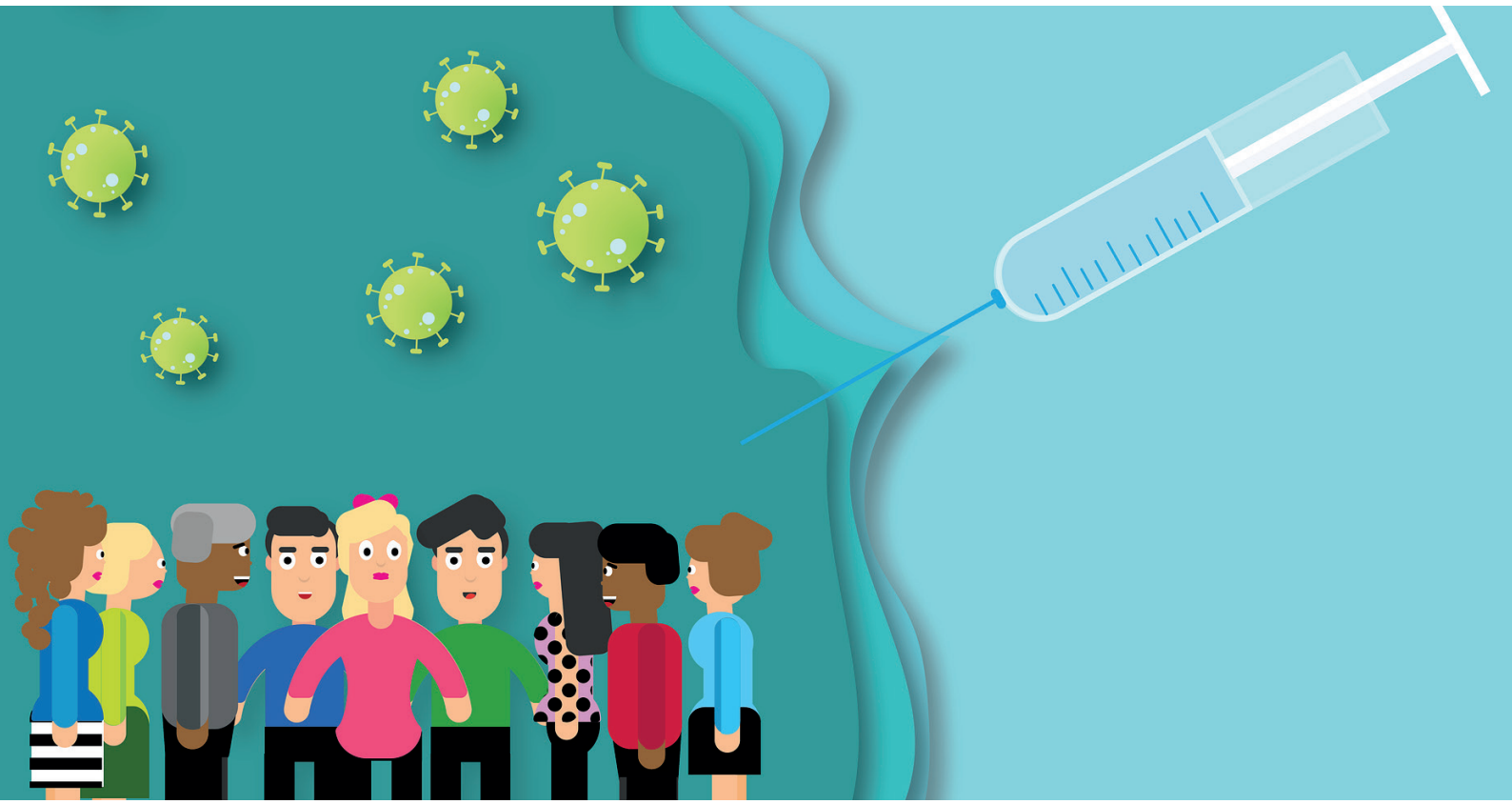
Torbay, Plymouth & Devon

VCSE Assembly



COVID-19 Vaccination Outreach Project Report

December 2023-January 2024

One Devon

Report author: Devon Communities Together

Devon Communities Together

helping communities help themselves

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1. Introduction

This project, funded by NHS Devon, aimed to engage specific groups and communities with lower COVID-19 vaccination uptake to understand barriers and listen to ideas to make things different with the idea to increase uptake.

The Torbay, Plymouth and Devon VCSE Assembly applied and delivered the engagement activities, including a survey, social media and newsletter promotion, focus groups, and the provision of an NHS specialist at a VCSE Assembly meeting, to share information and instigate discussion. This evaluation report focuses on the results of the survey and focus groups conducted in January 2024.

2. Deliverables

The project consisted of the following activities, with the aim to engage with specific groups and communities where the uptake of COVID-19 vaccination is lower to understand barriers, and how to address them to support increase in uptake.

- One online survey, to gain understanding about barriers, uptake and ideas for improvement.
- Use of social media channels to promote through networks about the project and how to be involved, and information about the vaccination programme. Provision of a minimum of two social media posts to VCSE Assembly members to share with their communities.
- One special newsletter to the VCSE Assembly distribution list of over 250 organisations in December 2023. This had a focus on the COVID-19 vaccination and promoting the engagement activities to share views and experiences. This information was also shared as a feature in the general January newsletter.
- Facilitation of two online focus groups aimed at VCSE Assembly partners regarding experiences and ideas for improvement.
- Provision of opportunity for a NHS specialist to present at an Assembly meeting in January 2024.
- Production of an evaluation report.

This evaluation report focuses primarily on the results of the survey and focus groups that occurred in January 2024, which aimed to increase understanding of the experiences of communities and ideas for improvement.

Image: Newsletter and communications promotion imagery

Torbay, Plymouth & Devon

VCSE Assembly



Your opportunity to contribute to an Assembly-led project:

Understanding experiences of accessing the Covid-19 vaccination

The Torbay, Plymouth and Devon VCSE Assembly has been awarded NHS funding for a short-term project to increase awareness of the Covid-19 vaccination programme and understand people's experiences of accessing the vaccine, including any barriers that might exist.

We will reach out to as many people as possible to hear their stories, thoughts and experiences, collating the independently gathered evidence and sharing it with the NHS to help inform future planning and engagement around the Covid-19 vaccination.

The TPD VCSE Assembly's combined reach into the VCSE sector - and all the different people and communities we support - will be a fantastic asset in gathering rich, valuable data and we hope you can be a part of this.

How can you get involved?

1. Our short survey

We have created a short survey that we would encourage everyone to fill in. There is an opportunity to speak from personal experience but also to share the experiences of people you work/volunteer with The survey may be accessed here: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TY3PXH2 and will close on 24th January 2024.

2. Focus groups

We are organising two focus groups that are open to anyone in the VCSE sector and the people we support. These will be facilitated by Devon Communities Together and will be an opportunity to share thoughts, opinions, feelings and ideas about the Covid-19 vaccination programme, particularly from a VCSE sector perspective. Joining these groups is an important opportunity to dive deeper into any issues that are being experienced and ensure your voice is included in the final evidence.

1. Tuesday 16th January 2-3.30pm (online)

2. Wednesday 24th January 1-2.30pm – Devon Communities Together, 1 Northleigh House, Thorverton Road, Exeter EX2 8HF

You would only be required to attend one focus group. To register your interest, please email info@tpdassembly.org.

3. Feedback via email

We are also happy to take any feedback you may wish to contribute via email. Please email info@tpdassembly.org.uk with your comments/experiences/thoughts about the Covid-19 vaccination programme and how it is accessed by you or the people you support.

Please do feel free to share this email with anyone you feel may be interested in contributing to this project.

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One Devon

Hollie Kidby to join our next Assembly meeting

As part of this project, we are pleased to announced that **Hollie Kidby, Clinical Lead for Seasonal Vaccination Outreach Team**, will be a guest speaker at our next Assembly meeting on 18th January (2-3.30pm).

Hollie has experience of running outreach clinics throughout Devon, including the Health Inequality clinics. You should already have received your invitation to the meeting but if you haven't, or have any other queries, please email info@tpdassembly.org.uk.

3. Methodology

The gathering of information for this project was conducted using a mixed-methods approach, which included both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods. Quantitative data was collected through a short online survey to learn about experiences of people across communities in Devon. Within this survey we gathered a combination of quantitative and qualitative data.

The quantitative data helped us to profile who the target stakeholders were and if they accessed the vaccine, as well as identifying potential reasons why accessing may have been a barrier. The qualitative data has helped develop a more detailed understanding of the barriers they faced and the experiences they had when accessing the vaccine.

The VCSE Assembly survey was live (on SurveyMonkey) from Thursday 14th December 2023 – Thursday 25th January 2024 to cover the project delivery period, and we received 98 responses.

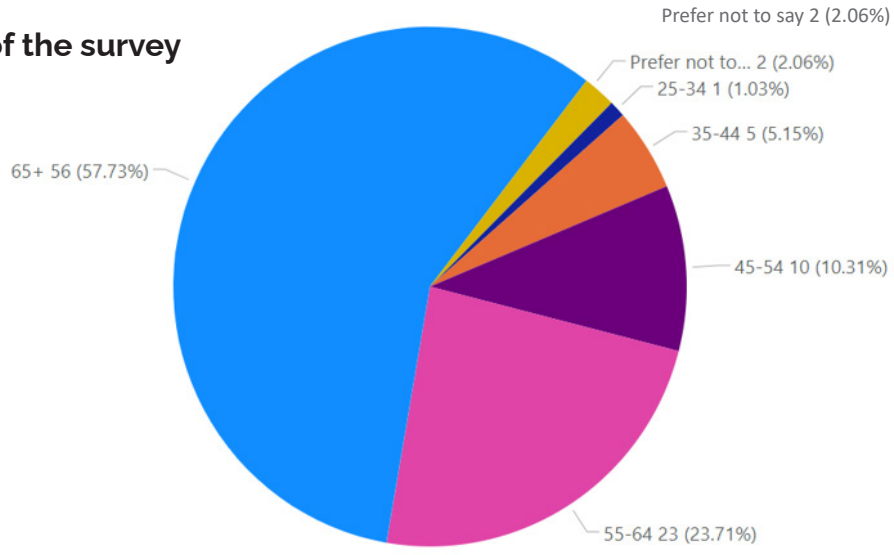
Alongside the survey, two focus groups were arranged in January to gather a richer level of data regarding experiences of accessing the vaccine, either through lived experience of the focus group attendees directly, or through their work supporting others in the community who were eligible. During this period, the wider Assembly general meeting included a presentation from a member of the Devon Public Health Vaccine Outreach Team and a further mini focus group was arranged to gather further data from the discussion after the presentation. 16 people attended the two focus groups, with 13 additional people attending the mini focus group.

4. Results

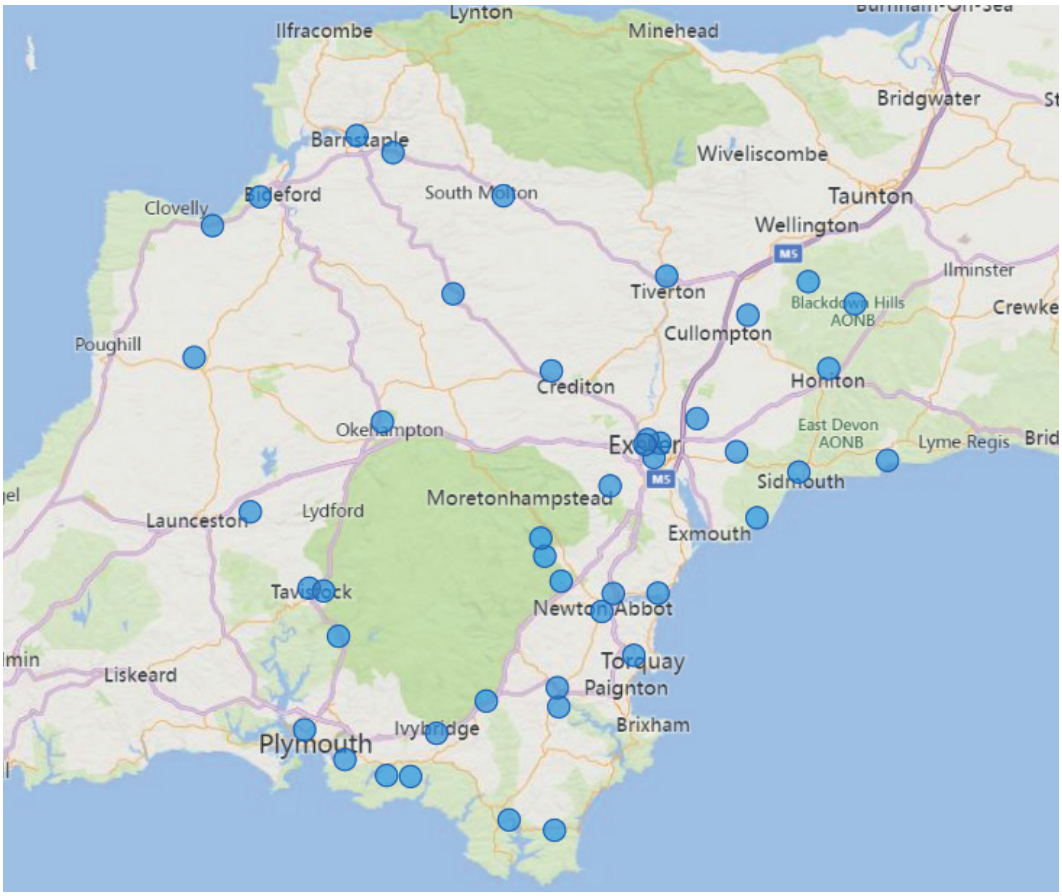
4.1 Survey quantitative results

There were 98 respondents. Details may be found below.

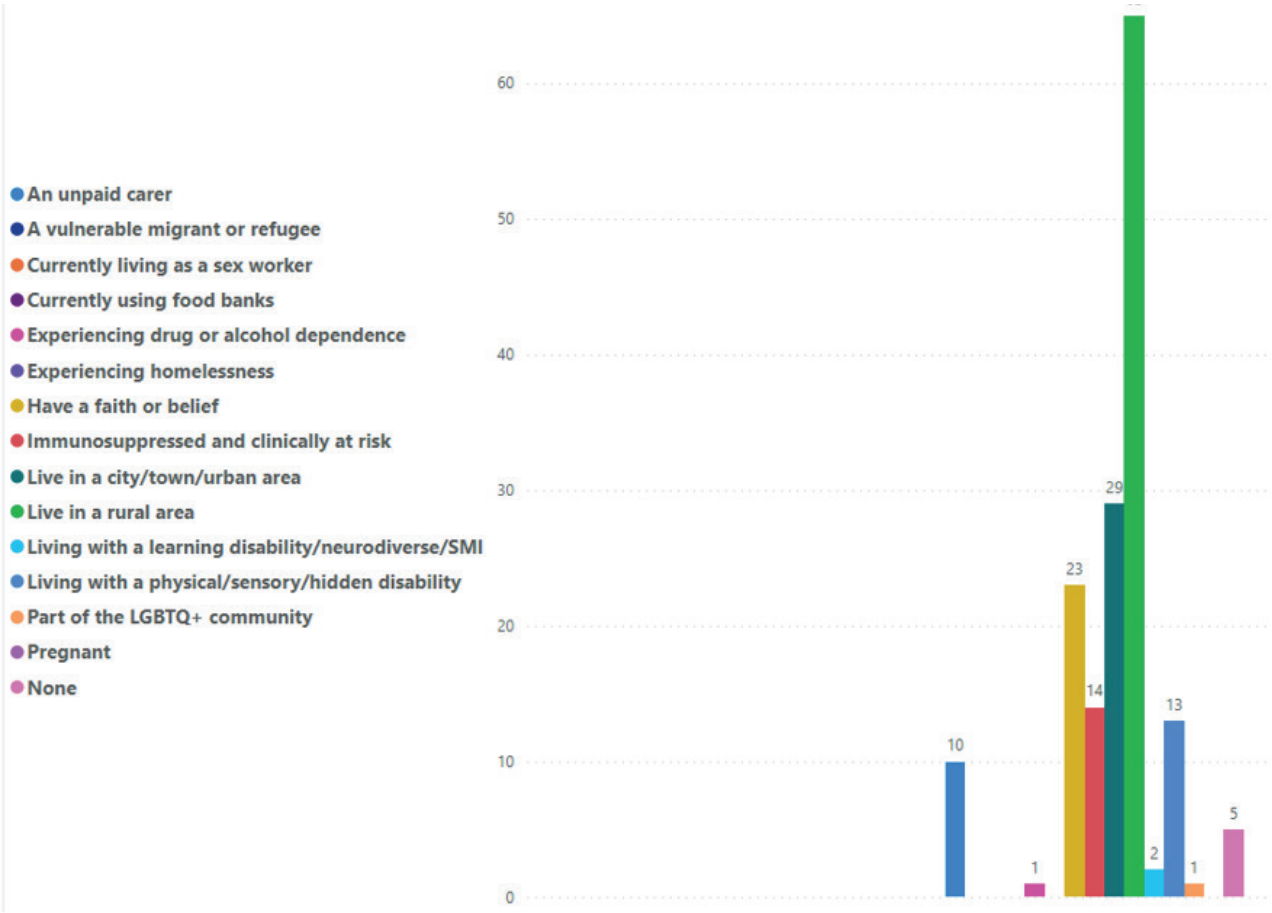
Age of respondents of the survey



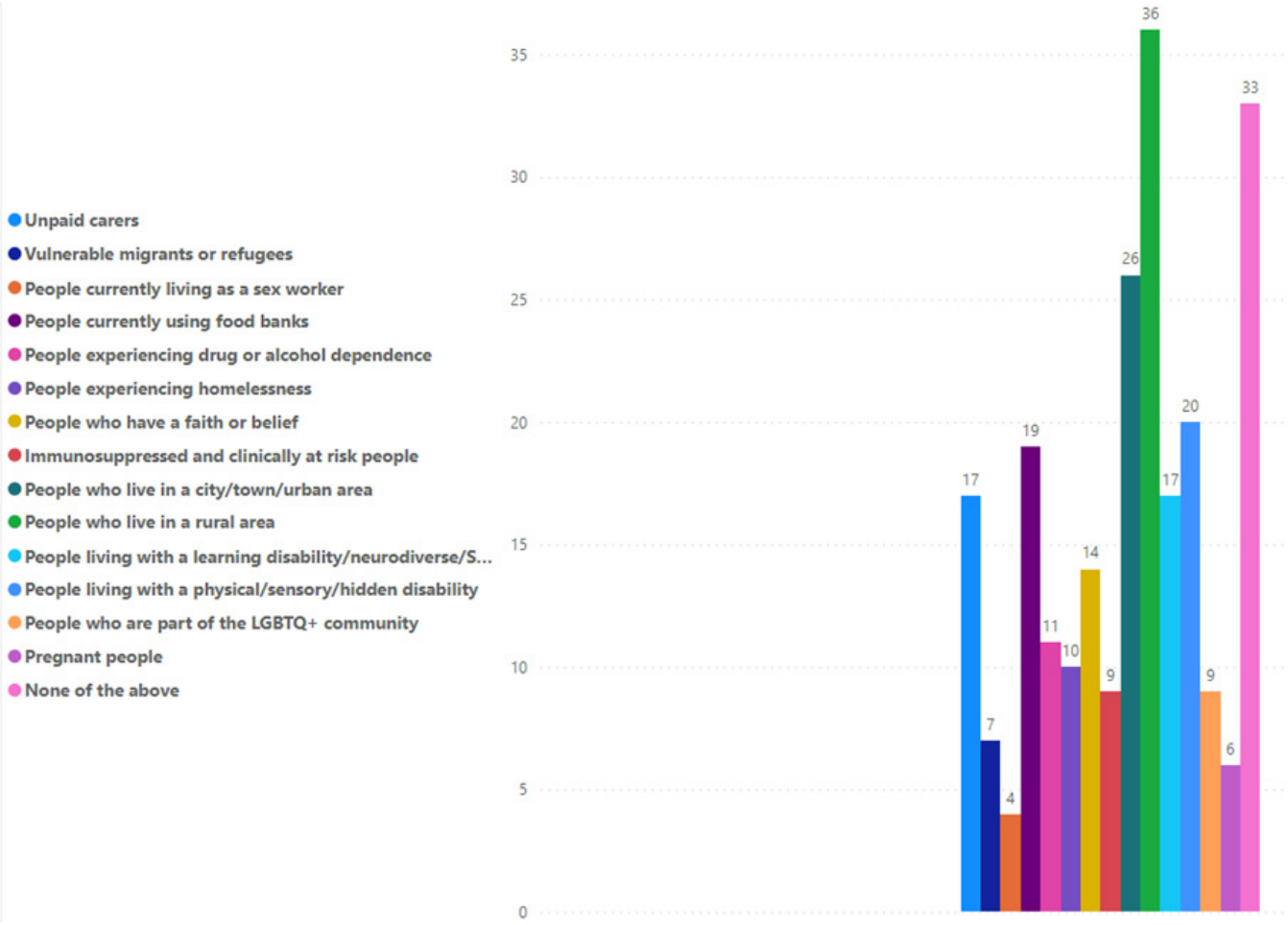
Geography of respondents of the survey



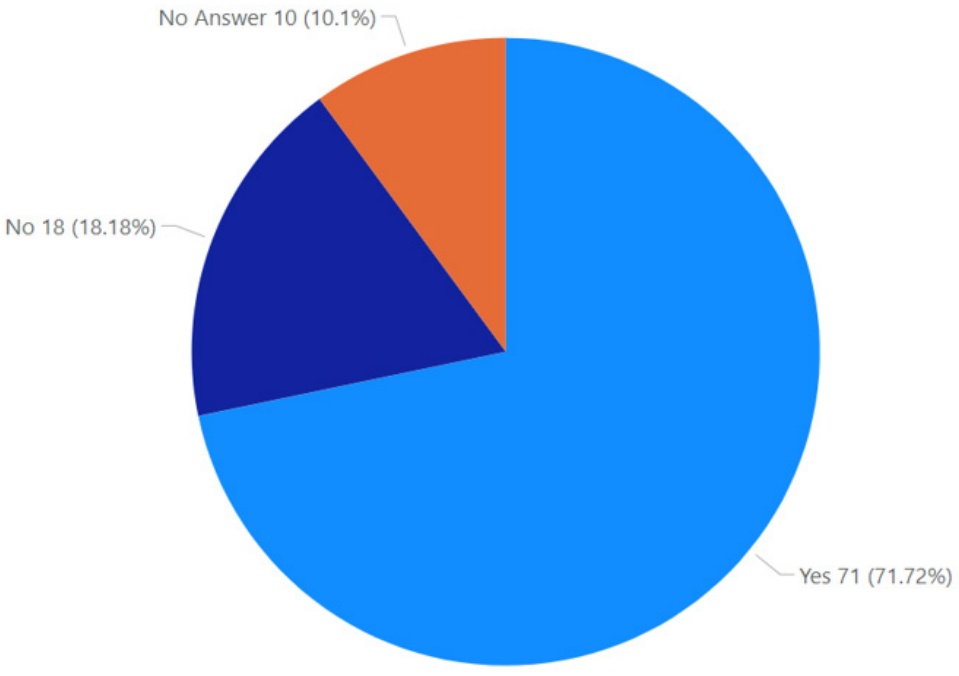
Identifying characteristics of respondents of the survey



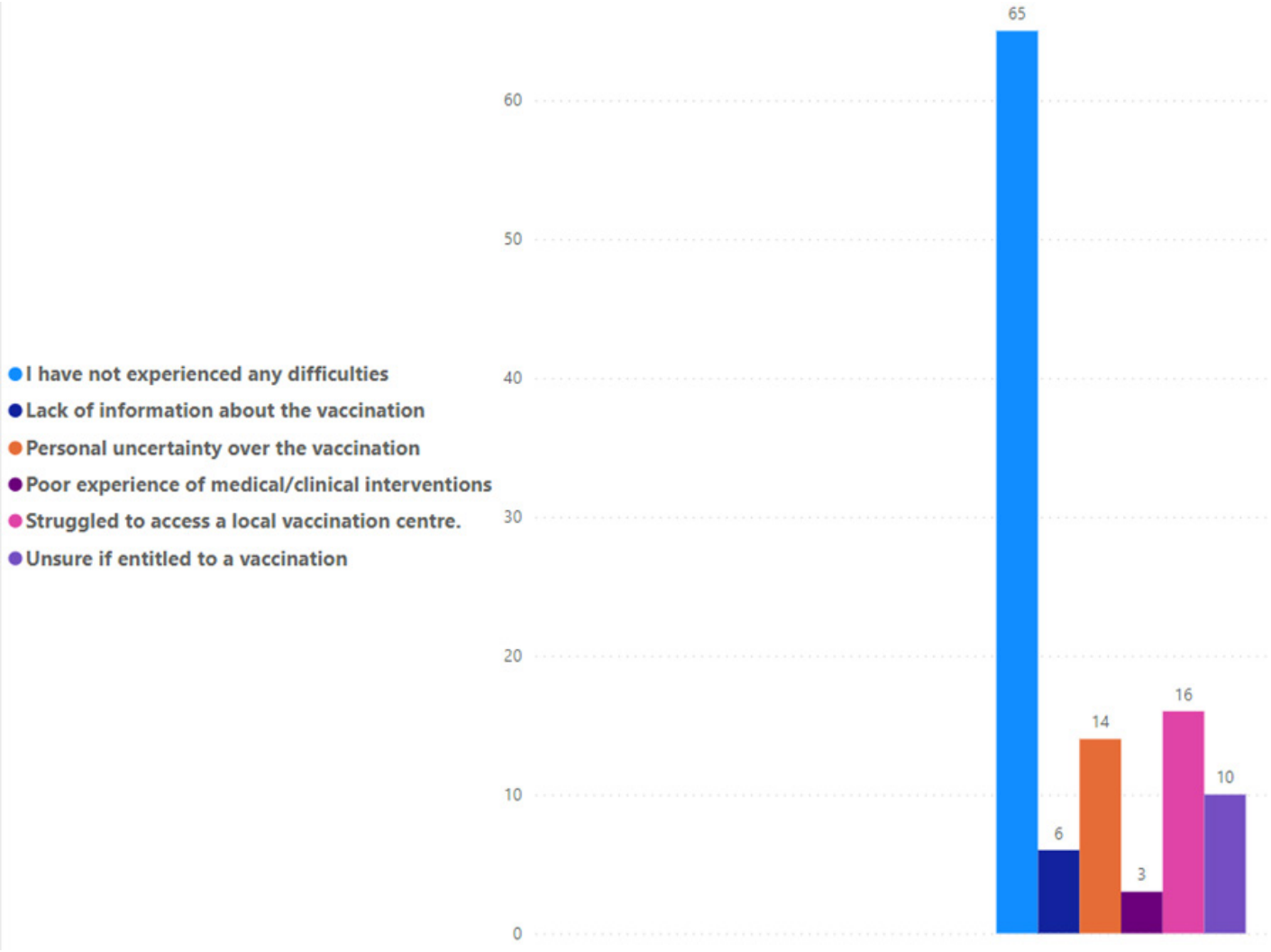
Identifying characteristics of people who respondents of the survey work with/ support



We asked whether respondents had taken up the offer of the Autumn COVID-19 booster vaccine, answers from the respondents of the survey:



Respondents' answers to the question if they had experienced barriers or difficulties to taking up the COVID-19 vaccination:



4.2. Qualitative feedback from surveys

The questions below allowed for open text answers to allow survey responders to expand on their views and experiences of the vaccine. Themes have been identified below with some of the comments noted to highlight experiences raised:

Q: Have you (or anyone you work/volunteer with) ever experienced any difficulties or barriers to taking up the COVID-19 vaccination? Please expand in comments box:

Loss of trust in information:

"I know quite a few people who have been damaged by the vaccine or have had very serious side effects but these are constantly denied and their experiences belittled, this made me lose trust."

"The risks appear to outweigh the benefits. Check out figures for excess deaths from government statistics and insurance companies. Not in 2020 but from 2021 onwards correlated around the world with time of rollout and uptake percentage. Tons of research papers explaining why."

"My first two vaccinations were Astra Zenica. I suffered bad headaches for 2 weeks after the first vaccination, resulting in blood clot tests - thankfully good result. However, knowing that I suffer with both migraine and HNPP (neurological condition), I do not agree that I should have been given the Astra Zenica. I did not want it and asked if I could have Pfizer but it was told it was not a logistical option. My husband, my daughter, my mother all received Pfizer in Devon when they had no propensity to any such existing conditions, yet I was not offered it. This does not make sense to me. I accepted the Astra Zenica (1st jab) on the basis that we all had to get jabbed to save the masses, but remembering how poorly I was afterwards and knowing now that most other countries did not licence it, I would not take it again."

"I have worked with elderly people who have expected to receive a letter telling them to book at their local health centre and who don't understand that there is a need to be pro-active about booking a vaccine rather than waiting to be invited. I have worked with people who in the past have been invited for a vaccine (eg have asthma) but who have subsequently not been eligible because the criteria has changed. They find this confusing. I have worked with people who had an adverse reaction to vaccines in the past and therefore are uncertain over getting it done again."

Access barriers:

"A neighbour who lives in a rural village is totally dependent on someone taking them to appointments."

"Personal experience was excellent but have worked with families whose young people have found it difficult to access the vaccination centre and didn't know there were other options."

"During Covid we ran a vaccination clinic at our Homeless Centre via partnership with Homeless GP Practice. In Autumn 2023 the GP practice was not directly provided with vaccines so this was not possible. This meant a huge missed

opportunity in being able to provide vaccines to clients who struggle to access 'mainstream' routes. Personally: my local village GP was not offering the vaccine - only the 'central' practice in a town some distance away that I would have needed to access via x2 buses. This meant I would have needed to book an entire day off work to get a vaccine."

"*Don't have my own transport, so need to arrange accessible transport so that I can remain in my wheelchair. This was quite difficult to organise, as I had to co-ordinate my transport with the time I was getting my vaccine ie often had to ask the driver to wait for me so this was an additional cost. As buses were not running regularly and often the wheelchair space was not available."*

Other experiences:

"*My husband was eligible for and took the vaccine in Autumn 23 but being younger I wasn't and got Covid for the third time in December straight after having flu then a throat infection. I would have liked the opportunity to have paid for a vaccine. As the wage earner it doesn't make sense to me to allow some in a household to have a vaccine and not all, even if the others pay for theirs like they would the flu jab. People want to protect themselves so give them the opportunity to please."*

Positive experiences:

"*It has all worked very well in the Okehampton area. All the age qualified and those with special needs have been offered vaccination, and the system has worked well in the health centre - organised/volunteer helpers and all."*

"*Greendale Centre made booking and receiving the vaccination very simple and accessible."*

"*Our health centre is excellent and we feel very privileged for that."*

"*Booked a date with Buckland pharmacy with ease. No problem with vaccine. Staff there very nice and picked up something I needed in the pharmacy."*

"*On the whole a good experience. Availability at more pharmacies would be helpful."*

What may help you to take up the vaccine offer in the future, should you wish to?

"Evidence of the effectiveness of the vaccine - and continuing to have further vaccines - in protecting yourself from Covid."

"More information."

"Clear scientific advice and medical support. This has been good so far, and needs strengthening in response to some of the negative misinformation which needs challenging. It's not just 'me', it is for the protection of others."

"Knowing when and where the vaccine is being given. It was difficult to find when the local hospital (8miles away) offered vaccinations."

"Re-assurance the vaccine is really safe."

"Provide vaccines directly to ALL GP Practices and learn from what worked during the pandemic for 'hard to reach' groups."

"For surgeries or vaccination centres, to have in place transport organised for those who need to remain in their wheelchairs for their journey. For example if I rang the surgery or vaccination centre, they could say 'We understand you need specialised transport so we can provide transport for you to attend your appointment on xxxxxxx at xxxxxxxx."

"None. I was coerced to take it for travel and suffered six months of heart irregularities. Never again. I survived for now. Long term downside is still unknown."

"Nothing would persuade me. I don't trust it."

"Efficiently organised by our Health Centre, as usual."

"Being able to book and pay for a vaccine."

"More advice for people with allergies."

"The surgery should be able to guide as to where it can be obtained locally."

"Clear information from research studies Clear information on eligibility Local access."

"More accessible centres are now available, but many people still require voluntary drivers/Community Transport Schemes."

4.3. Focus Groups results

During January, two dedicated focus groups and one mini focus group in the wider Assembly meeting were held to gather qualitative feedback about experiences, views and ideas regarding the COVID-19 vaccinations. A total of 16 people attended the two dedicated focus groups, and 13 at the mini focus group to give their views and experiences. A mixture of people attended, sharing their own lived experiences as well as representing organisations supporting others in the community. A snapshot of those who attended are below, to give an idea of the breadth of knowledge and experiences shared:

South West MS Centre

Citizens Advice South Hams

Devon Mental Health Alliance

Honiton Carers Support Group

Living Options Devon

Devon Communities Together

Intercom Trust

Red Cross

South Hams Community Action

Lived Experience Representatives

Evident themes from focus group respondents' comments are below, broken down into areas such as information and access barriers, issues surrounding personalised care, positive experiences and initiatives and ideas for future development:

Information barriers:

- Many focus group attendees agreed that as time has gone on, they feel less confident in knowing about eligibility for the vaccine. Those working in the sector have asked those in the communities that they work in, and generally those aged 70+ have a greater confidence in knowing their eligibility and when they are due a booster, where those under 70 are less confident whether they can access it, and when.
- Many focus group attendees agreed that through their work, they had received less information nationally and locally about the vaccine eligibility and availability, and how they as VCSE organisations could support and

share information to those they work with in the community.

- Unpaid carers aren't always aware that they are eligable for the vaccine as a group, and carers groups and those working with carers support by sharing that information.
- One person had arranged for a minibus to go to Greendale with a group of carers which would have worked well. This was arranged as their local GP surgery weren't providing the vaccine. However, after this was arranged, they were told nearer the time that the local pharmacy was going to provide the vaccines, so the minibus wasn't necessary. It would be beneficial for local PCN or local surgeries to provide comms for their area so local people know where they can arrange their vaccine appointment.
- Those with language barriers find accessing and understanding information about the vaccine difficult. Many were asked to go online to find out more in their own language, but they didn't have access to the internet easily.
- Some are sceptical about whether the vaccine works as they've heard stories from people in their community about getting a reaction from the vaccine, or having it and still getting Covid which puts them off accessing it. Some also for religious reasons state that they will trust in God rather than a vaccine.
- Some areas of Devon (such as Totnes) have a vocal community who are anti-vaccine and are active in encouraging others not to take up the vaccine. These cultural belief systems mean that vaccines aren't accessed and at times those voices can be strong in a community.
- One person found that they received less information when they moved to Devon about their son's eligibility and where to access the vaccine than when they lived in a different county. This increased anxiety for their son and meant that the parent carer felt less informed about the venue and what would happen on the day, as well as the side effects and options available.
- Some transgender men were anxious about receiving the vaccine due to information being shared regarding the vaccine causing additional menstruation, which can be very dysphoric. This issue was addressed locally through links with VCSE LGBT+ organisations and gender identity clinics in the area to gather and share more information to the community to increase their awareness about specific side effects and likelihood.

Access barriers:

- Public transport access was often patchy and had variable levels of success depending on the location of the people being vaccinated. For instance, to access Greendale near Exeter, this is quite inaccessible for those not living in the local area and would take a long time to travel to without a car. Many

people in the focus group mentioned this as a barrier to access.

- Disability access was generally good at the vaccination centres such as Greendale, but accessing via public transport is very difficult for those with disabilities and a barrier to attending. More recently the vaccinations have been accessible more locally, such as in GP surgeries or pharmacies, which makes it more accessible for some but not all, depending on geography.
- Rural communities have fewer access and public transport options, as well as fewer medical facilities in their local area and therefore access to vaccinations is still an issue.

Barriers regarding personalised experiences and care:

- Older people and those with additional physical needs, as well as those who experience neurodiversity and additional mental health needs find new venues and not seeing their usual GP or medical professional a barrier to accessing the vaccination as it increases anxiety due to lack of information about the facilities, staff and access options. Going to a local pharmacy, GP or centre increased their willingness to take up the vaccine due to feeling more confident of the environment and how to get there.
- Some unpaid carers were concerned about experiencing side effects to the vaccine, which would impact their capability to care for their loved one so were questioning whether to take up the vaccine for that reason.
- From an account from someone with lived experience of caring for someone with learning difficulties, accessing a vaccine site far away from their house was difficult as the person they care for finds long journeys and new places very stressful. Something local would have been better for them and improve the experience. They were able to access a separate area which was quieter at the centre which was good, but the staff weren't trained to support the needs that the person they care for has, so their approach was more stressful for them rather than supportive. Having someone with appropriate training for supporting someone with learning difficulties would have been more helpful to make the experience more positive.
- Some focus group attendees were supporting people on lower incomes, who found the cost of travelling to vaccination centres a barrier to attending as the cost of public transport is high, especially if they had to get multiple buses.
- Some people identifiying as transgender were questioned and challenged about their identity when they attended their vaccination due to their NHS identifcation name not matching their gender presentation, which was inappropriate and upsetting to them. That increased anxiety about accessing the vaccine and subsequent boosters. Staff should have

cultural competence training to be able to approach those discussions appropriately.

Positive Experiences and Initiatives:

- NHS contacted some people to arrange for someone to come to community groups or local centres to provide vaccinations but also other interventions such as blood pressure checks and weight checks etc. This was really positively received in the groups who mentioned it as it made it much more accessible, and they would welcome that again. It would be good to have more information about how to be proactive with requesting that service rather than it being offered by chance.
- Some health centres have made a big effort to share information about the vaccination and how to access it in their local community. People tend to trust their local surgery or GP over national or general information, and this has increased take up in their local area. They are also more comfortable with the environment and how to access their local facilities. A few examples of this type of initiative were described in the focus groups.
- One organisation worked within the medical centre they are based and arranged a peer led drop in for people to learn more about the vaccine from peers who had taken it up. Many of the people who attend the centre are experiencing homelessness, alcohol or substance misuse so it was a safe space for them to come and have some food, chat to peers and then nurses and medical professionals were on hand to answer some questions and provide the vaccine (and other medical checks/queries) in a responsive way on the day. This was a good example of VCSE sector and NHS working together to support a vulnerable community.
- Two organisations had developed an approach to create events or sessions to talk about health more generally and offer different checks and vaccine boosters, so people don't feel pressured and can learn about it in more detail before taking the offer up and can do that on the day if they feel they wish to. This has been positive and gathered a broader idea of what people need regarding their health and increased take up. This is another example of local VCSE organisations using developed trusted relationships in their community to support with health interventions.

Ideas for future:

- GPs reaching out to vulnerable groups or those eligable (such as unpaid carers) as a trusted source of information in their local area to explain about the vaccine and any concerns they may have.
- Greater communications about options for community nurses/liaison

workers to provide vaccinations and interventions in community centres/ with community groups, so those groups and community organisations can support in more practical ways in their community.

- Learning about best practice models in some localities regarding how medical centres/pharmacies have communicated and developed relationships and linked with the community to increase take up and confidence with the vaccine to encourage a consistent model across the county. This could improve personalised care options for different vulnerable groups.
- Combining the vaccine offer with other checks and vaccines such as blood pressure or flu vaccine means that people can save time and increase likeliness of accessing all those in one visit. This also helps those who have increased anxiety over medical interventions as they can prepare for one visit rather than many.
- Many would like to see more prominent comms from Public Health and other national bodies about the vaccines, population immunity and other subjects surrounding vaccination to support local systems and organisations to disseminate current information more confidently.

5. Key Findings

1. **Barriers to Vaccination:** The survey and focus groups revealed nuances regarding barriers to vaccination uptake, including impact of misinformation, lack of accessibility to vaccination sites due to issues such as rurality, disability, or associated anxieties. Themes also revolved around concerns about side effects and clear information being shared locally, and personalised support around cultural, societal or religious beliefs.
2. **Ideas for improvement:** Participants offered valuable insights into ideas to improve vaccination uptake, such as increasing local community outreach and education efforts, providing transportation to vaccination sites or ensuring a hyper-local offer, and addressing concerns through culturally sensitive messaging and support when receiving the vaccine.
3. **Collaboration with VCSE partners:** Collaboration with VCSE partners facilitated valuable discussions and contributed to the development of targeted interventions to address barriers to vaccination. Trusted relationships and specialist expertise within the VCSE sector with the communities they support

has enabled improved clarity and communication about the vaccine to communities.

6. Conclusion

The insights gained from the survey and focus groups provide valuable guidance for enhancing efforts to increase COVID-19 vaccination uptake in underserved communities. By addressing barriers within information and accessibility, collaborating through local community partnerships with the VCSE sector, and implementing targeted strategies, uptake may improve and increase confidence within the communities across Devon.



Torbay, Plymouth & Devon

VCSE Assembly

info@tpdassembly.org

Appendix 1 – Online survey questions

COVID-19 Vaccinations Views Questionnaire

1. **Which area of Devon are you based? Add first part of your postcode (optional).**

   Single textbox

2. **What is your age? (optional)**

   Under 18

   18-24

   25-34

   35-44

   45-54

   55-64

   65+

3. **Do you identify with any of the following characteristics or situation? (tick any that apply)**

   Live in a city/town/urban area

   Live in a rural area

   An unpaid carer

   Experiencing homelessness

   Have a faith or belief

   A vulnerable migrant or refugee

   Living with a learning disability, are neurodiverse or have severe mental illness (SMI)

   Part of the LGBTQ+ community

   Immunosuppressed and clinically at risk

   Experiencing drug or alcohol dependence

   Currently living as a sex worker

   Living with a physical, sensory and/or hidden disability

   Pregnant

   Currently using food banks

   None

   Other (please specify)

4. **Do you work or support people in Devon communities with any of the following characteristics or situation? (tick any that apply)**

   Same tickboxes as q3

   We wish to learn more about your views and experiences of the COVID-19 vaccine, please answer the questions below to share your thoughts.

5. **Have you taken up the offer of a COVID-19 vaccine?**

   Yes

   No

6. **Have you (or anyone you work/volunteer with) ever experienced any difficulties or barriers to taking up the COVID-19 vaccination? Please tick any that apply:**

   Struggled to access a local vaccination centre

   Poor experience of medical/clinical interventions

   Unsure if I'm entitled to a vaccination

   Personal uncertainty over the vaccination

   Lack of information about the vaccination and how to get it

   I have not experienced any difficulties

   Other – please specify

   Please use this box to expand on any of your choices for this question, or for any additional reasons – Open comments box

7. **What may help you (or anyone you work/volunteer with) to take up the vaccine offer in the future, should you wish to?**