

Dental Access for Adults and Children in Wiltshire

March 2023

1. Background

NHS England is responsible for the commissioning of dental services across England, having taken over from primary care trusts when the NHS was reorganised in 2013. NHS England's offices in the South West region manage these contracts locally. From April 2023 the Integrated Care Board will take on responsibility for commissioning NHS dentistry, supported by NHSE Commissioning hub.

Dental services are provided in Wiltshire in three settings:

1. Primary care – incorporating Orthodontic treatment
2. Secondary care
3. Community services – incorporating Special Care dentistry

2. Primary care (high street dentistry)

The dental practices are themselves independent businesses, operating under contracts with NHS England. Many also offer private dentistry. All contract-holders employ their own staff and provide their own premises. Some premises costs may be reimbursed as part of their contract.

Dental contracts are commissioned in units of dental activity (UDAs). To give context, the table below sets out treatment bands and their UDA equivalent:

Band	Treatment covered	Number of UDAs
1	This covers an examination, diagnosis (including x-rays), advice on how to prevent future problems, a scale and polish if clinically needed, and preventative care such as the application of fluoride varnish or fissure sealant if appropriate.	1
2	This covers everything listed in Band 1 above, plus any further treatment such as fillings, root canal work, removal of teeth but not more complex items covered by Band 3.	3
3	This covers everything listed in Bands 1 and 2 above, plus crowns, dentures, bridges, and other laboratory work.	12

4	This covers emergency care in a primary care NHS dental practice such as pain relief or a temporary filling.	1.2
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3. Access rates to high street dentistry

The table below shows the number of people in Wiltshire who have been able to access an NHS dentist for routine care.

Access rate	June 2021	June 2022
Adults	36.1%	32.7%
Children	33.2%	42.2%

For example, the total number of adults seeing an NHS dentist in Wiltshire has decreased from 36.1% of the population in June 2021 to 32.7% of the population in June 2022.

The access rate for the adult population of Wiltshire (32.7%) is lower than the access rate for England as a whole (37.4%).

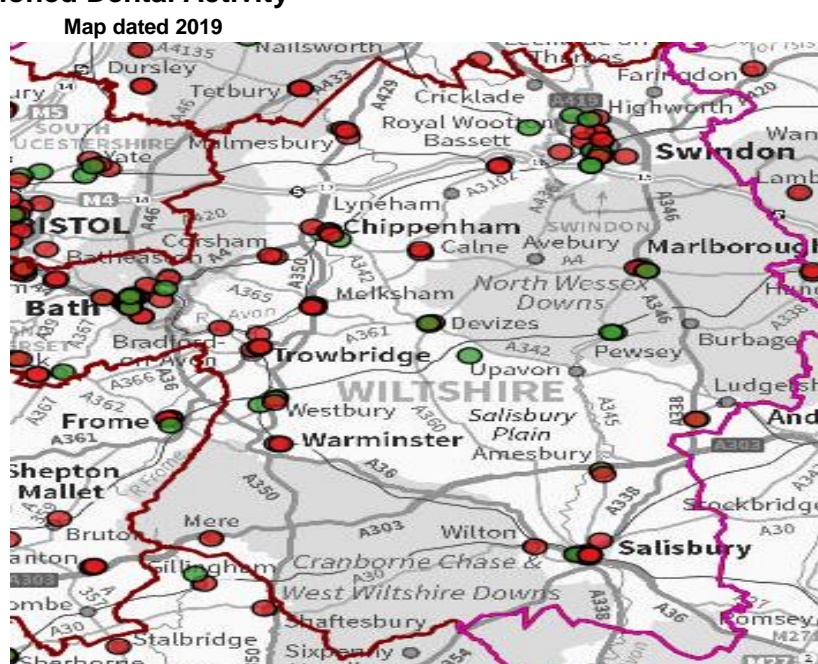
The number of children who have seen a dentist in Wiltshire has increased from 33.2% in June 2021 to 42.2% in June 2022.

The access rate for the child population of Wiltshire (42.2%) is lower than the access rate for England as a whole (46.9%).

For further details on these statistics, please see:

<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/data-tools-and-services/data-services/general-practice-data-hub/dentistry>

4. Commissioned Dental Activity



There are 62 practices in Wiltshire providing general dental services, as indicated in the above map of the Wiltshire area. There are a further 55 practices in BaNES and Swindon.

NHS England has commissioned dental activity from these providers in Wiltshire as follows:

- 22/23 total UDAs commissioned 576,320 – value £17,054,342.20. Total number of UOAs commissioned 28,970 – value £1,902,487.96.

5. Orthodontics

Orthodontics is a dentistry specialty that addresses the diagnosis, prevention, and correction of mal-positioned teeth and jaws, and misaligned bite patterns. A procurement exercise to secure new contracts was completed in 2019. These new contracts provide improved services for people. For example, under the new contracts' practices now have to provide 30% of appointments outside of school hours which may include after-school, at weekends and during school holidays.

Post Covid, orthodontic services have been able to return to normal levels of activity more rapidly than high street dentistry and normal contract volumes are in place for 2022/23

6. Urgent dental care

Great Western Hospital NHS Foundation Trust host the Community Dental Services that manage in and out of hours (weekends and Band Holiday) appointments for patients experiencing dental pain.

Access to urgent dental care would normally be expected to be available within 24 hours of contacting the service. Appointments are provided from sites in both Chippenham and Salisbury.

Only those people with a significant dental emergency, such as facial swelling affecting the airway, uncontrolled bleeding, or facial trauma, would be expected to be treated at accident and emergency departments.

The South West dental commissioning team have launched an initiative to increase the number of urgent care treatment slots by asking practices to provide additional urgent care sessions. There are currently 2 practices within Wiltshire who have signed up to the initiative, seeing a total of 11 patients per week.

7. Stabilisation

One of the exciting pieces of work currently underway is the dental stabilisation programme:

Throughout the pandemic there was a focus on urgent dental care and demand for urgent care remains high. Historically, urgent care was confined to the immediate urgent issue.

Anyone requiring further work to stabilise other dental issues that were less urgent, but likely to become so if left unattended, would need to receive that in a general dental practice.

Stabilisation would provide a more permanent solution to the dental problem, stabilising oral health leading to reduced likelihood of pain and recurrence of accessing the urgent care system, or of accessing other support (i.e., via ED or the GMP). This programme offers a more permanent solution that is better for patient outcomes and is more satisfying for clinicians.

Two practices are providing stabilisation in Wiltshire offering 5 sessions per week, this is accessed via triage through NHS 111.

8. Child Focused Dental Practices (CFDP)

This is an innovative scheme being piloted to address the current shortage of access to quality assured dental care for children under the age of 16. The goal is to improve access to dental and oral care for children in primary care, thus reducing the number of referrals to specialist paediatric dental services largely in hospital settings but also in community clinics.

There are a number of reasons for general dental practitioners (GDPs) feeling uncomfortable treating children in primary care. Of these, confidence and competence play a key role resulting in a referral being made as opposed to an attempt to treat the child.

The scheme aims to improve access by identifying GDPs interested in offering dental and oral care to children. The dental practitioners are supported in their journey of upskilling using different methods, thus giving them confidence in offering care to these patients. These practices are called 'Child Focused Dental Practices' (CFDPs) and a structured programme of learning and pathways for referral to the practices have been established and agreed.

The emphasis will be to offer children dental and oral care timely and efficiently within local settings. The target being upon completion, the patient will be discharged to the care of the referring GDP.

In Wiltshire there is currently one dental practice participating in the pilot scheme, GDPs are able to refer patients to the practice.

9. Workforce

A key factor affecting access to NHS dentistry across the country is limited workforce. The lack of dentists in the area undermines the ability of high street practices to fulfil their contractual required activity.

Recruitment in the South West is challenging and the unwillingness of dentists to come to the area is not necessarily different to those affecting other sectors of the health and social care system.

The lifestyle choices offered to both the medical and dental profession in terms of training opportunities and proximity mean that the younger generation often tend to favour the larger city of Bristol. Recruitment in the more rural areas can be more challenging.

Further training opportunities tend to be aligned with the big teaching hospitals. While we do have a highly successful dental school in Bristol, the need to train and retain dentists in the area outstrips its capacity.

Foundation dentists, who are undergoing further training for a year after graduation, tend to relocate at the end of their foundation year; very few of the annual cohort go on to practice in the South West. Many move out of the area to follow training pathways or to take hospital-based jobs.

Reasons for established dentists leaving include the challenges of working in pressurised NHS practices and the opportunities in private care. Anecdotally, it also seems that some EU dentists are leaving and fewer are arriving.

The SW dental transformation programme includes a range of initiatives to address the workforce gap and associated access issues.

10. Improving access to primary care for people in Wiltshire

- Running a South West recruitment day supported by the British Dental Association and dental providers to try and attract all practitioners to move into the region.
- Working with dental providers to ensure existing contracts are delivering to their maximum potential.
- Reviewing under and over performance of dental contracts on a regular basis and, as part of reconciling activity to contract payment, explore with those contractors with the most variance what they are doing to address under performance.
- Issuing new contracts for NHS primary care dental activity in areas of greatest need, we are having conversations where we can adjust activity and reallocate the activity where necessary,
- Developing plans to commission dental services in areas where there is inequality in access, within available resources. We are working closely with dentists, public health, and the dental school to develop referral pathways and identify initiatives to increase dental capacity across the region through the South West's Local Dental Network and six Managed Clinical Networks for dentistry.
- In collaboration with Health Education England and the Universities of Plymouth and Bristol, we are offering funding to dentists working in the South West who are undertaking post-graduate courses in Restorative; Periodontal; Endodontic and Oral Surgery to increase the number of local specialists within our region.
- Working towards further innovation with existing providers to address regionalised concerns. This includes adjusting contract activity, allowing for reinvestment. Any schemes will take into account national initiatives and regional priorities, e.g., Dental Checks by 1 campaign (to ensure all children see a dentist as their teeth come through, or by their first birthday, at the latest) or increasing urgent care sessions for patients who do not have a regular dentist.

The SW Dental Team has commissioned additional mandatory dental services across the region. Priority areas have been identified focused on replacing activity which has ceased within this financial year. Contract performance criteria for these new contracts included the measurement and assessment of the number of additional new patients accepted for treatment and delivery against the Starting Well Core initiative, which aims to increase access for 0–2-year-olds, promoting early attendance at a dental practice and offering preventative care.

11. Secondary care provision

NHS England contracts with Great Western Hospital NHS Trust, Salisbury NHS Foundation Trust, and Royal United Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in Bath to provide secondary care dentistry for people living in Wiltshire.

As with other services, secondary care was greatly impacted by the pandemic as services initially ceased to funnel additional clinical capacity to treat covid patients in hospitals. All services have now been resumed, but in some cases the frequency of clinics has been reduced due to continued stretched capacity at the hospital sites. This has led to an increase in waiting list for some specialities. Work continues with providers to support a reduction in waiting times.

12. Community services

Great Western Hospitals NHS Trust is commissioned by NHS England to provide a range of community dental services including special care dental. They operate from the following sites across Swindon and Wiltshire.

- Chippenham Dental Access Centre
- West Swindon Health Centre
- Swindon Health Centre
- Salisbury Central Health Clinic

Special care dentistry is concerned with the improvement of the oral health of individuals and groups in society who have a physical, sensory, intellectual, mental, medical, emotional, or social impairment or disability; or, more often, a combination of these factors.

Some of the people using the services include:

- People suffering from anxiety and/or extreme phobia of dental treatment
- People with learning difficulties and/or autism
- People with physical disabilities
- People suffering from dementia
- Patients needing bariatric equipment
- People undergoing chemotherapy
- Some homeless people

People are referred to the service from several routes including:

- High street dentists
- GPs
- School nurses
- Social workers
- Care workers
- Voluntary organisations

Special care dental providers are currently experiencing difficulties in recruiting to specialist posts. Measures are in place, supported by the Special Care Managed Clinical Network, to provide cover from out of county specialists.

We know that our special care dental services provide an invaluable service to some of our most vulnerable people. Our ambition is to ensure that the services are as good and as accessible as possible.

13. Dental Reform Strategy for the South West

Actions Planned for 22/23 Onwards

For the last two years we have been working with the dental practitioners and community representatives such as Healthwatch and NHSE SW's public and patient voice partners, to understand the oral health needs of the population, the reasons why it is difficult to recruit and retain dental practitioners in the region and what factors would support recruitment and retention. Now that we have a more thorough understanding of the issues, where need is greatest and what current students and the dental community suggest would make them more likely to work for the NHS in the South West, we have established three working groups to focus on improving 1) access to dental provision; 2) oral health promotion and 3) workforce gaps and building the architecture needed to support the dental community (such as the development of the previously mentioned LDN and MCNs and the inclusion of Healthwatch members in local dental committees).

Each working group has developed a workplan for the coming years. The following action plans are subject to change as we continue to consider new ideas and suggestions and learn from the pilot projects we have commissioned to determine what works best.

Programme Commitments

In expanding on its objectives, the reform programme has developed a range of commitments related to the workplan.

13.1 Access

The following summarises the commitments and actions that the dental reform programme will complete over the next year to improve access to NHS dental services in the South West: Below are some of the initiatives we have progressed

- The Urgent Care Managed Clinical Network are working to finalise aspirational pathways for future commissioning of urgent care and stabilisation.
- Dental helpline, 111 pathways are being reviewed, developing standardised access routes.

- Stabilisation pilot programme is currently being commissioned and will run until March 24.
- Starting Well Core aims to increase access for 0-2 years, launched October 2022. This now forms part of the criteria for the newly procured dental contracts.
- Welfare checks are taking place for under eighteens waiting for dental general anaesthetic is ongoing.
- Improved access for Armed Forces families review (via MDS procurement and stabilisation) is due to start quarter 4.
- Domiciliary care review has been completed, and suggestions for change have been agreed, which will increase the number of older people accessing dental.

13.2 Workforce

- Dental Stakeholder Conference to was held in January 2023.
- Website signposting to dental vacancies and training opportunities is ongoing.
- Dental workforce data review to support the development of the workforce action plan, is ongoing.
- PLVE - The Performers List Validation by Experience programme enables the NHS to employ overseas dentists. There are now discussions underway with both the Professional Standards Team and Health Education England to look at ways in which criteria, process and regulations can be improved to increase access for overseas dentists.
- Mapping utilisation of dental chairs is taking place to better understand where there may be capacity, is ongoing.
- South West Dental Education Review programme stakeholder group, started in October and is being led by Health Education England.
- Tier 2 accreditation panel has been established work is ongoing.

13.3 Oral Health

- Supervised Toothbrushing – pilot in progress and approval to expand across the SW for 4- and 5-year-olds – Bids are currently be evaluated.
- Task and finish group to review oral health among older population, has started with a piece of work in care homes.
- Task and finish group to review green impact on dentistry and rollout of national toolkit, is awaiting feedback from national colleagues.

14. Summary

Wiltshire scrutiny colleagues are asked to:

- Consider the underlying causes of the access difficulties that people are experiencing in Wiltshire and across the country.
- Consider the ongoing work of NHS England South West dental reform programme board to address these and improve the oral health of our population.
- Work in partnership with NHSE South West dental reform team to consider ways to market Wiltshire to attract the dental and other clinical workforce that it needs and encourage more young people in Wiltshire's schools and colleges to consider a career in the NHS