



**North East and  
North Cumbria**

# **Update on NHS Dentistry provision and Primary Care Dental Access Recovery Plan**

**Darlington Health and Housing Scrutiny Committee**

**1 November 2023**

# **The ICB in North East & North Cumbria now has responsibility for commissioning dental services**

- NHS England have delegated responsibility to NENC ICB for commissioning dental services from 1 April 2023
- From 1 July 2023 we have transferred people with the knowledge, expertise and experience of dental commissioning into our team from NHS England

# Summary Overview of NHS Dentistry

- NHS Dentistry services MUST operate in accordance with **Nationally set Government Regulation (2006)**
- Under NHS Dentistry national regulation there is **no 'formal registration' of patients** with dental practices as part of their NHS Dentistry offer, patients can therefore approach any dental practice offering NHS care for access.
- Dental contracts and provision is **activity and demand led** with the expectation practices deliver courses of treatment with **recall intervals appropriate to clinical need** and manage their available commissioned capacity to best meet both local demand and the clinical needs of patients presenting to their practice.
- The contract regulations set out the contract currency which is measured in **units of dental activity (UDAs)** that are attributable to a **'banded' course of treatment prescribed under the regulations**.
- **North East and North Cumbria ICB do not commission private dental services**, however, NHS dental regulations do not prohibit the provision of private dentistry by NHS Dental Practices.
- The prolonged **COVID- 19 pandemic period** required NHS Dental Practices to follow strict Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance which significantly restricted levels of access to dental care. As a result, **backlog demand for dental care remains high with the urgency and increased complexity of patient clinical presentations** further impacting the ability for the NHS Dental Care system to return back to pre-COVID operational norms.

# There are significant challenges to people accessing dentistry in North East & North Cumbria

- Dental services have struggled to recover from the impact of covid.
- There are significant challenges with recruitment and retention of dentists.
- As a result, some providers unable to deliver full commissioned capacity.
- There is widespread recognition that the national dental contract requires reform.
- The number of contracts handed back in NENC has increased from 3 in all of 2020 to 12 in the first 7 months of 2023 (only 1 contract handed back in Darlington, ie Firthmoor dental practice that closed end March 2023).
- This means local people across the NENC are experiencing problems accessing NHS dentists – areas of particular challenge include Darlington as well as N Cumbria, North Northumberland, parts of Co Durham and Sunderland.

# We will tackle the challenges in three phases

Improving access to dentistry will not be a quick fix

We are tackling this in three streams:



Immediate actions to stabilise services



A more strategic approach to workforce and service delivery



Developing an oral health strategy to improve oral health and reduce the pressure on dentistry

# Immediate actions undertaken

c£3.8m non-recurrent investment agreed to date for 2023-24 to:

- Increase NHS 111 dental clinical assessment capacity
- Increase out of hours dental treatment services
- Extend access arrangements to provide where possible an additional 27.5k patient treatment slots between July 2023 and end of March 2024 (to supplement the circ 4.3k slots funded in Q1).

Implemented a local commissioning process to re-provide (where possible) activity when contracts are handed back.

Flexible commissioning arrangement offered to practices to provide a training grant to support the employment of overseas dentists.

# Further actions/next steps

- Funding earmarked to progress formal procurements to secure new market interest/NHS dental practices to address gaps in provision where it has not been possible to re-commission UDAs from existing NHS practices (includes a new contract for Darlington).
- Advertise in BDJ to attract overseas dentists and to support them through National Dental Performer List process (required to deliver NHS dental care).
- Work with key stakeholders on further local initiatives to improve workforce recruitment and retention, service delivery sustainability and improved access particularly within CORE20 areas and for disadvantaged groups.
- Work with Healthwatch to update patient and stakeholder comms.
- Work with local system partners to progress development of an oral health strategy to improve oral health and reduce the pressure on dentistry.
- Work with NHS England regional and national teams to influence national Dental System Reform.

# Advice/signposting for patients

- Patients are not registered with a dentist in the same way as GP practices – you can therefore contact any NHS dental practice to access care.
- As independent contractors, dental practice are responsible for managing their appointment books and are best placed to advise on the capacity they have available to take on new patients.
- Practices providing NHS treatment are listed on [www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk). Practices are responsible for keeping the website updated and whilst it may currently indicate they are not taking on new patients, we would advise that patients do contact them to check the latest position on availability of routine appointments.
- Dental practices are being **encouraged to prioritise patients for treatment based on clinical need and urgency**, therefore appointments for some **routine treatments**, such as dental check-ups, may therefore still be delayed. Some practices are operating waiting lists to manage those patients requesting routine NHS dental care.
- If your teeth and gums are healthy – a **check-up, or scale and polish may not be needed every 6 months**.



# Advice for patients with an urgent dental treatment need

- If you develop an **urgent dental issue** telephone your regular dental practice (or any NHS practice if you don't have a regular dentist).
- It is important that when you ring the practice, you fully explain the nature of your dental problem so that the urgency of your dental treatment need can be determined.
- If the practice is unable to offer an appointment because their NHS urgent access slots have already been taken up, they will advise you to ring another NHS dental practice, or alternatively you can visit [www.111.nhs](http://www.111.nhs) or call 111.
- The NHS111 health advisor will undertake a clinical triage and where the dental need is deemed to be clinically urgent, an appointment will be made at the nearest in-hours urgent dental care hub, or alternatively depending on the time of the call, into the dental out of hours treatment services.
- If the issue is not deemed urgent, patients will be signposted to another NHS dental practice and/or given self-care advice until an appointment can be offered.
- You should be advised to make contact again if your situation changes/worsens.

# Oral health improvement initiatives (1)

## Darlington

- Supervised Toothbrushing Activity (June 2023)

Settings	Number of participating settings	Numbers of children brushing
Pre-schools	2	90
Primary Schools	16	942

- Oral health training provided to Health Visitors on key oral health messages and to encourage early attendance. Oral health packs are distributed to parents at the 8 month visit.
- Implementation of a dental access referral pathway for “Children in Care” and children receiving child protection medicals where an oral health need is identified for children not currently accessing dental care.

# Oral health improvement initiatives (2)

## Darlington

- Caring for your Smiles programme: in collaboration with Darlington LA team.
  - All care homes in Darlington have completed a NICE NG48 baseline needs assessment.
  - The oral health promotion team are working with care homes to improve information for residents, care plans to improve support with oral health and oral health training for care home staff.
  - The North East (including Darlington) programme was highlighted in the recent 2023 CQC report [Smiling matters: Oral health in care homes - progress report - Care Quality Commission](https://www.cqc.org.uk/publications-reports/2023/04/smiling-matters-oral-health-in-care-homes) ([cqc.org.uk](https://www.cqc.org.uk)) as an example of best practice.
  - Publication in British Dental Journal describing the results of the Darlington Programme
- Oral health training for public health teams and health and social care staff e.g. public health nurses, care delivered at home, and hospices.
- Mouth Care Matters: promoting good oral health in secondary care hospital wards e.g. for elderly care