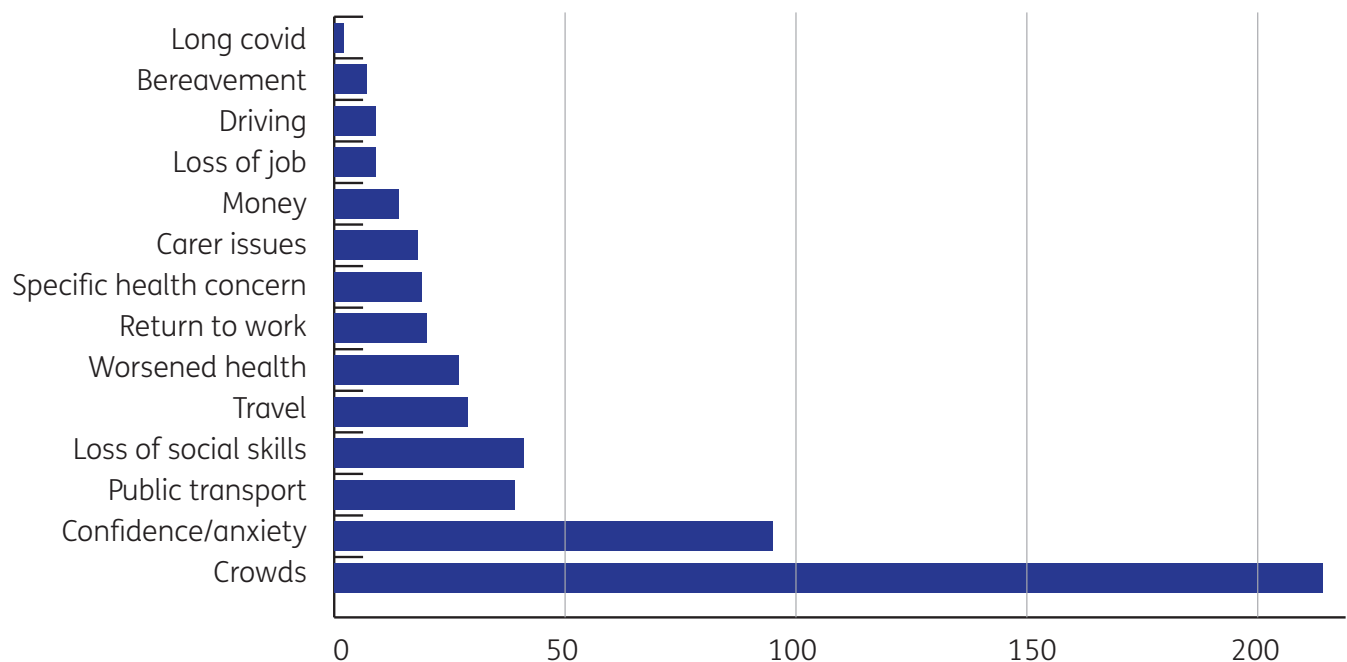
Part Eight: Challenge of moving out of lockdown

Respondents were asked, “As we move out of lockdown what do you see as likely to be most challenging for you?” Respondents to this question were free to concentrate on areas that mattered to them.

77 people said they saw no challenges coming out of lockdown. Of these, many had been working during the pandemic.

Open responses have been read categorised into the main areas as shown in the table below. Many did not respond to this question and not all answers could be clearly categorised. Some responses fitted into multiple categories.

Table: main challenges coming out of lockdown



Concerns regarding being in crowded places

Many respondents had concerns related to being close to many people after long periods of lockdown and social distancing and have fears that people will not maintain safe distances. Fears of catching the virus are compounded for those with specific vulnerabilities:

I am clinically vulnerable, afraid of mixing with people.
(Female, 55-59, Anglesey)

Having been confined for such a long time I am afraid to go out.
(Female, 70-74, Neath Port Talbot)

Mixing with other people. [...] I have been on my own for over a year and not gone into a shop or other home. Going inside I find very difficult. Being in a crowd - too many people around me - I avoid.
(Shielding female, 55-59, Carmarthen)

Some respondents told us of how their physical and mental health have deteriorated during lockdown and they have concerns about whether they are now mobile enough to go out more:

Physical fitness - With the lack of real movement for one year, I find it very difficult to be out and about without feeling tired and discomfort. I feel my physical ability has gone down to a third and this is very worrying. line
(Female, 70-74, Cardiff)

Accessing adequate assistance for mobility especially regarding modifications needed to daily life. I can now barely stand.
(Female, 65-69, Swansea)

Building up upper body strength in my wheelchair.
(Male, 75-79, Carmarthen)

Concerns around a loss of physical fitness often went hand in hand with concerns regarding a lack of facilities in public places. Many respondents mentioned concerns about places they can rest and whether public toilets would be open:

When able to go out [I need] toilets around and seats to [be] able to rest.
(Female, 85-89, Torfaen)

[I need] More benches in the park.
(Female, 70-74, Cardiff)

These were issues for many older people prior to the pandemic, but they are now of even greater concern.

Confidence and loss of social skills

Many respondents told us that they now lack confidence to go out after spending so much time at home and how this has impacted their usual daily functions and activities:

Going back out - I felt very vulnerable driving though I have been driving for decades. Even sitting in the car now I have to think about gears though before it was automatic to me.
(Shielding female, living alone, 60-64, Cardiff)

Some told us that they feel that having not seen people for so long that they are now concerned that they do not have the same social skills as previously:

Meeting up and mixing with people again. I used to go to church on a weekly basis and I haven't attended for a year.
(Shielding female, living alone, 65-69, Carmarthenshire)

Transport and travel

Many people mentioned concerns regarding travel in general, with some having specific concerns regarding the availability of public transport, which had been an issue before the pandemic:

Public transport may be unavailable or reduced and I may still be unable to travel when those with cars can.

(Female, 55-59, Swansea)

Public transport is my biggest problem. Reduced services during lockdown have been a big problem.

(Female, 70-74, Pembrokeshire)

Staying safe while out on public transport as we now have a reduced train service so the trains will be crowded.

(Female with additional caring responsibilities, 65-69, Caerphilly)

Trying to visit my 85 year old father who lives in Kent. I do not drive so would have to travel by coach to go and see him. I panic just at the thought of the idea.

(Female, 55-59, Carmarthen)

Transport and seeing friends and family safely [...] One of our buses has been taken off completely which means if I want to go into town I have to rely on the more expensive Bwcabus service. We had no buses running through lockdown but forced to use Bwcha Bus which costs more - difficult if you are on a low income due to benefits.

(Female, 55-59, Ceredigion)

The ability to travel is a major concern for many older people in Wales as we come out of lockdown and transport providers need to make additional efforts to ensure that travel is safe and that this is advertised so that confidence is there for older people.

Bereavement

We know that the majority of deaths from coronavirus over the last year have been in older people and so this age group are disproportionately affected by bereavement. Some respondents told us that their biggest challenge will be publicly dealing with their grief for the first time:

Church...we have lost a large number of friends.

(Female with additional caring responsibilities, 55-59, Neath, Port Talbot)

Adapting to a new life without my Mother.

(Female with additional caring responsibilities, 60-64, Carmarthenshire)

As I am grieving for the loss of my husband of 59 years, he passed away the 5-11-2020 I now have to build a new way of life for myself on my own. My children all live away. So this year will be another hard one for me.

(Female living alone, 80-84, Swansea)

Dealing with delayed grief.

(Female, 50-54, Neath, Port Talbot)

Seeing others getting back to normal, when life will never be the same for me because my husband has gone.

(Female, 60-64, Cardiff)

Trying to find a home and getting some answers about my husband's death.

(Shielding female, lives alone, 70-74, Carmarthenshire)

One said that they were not looking forward to coming out of lockdown as they preferred to grieve in private.

Carers issues

Caring responsibilities have increased for many older people in Wales during the coronavirus pandemic. Some people have had to give up paid employment to take on additional care responsibilities. Some have been able to take on caring responsibilities whilst working from home but cannot continue with this when things change.

[I'm] self-employed but husband [is] shielding so [I] had to stop working.
(identity and area unknown)

As businesses start to open up again, who will provide care is a growing concern:

Worries about my partner if I have to stop working from home.
(Female carer, 55-59, Rhondda Cynon Taff)

Getting someone to look after husband.
(Female, 65-69, Swansea)

For others the concern is whether respite care will now be available:

Getting a break from the caring regime.
(Female carer, 65-69, Cardiff)

Looking after mam, who's 94, living with me, and has been at home with me all the time.
(Female, 65-69, Cardiff)

Getting respite care for my 91 year old Mum. Haven't had a break since August 2019.
(Shielding female carer, 60-64 Wrexham)

Loss of confidence having been restricted and increased caring responsibilities challenging opportunities to begin social contacts again.
(Female carer, 80-84 Isle of Anglesey)

Maintaining the high level of support for my parents as well as the usual demands of work, social life etc.
(Female carer, 60-64, Swansea)

Jobs and finances

Job opportunities have decreased as a result of the pandemic for all age groups. With ageist perceptions by some employers, getting another job as an older person is a challenge:

Redundant end of 2020 so seeking a new opportunity at 56.
(Female, 55-59, Rhondda Cynon Taff)

Several women who responded to our survey told us how the reduced pension age for women is affecting them during the pandemic.

Should have had pension at 60 (2018) but retired [...] at 60 as work too physically hard, part time work would be good, but very difficult to find work till 2023 and get pension that I've paid into since 1974.
(Female, 60-64, Isle of Anglesey)

For some, the pandemic has increased their cost of living and they are struggling to deal with this.

Cost of living went up as heating bills increased as in house longer and food bills went up due to online shopping. Plus trying to build up a social circle again.
(Female, 50-55, location not specified)

People seem generally concerned about others, about feeling safe in crowded areas about whether others would be wearing masks or socially distancing.

Part Nine: Support needed as lockdown eases

We asked, “What would support you to engage with your local community as lockdown eases?” The open-ended responses to this question have been read through and categorised into different areas of response.

The majority of people answering this question simply want to be able to see friends and families indoors and to be able to travel further distances in order to do this. Some of these need support from friends and family to go out.

Some of these responses were given before any restrictions in movement were lifted. Some responses around travel related to just being able to go further than the five mile limit whilst others related to being able to go abroad on holiday.

Many people also told us they want ‘confidence that places are safe,’ some respondents included views on social distancing and wearing of masks, with some wanting measures to stay in place and others calling for an ending of all restrictions.

To be able to hug or even touch someone close to me. I haven’t had or felt human touch for over 12 months.

(Male, 55-59, living alone, Bridgend)

Just getting with friends to have morning coffee helps so much.

(Female, 85-89, Rhondda Cynon Taff)





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