

HOW OLDER LONDONERS HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC – TIM WHITAKER

The jury is still out on whether we're over the pandemic. Recovery continues, summer holidays taken by some, but there are still rising cases and as the threat remains measures will need to be taken in the Autumn with a bumpy ride ahead – even another lockdown could be on the cards.

The huge risk is that we may overlook the impact the pandemic has had on older people as things “get back to normal”. PAiL has been arguing with little progress, that the GLA should be providing better information about how the pandemic has affected older Londoners. There have been some useful national studies notably from Age UK about the health effects on older people across the country ([Research showing just how badly the pandemic was impacting older people | Media | Age UK](#)) but so far not in London.

Now with thanks from Independent Age we have some London specific data from a survey of over 65s living in Greater London how the pandemic affected their health and wellbeing. This is part of their series monitoring the effect of the pandemic on older people across the UK ([Home Truths: Experiences of people in later life during COVID-19 | Independent Age](#))

Those surveyed had been careful during the height of with over 60 per cent shielding. Only a small percentage had suffered with covid, but for COVID-19 those that had been affected some were experiencing after three months symptoms notably tiredness, dizziness and what is known as “brain fog”. Although affecting their routine very few spoke to their GP about what might be long COVID.

Many more respondents - a half - said their physical health had got worse during the pandemic with 42 per cent also saying their mental health and wellbeing had also suffered. Understanding the consequences of this and developing appropriate support and services is clearly going to be a key challenge for the NHS when it is fully stretched.

Just under a half were also experiencing problems with their NHS treatment – problems of booking appointments, postponement or cancellation of operations or regular treatments or difficulties getting prescriptions were all cited.

One in five were waiting for an operation and worryingly nearly forty per cent had been waiting for over twelve months. Yet nearly two thirds hadn't been advised by their GP how long they should wait, plus what they needed to do to manage their condition. Only a quarter stated they were receiving any additional treatment to manage their condition whilst waiting for hospital treatment, for example physiotherapy, or access to exercise classes. This wait for treatment has an adverse effect on people and over a half said their physical health had suffered with pain experienced, plus had exacerbated feelings of loneliness. With increasing waiting lists providing support for those older people is clearly essential to prevent suffering. Independent Age have produced a report on showing the scale of the problems experienced ([Majority of older people waiting for treatment in daily pain as delays to surgery continue | Independent Age](#))

The ending of lockdown hasn't quite been the simple panacea for older people. The overall picture is that many older people have been deeply affected by the experience of lockdown. Well over a third feel anxious or worried about the prospect of interacting more with people and public spaces and feel sad, low, or depressed about the future. Twenty-seven per cent feel sad, low, or depressed about the future. One fifth of those surveyed are still worried about being infected by COVID. Most noteworthy only 14 per cent have felt an improvement in their mental wellbeing since lockdown ended. Clearly older people have to get out about although a quarter still feel uncomfortable about their safety, for example, going to the supermarket, church, or other social activity. The majority

want to see all customers and staff wearing masks plus social distancing enforced by staff and clear signage.

Last winter Positive Ageing in London called for an action plan to help older people and the evidence is problems are still being experienced and have not simply gone away. We don't want older Londoners to fall below the "recovery radar" with the assumption they have coped stoically and we're now beyond COVID. A coordinated holistic approach by London councils, the GLA and the NHS is required to address the difficulties being experienced. Older Londoners deserve better.