

Quick Poll Survey: Dental Services

May 2022

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Introduction

Access to NHS dental services is a national issue. Certainly, over the past year, concerns around NHS dental services throughout Lincolnshire has been repeatedly raised to us. Lack of availability of NHS practices taking new patients and struggles accessing NHS dental treatment during the pandemic are key concerns.

Therefore, to gather further insight into these concerns we conducted an online survey.

This survey supplements additional work we have been doing surrounding NHS dental services in Lincolnshire such as our YourVoice Event held on 30th March 2022.

Aim

To gain an insight into the accessibility of NHS dental services in Lincolnshire and the ability to seek NHS dental treatment in the past 12 months.

Methodology

We conducted an online survey during March 2022.

We heard from
236
people

Findings

Who took part:

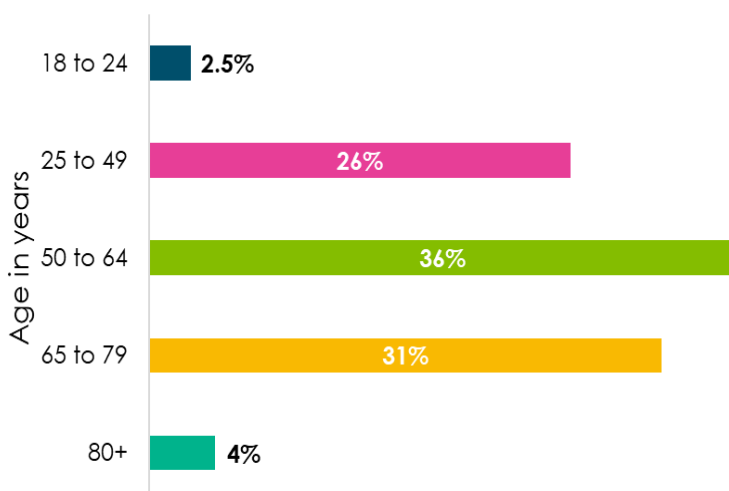
| | |
|-----|-------------------------|
| 7% | Boston Borough |
| 25% | East Lindsey District |
| 2% | Lincoln City |
| 9% | North Kesteven District |
| 16% | South Holland District |
| 30% | South Kesteven District |
| 10% | West Lindsey District |
| 2% | Out of area |



72% of respondents were women.

26% were men and 0.5% preferred to self-describe their gender.

Age of the individuals who responded to the survey



What you told us

Access to an NHS Dentist



55%

had an NHS Dentist in Lincolnshire



45% had no

NHS Dentist in Lincolnshire

Over the past year, our Information and Signposting team have repeatedly heard from individuals who have contacted 10+ dentists to try to register with an NHS practice with no success. However, patients are able to register with many of these practices as private patients.



How far do you travel to your NHS dentist?

10

63% within 10 miles of their home address

25

24% within 25 miles of their home address

>25

13% travelled more than 25 miles from their home address

However, we did hear of several cases of individuals travelling over 100 miles to access NHS dental services.

"I live in Grantham Lincolnshire and have to travel to Newark Nottinghamshire to access an NHS Dentist."

"Have to do a 120 mile round trip, as unable to get a dentist in the area I now live in."

"I have not needed any emergency dental care but am concerned at not having my teeth checked in such a long time."

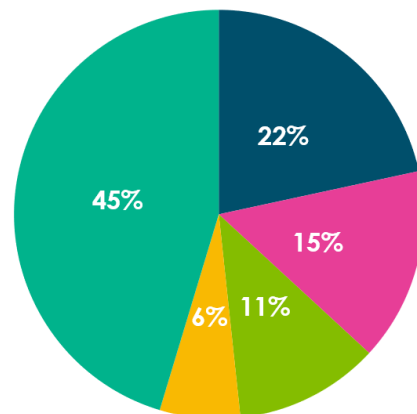
Access to NHS Dental Services

Check-up appointments

Even for those registered with an NHS Dentist, there have been struggles accessing not only emergency treatment but preventative check-ups, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The coronavirus pandemic saw the temporary suspension of many NHS dental services to keep staff and patients safe.

When asked 'When was the last time you had an NHS Dental check-up?' the majority had not had a check-up in the past 2 years.

When was the last time you had an NHS Dental check up?



■ In the last 3 months

■ Between 3 and 6 months

■ Between 6 months and a year ago

■ Between 1 and 2 years ago

■ More than 2 years ago

Emergency/Urgent treatment

For those needing emergency or urgent treatment in the past 12 months, the picture has been especially bleak. Individuals reported not being able to access emergency treatment or having to wait months for it, causing pain and discomfort. This has led to individuals looking for help from elsewhere.

In the past 12 months, **40%** contacted an alternative NHS service, when unable to see an NHS Dentist either for themselves or someone else.



Which service did you contact because you were unable to see a dentist?

Individuals sought help from a range of different services including ringing an NHS helpline such as 111, others were left with no other choice but to pay for private treatment, whilst others remained in pain due to not being able to get treatment.



28% ended up going to a private dentist



10% called an NHS helpline e.g., 111



6% looked information up online

Other services contacted/used included:

| | |
|--|-----|
| Online NHS services (including NHS 111 online) | 4% |
| Went to A&E | 3% |
| Went to GP practice | 3% |
| Spoke to a pharmacist | 1% |
| Cannot remember | 13% |
| Other* | 32% |

"I have been unable to get to see a dentist at all. Even being referred by 111."

"Absolutely terrible I needed tooth out in a lot of pain but was told NHS I would have to wait 18 months it's a joke when you're in agony."

"Had chronic toothache and abscess after tooth broke off. No NHS dentist available, cannot afford private treatment. Self-medicating with paracetamol and ibuprofen."



*Other included individuals who: were told to recontact their dentist at a later date, gave up trying to register or get an appointment, are still waiting for an appointment, those who went to a dentist in a different county or country and those who persisted with the pain.



68% did not know how to make a complaint, if they were unhappy with service they received.

Our stance

Both ourselves and Healthwatch England have been very vocal on the lack of NHS dentistry both in Lincolnshire and nationally.

To read the full report published by Healthwatch England in response to concerns around dental services, click on the link below:

[Healthwatch England's National Response to Dentistry Concerns](#)

In line with Healthwatch England we have made some recommendations for NHS dentistry.

Our recommendations



Use the reform of commissioning to tackle the crises of access and affordability:

- For many, there are two significant difficulties they face when needing to access NHS dental care: the availability of appointments and the ability to meet NHS charges.
- Currently it is not possible to get a clear picture of access to dental care as lack of formal registration means there is no oversight of which areas are under-served, and which require attention.
- Dental charges are often unexpected and higher band treatments can prove unaffordable for some people.
- New arrangements should be based around maximising access to NHS dental services, with particular emphasis on reducing inequalities.

Greater clarity in the information about NHS dentistry:

- People need to know which dental practices are taking new patients, when they are restarting routine care appointments, how they can access urgent care if needed, and how much they would pay for their dental treatments.

While the NHS website has information about some of these topics, we continue to hear from people about not being able to find the right information when they need it or getting inconsistent information from the providers. Information therefore needs to be accurate and more transparent especially in relation to the cost of treatment.

Treatment Prices

| | |
|--------|-----|
| Band 1 | £ |
| Band 2 | ££ |
| Band 3 | £££ |



- Healthwatch England reiterate what they have said in previous reports that the Government needs to make it a legal requirement for NHS-contracted dentists to regularly update their website and information on their practice notice boards. The NHS 111 and the NHS.UK website must be able to provide with relevant and latest information to the public.



- Also, both dental practices and patients need to be clear what it means to be 'registered' with an NHS dentist. People are being removed from their practice list because they haven't seen their dentist regularly. However, there is no information about how often people should visit their dentist if they want to retain their 'registration'. The information on the NHS website about NHS dental registration conflicts with the messages people get from the practices, which suggests that providers are equally unclear about the registration policies.



Explore the possibilities of using dental practices to promote a broader wellbeing:

- With the development of primary care networks, there should be opportunities for dental care services not only to consider the oral health implications but also to refer people to appropriate services – such as weight management and smoking cessation – that may have broader health benefits.



Summary

Access to NHS dental services is a key issue throughout Lincolnshire. Whilst 55% reported having access to an NHS dentist, 45% did not. Those trying to register with an NHS dentist often contacted multiple practices, only to be told there are no places, but that they could register as a private patient. This is not only confusing but also not feasible for many. These individuals are left without preventative dental care, which is likely to present problems later down the line, and emergency/urgent care. The latter results in deteriorating problems and considerable pain.



However, even those with access to an NHS dentist still struggled to access either preventative or emergency treatment over the past 12 months. Most (45%) reported having their last check-up over 2 years ago. The reduction in dental services over the past 12 months has been in part due to restrictions because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Confusingly, during this time whilst NHS dental treatment came to a halt, individuals were able to receive treatment if they went private, even at the same NHS practice.

"I had to go private for emergency treatment that will set me back £400. I cannot afford this but see no other option as I am in so much pain."

To cope, whilst waiting for treatment, 40% of patients contacted other services for help. Individuals commonly looked to NHS services such as 111 and online advice for support. However, 28% ended up paying for private treatment.

Whilst the situation should improve slightly as services return to normal, and catch up from the COVID-19 pandemic, there will still be a shortage of NHS dental services in Lincolnshire.

"I have only just got a dentist again. Having shielded as a vulnerable person, I was taken off my old dentist's list. I had to pay out £800 for emergency dental work in the interim because I couldn't get an NHS dentist anywhere."

Healthwatch Lincolnshire recognise and echo the serious concerns you have raised around access to dental services in our county. In line with Healthwatch England's response to national concerns around dental services, we have made a set of recommendations.

These recommendations are broad, and we hope to tackle some of the wider issues relating to dental services such as inequalities in access and service provision.

The key areas that need addressing are:

- Service provision
- Registration
- Treatment costs
- Accurate and transparent information
- Equitable access

On an encouraging note, we did receive some positive comments surrounding NHS dental services in the past 12 months:

"We haven't had any real problems, our dentist is local, so very lucky."

"Back to 6 monthly check-ups now Excellent, had 2 check-ups in the last year."

"Appointments were on hold due to Covid but contacted practice to get an update since had not received NHS follow up invite and wished to check if still registered. Told that they were beginning to catch up on routine and was offered a convenient appointment the following week."



Share your thoughts

You can help make health and care services better by sharing your experiences and ideas.

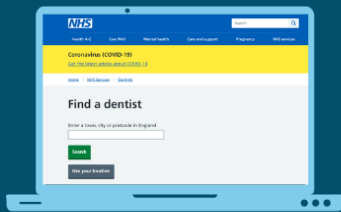
Healthwatch Lincolnshire, Rooms 33–35, The Len Medlock Centre, St George's Road, Boston, Lincs. PE21 8YB | 01205 820 892 | info@healthwatchlincolnshire.co.uk | www.healthwatchlincolnshire.co.uk

Finding it hard to get a dentist appointment?

Dental practices are recovering from backlogs due to strict hygiene measures to minimise the risk of spreading COVID-19 to patients and staff. The situation is improving but we are hearing that Lincolnshire residents without a regular dentist are still finding it difficult to get an appointment. Read our steps below on accessing NHS dentistry.

1 If you have a dentist you usually visit phone them to make an appointment. Appointments will be available according to your individual situation and dental need. Be prepared to **wait longer** than usual for a routine, non-urgent appointment. You can also take personal steps to maintain healthy teeth.

2 Unlike registering at a GP practice, NHS dental practices are available to everyone to attend a course of treatment regardless of where they live. Visit the [NHS Find a Dentist website](#) to search for a dentist in your area. You should also consider **widening your search area** to where you can travel to.



What is Healthwatch Lincolnshire doing about this issue? We regularly monitor the access to NHS dentistry in Lincolnshire sharing our findings with dental commissioners to **influence positive change**.

3 **Is your dental need urgent?** Phone or go online to [NHS 111](#) to check your symptoms and see if you need urgent help. You will be advised if you need to visit your hospital emergency department (A&E) or advised of your nearest NHS dentists providing urgent appointments. The number of urgent appointments available each day is limited. When phoning a dental practice, clearly describe your symptoms, any pain or swelling and the impact it is having on your daily living.

111

4 If you can't find a dentist for urgent treatment, call [NHS England's Customer Contact Centre](#) on 0300 311 2233 stating your situation. Keep sharing your experiences with us, positive and negative, the more information we have the more we can help.

