

Covid-19 - Birmingham African-Caribbean Online Health Workshop

Introduction

As part of the local approach to restoration and recovery the NHS Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG Engagement team carried out a number of targeted surveys, online workshops and focus groups to gain feedback on communities' experience of Covid-19. One of the communities the CCG wanted to work with was the African-Caribbean community, who have been disproportionately affected by Covid-19, to understand the specific issues faced by that community. In partnership with Healthwatch Birmingham we held an online workshop on the 6th July 2020. We were joined by Governing Body member of the CCG and local GP Dr Manir Aslam and members of the community.

Our Approach

We wanted to hear from the African Caribbean community about their experience of health services during the period of Covid-19 and any barriers they faced when accessing health and care services. We also wanted to explore and discuss how we might better support this community in the future and how communities could support themselves. The workshop was carried out online using Zoom software.

What we heard – a summary of feedback

- The CCG needs to listen to the views of seldom heard groups and services need to be tailored to their needs.
- Better reassurance that primary and secondary care services are safe and clean.
- Mental Health services need to be improved.
- There are health inequalities across the system, which mirror wider inequalities for this community. There is also racism in the system.
- There are issues for people who are not online accessing GP appointments.

Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG Response and next steps

Working with communities

We are exploring setting up a community leaders network/forum for West Birmingham. We are also exploring working with the Birmingham Public health team to see how we can tap into their “community champions” initiative, which will give us a two-way dialogue with grassroots community groups and seldom heard groups. We hope that this will also build trust, strengthen relationships and offer reassurance that local services are safe to use.

Mental Health Services

West Birmingham is covered by the city provision commissioned on our behalf by Birmingham and Solihull CCG. The support for any resident or registered patient can all be accessed via the 24/7 helpline (delivered by MIND) on 0121 262 3555. This gives access to all talking therapy, lower level support services (both statutory and non-statutory) and specialist mental health services.

Health Inequalities

One of the priorities of the newly formed CCG executive team is to tackle health inequalities and it is also in our constitution to value diversity and tackle inequality. Our newly appointed Transformation and Partnership Director, Taps Mtemachani, will have a lead role in reducing health inequalities and developing services that responds to local need informed by data on health outcomes. The CCG’s engagement team want to support the reduction in health inequalities by engaging with communities who have the worst health outcomes, engaging them to plan and evaluate the services we commission.

As the CCG’s come together across the Black Country and West Birmingham we have created the Black Country and West Birmingham Academy which brings together a new team of people who will play a key role in tackling health inequalities.

Within the CCG we have built on good practice from across the Black Country and West Birmingham CCGs and rolled out the following staff forums who advice the leadership team:

- The Staff Council is a forum representative of all directorates across all pay bands.
- The Staff Inclusion Forum is a self-organised staff group established to help improve the working lives of minority groups of staff by empowering them to voice specific issues, ensuring that their voices are heard.
- The BAME Network was established to shape the development of CCG Policies, Process and Culture. It creates opportunities for all managers and staff to listen to BAME staff experiences to give them a better understanding

of issues. It focuses on inclusion to build our culture as CCGs that engage all the diverse talent across the organisation.

Online Health Services

We understand that many of the population we serve do not have access to the internet, or they may not have the skills or confidence to do so. Although there is a national ambition to move some NHS services online (accelerated because of Covid-19) we want to reassure patients that they can still access their GP by telephone and get a face to face appointment if necessary (although this might not be at their regular GP practice due to Covid-19.)

Healthwatch Birmingham Response

Healthwatch Birmingham is committed to reducing health inequalities. We would like to thank Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG and Dr Manir Aslam for supporting this mission by helping us engage with the city's African-Caribbean community, a group which experiences numerous barriers and inequalities in accessing care..

Feedback collected from the workshop has been included in our report [What care and support did Birmingham citizens need during the Covid-19 lockdown?](#) which was presented to NHS services, the Care Quality Commission, Birmingham City Council and Birmingham's voluntary and community sector, to highlight areas that need improvement. The report was also covered by the Birmingham Mail, raising awareness of the issues affecting the African-Caribbean community. In addition, we have published a new report [Health Inequalities: Somali people's experiences of health and social care services in Birmingham](#) as part of our continued drive to understand the specific experiences and needs of the many diverse groups under the BAME term.

Following the success of this online workshop, we look forward to building on our partnership with Sandwell and West Birmingham CCG to gather more feedback from the African-Caribbean community, and other seldom-heard groups, in order to improve health and social care services for everyone in Birmingham.

To Conclude

We would like to thank the community members who attended the session and ask that any further views or comments be sent to the CCG Engagement team at our email address: bcwb.engagement@nhs.net

All feedback gathered has been fed into our plans for restoration, recovery and reset of local healthcare services.

We will continue to engage the communities of West Birmingham we serve to improve health services through our Citizens Forum and through other avenues with community leaders and the Voluntary and Community Sector