



Reconnect, Reset, Rebuild. Cippenham Carers

healthwatch
Slough

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Background

Healthwatch Slough partnered with Frimley Health and Care Integrated Care System (ICS) to support their engagement project- Reconnect, Reset, Rebuild. The aim of this project is to bring together people in communities across the Frimley area to spark conversations about health and wellbeing priorities. The information in this report will help Frimley ICS to identify what matters most to the residents of local care homes empowering them to better join up health and care services, to improve population health and reduce health inequalities.

Why is Frimley Heath and Care carrying out this engagement now?

Recent reports, such as the Darzi review and the recommendations from Grenfell, remind us of the urgency to listen and understand the needs of our communities. As the government's 10-year plan for the NHS takes shape, it is essential that it is rooted in and reflects the true needs of our communities. This is our chance to make it happen.

What we did

Healthwatch Slough visited Cippenham Carers Group on 15th January 2025. Cippenham Carers Group offers carers the opportunity to meet for mutual support over lunch or a hot drink. The group was valued by attendees who told us "Going to groups like Cippenham Carers is good, they give loads of information." and "This group is great for support."

We spoke to 14 attendees, conducting informal interviews and providing signposting and information.

What we heard

We asked people, what are your top priorities when receiving health and care services in your community?

GP Access and Appointment Challenges

The difficulty in accessing GP services, including long waiting times, lack of availability for appointments, and issues with online systems, is a significant concern for many.

"Being seen in a timely manner by the right person. I'm a carer for my daughter who has multiple health conditions. When I called the GP about her, they referred me to the pharmacy or to the nurse at the urgent care centre, she's under a specialist and she really needs to be seen by somebody who knows her condition. When I went to the pharmacy, they said I'm sorry I don't think we can help her."

"Biggest concern is not being able to see a GP when I have back pain, trying to see a GP is like trying to speak to the prime minister!"

Support for Carers

Carers expressed a need for more support, both in terms of practical help (e.g., carers' assessments, exercise groups) and emotional support (e.g., through local groups or services for those caring for people with mental health issues).

"Better carers assessments. I have been trying to get a carers assessment but don't know where to start as I don't have the internet. I've tried to call so many times and can't get through. You get put on hold and then I give up. After a certain amount of time, you get through to the voicemail and it says the voicemail is full. I've not managed to speak to someone yet, my phone credit is used up and I can't get anymore. I think they just assume everyone has unlimited calls and a smartphone."

"Dementia support- how to care for someone. I would like a person to speak to tell me what to expect and how to deal with things. I don't know, I've never had to do this before."

Healthcare Communication and Coordination

There were positive experiences with communication between hospital and GP noted, but there are concerns about poor communication in certain instances (e.g., when specialist care is needed but GPs are not adequately informed).

"I had good care at Wexham hospital, haematology. I experienced good communication between the hospital and GP."

Access to Information and Local Services

People want more accessible information and services, including for those who cannot use online resources, and express a need for physical locations like Citizens Advice services in the local area.

"I'm in a really difficult situation. My husband has dementia, and my social network is limited people have stopped coming to the home to see me."

I've now got a paper copy of the carers assessment form and filled it in but I'm not sure where to take it? I'm going to go into town tomorrow and just knock on doors until I can find the place."

Health and Fitness Support

There was interest in support for personal health and fitness, including finding groups for walking or chair exercises, and addressing mobility needs post-surgery or for those with long-term conditions.

"I'd like some help with my personal health and fitness. I enjoy walking and I go for short walks with my husband but would like to join a walking group, not sure where to go."

"I am looking after a person who has had a stroke. I would like to take him to some chair exercise classes. I think they would help him."

We asked people, have you experienced barriers to getting great care?

Difficulty Accessing GP Appointments and Services

Many carers and the people they are caring for reported challenges in securing timely appointments with their GP, citing issues with online systems, long wait times, and lack of in-person options. Some struggled with the transition to digital-only systems, particularly those without access to the internet or smartphones.

"There are a lot of problems with my GP. We can never get appointments. They said to go online but then it's fully booked. I found out that online appointments open at 7.30am and the phones open at 8am so if you're not online you've got no chance, have you?"

Communication Problems

There were multiple instances where communication was ineffective, such as difficulty reaching healthcare providers by phone, unclear instructions for appointment rescheduling, and lack of follow-up or response to messages. This has led to confusion and a sense of being unsupported.

"I had an ENT referral, and I couldn't make the date on the letter. I tried ringing the contact number given and couldn't get through. I tried several times. I tried lots of alternative numbers that people gave me and eventually I found a number that had an answering machine so I left a message there to say that we couldn't make the appointment. I've no idea if this was actually received by anybody because nobody got back to me. I need to make a different appointment; I just wanted an alternative, but I don't know if they think I didn't turn up and I've been struck off or if there's another appointment in the system that I'll get. There needs to be better communication."

Long Waiting Times and Delays in Care

Carers highlighted issues with long waiting times for appointments, tests, and treatments, including significant delays in referrals and specialist consultations. This also includes waiting in emergency settings like A&E.

"I was in Wexham A&E with my grandchild, we waited for 4 hours. I spoke to a lady when I was there who had been there for 12 hours to get a doctor to look at her toe. If we could get into the GP, she wouldn't have to do that."

"I have a small hernia that I've been told can't be operated on because it is not big enough, so they've given me some vitamin D tablets but now I'm finding it difficult to walk. I'm elderly and I really need to keep mobile, and I think the hernia might be causing that. I've spoken to the doctor, and they said they would refer me to Saint Marks. That was over a year ago and I've never had anything else from them, no letter or anything."

Technology Barriers

Many people expressed frustration with the reliance on digital platforms for appointments, prescriptions, and other healthcare tasks. This is especially challenging for individuals without internet access, smartphones, or the technical skills to navigate online systems.

"GP sends text messages to my husband with dementia. He only has a basic phone for calls and texts, it's not a smart phone. They put internet

links into the text, like follow this link for more information or to book. I have told them he can't do this, but they still send them. What are we supposed to do?"

"My son is living with us at the moment so he helps us to get appointments with the doctor, he's got a phone that can do that sort of thing, so he fills in the online form. We haven't got a computer, it's difficult. He'll be moving out in February so I'm not sure what we'll do then."

One carer told us that they were planning to attend a group that are supporting people to get online and use digital resources.

"I'm going to the cybercafé tomorrow in Burham, I'm hoping they will be able to get me set up on the NHS app. It would make things easier for me."

Challenges in Receiving Timely or Adequate Support

Some carers mentioned delays in receiving care or support, such as assessments for carers. This included experiences where essential services or medications were not delivered promptly, leading to stress and health concerns.

"My doctor's surgery has switched everything to online. I knew they were going to do this with appointments, but I didn't realise that it meant everything would be online. Because of this I have had problems getting my prescriptions including essential medications for my mother and daughter. It's been going on since last Month and now we are completely out of several medications that we desperately need."

"I used adult social care when my husband was alive. They didn't give us any help until he got admitted to hospital with dementia and was there for 4 Months. They sorted out a home for him after that."

We asked people what improvements they thought would have the greatest impact?

The residents identified these top 5 themes

- Improved communication
- Improved GP access and appointment availability
- Holistic approach to care
- More training for healthcare staff
- Better dementia and social care support

These findings will be shared with Frimley Health Integrated Care System to be considered alongside other feedback received as part of the Reconnect, Reset, Rebuild project and will be presented to their board for consideration. We will update the public with any actions agreed at a later date.

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