

The impact of COVID-19 on older people's physical and mental health: third wave research findings

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Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on older people's health and lives: Wave Three

- **Online survey promoted through Age UK networks (September 2021)**
 - 17,095 responders (1,749 answering on behalf of another person)
 - 75,906 individual free text responses
 - 51% aged 75+
 - 75% reported at least one long term condition (68% more than one)
- **Representative online poll older people (Kantar, September 2021)**
 - All respondents aged 60+ with 16% 75+
 - 52% female; 38% from more disadvantaged groups
 - 13.6% from Black Asian Minority Ethnic communities
 - 37% reported at least one long term condition
 - 28% providing care (significantly more women and people aged 60-69)



Survey Questions

Accessing NHS services

Physical health - reasons for change

What could improve physical health?

Mental health - reasons for change

What could improve mental health?

Accessing treatment or services for Long COVID

Experiences re: social care needs

Experiences re: providing care

Accessing carers support services

How has pandemic affected you?

Thoughts about the future



Polling Questions

**Experiences of
caring**

**Activities of daily
living**

**Confidence in
abilities and health**

**Mental health and
wellbeing**

**Accessing NHS and
other services**

**Confidence in seeing
people and
accessing services**

**Relationships with
friends and family**

Loneliness

**Access to help from
others**

**Views related to
winter**

**Views on flu and
COVID booster
vaccinations**



Physical health - reasons for change

Also having **Covid or Long Covid** caused health to worsen

Less physically active -
made conditions and
mobility worse
**23% less fit; 28% less
walking; 20% less steady**

Shielding
causing
deterioration
**21%
shielding**

Lost confidence
going out
**33% more
anxious**
**7% confidence
will decrease**

Lost
independence

Consequences of restrictions

Dementia
worsened in
lockdowns

Waiting for
appointments
and surgery
35% & 27%

Unmanaged pain
23%

Reduced access to NHS services

Not able to
see GP
45%

Lost
motivation
**34% less
motivated;**
**35% less
energy**

Caring for
partner more in
lockdowns

Isolation and
lack of contact

Technology
making
access
difficult

Not had usual
appointments to
manage condition
**37% LTHC – 36%
affects ADLs**

Bereavement
and loneliness

Note: Percentages taken from representative polling

Mental health - reasons for change

Feel left behind / no one cares

Life on hold

Feeling 'locked in' / a 'prisoner'

Lack of purpose

Difficult to see a doctor / no medical help

Angry / frustrated with Government actions

Afraid and stressed **33% more anxious**

Lack / loss of activities and social contact

Not being able to see family **37% less time with; 24% less close to; 23% speak less to**

Unable to access services

COVID restrictions

Isolation due to shielding **21% shielding**

Angry about restrictions

Living alone – isolation and loneliness **41% lonely; 24% more lonely in winter**

Total isolation in care home

No support available **6% no one to ask for help**

Fear of catching COVID

Bereavement (COVID)

Memory got worse **23%**

Impact of COVID

Depressing COVID news

Loss of confidence **7% confidence decreased**

Long COVID

Anxiety about going out and socialising / crowded places **Unconfident: 46% leisure; 29% indoors; 26% religious venues**

Lack of opportunity to be physically active

Poor physical health **24% worse health**

Dementia speeded up with no contact or support

Physical health

Being in pain

Anxious about health **55% unconfident health improve**

Never depressed before pandemic

Resurgence of prior depression

Too many worries

Worries and depression

Lost interest in life / suicidal

Worries about winter

Burden of caring **28% providing care; 83% worry can continue; 49% tired; 40% anxious; 28% overwhelmed; 16% lonely**

Caring and relationships

Shorter temper

Family relationship breakdown

Financial issues

Navigating benefits system

Money worries

Covid restrictions had negative impact on physical and mental health

- Being less physically active has made mobility and health conditions worse.
- **23% older people less fit; 28% walking less; 20% less steady.**
- Many older people have lost motivation to be active and improve their physical and mental health.
- **34% older people less motivated; 35% have less energy.**
- **Carers (47%) and people living with LTCs (48%) have the lowest levels of motivation.**
- **37% spent less time with family; 24% felt less close to family; 23% spoke less to family.**
- **33% older people are more anxious; 46% not confident going to leisure facilities.**
- **23% finding it hard to remember things.** Dementia and cognition has got worse.

Impact of reduced access to NHS services

- Being unable to see a GP has had a huge impact on many older people's physical and mental health.
- **45% older people concerned about being able to access their GP; 29% better access to GPs would help them the most.**
- Older people's conditions deteriorated, and pain increased, while waiting for appointments and surgery.
- **23% older people living with more pain.**
- Having talking therapies, through properly funded mental health services, or just someone to talk to would help.
- Older people want easier access to the services that they need, with technology barriers removed.

Without the check ups I feel 10 years older.

I am just depressed because I am getting nowhere with a GP. I am a lone carer for my wife who has dementia.



The burden of caring has increased

- **83% worry about whether they can continue caring.**
- Withdrawal of support has had a huge impact on carers and on relationships.
- The majority of older carers are receiving no support at all, finding support too difficult to access and services unavailable.
- Services were stopped without explanation or alternative and now **less than 1% who need it are accessing day services, and 1% accessing respite care.**
- On almost all questions, carers were having a harder time.

I have had a lot of pressure caring for others with no support for me. I am invisible and ignored.

Looking after my terminally ill wife with no help from anyone has completely crushed me, I will never get over it.

I paid £2,200 for my husband to receive respite care. It didn't work as I was phoned on an almost daily basis complaining about his challenging behaviour.

What could improve physical health?

Easier access to services
13% need more support

Seeing a Specialist face to face

More exercise
23% harder to stay fit; 41% harder to stay active in winter

Getting out and socialising
Unconfident: 46% leisure facilities; 29% indoor venues; 26% religious venues; 13% shops

Seeing a GP face to face
29% better access to GP

Medication review

Tests / scans / treatment / operations taking place
7% better access hosp. appts; 19% harder to manage conditions

Personal actions

Resuming 'normal life'

Face to face / hands on physiotherapy
23% concerned re: access

Pain management

Empathy / care / friendly approach

Healthier eating / losing weight
4% not able to eat well

Reduced waiting times

Health and Care Services

Talking to someone / being listened to

Bereavement counselling

Psychological help

Paying for private treatment

Better communication from NHS

A keyworker, to oversee care

Encouragement / external motivation

Nothing / too late for me
55% unconfident health will improve

Good, reliable social care

Diagnosis

A holiday and sunshine

Practical help / opportunities

Help with caring

A different Government

Government actions

No more lockdowns

Help with housework
5%

Free / affordable activities (e.g. swimming)

Freedom from financial worries / able to retire



Personal and Government actions to improve physical health

- Many older people recognised that being more physically active, eating more healthily and losing weight would improve their physical health, but
- **23% finding it harder to stay fit; 41% harder to stay active in winter.**
- Getting out and socialising, resuming 'normal life' would also improve physical health, but **46% not confident in leisure facilities; 29% not confident in indoor venues.**
- Many older people felt the Government's handling of the COVID pandemic had made their health worse and that 'no more lockdowns' would improve their physical health.

Getting more exercise, which I'm trying to do. I've joined a group for a health walk weekly though I don't always get there, usually because of poor organisation on my part.

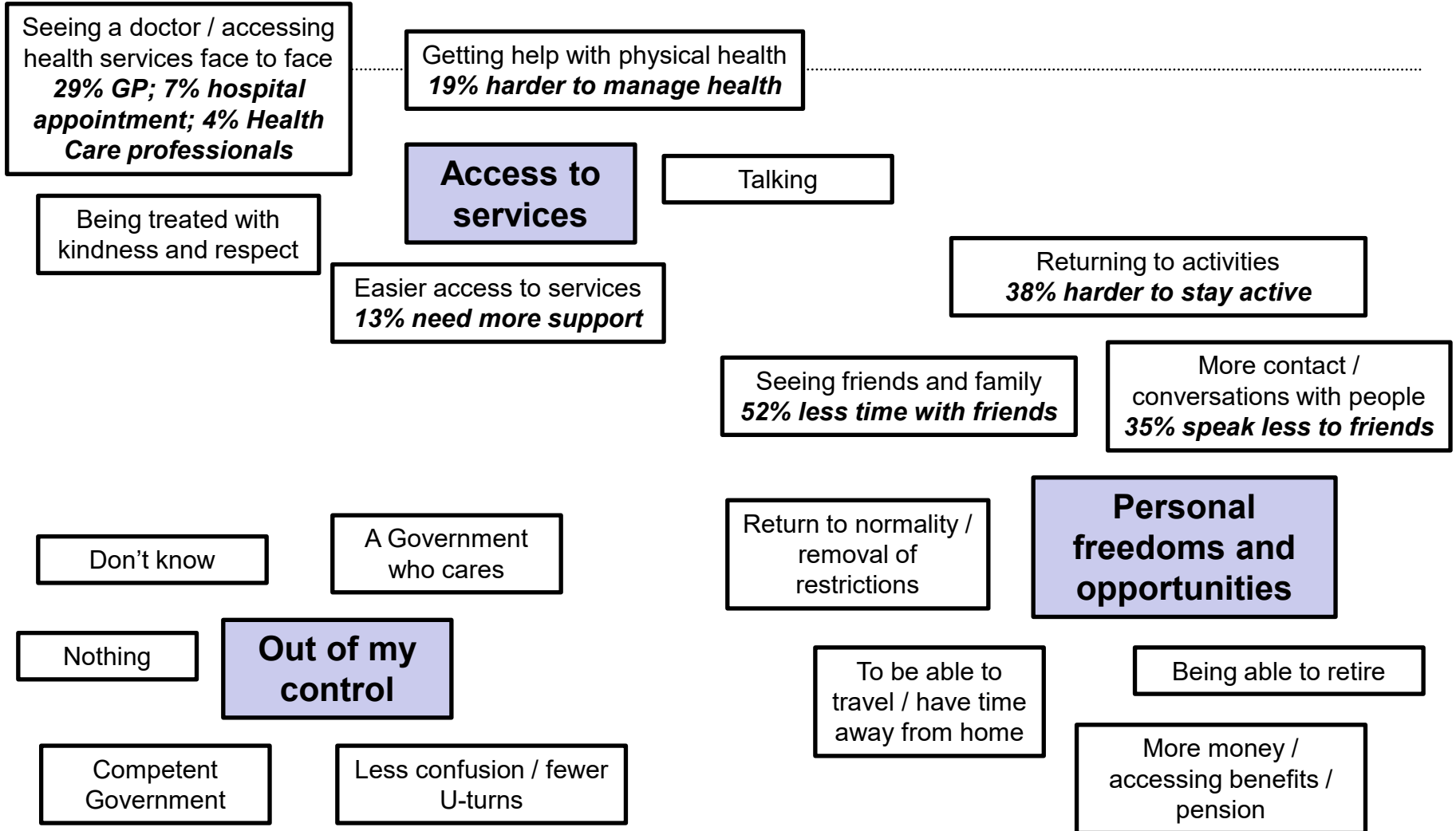
More of a social life and being able to go out and meet people. Very worried about threats of a winter lockdown which will leave me even more isolated.

Being able to return to doing things I have always done without thought of Covid.

Not having to worry about more lockdowns so I can get out more.



What could improve mental health?



Having more freedom and opportunities to be actively engaged in community life

- A return to normality and the removal of restrictions would improve many older people's mental health.
- **52% older people spent less time with their friends; 35% spoke to them less.**
- Seeing friends and family, having more contact and conversations with people would make a big difference.
- Being able to travel and spend time away from home would also help.
- Older people want to be able to return to their activities, but some have still not resumed.

Some normality and not fearing another lockdown.

Being able to comfortably mix with friends and family again.

Contact with other people outside my home and area for social activities not just medical trips out.

Being able to travel abroad safely to visit friends and family.

I need to travel to visit my family.

Activities and social interaction are only resuming slowly at the care home and are not yet at the level they were before.



Some older people have been able to stay positive, but many have not

- We heard from some older people who said their lives hadn't changed much. *No change really. Live a simple life on my own.*
- Feelings of loss - social contact, support and trust in others, 'loss of my life'. *My life had completely changed and am not confident to go back to the things that I was doing before the pandemic. Actually, I am heartbroken about it all.*
- Older people told us their lives are now totally different and have been ruined. *I feel as if I have lost 2 years of my life and my remaining time may be affected by the deterioration in my health as a result of the restrictions.*
- Loss of freedom, anxiety about catching COVID, loss of confidence, grief and anger about restrictions.



Some older people are beginning to feel more positive about the future, but many feel hopeless.

- Some older people feel their lives are starting to get back to normal.
- **32% feel their confidence will increase, looking forward.**
- Worries about catching COVID are still very real, especially for people who live alone.
- Many people told us they are scared about the future and don't see life getting any better.
- Some recognised the need to get back to normal as soon as possible, for everyone's mental health.

I am confident about going back to do things I did before the pandemic, but my motivation is not quite as high as it was before.

I feel less confident to go back to doing the things I did before as I am worried I will get ill when I am out, or because I am on my own, that if I do get ill, no one will know. I really do feel stuck and don't know what to do for the best.

For me, the future is grim, as I can't ever see us going back to the way we were.

You can't live life as a recluse and a return to an almost normal way of life has a direct link to better physical and mental health.



Thank you for listening

If you have any further questions, please contact:
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