healthwatch Cheshire West

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Mental Health and Wellbeing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic

July 2020

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Introduction

What is Healthwatch?

Healthwatch Cheshire, consisting of Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West, is an independent consumer champion for health and care across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester, forming part of the national network of local Healthwatch across England. Our role is to make sure that those who run health and care services understand and act on what really matters to local people.

Healthwatch Cheshire East and Healthwatch Cheshire West undertake continuous engagement activities with the public to hear about concerns and compliments regarding health and care services. The information we gather is then analysed so that we can identify and act upon trends and common themes by presenting our findings to decision makers in order to improve the services people use. We also share people's views locally with Healthwatch England who make sure that the government put people at the heart of care nationally.

Asking people about their health and wellbeing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

Since the beginning of May 2020, we have been asking Cheshire residents to complete a survey to tell us about their views and experiences during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic so we can understand what is working well and what could be improved, as well as considering people's mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic. We have been working in partnership with the communications teams at each Hospital and Community Trust, NHS Cheshire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), and Cheshire East Council and Cheshire West and Chester Council, who provide us with the latest updates from their organisations to ensure consistent communications across Cheshire.

As a part of this partnership working, the findings of this survey are reviewed regularly in order to provide up to date information to partners including the CCG, Hospital Trusts, Local Authorities, voluntary sector organisations, the Care Quality Commission and Healthwatch England. The survey is ongoing so that we can capture experiences as the situation progresses, with information continuously provided in a timely and useful manner to those people who make decisions on how services are delivered both nationally and locally.

The following is a report of the findings from the Healthwatch Cheshire Health and Wellbeing During Coronavirus survey. It is based upon the 1,121 responses up to Friday 3rd July 2020, of which 551 are from residents of Cheshire East and 571 are from people living in Cheshire West and Chester. The nature of the survey being made up of multiple questions means that across Cheshire we have close to 4,000 individual comments on health, care, mental health and wellbeing during this period. This particular report focuses on what people told us about their mental health and wellbeing during this period, with a separate report published regarding the general views and experiences of people accessing health and care across Cheshire.

We have chosen to produce a report based on responses up until the end of Friday 3rd July 2020 as the survey has since been adapted to continue to provide relevant information following the changes in Government guidance that took effect on Saturday 4th July 2020. The survey is ongoing and we will continue to provide up to date information to partners and publish further reports on our websites. A reminder that you can access the survey at: https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/7W255V8

Summary of Findings

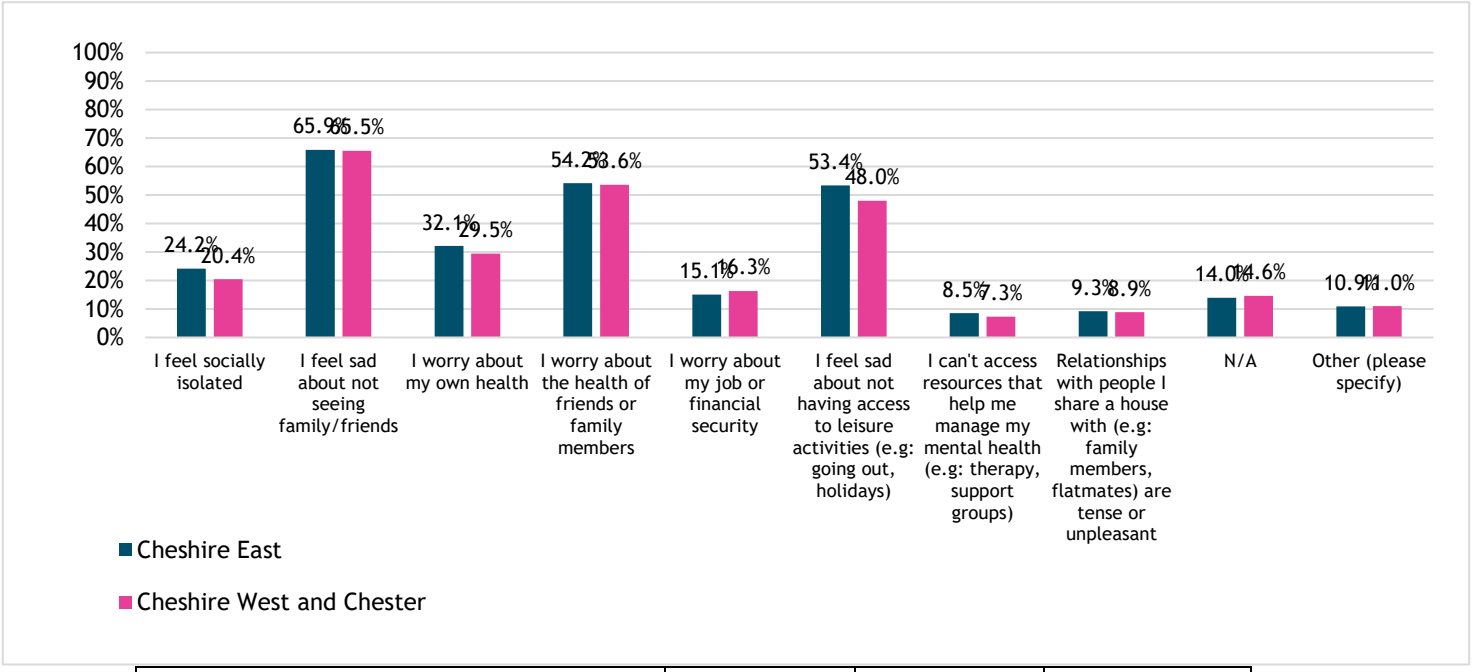
Below is a summary of what respondents across Cheshire told us about their mental health and wellbeing during the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic:

- In the most part people generally felt that they were coping well. However, respondents also talked about the stress and anxiety they felt, confusion over national guidance and missing family and friends.
- Although the majority of respondents felt their mental health had remained unchanged over the course of a week, of those who did notice a change, numbers fluctuated throughout lockdown.
- The number of respondents who reported declining mental health decreased over time, which could in part be due to the easing of lockdown measures.
- 65.7% of respondents across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester felt sad about not being able to see family and friends.
- Of those who said they did not need to seek support for their mental health, the majority in both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester (30.4% overall) looked to their family and friends. Only 2% overall sought support from a mental health provider.
- 7.2% of people who sought support for their mental health found this online or via an app.
- In terms of what would help people maintain better physical and mental health, there was frequent mention of clearer information being provided, in particular relating to national government messages.
- Respondents also talked about the importance of family and friends, support from the community and the workplace, exercise and better access to services.
- We asked people to tell us what had had a positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing during lockdown. Around half of all respondents in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester talked about family and friends, and the positive impact of exercise. People also talked about their hobbies and using IT to support their interests and stay connected with others.
- Over half of respondents across both areas stated that they had concerns for the future regarding people observing social distancing rules. Aside from this, the top 4 future concerns related to mental and physical health, money and the economy and education.

Survey Results

Do you feel that the coronavirus pandemic has affected the mental health of you or the person you are responding on behalf of?

We had 1,093 responses to this question (530 from Cheshire East, and 563 from Cheshire West and Chester), with 3,172 options selected in total as people were able to select more than one concern.



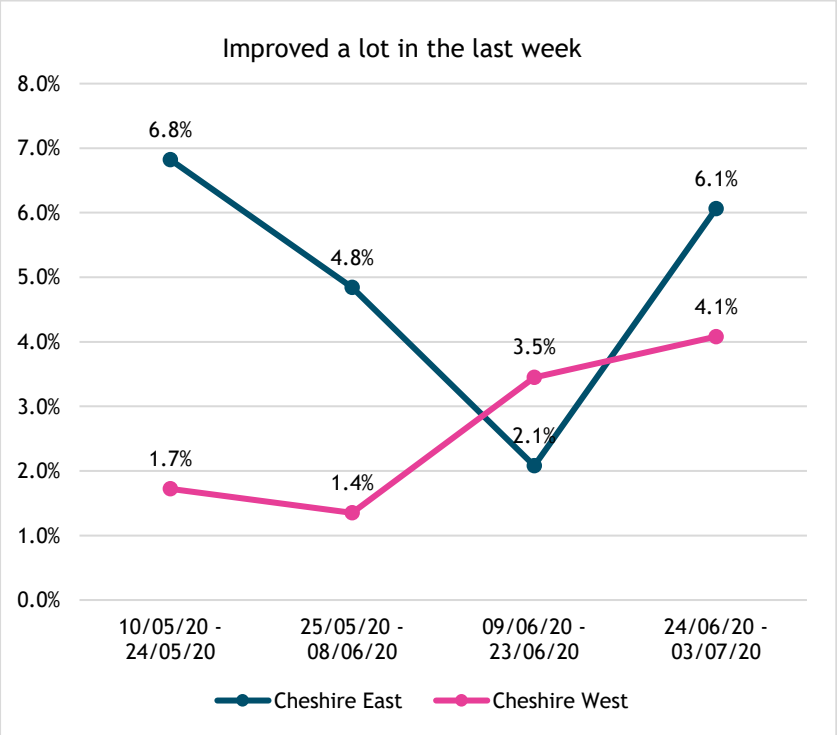
	Cheshire East	Cheshire West & Chester	Total
I feel socially isolated	128 (24.2%)	115 (20.4%)	243 (22.2%)
I feel sad about not seeing friends and family	349 (65.9%)	369 (65.5%)	718 (65.7%)
I worry about my own health	170 (32.1%)	166 (29.5%)	336 (30.7%)
I worry about the health of friends or family members	287 (54.2%)	302 (53.6%)	589 (53.9%)
I worry about my job or financial security	80 (15.1%)	92 (16.3%)	172 (15.7%)
I feel sad about not having access to leisure facilities (e.g. going out, holidays)	283 (53.4%)	270 (48.0%)	553 (50.6%)
I can't access resources that help me manage my mental health (e.g. therapy, support groups)	45 (8.5%)	41 (7.3%)	86 (7.9%)
Relationships with people I share a house with are tense or unpleasant	49 (9.3%)	50 (8.9%)	99 (9.0%)
N/A	74 (14.0%)	82 (14.6%)	156 (14..3%)
Other	58 (10.9%)	62 (11%)	120 (11.0%)
Total responses			3,172

The most common response to this question was feeling sad about not seeing friends and family, which accounted for 65.7% of responses overall with a similar number in Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester. Across Cheshire, this was followed by worries for the health of friends and family at an average of 54%, and thirdly feeling sad about not having access to leisure facilities.

Has your mental health changed in the past week?

We asked respondents to tell us about their mental health and whether they felt it had changed. We looked at this at intervals to see if there had been any change to people's feelings towards their mental health over time. We looked at responses fortnightly starting on 10th May, asking people to tell us whether their mental health had improved a lot, slightly, stayed the same, become worse, become significantly worse, over the course of a week. 572 people responded to this question (187 from Cheshire East and 337 from Cheshire West).

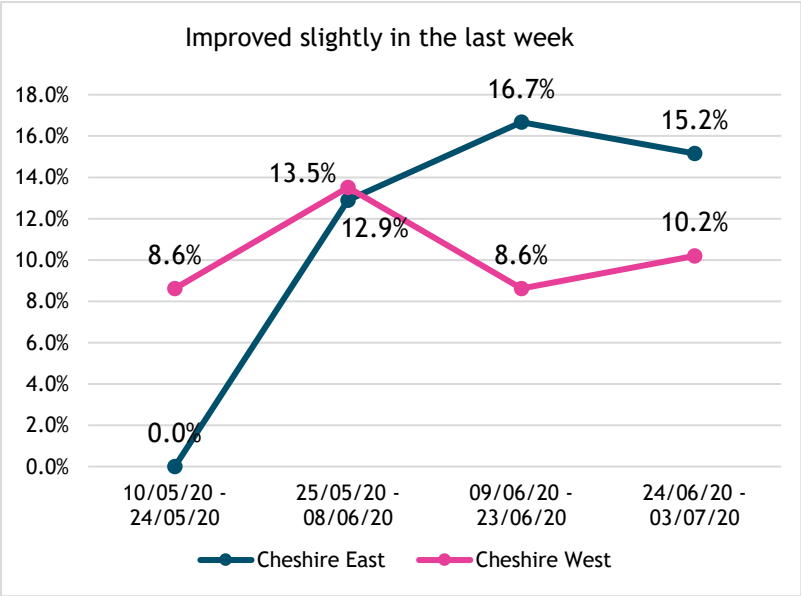
- **The largest percentages were those whose mental health had stayed the same over the course of a week, ranging from 51.7% to 72.7%, indicating that the majority of respondents felt their mental health had remained consistent over the course of lockdown.**
- **There was a gradual decline in the number of people who felt that their mental health had become worse over the course of May and June, which may have been impacted by the gradual easing of lockdown measures.**
- **In terms of mental health improvement, there was a less consistent picture, though this did overall show an upward trend across both Cheshire East and Cheshire West.**



In the first two weeks of monitoring, almost 7% of respondents in Cheshire East said that their mental health had improved a lot compared to 1.7% in Cheshire West.

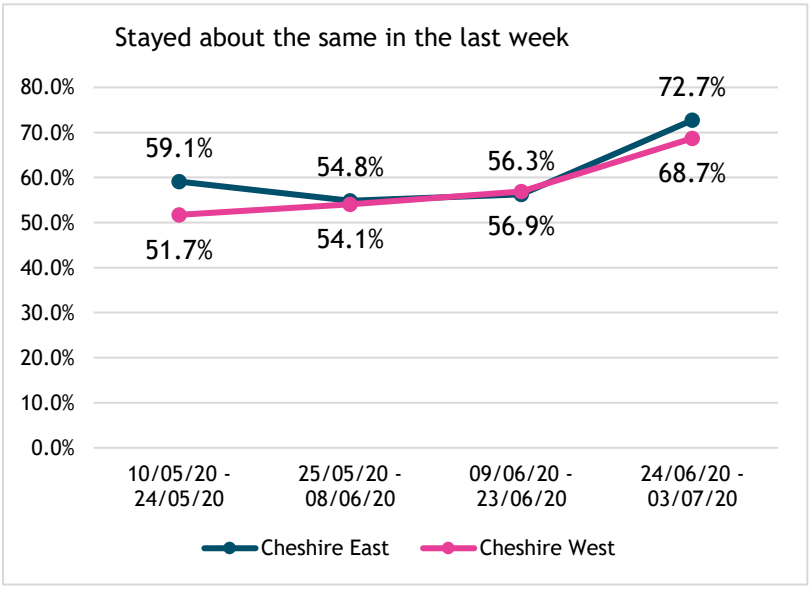
In Cheshire East over time this dipped down to 2.1% at the beginning of June before increasing again towards the beginning of July.

In Cheshire West, after a slight dip, there has been a steady increase in respondents saying this.

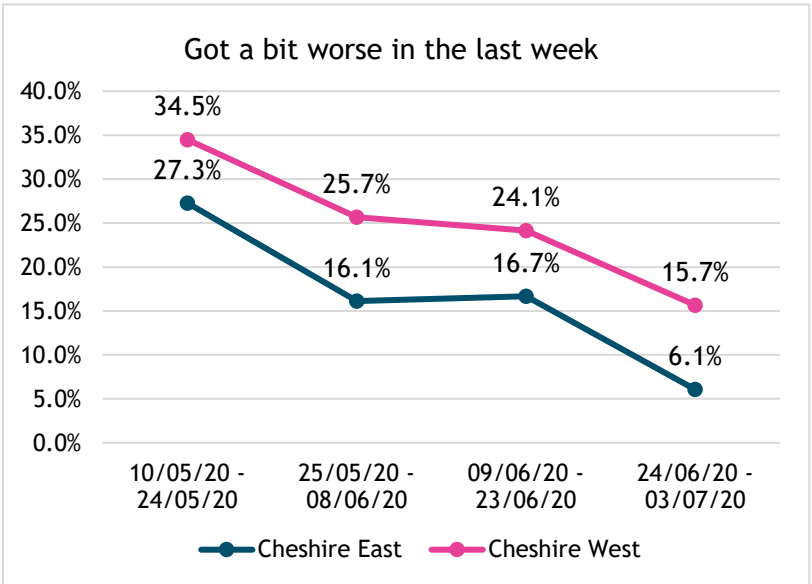


In terms of slight increases in mental health in Cheshire East, no respondent stated this at the beginning of monitoring, but this did sharply increase up to 16.7% from the 9th June.

In Cheshire West, although 8.6% initially stated a slight improvement, rising to 12.9% this dropped throughout June, before increasing to 10.2% at the beginning of July.

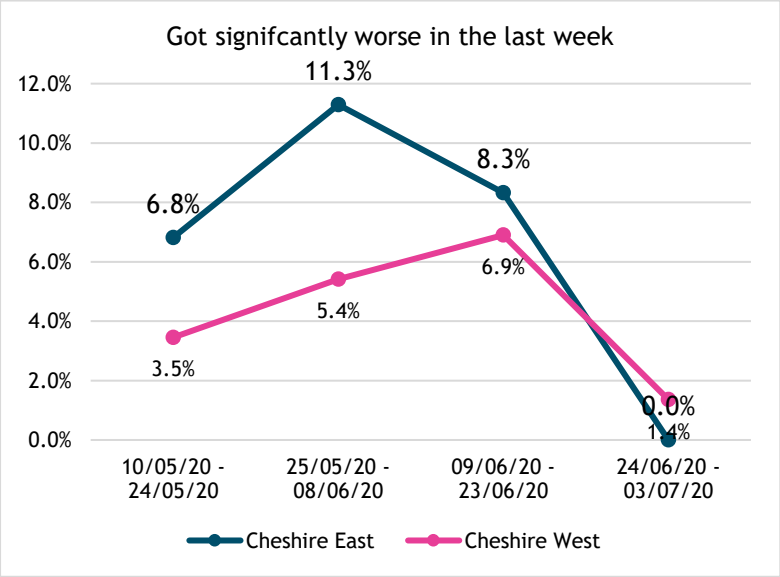


There is a similar picture across Cheshire East and Cheshire West with regards to respondents who stated that there mental health had stayed about the same over a course of a week, with at least half of all respondents stating this. This increased in East and West over time, rising to 72.7% of Cheshire East respondents, and 68.7% of West respondents.



The number of people that stated that their mental health had been getting worse over the course of the week steadily declined in both East and West over the time period. In Cheshire East this fell from 27% to 6% over time.

In Cheshire West, this also dropped from 34.5% to 15.7%.



For those who felt that their mental health had got significantly worse over the course of a week, in Cheshire East this peaked in the two-week period from the 25th May, at 11.3%, falling significantly to 0% by the end of the time period.

In Cheshire West, there was an increase up to 6.9% falling to just 1.4% by the end of June

Cheshire East

In May and into early June there was a mixed response to how people felt about their mental health:

- *"I am fortunate having a garden and I have been gardening most afternoons and that does me good."*
- *"It changes daily depending on how tired and stressed I feel about my caring roles."*
- *"Bored with being at home, no socialising with friends and family, face to face."*
- *"I've felt more optimistic about future work prospects and have plans to see a few people (socially distant)."*

Throughout the first two weeks of June, the majority of comments were negative:

- *"I have no access to mental health support."*
- *"Tension in the house, arguments, feel emotionally distant."*

Towards the end of June and the beginning of July comments were becoming more positive:

- *"Stayed strong fed by data and knowledge. Know I've done all I can to avoid Covid."*
- *"I'm a lot better now so feel good."*

Cheshire West and Chester

In Cheshire West and Chester throughout May and early June comments from respondents were fairly mixed:

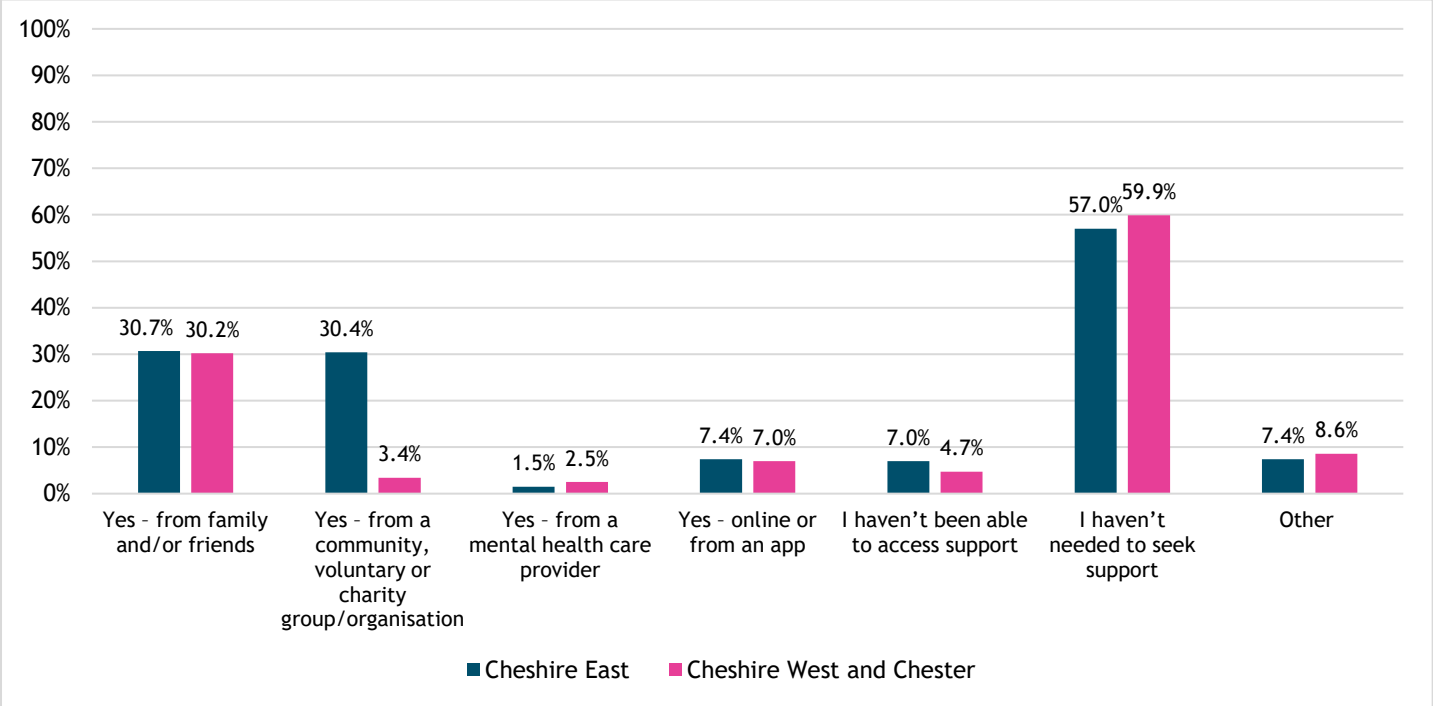
- *"I'm a social person being involved in the community by volunteering and socially engaging with my family and many friends."*
- *"Lonely but have distracted myself with jobs in the garden."*
- *"The messages coming from govt which don't seem to tally with the plan they initially set out with regard to alert levels coming down before lockdown easing. Uncertainty as to safety of easing of measures."*
- *"I have settled into the rhythm of working from home which removes any added stress relating to the use of public transport/social distancing etc. I hope to continue working from home once the lockdown is removed."*

In Cheshire West people were responding with mixed comments relating to their mental health throughout late June and July:

- *"I don't feel that my mental health has suffered unduly, no more than the usual "normal" ups and downs."*
- *"Difficulties of not being able to go out and enjoy leisure activities and meet with family or friends properly - was ok to manage at first but the longer this has gone on it just contributes to low mood in everyday life."*
- *"Feeling some depression due to isolation from social contacts. Some days worse than others."*

Have you been able to access support for your mental health over this time?

1084 people answered this question (525 from Cheshire East and 599 from Cheshire West and Chester), with some choosing more than 1 option.



	Cheshire East	Cheshire West	Total
Yes – from family and/or friends	161 (30.7%)	169 (30.2%)	330 (30.4%)
Yes – from a community, voluntary or charity group/organisation	18 (3.4%)	19 (3.4%)	37 (3.4%)
Yes – from a mental health care provider	8 (1.5%)	14 (2.5%)	22 (2.0%)
Yes – online or from an app	39 (7.4%)	39 (7.0%)	78 (7.2%)
I haven't been able to access support	37 (7.0%)	26 (4.7%)	63 (5.8%)
I haven't needed to seek support	299 (57.0%)	335 (59.9%)	634 (58.5%)
Other	39 (7.4%)	48 (8.6%)	87 (8.0%)

The responses show that over half of did not feel that they needed to seek support, whilst the largest percentage across both Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester who did access support, got this support from family and friends (30.4% across East and West).

Of those who sought support outside of family and friends 7.2% across Cheshire East and Cheshire West and Chester accessed this online or via an app. The lowest response for both areas was accessing support through a mental health provider, at 1.5% in Cheshire East and 2.5% in Cheshire West.

In Cheshire East 7% also said that they hadn't been able to access any support for their mental health.

Other comments in response to this question related to respondents feeling that they didn't want to overburden the NHS when seeking support, though some respondents mentioned approaching their GP and seeking support from employers with regards to their mental health. Other respondents mentioned that they would not always seek support for their mental health:

- *"More important to leave access available for others."*
- *"Workplace employee support scheme."*
- *"I get counselling from work organisation."*
- *"I have not tried to seek support. I have used exercise mainly running to help."*
- *"I don't generally seek support for my mental health issues unless they are severe."*
- *"I try to manage my mental health issues myself."*
- *"Spoke to my GP."*

What would help you maintain a better level of physical and mental wellbeing during the pandemic?

Cheshire East

There were 289 respondents to this question which have been themed, with some respondents mentioning more than one theme.

18% of people who commented responded that they didn't know or that this question was not applicable to them, and a further 16% stated that they didn't need any additional support. Of those who did mention support 14% felt that being provided with clearer information would help with their wellbeing during the pandemic. People also talked about the importance of family and friends, support from the community, work and schools, and better access to services.

Of those who said that they **didn't need any additional support** to help them maintain their wellbeing during the pandemic, people largely talked about resilience and self-sufficiency. Example comments:

- *"My well-being is fine, yes there are lots of changes to deal with and I manage what I can when I can."*
- *"Nothing - instructions on NHS website are self-explanatory."*
- *"I have sufficient personal, social and environmental resources to maintain my well-being."*
- *"I think people are doing the best they can... so I am not going to complain or criticise."*

When respondents commented on the provision of **clearer information**, the majority of comments related to consistent and clear public messages, primarily relating to national government messaging, rather than issues with local information provision:

- *"Clarity from the Government! Not ending the lockdown while number of people dying is not reducing significantly."*
- *"Clearer information. Have felt that the Government are not honest and do not really help people's well-being unlike some other countries."*
- *"Clear communication and not constantly changing e.g. schools meant to open 1st June, Cheshire East Council have now changed that to later in June. It causes anxiety and confusion."*
- *"Nothing from a local perspective, clarity from the government."*

In relation to this people also talked about their frustrations with people not following the rules and **observing guidance** particularly in relation to social distancing:

- *"For people to follow the guidance and keep their distance. I find shopping particularly stressful because of people not following guidance and the shop staff don't prevent this."*
- *"Clearer guidance for going out, clearer instructions to the police about challenging people... And suitable masks!!!"*

The importance of **family and friends** to wellbeing was also highlighted by respondents. People talked about this in relation to how it already supports their wellbeing, and how they feel it will help them once they are able to see friends and family again:

- *"Being able to not worry about my elderly parent who is lonely and isolated. Being able to not worry about my daughter's age 18 and 22 who can't see friends or partners."*
- *"Just being able to hold my family would be help enough."*
- *"Family provides all the support I need."*
- *"Because of support from our neighbour and daughter I feel we have all the*
- *support we need."*

Better access to services was also cited by respondents as something that would help with their physical and mental wellbeing, particularly in relation to healthcare provision:

- *"Medical appointments need reinstating especially dentistry. I've had problems for 3 months and they are not able to see you. Crazy!"*
- *"Regular appointment with doctor to manage meds. Am self-medicating at moment."*

10% of comments also related to **exercise** and its importance to wellbeing, with a third of these referring to a wish for gyms and other leisure facilities to re-open. People also talked about how accessing fitness and sports activities online has been a help to them, and others commenting that although they know it would help them, they are lacking the motivation to exercise:

- *"I need more will-power! I'm not good at physical exercise but I'm trying to stay active, e.g. gardening, walking, exercise bike."*
- *"I do my usual Thai Chi via Zoom with my tutor."*
- *"Sensible restrictions to gyms, sports/leisure facilities rather than a blanket shut down."*

Comments also related to **support from communities and from the workplace** as being important to wellbeing:

- *"Someone actually checking up that we are OK. Cheshire East Council have put me and a volunteer in touch for shopping occasionally for me. I need the bed clothes changing, I need jobs doing in the house, but as I am self-isolating, this is not possible."*
- *"My needs to be acknowledged by my employer with the additional responsibility of caring for my elderly family members and grandchild (son keyworker and works nights so cannot go to school)."*

Other comments that people made related more generally to how the end to lockdown would help and the importance of testing and a vaccine in order for people to be able to return to normality. People also talked broadly about the desire to have somebody to talk to, more access to the outdoors and more access to resources to support them:

- *"Resources for managing pandemic."*
- *"Someone to listen to me and talk with me."*
- *"The announcement that someone has invented a vaccine!"*
- *"Freedom to go to caravan meets or rallies where units are required to be a minimum of 6 metres apart."*

Cheshire West and Chester

In Cheshire West and Chester, 17% of respondents said they didn't know or didn't find the question applicable to them, and a further 15% felt that they didn't need any additional support with their wellbeing. Of those who **didn't need any support** with their physical and mental wellbeing, people talked about feeling self-sufficient and being aware of where to find support and information if they needed to:

- *"Personally, I feel that everything that could be done has been done to help people get through this, there are so many groups around to support and help you, we have never been through anything like this and everyone is just trying their best."*
- *"I'm quite self-sufficient and am getting shopping for 2 other families when I go."*
- *"There are plenty of resources on line. I can't think of anything that would help me in particular."*

Respondents did talk about the need for **clearer information** to enable support of their wellbeing. Of the 13% who mentioned this, the majority referred to clearer information being provided nationally from the government and also clarity around messages nationally, from the government but also via the media:

- *"Clear information from the government. Stop drip feeding us snippets without the full facts. It feels that the decision-making process is coming from the wrong drivers."*
- *"I have found the media particularly the BBC television and news have been very negative and seemingly scaring people. We need facts and not their speculation and negative view and they need to be much more balanced."*

People also mentioned clear messages for those **more vulnerable and shielding**:

- *"For the government to have communicated with the shielded rather than keeping repeating how many food boxes they have sent out, other than the practical support they completely disregarded the shielded for many months."*

In relation to national information, people also commented on the need for people to stick to government guidance, regarding social distancing and PPE:

- *"Clear and definite information from the government regarding social distancing, the transmission of the disease and the use of face masks."*
- *"If some members of the wider population would stick to the lockdown rules so as not to put the rest of us in danger - e.g. protests, illegal raves etc."*

9% of respondents who commented on what would support their mental and physical wellbeing, talked about **accessibility of services**, in particular health services such as GP services and hospital appointments, and being unable to access services due to cancellations:

- *"A date for resumption of elective surgery."*
- *"Access to GP services as required; we are being told that the NHS is still open but it needs to be so."*
- *"Having a date for surgery before my sick pay runs out."*

Of those who mentioned **family and friends**, most respondents talked about how it would help to see them, and also having a clear idea about when this would be.

- *"Knowing when I can see my child as she is with other family members due to work commitments."*
- *"Being able to see my mum and dad, as worrying all the time about what if!"*
- *"Being able to see my parents and getting a respite from being the sole provider, working from home, doing everyone's shopping (including my parents) and looking after a teenager whose GCSE's have been cancelled, her summer taken away and a very emotional 7-year-old. I just want to be able to see my parents and for my children to see my parents."*

Just over 10% of respondents talked about **support from the community** and from the **workplace.** Regarding the community respondents talked about how they are accessing this already, and some how they would like more support, and in the workplace, comments primarily focussed on how they would like more support:

- *"I live in Elton with a very supportive community. I have food delivered weekly from Port Shops which I am very thankful for."*
- *"More social contact with people in the community."*
- *"I have been self-isolating. It would have been good to have had some advice about obtaining essential supplies."*
- *"The support from my local community is brilliant."*
- *"Support from work colleagues - sometimes feel a bit remote."*
- *"Better support and clearer guidance from my employer. Same from the government."*
- *"Less work load in the care sector and more support."*

People also talked about how important **exercise** has been to them, how they have found alternative ways to exercise, but also their desire for more facilities to be opened:

- *"Access to a gym as struggle with the motivation of going for a run."*
- *"The opening of public parks and waters has enabled me to exercise."*
- *"Daily workouts and walks."*
- *"If the local leisure centre would allow people to have a lane swim, maybe 20 minutes each lane, this could easily be done by brio leisure and safe, there are 6 lanes."*

What has had the most positive effect on your mental health and wellbeing during this period?

Cheshire East

We asked what had had a positive effect on people's mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic lockdown; there were 436 responses to this question in Cheshire East.

Once these comments had been grouped into themes, it was clear that half of the people found **exercise** to be helpful:

- *"I've had much more opportunity to exercise and have been doing 4 online HIIT sessions per week plus started cycling to work. I also walk a couple of times a week."*
- *"Exercise, slower pace, less traffic on roads making it safer to cycle."*
- *"The weather has helped to encourage me outside to take more walks than I have done in the past - I feel fitter."*
- *"Getting out for walks every day with my daughter sometimes in her wheelchair and sometimes on foot if not too far."*
- *"Quieter roads for exercise, be great if Cheshire East could be proactive in supporting safe walking and cycling post-lockdown as Grant Shapps detailed."*
- *"Being able to exercise - I have improved running time and speed."*
- *"I am walking 5km almost every day so I think my fitness is slowly improving! My challenge to myself is to continue this after lockdown!"*
- *"More online exercise, no tense timetable to keep to, more time for family."*

A slightly smaller number, 48% of respondents found keeping in touch with **family and friends** had a positive effect:

- *"Keeping in touch with family and friends. Knowing how much they care."*
- *"Exercise, family and friends contact especially Zoom meetings as it is delightful to 'see' people that I miss so much."*
- *"Having someone else in the household (husband) to talk through the issues of Covid. Being able to keep in touch with friends and family."*
- *"Family, friends and trying to keep mentally and physically busy."*
- *"Spending time doing all sorts at home with my family. I love it. Whenever are we going to get the opportunity again? Facetime with friends and family is also fun."*

A variety of **hobbies** were mentioned by 32% of respondents as helpful occupations during lockdown:

- *"Walking, gardening, interior decoration, reading, films, boxsets."*
- *"Exercising and baking, decluttered the house and painted from top to bottom."*
- *"Nothing except my pets."*
- *"Exercise, yoga, mindfulness, keeping in touch with friends and family, reading, gardening, walking, TV."*
- *"Relaxation like watching my favourite films. Chatting online with friends and family. Doing things I enjoy most like mixing music on my laptop using DJ software. Managed to prepare my college tasks and joined the Zoom conversation with my classmates and did my presentation."*
- *"Eating. getting stuck into crafts and DIY."*
- *"Began to learn new language through an app."*
- *"Going to my allotment."*

- *"Reading, meditation, relaxation, gardening."*
- *"I listen to music, read a lot, watch the wildlife in the garden, I'm growing things from seed, cooking a lot… I'm not bored, lonely or over-anxious about the pandemic."*

People used **IT** in many ways to assist in their wellbeing during lockdown. From keeping in touch, to relaxing and exercising, 28% of respondents found it useful:

- *"Data. Social media. Zoom meetings and zoom socialising. TV stuff from isolating celebs - all in this."*
- *"Social media local civic 19 group is very good and positive."*
- *"Seeing family and doing activities with them on video meetings."*
- *"Audible - when you have screen fatigue, it nice to listen and relax."*
- *"Online music resources."*
- *"My gym teacher is doing exercise classes via Zoom and Facebook which has been a lifesaver and supports a positive mood."*
- *"Our street has been doing virtual quizzes and we have a WhatsApp group."*
- *"Using Headspace app."*

Being outdoors was felt to be important to the wellbeing of 10% of respondents:

- *"Sunshine, warm weather, light nights, bike rides."*
- *"Picnics!"*
- *"And now I can go out - getting fresh air."*
- *"Exercise!! Getting out in our beautiful surroundings."*
- *"I live on the edge of open country and have accessed it more than usual. Wildlife and the natural world are important to me both of which I have connected with to a greater extent during the emergency."*
- *"Being in the garden and taking (careful)walks during this beautiful weather, but if I couldn't do this, I would soon feel very depressed."*
- *"Family. Pottering around in the garden."*
- *"We have always loved the outdoors and nature, but appreciated it even more lately. My daily walks (with my dog) are 100% the best bit of my day."*

Being at home - Having enforced time at home helped 8% of respondents, giving them time away from regular responsibilities or activities and making them feel safe:

- *"I am a loner by nature, so not feeling I have to go out and socialise has been bliss for me."*
- *"I have enjoyed the peace and quiet and time to myself with no pressure to be anywhere or do anything."*
- *"Being able to stay in and protect myself and limiting contact during the peak."*
- *"Gardening, doing jobs around the house that we never have time to do."*
- *"Being at home, going for a walk each day and doing the garden. Shows how crap going to work is and how much pollution and traffic issues we have."*
- *"Not having to deal/interact with other humans during lockdown has been wonderful! I have never felt so happy and relaxed."*
- *"Having time at home has been very positive."*

The opportunity to **work from home** was commented on favourably by 3% of respondents as they were relieved of the stress of commuting and had more time to connect with their surroundings:

- *"Working from home, getting out for a daily walk, spending more time with immediate family."*
- *"Exercise, cooking embroidery, dance classes on-line, learning Italian and working from home."*
- *"Working from home means that I don't have a lengthy commute in my car every day, this has definitely lowered my stress."*
- *"I am less tired as working from home - normally I would be doing a lot of travelling. I am eating better but I am not sleeping as well."*
- *"Daily walk or run. Keeping in touch with family and friends by phone and Skype. Working at home - opportunity to have break with drink in the garden. Enjoying seeing the garden change - do not usually have time except weekends to notice. Happy it is Springtime when plenty to look at in gardens."*

The opportunity to chat to or support **neighbours** was appreciated by 3% of respondents:

- *"Exercise, limiting social media and news, taking time to connect more with neighbours, cooking, volunteering, getting enough sleep."*
- *"Neighbourhood spirit, social media."*
- *"Our neighbours have let us keep their dog until lockdown is over."*
- *"Exercise, gardening and sunshine. Better relationships with neighbours."*

Volunteering activities such as sewing scrubs and delivering food parcels, was important to 3% of people responding to this survey:

- *"Volunteering for Cheshire East. Looking after the shopping and medication needs of 12 families who were shielding."*
- *"Community have offered help through We Are Knutsford which is great and I have volunteered as a befriender."*
- *"Helping others. We've provided a food parcel delivery service. I've volunteered through the Cheshire East People Helping People initiative."*

Religion. People also talked about their faith and the value of prayer:

- *"My faith group - Quakers - has been the most positive. We hold Meetings for Worship on Sundays, discussion sessions mid-week, committee meetings, etc via Zoom."*
- *"Prayer."*
- *"Exercise - daily walks, planning daytime routine, gardening, contact with family and friends online/phone and on doorstep (2m distancing), online church services, humour on social media, good news about positive people, contacting friends who need extra support."*

Cheshire West and Chester

In Cheshire West and Chester there were 462 respondents to this question.

The importance of keeping in touch with **family and friends** was seen to be key with 53% of respondents including this whether it be socially distanced contact, conversations by phone or using some other form of technology. Others appreciated extra quality time with their immediate family:

- *"I have had some very low moments but my family send me pictures of my grandchildren, FaceTime me and have visited out in the garden, I was inside."*
- *"Being with my family and allowing me time to recognise what's important in my life."*
- *"Dinner with my partner each evening (we both live and work alone in our respective homes)."*
- *"Contact with people who I have lost touch with."*
- *"My husband, we still enjoy each other's company after 40 years."*

Some respondents commented on the value of contact from **outside agencies and carers**:

- *"Getting safe and well calls from Dial West Cheshire, speaking to my family and friends."*
- *"The Neurotherapy Centre Saltney, The Brain Charity, Liverpool."*
- *"My garden kept me sane plus my PA and phone calls from friends."*

A further 49% of respondents said that **exercise** had helped them:

- *"Accessing Chatter Chairs daily."*
- *"Walking at least a mile after lunch each day."*
- *"Daily exercise especially daily sessions with 'PE with Joe Wicks'. This has kept me focused."*
- *"Able to do Pilates on Zoom."*
- *"Exercise and time in the fresh air - walking the dog, gardening, cycling instead of driving while the roads were quiet and safe enough to do so."*
- *"I have been completing online exercise classes from Brio, which I have found very beneficial."*
- *"Doing my Tai Chi classes online with my instructor."*
- *"Walking the dog instead of commuting."*
- *"Yoga definitely and getting out riding our bikes in the country lanes and enjoying the peace and imagining we are on holiday."*

34% of people found that **hobbies** helped them to cope, some developing previously held interests, many taking on new skills.

- *"The dog! Cooking and eating together. 'Dressing for dinner' weekly. TV films etc."*
- *"Reading, family history and the jobs I never found time for!"*
- *"I have also used crafts to help my mental state."*
- *"Learning to fish with my husband since things released."*
- *"Exercise, cooking, gardening - and I've taken on an allotment."*
- *"Husband has learnt to cook at 65!"*
- *"The sun, gardening, knitting, cooking, my dog, being able to go for a drive and see the countryside. Flowers, birds, the list goes on."*
- *"Ignoring the news; home hobbies (crafting etc); staying the eff out of the kitchen."*
- *"Being in the back garden. Growing things."*
- *"Daily walk, art projects, keeping house and garden clean and tidy. Looking after my chickens. Regular FaceTiming with family, lots of phone chats."*

The **use of IT** to keep in touch with family, friends and colleagues, to exercise, study, sing, watch theatre and pray was evident with 24% citing it as a positive asset to their wellbeing. The use of apps to stay focussed on diet, exercise and relaxation was also popular.

- *"Online meet-ups with community choir Hip & Harmony and with friends."*
- *"Skype calls with my husband's family and our son in China."*
- *"Having Facetime with family and contact with friends. Doing family quizzes and virtual bake-offs."*
- *"My mum using FaceTime more."*
- *"Time to continue study remotely and keep in contact via technology."*
- *"Local WhatsApp group has been good."*
- *"Access to online activities via apps such as 'Headspace' and '30-day fitness'. Also completing yoga sessions online. Contact with family and friends via video calls and completing quizzes etc with them."*

A lesser number stated that they found their wellbeing was improved by keeping away from social media.

Being outside, enjoying fresh air, connecting with nature and being able to access the countryside were helpful factors for 10% of respondents:

- *"I'm loving sitting in my garden watching the nesting birds bringing their fledglings out. Also have been distracting myself with internet, TV etc."*
- *"Working from home I have access to my garden for breaks."*
- *"Dog walking, getting out of the house walking. It would have been so much harder during the winter."*
- *"I feel very grateful to have a small backyard where I grow flowers and can sit in the good weather."*
- *"Exercise and access to open spaces."*
- *"Gardening, fresh air and keeping in touch with friends."*
- *"Positive thoughts that the environment is having a break from all our pollution and destruction."*
- *"Being able to drive to exercise in new locations has made a big difference."*

A further 5% of respondents enjoyed various aspects of **being at home**:

- *"Having a quiet time without folk mithering me!"*
- *"Being able to stop rushing and relax."*
- *"Not having to commute to work - life is at a slower pace which is refreshing."*
- *"Lots of time for exercise. No need for petrol so saved money. Been able to decorate the house and garden. Lots of baking."*
- *"Spending quality time in the home with close family."*
- *"Less stressed due to the extra time I have, much more relaxed now as not rushing around to fit work and everything in."*

Respondents commenting on **working from home** amounted to 6%. These concentrated on the positive benefits:

- *"Being with family. Working from home, less stress. Good work home life balance. Able to spend time helping children with school work."*
- *"I have enjoyed working from home in a safe environment."*
- *"Exercise, good family support, good weather! Being able to work from home has helped with keeping structure to my days."*
- *"Exercise. Fresh air. Laying on the lawn. Playing with my cats. Weeding the garden. Being able to do my day job entirely from home."*
- *"Keeping in touch with family and friends via landline, WhatsApp and video calls. Working from home has had a very positive effect on my mental health."*

Volunteering was also seen as a positive pastime for 2% of respondents:

- *"I've been sewing scrubs for the NHS which has given me positivity."*
- *"Delivering veg boxes for a charity."*
- *"Exercise and volunteer in nature area."*

Another 2% of respondents found their **faith** to be supportive:

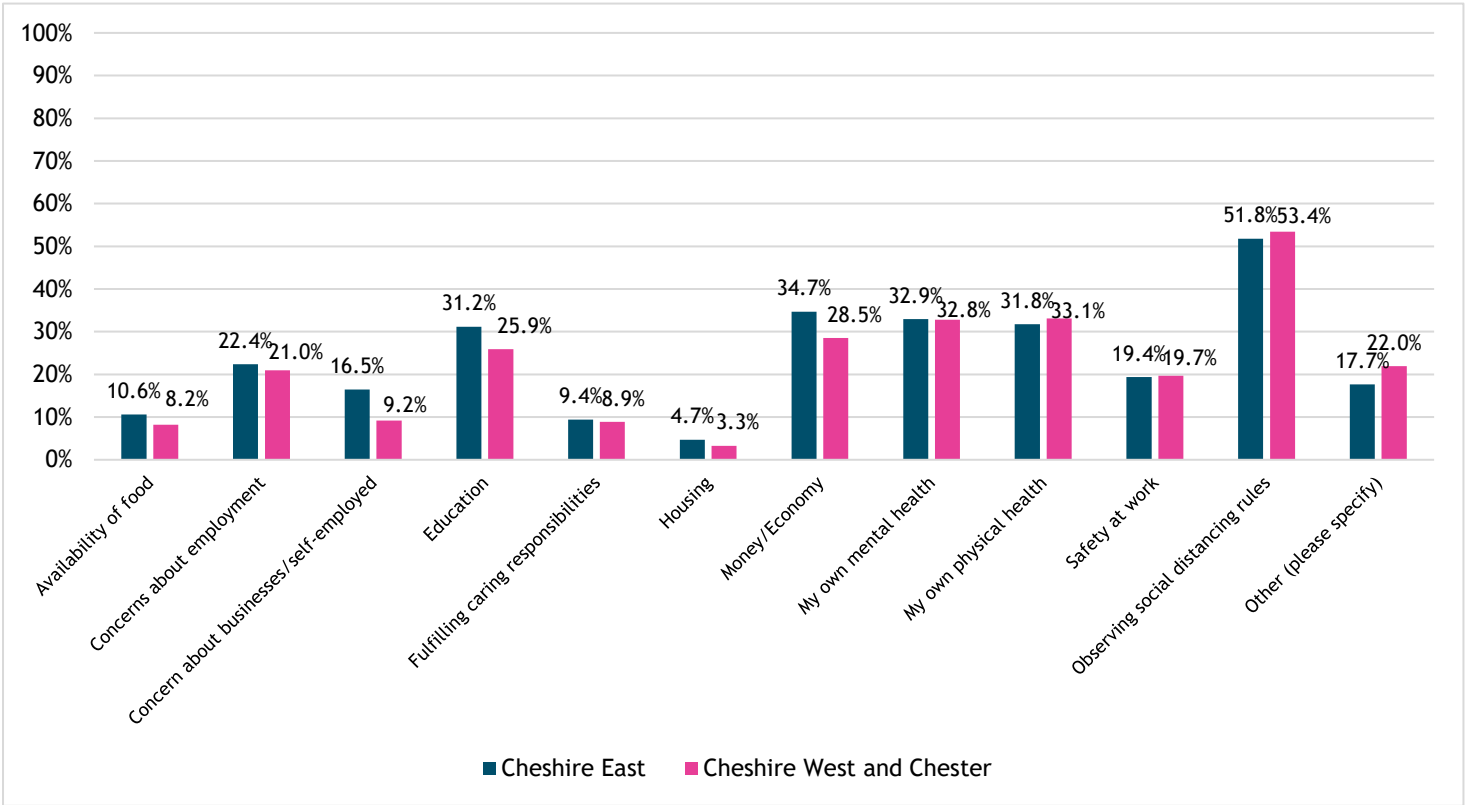
- *"Exercise, family, friends, church, prayer, Bible study, keeping busy (working from home)."*
- *"Daily walk. Family mealtimes and healthy food. Being part of a caring faith community. Creative activities and gardening."*

Neighbours and the support they gave were seen as important by 1.5% of people:

- *"Clean air, lovely vibrant trees, hearing nature at 4am in the morning singing so loud, no foggy fumes, my Asthma has been considerably better, not hearing loud traffic noises day in day out, comradeship between neighbours outstanding."*
- *"My neighbour calls me each day."*
- *"More early morning walks/telephone and video calls with friends and family/ revamping the garden (and don't my knees know it!) and the neighbours who have all been very helpful to me and to each other."*
- *"One of the key things is the way my neighbourhood has responded and pulled together looking after each other. Which I feel/hope will continue."*

Do you have any concerns about the future impact of the pandemic?

We asked respondents to tell us if they had any concerns for the future as a result of the pandemic. 475 people responded to this question, 170 people from Cheshire East and 305 people from Cheshire West and Chester



	Cheshire East	Cheshire West & Chester	Total
Availability of food	18 (10.6%)	25 (8.2%)	43 (9%)
Concerns about employment	38 (22.3%)	64 (21.0%)	102 (21.5%)
Concerns about businesses/self employed	28 (16.5%)	28 (9.2%)	56 (11.8%)
Education	53 (31.2%)	79 (26.0%)	132 (27.8%)
Fulfilling caring responsibilities	16 (9.4%)	27 (8.8%)	43 (9.0%)
Housing	8 (4.7%)	10 (3.3%)	18 (3.8%)
Money/economy	59 (34.7%)	87 (28.5%)	146 (30.8%)
My own mental health	56 (32.9%)	100 (32.8%)	156 (32.8%)
My own physical health	54 (31.8%)	101 (33.1%)	155 (32.6%)
Safety at work	33 (19.4%)	60 (19.7%)	93 (19.6%)
Observing social distancing rules	88 (51.8%)	163 (53.4%)	251 (52.8%)
Travelling on public transport	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0.0%)
Other	30 (17.6%)	67 (22%)	97 (20.4%)

Over half of respondents to this question across both areas stated that they had concerns about people observing social distancing rules. Aside from this, the top 4 concerns related to mental and physical health, money and the economy, and education.

Other responses included comments relating to the disruption of future holiday plans, the impact upon accessibility of services and the impact upon children's health.

We asked survey respondents if they had any other comments about how the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic is impacting upon their life and what kind of support they might need.

Cheshire East

The responses were grouped into themes and it showed that 115 people were generally **coping well**:

- *"No as to be honest it hasn't affected me that much."*
- *"It has drastically improved my life."*
- *"No, I don't need any support."*
- *"I am lucky in that I am healthy, have an income and means of communication."*
- *"I do not need any support, sorry, but I am rather independent, and since being retired the only difference I have noticed is not being able to go to town for a coffee with friends on a Friday and Saturday. But so what I have got facetime and Zoom!"*
- *"I don't need anything but I'm sure there are people who do and I hope they can get help quickly."*

The theme of **stress and anxiety** was common for 45 respondents:

- *"I am worried that things will turn worse in the winter when there is long dark nights and more isolation. Also worried that there will be food shortages."*

- *"It's been sad not being able to see my daughter who lives 40 miles away and I'm worried that it might stay like this for a long time."*
- *"I am nervous of being near to people e.g. online food delivery. I don't know when I will feel ok to leave my house and go for a walk."*
- *"I have no motivation, I can't concentrate on anything. Not even TV. Can't sleep. Can't visualise any required support. We're all in same boat. I'm concerned that I am now becoming too frightened to ever go out again."*
- *"Nothing to look forward to. All plans cancelled. Worried about my elderly mum's mental health. Worried about my adult daughter's mental health. The long term and short impact on society and individuals."*

35 comments were made about the **national guidance** provided by the government over the course of Covid-19:

- *"Autistic people need clear rules and Government has not been clear."*
- *"I just need to go away from here honestly! The handling of this pandemic has been an inconsistent disaster!"*
- *"Guidance given needs to be more prescriptive. Some that has come directly from the government has been too vague and people have interpreted the guidance to suit their own needs. Police should also have been given more powers to fine and imprison those who purposefully ignore the rules."*
- *"Clear information as lockdown is eased rather than uncertainty."*
- *"More honesty from the government- face masks - surely logically they will reduce the spread? To me it's the lack of PPE in general therefore the government will not admit the benefits. Government needs to prioritise health and wellbeing not money when moving forward - the latest announcement was all economic which will lead to a decline in wellbeing - people need to see their families - the government has not considered families who have family members shielding."*

A similar number of respondents left comments about their **family and friends:**

- *"I am also joint carer for my Mum in London and have limited contact with her at this time due to her hearing impairment. I feel sad not knowing when she will be able to see me and my siblings."*
- *"Not knowing whether I have had Covid-19, or whether anyone else in the family has had it is a big issue. My husband is shielding himself due to various health issues. He is working from home and cannot return until vaccine or similar available. This has a huge effect on what employment my daughter can apply for."*
- *"Uncertainty as to whether any baby groups will be re-established whilst I am on maternity leave and how we will get baby socialised with others before having to leave her at nursery/with family when return to work."*

17 respondents commented on feeling like they have needed more **support from work** across the course of Covid-19:

- *"NHS to offer more support to those NHS staff who have lost work due to crisis."*
- *"I just would like my employer to help me with flexible working (I am working from home), this would give me a break as fulltime work and the additional caring is really hard. I know others have troubles too."*

- *"The only other comments I wish to make are on behalf of my Mum who is a Care Home Manager for a Residential Care Home for the elderly. There has been little to no support from the local authority or the NHS. No guidance on policies and procedures for lock down etc. She has been expected to continue to take Residents in. It is the Care Homes that are struggling most and I feel more can be done for Care Homes."*
- *"Working from home but no motivation, hard to carry on as normal when it isn't."*
- *"I had symptoms of covid-19 infected from work, not happy that they did not want to test me, which then changed later due to media pressure, now I have doubt and uncertainty, don't like the way my trust handled the situation."*

A similar number of respondents told us that they were **missing socialising:**

- *"I'm retired and it's just stopped me socialising and going places. I'm just waiting for places to open again so I can go out more."*
- *"I worry I can't go back to work or socialise like before until there's a vaccine or potentially till we hit herd immunity. And that could be a long time."*
- *"I miss my family so much. I don't want the isolation to go on for too long, it's scary when you don't know what will happen."*
- *"My main concern is surrounding my elderly mum who is 82 and self-isolating - I have been providing for her needs but self-isolation for an 82-year-old is challenging and she has found not being able to go out and do her usual activities very difficult."*

Another theme that 14 of respondents commented on was the **behaviour of others:**

- *"It annoys me that some people don't think it will affect them."*
- *"I just wish that our society would exercise some common sense and if they did we may not need to brace ourselves for round 2 of this horrific disease."*
- *"I am concerned how my life can be impacted by those not following government rules/guidelines."*
- *"The impact is I keep away from people, I am concerned there are many in supermarkets who seem totally ignorant of the 2 m rule. It requires reinforcing. As an asthmatic I need to be careful and I cannot get online delivery slots."*

9 comments were left around individuals experiences of **shopping** throughout Covid-19 pandemic:

- *"Have high level of anxiety about shopping without support."*
- *"My wife and I are strictly self-isolating. My only concern is the weekly lottery of trying to get a supermarket delivery slot - but we have managed so far."*
- *"Supermarket deliveries has been difficult, as I don't yet want to visit shops in person, but we have managed and not gone short of anything so far."*
- *"My community volunteer has literally been my lifeline, delivering my mail and doing my shopping. No other support is needed at this time thank you."*

Other comments related to **education, exercise** and comments that didn't fall into a particular theme were:

- *"Safer spaces for walking and cycling please. the government wants it and while major cities throw up extra pavements and close entire zones to traffic, in Crewe and Nantwich we have nothing."*
- *"I have a slight concern about children returning to school at the start of June and the risk of them catching covid-19 with them mixing with possibly vulnerable teachers and children, then them fetching the virus back into the family home. I would prefer a vaccine or testing for all (anti-body) to be available before the return to school, so the balance of risks can be fully assessed. I do not feel the importance of exam results over the next school year are that important when the current GCSE results this year will be based on the current grades/levels etc."*
- *"Unhappy that Disley has been left without face to face access to a doctor or nurse."*
- *"Inability to free run my guide dog."*
- *"I might need to talk to a physiotherapist at some point - sore neck and shoulders."*

Cheshire West and Chester

The responses were grouped into themes and it was evident that for the most part people were generally **coping well**:

- *"Not at this time. I am fortunate that my husband and I are healthy and take regular exercise. My husband is a retired scientist and is very good at being factual and putting things in context. We are believers in personal responsibility."*
- *"No I'll look after myself and those dear to me I just wish I'd been given this information on 23rd March."*
- *"No support needed. Impacting generally positively on life."*
- *"I realise that my age 73 means I'm in this for the long haul but so far reckon I'm managing OK and even better recently."*
- *"No, I have been lucky and have not been impacted directly by the pandemic (no friends or relatives have been infected yet)."*
- *"Lucky enough being retired and financially secure to be little impacted apart from travel restrictions to overseas family."*

A slightly smaller number, 48 respondents found that they were experiencing some **stress and anxiety** relating to the impact of Covid-19:

- *"I'm becoming a bit institutionalised in my own home (shielding) and feel I've lost confidence to drive and go out when it's safe."*
- *"I have a fear of going out and battle each week with going food shopping. My fear is ending up needing anti-depressants."*
- *"Anxiety about when I can eventually go out."*
- *"The pandemic worries me a great deal. I mostly worry a lot about mine and my partner's health."*
- *"I am getting to the point where I may seek mental health support."*
- *"My partner is ex-army disabled with other illnesses and I have a couple of underlying conditions, but any of these don't qualify separately in the extremely*

high-risk category, our doctor has said he thinks my partner should be in the top-level group but unfortunately isn't according to the rules."

- *"Worried what will happen to those of us who are social shielding once lockdown restrictions are relaxed."*

33 comments were made about the **national guidance** provided by the government over the course of Covid-19:

- *"Consistent approach in England and Wales as I live close to the border."*
- *"I think rules need to be clearer many people are now just disregarding the rules I find it very scary when people make no effort at all to socially distance themselves. The rules are not clear."*
- *"I think the younger children need support and we need guidance on relaying information to them. How do we support them to understand that the 'rules' are changing when they don't make sense. You can go to nursery but can't see Grandma..."*
- *"As a mixed ethnicity individual, I've experienced a lot of confusion over my risk rating. Particularly as I work for the NHS, I was redeployed to a ward, then told 1.5 weeks later that shouldn't have happened and to not go on the ward again. A lot of my older relatives ideally need shopping delivered, one is recovering from a knee replacement and the other is 98 and has long term memory problems from a stroke. However, because they are not counted as shielded, they cannot get things delivered to them. Instead other family members have to do this, the majority of which work for the NHS, thus increasing their risk. Can't win in this situation."*

A common theme from respondents was 35 comments about their **friends and family.**

- *"Not being able to visit grandchildren because can't stay overnight."*
- *"I'm concerned that if there's a second wave it will hit around the time my baby is due and this will again isolate us from any family visits and their invaluable support."*
- *"Only restriction causing concern is lack of travel to visit family and friends but still in contact via video calls and other technology."*
- *"Other than see friends and family which is not possible at the moment I cannot think of anything else."*
- *"Visits to our 4 children and 8 grandchildren (in London, Bournemouth, Manchester and Newcastle-upon-Tyne) stopped. Long planned holidays in France, Italy and UK stopped. Little can be done. Given we are 73 and 74 years old, loss of 2 years of our remaining life is significant proportion..."*

16 respondents made comments relating to **missing socialising** over the course of Covid-19:

- *"I am terrified that people will be very used to life without me and my family - people will move on - I feel so isolated."*
- *"The limitations on socialising has been difficult to adjust to, may need re-educating on how to manage this once lockdown is lifted."*

- *"I understand the need for isolation, but I have lived in this area for less than a year and was just beginning to develop a social circle. This has mostly disappeared, contributing to loneliness and feelings of helplessness."*
- *"Feel a bit socially isolated but I don't need any support."*
- *"Unable to go to groups, meetings and church."*

A theme that was prominent was the concern for the **behaviour from others.** 12 comments were left relating to this theme:

- *"No one is social distancing outside the chip shop in Parkgate, people sitting all along the wall not distancing. The Elephant selling alcohol in Parkgate and people sat again along the wall not distancing and drinking."*
- *"The general public need to wise up and stop being arrogant, ignorant and selfish and support the NHS by acting responsibly and do social distancing, stop bloody socialising. Can't see that happening if 40,000 deaths hasn't proved it. And Boris starts to act like a leader of the country in a crisis instead of a babbling confused idiot."*
- *"I just want everybody to listen and obey the rules needed so we can all go back to normal."*
- *"Lockdown should have started earlier and been stricter as too many have ignored it and clearer concise information should have been given even more so after the government's speech last night as this will only get worse as it was too confusing."*
- *"To go back to work I need to use public transport but I don't trust other users to observe social distancing."*

12 respondents suggested that they needed more **support from work** during the course of Covid-19:

- *"Working in care has been incredibly difficult with very little support apart from the office team."*
- *"Senior management communication has not been good."*
- *"I just would like to feel safe enough to return to work."*
- *"Greater understanding from an employment perspective about the needs parents may have to safeguard their children and keep them safe during the pandemic. There needs to be a more sympathetic approach to balancing working/family commitments, recognising that we are all doing our best."*

Other comments were made about the respondents' experience or support provided for **shopping**:

- *"It took me a long while to get a supermarket slot despite my being in the top most at risk! Now I have one I will stay on online delivery to safeguard myself."*
- *"I had one 30 second call from shielding people support, just asked if I had groceries, I said I was having difficulties getting them, he said ok as long as you have some. goodbye."*
- *"Having to rely on a volunteer to do a weekly shop has proved difficult, trying to include all we could need. Being unable to get on to a supermarket shopping list, even though we are 3 vulnerable people and I have shopped with them for years."*

- *"We were told at the beginning after my Husband received the Govt letter that we would get priority for shopping online. This didn't happen and it was very very stressful. For 3 weeks we struggled with little shopping. I will never do online shopping again once I'm allowed out."*
- *"I am not receiving adequate support in accessing supermarket yet I am on the shielding register."*

A smaller number of respondents commented on issues with **education:**

- *"As key workers our children have not had the benefit of having a parent at home to home school. Our youngest has been in school as childcare, no work was done with her I feel she has been let down by the system. I have worked in the hospital caring for sick people and my child has received no education for 4 months. I feel completely let down by some of the decisions made."*
- *"Having a lack of control over my child's safety and choice about sending into school or not has caused tensions and psychological issues for all involved."*
- *"Struggling with son with SEN who should have been taking GCSEs - no work or activities given by school at all."*
- *"Afraid of going back to school it will be difficult, getting used to a new normal, transition and change to new routines, will need a very patient and caring school to help with this."*
- *"Availability to look at schools we have got to make a choice about this autumn is my only concern."*

33 **Other** comments were made that didn't fall into a particular theme:

- *"I just need hospital operations and appointments to be reinstated."*
- *"I would like to have an antibody test if this was available on NHS."*
- *"Financial support."*
- *"It is making me realise that life will probably change for a long time."*
- *"My mobility has been affected due to lack of spine treatment. Therefore, may need physiotherapy again after treatment has restarted to help with this."*

Conclusion

The main theme running through the survey findings is the importance of family and friends to people's overall mental wellbeing. People reported missing others and how the use of technology has played an important role in connecting with others.

Over half of all respondents to the survey said that they did not need to seek any additional support for their mental health, suggesting resilience and self-management. Many people commented on the benefits that lockdown has had, being able to exercise more regularly and enjoy the outdoors. However, for others there has been a fluctuation in their mental health over the course of the survey and lockdown, although overall reports of negative impacts to mental health has declined over time. This could in part be due to the gradual easing of lockdown, as people have been able to see more of family and friends and resume normality in some areas of their lives.

People also talked about their frustrations with regards to messaging, and in particular in relation to national messages from the government. This ties in with people's concerns regarding observing of the rules, in particular in relation to social distancing and PPE. As the survey progresses and lockdown measures change it will be useful to see if respondents mentioning of social distancing and other rules around the pandemic become more commonplace.

The importance of exercise to respondents has been a thread throughout the survey, with many talking about how regular exercise has played an important part during lockdown but also how much people have missed not being able to access leisure facilities. Again, it will be useful to see with later analysis if exercise is still playing an important role in people's mental health, particularly as people return to workplaces and a more 'normal' way of life.

Technology has also had significant mention throughout the analysis of the survey. It has played an important role in keeping people connected with family and friends, but also in connecting communities, and through online sports programmes and also mental health support.

Although many respondents feel that they have coped well throughout the pandemic, many have also voiced concerns about the future, in particular mentioning a concern about others not observing social distancing rules, and more generally worries about education, the economy and their mental and physical health. People told us more about struggling with stress and anxiety which was a common thread when talking about the impact of the pandemic. As the survey progresses it will be useful to see how people's view of the future impact may change.

The survey is ongoing and people are continuously providing information that we are able to regularly feed back to partners. We can see from our responses so far that there is still more work to do in making sure that our survey respondents represent the full diversity of the people of Cheshire. We will work together with partners, including individual Care Communities, to ensure that as wide a range of people as possible have the opportunity to respond to the survey.