**Somerset’s Big Conversation Engagement Report**

**Introduction**

In 2024, NHS Somerset launched ‘Somerset’s Big Conversation’ to hear directly from residents about their experiences, concerns, and priorities regarding health and wellbeing in Somerset. Through surveys, social media engagement, and in-person events, we collected valuable insights that will help shape future healthcare services. As well as being an engagement programme, Somerset’s Big Conversation had two other main objectives: to raise awareness of NHS Somerset and its role, and to promote key local health campaigns.

**How we engaged**

From May to September 2024, NHS Somerset:

* Attended 26 events across the county, including community festivals, welcome hubs, and public forums.
* Had 2,021 conversations with residents.
* Gathered feedback through surveys, social media polls, and public comments.
* Achieved 147,629 social media impressions and 5,068 engagements.

**Key themes from public feedback**

The responses were categorised into eight key themes that reflect the health and wellbeing priorities of Somerset residents:

**1. Access to primary care services**

* Many residents praised their local GP services but highlighted the need for more same-day appointments and shorter waiting times for prescriptions.
* The lack of NHS dental services was a common concern, with some travelling out of county for treatment.

**2. Mental health support**

* Positive feedback for Open Mental Health Somerset and Young Somerset Mental Health services.
* Calls for increased funding and facilities, especially for young people, neurodiverse individuals, and those experiencing crisis situations.

**3. Communication and service integration**

* Requests for better alignment between services to allow seamless patient care.
* Concern over reliance on digital appointment systems that may exclude elderly or less tech-savvy individuals.

**4. Health inequalities and diverse community needs**

* Refugees, asylum seekers, and ethnic minority groups expressed concerns about language barriers and lack of culturally appropriate services**.**
* Calls for translated health materials and increased outreach through community partners.

**5. Social wellbeing and community support**

* Residents emphasised the importance of social connection and community spaces for wellbeing.
* Many requested more activities for children and young people to reduce antisocial behaviour and improve mental health.

**6. Transport and accessibility to services**

* Poor public transport makes it difficult for residents, particularly in rural areas, to access healthcare.
* Requests for more flexible clinic hours to accommodate shift workers and carers**.**

**7. Preventative health and lifestyle choices**

* Strong support for anti-smoking and vaping campaigns.
* Calls for improved sexual health education and more support for LGBTQ+ healthcare needs.

**8. Hospital services and urgent care**

* Praise for Somerset hospitals but concerns about long waiting lists for specialist treatments.
* Need for better hospital transport options and more community hospital facilities.

**Next steps and actions**

NHS Somerset remains committed to listening to the voices of Somerset residents to achieve a healthier future for all. Building on our engagement roadshow and our continuous engagement, we will be taking steps to further improve community health:

* **You Said, We Did**: We are committed to ensuring all feedback we heard as part of our engagement roadshow is shared with colleagues and teams across the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and with our Integrated Care System (ICS) partners, to inform planning and commissioning of health services across the county. Our aim is to share with you, how your feedback has informed our work
* **Expanding Outreach**: We are planning to reach our diverse and underrepresented communities during our 2025 engagement roadshow by working collaboratively with trusted community leaders, who hold strong relationships with local groups and communities
* **Access to Care:** All feedback has been shared with our colleagues to help inform current plans to improve access to primary care, including GP and dental services, helping to ensure timely and effective support for all
* **Enhancing Mental Health Resources:** Recognising growing needs, we are committed to expanding and strengthening mental health support
* **Addressing Transport Barriers:** We will continue exploring solutions to reduce transport challenges, making it easier for everyone to access health services
* **Public Health Campaigns**: Our Smokefree Somerset Campaign launched in March 2025 and we are committed to maintaining momentum with the Know Your Numbers initiative, which has proven effective and popular by bringing services directly to you.

**Conclusion**

Somerset’s Big Conversation has been an invaluable opportunity to listen to the community. NHS Somerset will continue working with residents, stakeholders, and healthcare professionals to implement meaningful changes based on these insights. Thank you to everyone who participated and shared their voices. Together, we are shaping the future of healthcare in Somerset.