

## Cancer Support Scotland – Wellbeing Survey Results

From the first positive case of COVID19 confirmed in Scotland on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2020, the subsequent lockdown on 20<sup>th</sup> March and the 25 weeks that have followed, our determination and absolute focus has been to continue to support the mental health and wellbeing of anyone affected by cancer across Scotland. We recognised immediately that we could not simply close our services and press pause on the people that we supported who were vulnerable and isolated.

We **redesigned our entire organisation** within a matter of weeks to suit the COVID landscape, whilst simultaneously responding to increased demand from people with rapidly escalating feelings of suicidal ideation, anxiety, stress, fear, worry and isolation. Many of those we support were already socially or financially isolated and facing multiple challenges in their everyday lives and our priority remains to protect and improve the mental health and wellbeing of those affected by cancer. **We have responded swiftly from the very beginning, providing continued support even in the early stages** and adapting to the new needs of people coping with cancer in Scotland. We are now offering digital counselling, virtual stress management courses, a wellbeing call service, and a wide range of online self-care tools to help people cope well with cancer today, and in the future. We offer all these services at no cost to anyone who needs them.

All of the above was carried out on the background of a collapse of income from some of our main income streams. We furloughed over 50% of our staff team and in July took the difficult decision to restructure which resulted in 50% of staff being made redundant. This was all to ensure some form of sustainable footing for the organisation however like many organisations the funding climate is challenging.

In August we undertook a survey to further understand the mounting impact COVID19 has had on the mental health and wellbeing of those affected by cancer across Scotland and the following is an outline of those results. The survey was open for two weeks and we received over 450 responses to our survey.

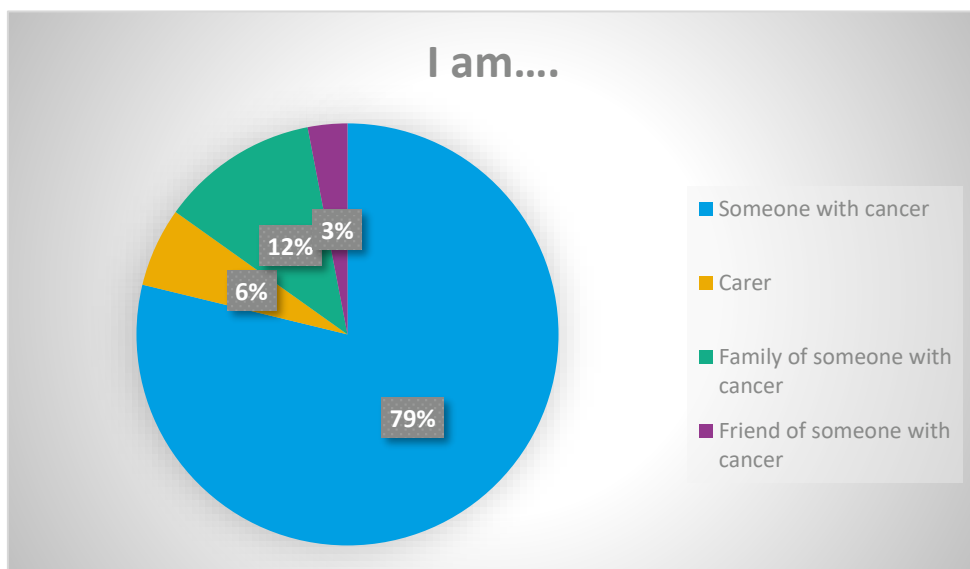
### Demographics of Respondents

#### Gender

Female:	81%
Male	18%
Prefer not to say:	1%

#### Age

25-44:	7%
45-64:	67%
65+:	26%



## Family

*“I didn’t think I needed counselling because I have a good support network, however I decided to give it a go to see if it would help after my sister suggested it. I have realised that there are things that I can say to my counsellor that I haven’t been able to say to my family and friends as I don’t want to upset them. It’s really helping me practically and emotionally to put things into perspective.”*

71% of respondents said they felt that COVID19 had put more pressure on family life, with 44% feeling isolated and 43% having increased mental health issues.

**When asked; Have you experience any of the following during the period April – July, respondents could tick more than one answer:**

Anxiety/Worry	72%
Sleeplessness	60%
Low mood/Depression	57%
Increased Stress	50%
Fear	26%
Increased physical pain	20%
Panic Attacks	14%

**As we have heard from many of those we are supporting, the inability to manage anxiety and worry, coupled with being unable to relax has had a big impact on sleep possibly leading to low mood and depression.**

## Shielding

*“The contact with a real person has been my saving grace, I have been so isolated, frightened and lonely whilst shielding through my Cancer journey and have no family, this feels as if it has been a gift from god.”*

Shielding went from being a completely unknown term to an everyday word in a short period of time. **61% of respondents were advised or chose to shield.**

90% of respondents said they felt shielding had an impact on their stress levels, with **89% experiencing an impact on their wellbeing.**

70% of respondents were worried for their health during the shielding period and understandably a very high **83% of respondents are very worried about a second wave of COVID19.**



## Resumption of Health Care

- 52% of our respondents had their appointments cancelled due to COVID19, have now had these rearranged.
- 26% of respondents have **NOT** had their appointment rearranged
- 26% have experienced difficulty in accessing wellbeing therapies

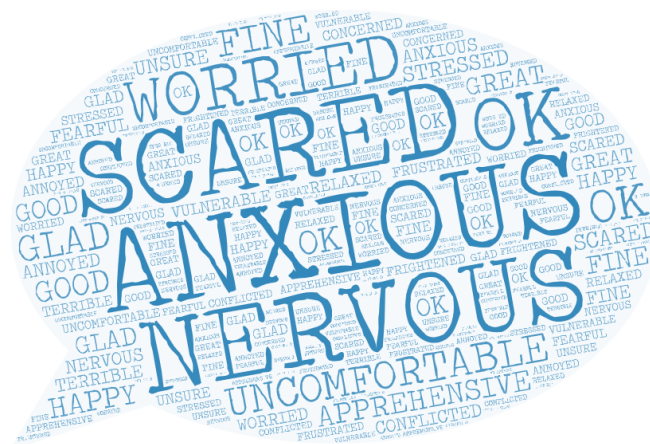
57% of respondents who had planned surgery have not had those appointments rearranged.

## The Work Place

## How our respondents felt about returning to the workplace..

Of those who are working, 23% said they had been asked to go back to the office.

The Scottish Government have created an **occupational risk assessment tool** which was launched towards the end of the summer period. This tool enables individuals to identify their individual level of vulnerability and then discuss this along with a workplace risk assessment with their line manager.



It is clear from the feedback received there are feelings of worry, anxiety, nervousness. There were however some individuals who were happy and ok to be back at work.

***“50% nervous but 50% happy, I miss the office environment and I’m relieved I’ve still got a job to go back to”***

***“A full risk assessment has made me feel as comfortable as is possible in the circumstances. The use of face covering in the work place will strengthen this further.”***

***“Extreme anxiety as I’m in an open plan primary school, no masks or social distancing”***



## Education

Of those who had children of school age 96% told us they had sent their children back to school.

For the 4% who did not send their children back to school some of the reasons included:

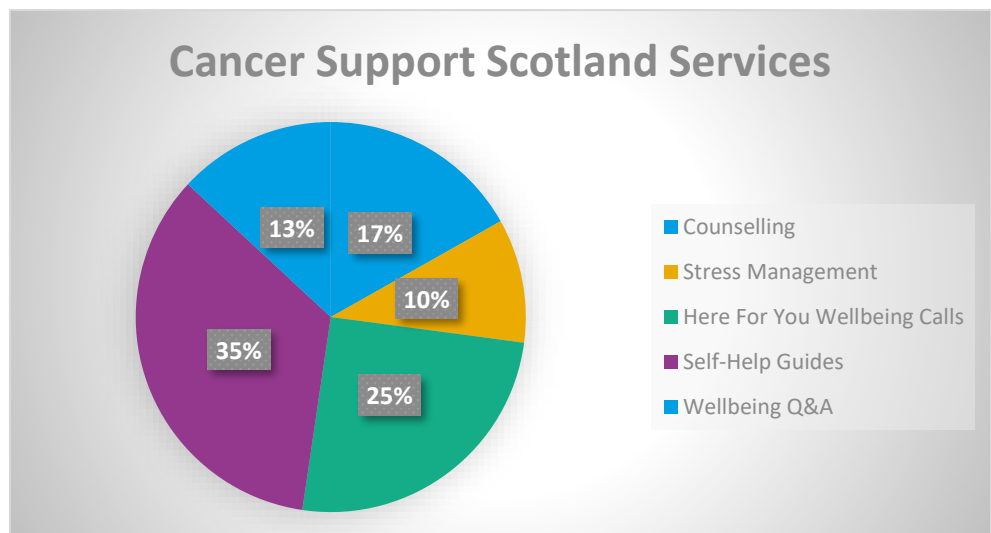
- continued home schooling
- not confident the school environment is safe
- grandparents are looking after children
- children had been sent home due to contact tracing.

***“My son did return to school. But he was mistakenly identified as a close contact to someone that tested +ve but a few days later Contact Tracing said he was ok to return to school. We have taken the extra precaution to keep him off 14 days or until we feel the school environment is safe.”***

## Service Provision

We asked if respondents had access to a mobile phone, laptop or tablet and all respondents did however as this survey was shared online, we understand this response may not be indicative of the full picture across Scotland.

**Which of our services did you access?**



72% respondents said they **would** utilise the option to access their GP/ Clinical/ Counselling Appointments digitally longer term however we received many comments on the importance of face to face appointments:



*“Prefer face to face”*

*“Not very confident with technology”*

*“I feel I get more out of a face to face consultation”*

*“My husband would prefer to see his oncologist in person he is in palliative care at home I’m his wife looking after him and have been paid off from my job because I’m caring for him he is also deaf so phone conversations are not great also as no further treatments are available and he had lumps appearing on his head and body he would obviously like some to physically look at them and not just be giving results of scans over the phone as apart from being deaf he also suffers from delirium so he’s not always able to comprehend either which is very frustrating for him.”*

### In Summary

Each one of us is facing enormous challenges that we never expected, nor wanted. We are living in uncertain times caused by a global pandemic however one thing is clear, those **affected by cancer** are struggling and are feeling the devastating impact of this virus.

This research, whilst conducted over a short period of time, has highlighted the impact covid-19 and shielding has had on mental health and wellbeing for those with cancer and the family of those affected. With over **90% of people** telling us their stress levels had increased and **89% saying shielding** had an impact on their wellbeing it is vital that wellbeing and mental health services are provided across Scotland.

We can see the impact the workplace can have on people’s **wellbeing and mental health**. Those with cancer being asked to go back to work and the sheer anxiety this is causing. At Cancer Support Scotland we have seen an increase in people talking to our Counsellors about workplace as a concern.

Charities are facing a funding crisis, and this is highlighted through the vast numbers of organisations from national to local organisations closing doors or making staff redundant. Whilst funding through the Wellbeing Fund from the Scottish Government for three months during the pandemic was welcomed, the crisis is continuing and without further support at an early stage many people with cancer will be left in isolation and left alone. It is important that during times when investment from other sources is down, the Scottish Government steps up and carries out its pledge to provide parity of care between mental and physical health. Investing in early intervention for counselling and psychology for well-established organisations will ensure a mental health crisis for those with cancer can be avoided.

