



## **Wider policy context**

The stories people have told us about their access to SLT during lockdown echo what other surveys have found since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, including those by charities and other organisations.

Crucially, they also corroborate what speech and language therapists have reported – the data from the users of SLT services have told us the same stories as the data from SLT services have told us.

### **Other organisations' surveys**

Surveys undertaken by various charities and other organisations of the experiences of their beneficiaries and/or the professionals who work with them since the start of COVID-19 have found similar themes to those reported by respondents to the RCSLT survey.

Details from these surveys are included in the APPENDIX and include findings from Stamma, the Northern Ireland Assembly's All Party Group on Learning Disability, MENCAP, Parkinson's UK, the Neurological Alliance, the Alzheimer's Society, the MS Society, the Stroke Association, Cerebral Palsy Scotland, The Swallows, The Family Fund, the Disabled Children's Partnership, Ulster University and Ofsted.

Many of the themes people identified to us from lockdown persist with services not being back to their pre-pandemic levels. Recent surveys from the Disabled Children's Partnership and Special Needs Jungle, also detailed in the APPENDIX, highlight this.

On the postcode lottery of access to SLT for children and young people in England, this was the subject of a major report from the Children's Commissioner for England in June 2019.

### **RCSLT member surveys**

What people have told us about their experiences of accessing SLT during lockdown has also been echoed by surveys of its members that the RCSLT has undertaken. Responses from speech and language therapists to a survey conducted between August and September 2020 found the following:

## ***Children and young people***

For children and young people:

- Referrals were down by 50% in April/May compared to 2019.
- There was improvement by June/July, but they were still down by about a third.
- 90% said there were children on their caseload who had not received intervention (but would usually have done so) since the start of the pandemic.
- Common reasons for this were that the venue where intervention would normally be provided was closed; that delivering the intervention remotely was either inappropriate or not accessible to the child; or because of staff availability – many services were working with reduced capacity due to a combination of staff sickness, shielding and redeployment.
- Nearly a third of respondents reported that they had observed or been informed about a deterioration in the speech, language and communication of the children they support.
- Almost half reported the same about an increase in challenging behaviours.

## ***Adults***

For adults:

- Referrals were down by 28% in April/May compared to 2019.
- 72% said there were adults on their caseload who had not received intervention since the start of the pandemic.
- 44% reported a deterioration in speech, language and communication skills for many or some of the adults that they support.
- 43% reported a deterioration in swallowing function for many or some of the adults that they support.
- 36% reported an increase in challenging behaviours for many or some of the adults that they support.

## ***Overall conclusions***

Overall, our members have told us:

- Referrals to SLT services during the acute COVID-19 period in the UK were substantially less than in the same period in 2019.

- A number of service changes were common, including adopting more flexible approaches to provision (such as tele-therapy) and being unable to provide services to some patients.
- Fewer patients have accessed SLT since the pandemic began, including a reduction in neurorehabilitation patients.
- For those who received SLT, the outcomes did not change.
- SLTs supported a range of needs of COVID-19 patients.
- Treatment outcomes for COVID-19 patients with dysphagia were positive.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup><https://bit.ly/2O2ZRPC>