

NHS dental services in Devon

Stakeholder briefing

February 2024

Introduction

Pressures on NHS primary care dental teams is severe, with workforce shortages, high demand and a backlog of demand for appointments.

In the South West, we are working in partnership with the NHS South West Collaborative Commissioning Hub (CCH), local dentists and other Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) to develop our South West Dental Recovery Plan to try and address these issues and improve access to dental services for local people.

We are reviewing our plans in light of the newly published national [Dental Recovery Plan on 7 February 2024](#), and welcome the new focus this has placed on NHS dentistry. We will continue to develop our local plans, aligning to the national priorities, and ensuring the needs of our local communities are being prioritised.

This plan is an important next step in improving patient access to NHS dental care and supporting dental services to return to pre-pandemic levels of activity.

Supported by £200m of new government investment, the plan sets out how we will grow the workforce, including providing targeted funding for dentists to work in areas that have historically struggled to recruit and retain staff, raising the minimum Unit of Dental Activity value to £28 to help make NHS work more attractive to dental teams, and offering dental practices a new patient premium payment to treat patients who have not been seen for over two years.

To attract new NHS dentists and improve access to care in areas with the highest demand, around 240 dentists will be offered one-off payments of up to £20,000 for working in under-served areas paid over three years.

There are several measures in place across the region to increase dental access for patients. Highlights include:

- Commissioning additional urgent dental care appointments that people can access by calling NHS111 with an urgent dental need. There are over 356 additional appointments every week across the South West.
- NHS England has commissioned additional stabilisation sessions across the South West, with 47 practices now providing 750 appointments every week.
- We have commissioned additional children's orthodontic capacity in the South West, with 20 orthodontic practices who have treated an additional 650 children during the 2022/23 period.
- We are supporting an oral health improvement initiative called First Dental Steps where health visitors and midwives are trained to give oral health care advice to families with children under two and have oral health care packs (toothbrushes and

toothpaste) to give to families in need – this work is being undertaken in partnership with local authorities.

- Supervised toothbrushing programmes are running in schools in areas of deprivation across the South West.

Background

Patients are not registered with a dental practice in the same way as they are with a general practice, although some dental practices might see patients on a regular basis. Instead, dental practices are contracted to deliver activity and are obliged to only deliver a course of treatment to an individual, irrelevant of where they live, and not to deliver ongoing regular care.

There is no geographical restriction on which practice a patient may attend, allowing patients the choice of where they would like to receive a course of treatment, as long as the practice is accepting new patients.

Dental practices are independent businesses, often providing a combination of NHS and private dentistry. Practices providing NHS treatment are listed on the [NHS website](#) and they update this list themselves. Neither NHS England or commissioners hold information on practices who are currently accepting new patients, and practices can close their lists at any time if they are full.

Dental commissioning delegated to Integrated Care Boards

On 1 April 2023 responsibility for commissioning NHS dentistry was delegated to ICBs across England. The seven ICBs in the South West are supported by the NHS South West Collaborative Commissioning Hub (CCH) to commission NHS dentistry in their area.

To complain about primary care services in Devon – including dentistry – contact the NHS Devon for advice and signposting.

In the first instance, NHS Devon will recommend that concerns or complaints are raised directly with the healthcare provider in question. This is the organisation from which you received the service for instance, a dental surgery. However, if that's not possible, they will discuss with you what happens next.

- Telephone – 0300 123 1672
- Email – d-icb.patientexperience@nhs.net
- Post – Patient experience team, NHS Devon, Aperture House, Pynes Hill,

South West dental reform programme

In the South West, the seven ICBs, NHS England and the NHS South West CCH have been working together on the NHS South West Dental Reform Programme to tackle some of the issues creating pressure on NHS dental services across the South West region.

Regional teams are supporting the ICB to deliver improvements with a focus on access, oral health improvement and workforce.

Access

Urgent care

- Urgent dental care is available via NHS 111 for those without a regular dentist. If any individual has a dental emergency, there are arrangements in place to ensure that anyone who does not have a dentist and has an urgent dental need can access an urgent dental appointment. Patients should contact NHS111.
- Co-ordinating an urgent dental care initiative in place across the region since September 2021. This involves commissioning additional urgent dental care appointments, with an additional 356 appointments each week across the SW

Stabilisation pathway

- Implementing a new pathway for those who do not have access to a regular dentist but for whom the urgent care pathway is not appropriate - the stabilisation pathway.
- Stabilisation sessions are for patients who seek urgent care and who are identified during the appointment as having several additional dental issues that need addressing imminently. Patients can access stabilisation dental care by calling 111.
- 47 practices in the South West offer stabilisation appointments, seeing approximately 750 patients per week. This stabilisation programme is currently running for 18 months, but we are hopeful that it will continue into 2024/25.

Oral health improvement

The South West has a high rate of dental decay in children, with some areas having a higher than average rate. [The 2022 Oral Health Survey of Year 6 children](#), by local authority and ICB areas, published on 1 February 2024 by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) found:

- Tooth decay is a preventable disease that can lead to pain and infection. It can affect children's eating, sleeping, school readiness and their ability to thrive in life.
- Across England, 16% of Year 6 children who participated in the survey had visible tooth decay in their permanent teeth. This is the first time that the oral health of Year 6 children (aged 10-11 years) in England has been monitored.
- In the South West as a whole, based on the data available, the percentage of Year 6 children examined with experience of dental decay in their permanent teeth was 12%.
- Across the region, where data is available at higher tier local authority level, the percentage of children examined with experience of dental decay ranges from 3.4% in Bath and North East Somerset to 26% in Cornwall.

There are a number of children-focused initiatives underway across the South West to try and improve the oral health of our children, detailed below, and health visitors provide advice and support to parents about healthy feeding options for babies and toddlers.

First Dental Steps programme

- The First Dental Steps programme is an oral health improvement intervention, embedded in the Healthy Child Programme. It incorporates public health and NICE recommendations into a multi-stranded oral health initiative and builds on the learning from a recent pilot delivered across six South West sites.
- In the short-term it is anticipated that the intervention has the potential to support the promotion of preventive dental care for children aged 0-2 years. The universal

element of the programme has the potential to impact upon 163,000 children (aged 0-2 years old) across the South West, with a targeted offer to approximately 4,000 vulnerable children.

- In the longer term it is expected that implementation will support the realisation of the following benefits:
 - An increase in dental access and attendance for children aged 0-2 years;
 - A reduction in the prevalence and severity of dental caries, alongside a reduction in oral health inequalities in young children;
 - A reduction in hospital-based tooth extractions for children due to dental decay.
- Health visitors and community nurses have received training in oral health promotion, so they can support families with young children in providing evidence-based advice, alongside toothbrush and fluoride toothpaste packs. Children at high risk of decay are identified and referred directly to community dental teams for further help where needed.
- This programme is already running in Torbay and Plymouth.
- This scheme complements the existing Brighter Smiles programme run in a few areas, which is aimed at 3–5-year-olds.
- Work is ongoing with the ICBs towards an anticipated continuation of the programme in 24/25, and to being extended to other areas in the South West.

Supervised toothbrushing and fluoride varnish programmes

- Programmes are currently underway to give children time and supervision to brush their own teeth at nursery and reception class in some areas, making brushing part of children's everyday routine and helping to protect their teeth from decay.
- Dental professionals visit some nurseries and schools to apply fluoride varnish to children's teeth, with parents' consent.
- Supervised toothbrushing schemes are already running in the Devon ICB area.
- The roll out will be targeted to areas where we know children are at increased risk of developing tooth decay, such as in areas of high deprivation.
- Providers of the service will work together with colleagues involved in oral health promotion across the region to ensure the successful roll out and reach of this service, including working with the local authority to identify schools in the most deprived areas, before linking with these schools to introduce the project and engage with the school staff and the parents.

Workforce

The [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#), published on 30 June 2023, sets out the steps the NHS and its partners need to take to deliver an NHS workforce that meets the changing needs of the population over the next 15 years. These include a 40% increase to dentistry undergraduate training places by 2031/32.

To support this ambition in the South West, we will expand dental placements by 24% by 2028/29, taking the overall number that year to 1,000 places.

Work is also underway through the establishment of Centres for Dental Development to bring together dental education and training with service delivery models, particularly in areas where there is a shortage of workforce relative to population needs.

The national dental recovery plan also outlines the plans for a £20,000 'golden hello' incentive payment to work in areas that historically have struggled to recruit and retain dental

staff and in areas that are under-served. There will be funding for up to 240 posts to benefit from a golden hello across the country.

The plan states there will be an expansion to training places and the Department of Health and Social Care will confirm following through on entry changes to allow therapists and hygienists to work with full scope regarding anaesthetics and fluoride varnish.

NHS Devon

Cornwall and Devon share a dental helpline which patients can access via NHS111 and are then put through, where possible, or are given the dental helpline number to call. Through the helpline people can access urgent or stabilisation advice, or appointments, if appropriate, and put themselves on a waiting list of those seeking a regular NHS dentist.

Dental vans

As part of the national recovery plan announcement, it was also announced in Parliament that Devon would be one of 15 ICBs that would be receiving a dental van sometime over the next year (no timeframe available yet).

The bus will go to more rural and coastal areas.

Staffed by NHS dentists, they will offer check-ups and simple treatments such as fillings.

Patient communications

There is a page on the [One Devon website](#) dedicated to local information about NHS dental services, which is regularly updated with key information and signposting.

There are plans for dental campaigns to be rolled out nationally with local authorities that will focus on prevention and good dental health.

Access

Emergency dental access	Routine dentist access
<p>In clinical hours contact the Devon helpline operated by Access Dental - 03330 063 300.</p> <p>Patients will be referred to the closest emergency provider or allocated an appointment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Torbay - 01803 217777 • Plymouth - 01752 4234664 • Exeter and rest of Devon - 03330 063 300 	<p>Contact Devon and Cornwall waiting list managed by Dental Access - 03330 063 300.</p>

Provision

Urgent Care

Number of practices	Number of appointments per week
4	47

Stabilisation

Number of practices	Average number of sessions per week	Number of appointments per week
6	15	75

Children's Orthodontics – Q4 2022/23

Number of practices	Number of children
2	44