Building back better: speech and language therapy during and beyond COVID-19

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#BuildBackBetterSLT
What, why, who

- **What** – survey on people’s access to speech and language therapy (SLT)
- **Why** – concerns about the impact of March-June 2020 lockdown on access to services
- **Who** – 500+ responses:
  - 100 from people aged 18 & over
  - 400+ from or on behalf of people aged 0-18
Good things people of all ages told us

- SLT makes people’s lives better
- It makes their families and carers’ lives better
- Some people continued to have SLT in person during lockdown
- Some people liked therapy over the phone or online/video
Bad things people of all ages told us

• Many had no SLT at all during lockdown – 44% 18+/62% 0-18

• Of those who had SLT, most had less than before lockdown – 52% 18+/81% 0-18

• This was bad for them in various ways inc. mental health, education and home and social life

• People are worried about future access to SLT

• People in most deprived areas fared worst
Children and young people’s (CYP) general experiences

- 62% had no SLT at all during lockdown
- Of those who had SLT during lockdown:
  - 10% had the same amount
  - 81% had less than before lockdown
- Reasons cited included: SLT services cancelling appointments, closure of schools & colleges, redeployment of therapists
CYP in the most deprived areas

• In the **most deprived** areas:
  
  • Higher % in most deprived areas had **no SLT** (71% cf 58%)
  
  • Higher % in most deprived areas had **less SLT** than in the least deprived areas (82% cf 80%)
  
  • Lower % in most deprived areas had **in-person SLT** (7% cf 13%)
  
  • Lower % in most deprived areas have had **in-person SLT since lockdown ended** (22% cf 37%)
  
• Interestingly though, if children and young people had **more SLT** during lockdown, a higher % were in most deprived areas (4% cf 1%)
Different forms of delivery...

Of those who had **SLT over the phone (28%)**:  
- 13% liked it  
- 45% found it ok  
- 20% did not like it  
- 18% could not do it  

Of those who had **SLT online/video (54%)**:  
- 29% liked it  
- 40% found it ok  
- 19% did not like it  
- 12% could not do it
…the phone…

Parents highlighted the following issues:

• Assessment over the phone did not give full picture
• Some thought virtual assessment of swallowing was unsafe
• Some felt unsupported by lack of in-person access
• Ability of children to engage & focus
• Child not being able to engage with SLT on the phone
Parents highlighted the following issues:

- Bad connection & technology lags
- Difficulties in capturing non-verbal communication
- Distorted sound, poor sound and image quality
- Difficulties keeping CYP engaged & concentrated on the screen
- Reliance on parents to support & interpret
implications for telehealth

- Personal preference
- Digital poverty & exclusion
- Ability of SLT services to provide online therapy
- Considerations of age
- Accessibility issues for certain people
Impact of lockdown on communication & swallowing

Majority of CYP saw no improvement or a worsening during lockdown

- 47% said their communication & swallowing stayed the same during lockdown
- 24% said it got worse
- 18% said it got better
Impact on CYP...

Children and young people told having less SLT was bad for their:

- Education – 67%
- Social life and friendships – 59%
- Mental health – 45%
- Home and domestic life – 44%
- Hobbies and leisure – 23%
- Employment – 2%
...and on their families and carers

Families and carers told us having less SLT was bad for them too:

- Home and domestic life – 64%
- Mental health – 58%
- Education – 43%
- Social life and friendships – 42%
- Hobbies and leisure – 21%
- Physical health – 14%
- Employment – 14%
Thoughts on the future

• 79% concerned about receiving SLT in the future

• Most concerned about the impact on their:
  • Education (82%)
  • Social life and friendships (74%)
  • Mental health (60%)
Other issues highlighted

- Value of SLT & importance to communication
- Gratitude for some support during lockdown
- Lack of resources making access to SLT difficult inc. pre-lockdown
- Shortage of SLTs
- Struggles not having in-person SLT & preference for it
- Particular concerns around SLT when delivered in schools
Where we are

We all face:

• Challenge

• Opportunity
Building Back Better

The *Building Back Better* report calls for:

- **improvement in support** for people with communication and swallowing needs
- **better access** to speech and language therapy
- **levelling-up of provision** so the most deprived areas have the same provision as the least deprived areas
- **removing inequalities** of access to services
Building Back Better – cont’d

National and local recovery policies

- **Need** - Identification of need & appropriate support
- **Education recovery plans** – communication and language development must be central to them
- **Rehabilitation services** – communication and swallowing must be integral to them
- **Mental health services recovery plans** – SLT must be recognised as integral to them
Building Back Better – cont’d

Adequate resourcing for SLT services

• **Increase in demand** because of pandemic – inc. supporting people with Long Covid, a new clinical area

• **Higher level of need** due to backlog in identification and support

• Return of SLTs to **substantive posts** ASAP

• Promotion & protection of people’s general **mental health and wellbeing**
We are not alone
Thank you!