

New action plan for Croydon's care homes based on residents, family, and staff experience

Press release: 24 June 2021 (Embargoed 23 June 2021)

- Croydon Council have defined a new action plan to support Croydon's 127 care homes based on residents, staff, and friends and family insight from first COVID lockdown.
- Most residents had a good experience and staff knew how to cope and where to get help. Many friends and family felt they could have a phone call or video with residents and felt informed by the care homes.
- Some residents felt isolated with limited social activities and no friends or family to contact them. Many staff felt they needed more mental health support and more recognition for the work they do. For some families, there was sometimes inconsistent communication.

Croydon's care home residents, as well as staff and friends and family, have shared their experiences of living under the impact of COVID-19 during the first lockdown in a report published by Healthwatch Croydon today.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, care homes had to respond to protect their residents and well as provide information for family and friends and supporting staff. Croydon Council was asked by government to coordinate and support care homes. This report, *Experience of residents, friends and family and staff in Croydon's Care Homes during COVID-19* presents an analysis of the results for four surveys that, Healthwatch Croydon undertook with 54 residents, 29 residents with learning disabilities, 94 friends and family and 179 staff of Croydon's care homes. This insight was shared with Croydon Council who have derived an action plan as a result.

These are our findings:

- **Resident experience:** 85% of residents had a good experience and 82% managed to maintain good contact with their doctor and all could get access to medication. However, many needed to adjust to the restrictions.
- **Residents with learning disabilities experience:** For residents with learning disabilities, most were happy with the way the care homes had supported them. However, living in lockdown, was less enjoyable. There here was a lack of consistency in the application of rules around social distancing. between care homes. Some residents seemed to have more freedom than others. Residents with learning disabilities found access to prescriptions to be the same but had to adapt to virtual appointments and challenging expectations and experience for some residents.
- **Staff experience:** Most staff (91%) said they were able to cope and knew where to get help. Most felt safe at work (87%) and supported by their employer (84%) and the same felt their concerns these were addressed. Most had a positive approval of their managers. However, only 73% felt current mental health and wellbeing services are supporting their needs - many wanted more help.

Staff recognition: While NHS staff are being thanked, and rewarded, care home staff felt they are not being recognised in the same way yet do as important a job.

- **Family and friends experience:** Most Friends and family (87%) felt they had enough time to speak with a family member via phone or video. There is a variance between care homes with some communicating well with emails and newsletters and some less well. Nearly all family and friends (98%) felt care homes kept them informed of their family. Most care homes published regular newsletters with details. Some respondents had received emails from the care homes with photos of their family members and friends.

- **Safety and PPE:** Most staff could access PPE, but one in five could not access a COVID test. Some felt the PPE came late, but most felt quite safe. Most family and friend (82%) could visit but a quarter were not supplied with personal protective equipment.

These are our recommendations which are reflected in the Croydon Council's action plan:

- **Support residents to transition to new ways of social contact and focus on those residents who do not have family and friendship links.** Croydon Council is supporting care homes to set up telephone and video chats between residents and volunteers (e.g., remote befriending) working with the local voluntary and community organisations and empowering people. Also support staff are to work with residents how to have difficult conversations with residents and family around feelings of loneliness and wider quality of life issues.
- **Bring consistency in approaches to allow socialisation for those with learning disabilities during lockdown periods:** Croydon Council will work with learning disabilities homes and seek out good practice to share with other homes such as safe social activities and reducing isolation during lockdowns or self-isolation.
- **Residents with learning disabilities would like to have their expectations managed concerning video and phone access with health professionals and ensure effective support:** Croydon Council will be providing ongoing support with the use of telemedicine/telehealth as a way of becoming used to technology and updated information from health professionals provided through newsletters and fortnightly webinars.
- **Develop more dedicated mental health support for all staff:** Croydon Council are working with South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust to create mental health and wellbeing offer for care home to staff to include supervision tools for

care home managers, access to therapies and support, and raising awareness of exiting mental health and wellbeing resources.

- **Look at ways that staff could be recognised more and rewarded:** Croydon Council will ensure all care home staff are paid full wages where they are required to isolate, and which be checking and engaging with homes who have allocated less for this including talking with staff. Work with the sector to encourage them to become London Living Wage providers and develop national training programme for care workers.
- **Good practice could be applied to ensure consistent and relevant communications across the care:** Croydon Council are providing access to technological and financial resources, and training to get staff used to using technology with webinars to be run with homes. Engagement and communication by care homes will be monitored and regular dialogue with care homes to better understand the barriers to communication. Training opportunities to share best practice across the sector via webinars, newsletters, and websites.
- **Maintain and enhance the current information, PPE, testing and support processes for all providers:** Croydon Council will ensure PPE will be checked as part of Care Quality Visits along with the National Capacity Tracker. Best practice to be shared at webinars and newsletters.

Gordon Kay, Healthwatch Croydon Manager, said:

“The last year has been a very challenging time for Croydon’s care homes. As a place with the largest market in London, Croydon Council had to support them in meeting a large range of new responsibilities under many changing restrictions. We have welcomed the open and positive approach they have taken enabling us to deliver this survey by inviting us to be part of the Care Homes Strategy Group. We also thank all those care homes who encouraged their residents, staff and friends and family to complete the survey and provide insight that is relevant to Croydon. We very much welcome the action plan

proposed in response to our recommendations and look forward to working with both the Council and the care homes them as the recovery of services continues.”

Councillor Janet Campbell, Cabinet member for Families, Health and Social care said:

“We are very grateful to Healthwatch for writing such a comprehensive report drawn from more than 50 Croydon care homes and detailing the feedback of residents, families and staff to give us a clear insight into the impact of Covid-19 on care homes.

“This report is very important as it provides specific feedback from our residents and care home staff and we can now look at the support we provide and consider more fully a range of concerns including staff’s mental wellbeing, how to address residents and families’ sense of isolation during lockdown and forward planning if there are restrictions in future. It has been vitally important for the council in developing an action plan with Healthwatch and partners that we can now take forward in response to the pandemic.”

Editor’s notes

Healthwatch Croydon is here to improve the experience that Croydon people have when they need to use health and social care services. We believe that the best way to do this is by listening to patients and service users.

There is a local Healthwatch in every local authority area in England.

Our role is to make sure that that local health and social care services, and the local decision makers, put the experiences of people at the heart of their care.

We are a statutory body - this means that we have a legal status to exist within the Health and Social Care Act 2012. This means decision-makers should listen to us when we give them feedback and make suggestions.

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