

Dental Experiences

December 2021 to April 2022

In December, we published a [summary of the challenges experienced by the residents of Surrey in accessing NHS-funded dentistry](#). We shared this information with Surrey's MPs, calling on them to champion for change at policy level.

Healthwatch England have since collated experiences from [across the country](#) demonstrating that the barriers to accessing dental appointments is widening health inequalities, and putting people at risk of developing additional health problems as a result.

In Surrey, we continue to hear how the cost to access private care is a barrier which could also lead to further health complications and widen health inequalities in Surrey

Financial Barriers

We have heard from Surrey residents who are struggling financially leaving them without the ability to afford dental care and therefore unable to receive any support:

I really need a dentist. I have what I think is gingivitis in my gum. I have emailed loads and I get the same response we are not taking any new patients, unless I pay of course. I don't work and I don't have any money, because I very recently lost my job, and I don't claim benefits so I don't know how that works with me getting treatment. What can I do because gingivitis is a horrible thing to have and in this day and age. I should not be made to suffer it's depressing me it really is. **157183 January 2022.**

We have also heard examples of families who have obtained HC2 certificates who are also unable to find any help:

My 19-year-old needs urgent Root Canal Treatment. He has been seen twice by NHS 111 who have referred him for treatment. He is currently based at The University of Surrey and has been popping Ibuprofen every day for over two weeks to deal with the pain as he cannot find a local NHS dentist who are taken on new patients and he is also covered by a HC2 Certificate for payment. I am getting worried that he will become addicted to the painkillers if he doesn't get the issue sorted sharpest. He saw a dentist in

November who gave him a filling which then split. He then made another NHS 111 appointment who temporary fixed this in January but was told he would need Root Canal Treatment ASAP. **157479, February 2022**

And some who are receiving Universal Credit support who are experiencing barriers to their care:

When I recently visited the dentist for a check-up, I was able to prove that I am on Universal Credit however they still told me that I had to pay. They said they didn't take NHS appointments. It was a private practice, but they did have a poster on the wall regarding advice for Universal Credit claimants. If I had known I wouldn't have taken an appointment that cost me £206. **159424, April 2022.**

No Support for people with Disabilities

We have heard from Surrey residents who are receiving disability support and are in pain and unable to receive NHS dental support:

I have managed today to get an emergency appointment at a dentists via the NHS 111 service as I have been suffering with bad tooth pain. The dentist has advised that I will need the tooth removed as its decayed and infected. She has prescribed me some antibiotics and said I should find a local dentist. I have tried pretty much every dentist I can find on Google locally and none are accepting new NHS clients. I have a disability and now unable to work so just rely on disability benefits for our income so I just can't afford to pay for a private dentists. **159305 March 2022.**

Additional Health Problems

Surrey residents who have been unable to access routine appointments are experiencing worsening health problems:

I rang my dentist to be told that as I had not been for some time they had removed me from their lists. I also want to sign my two young children up. I have used the NHS website and phoned around a long list of dentists in both Surrey and West Sussex, to be told that none of them can accept new NHS patients. I now have what I believe to be an impacted wisdom tooth which is causing

facial, jaw and ear pain and I am not sure what to do now. **152321**

January 2022

Some residents have other health problems which have impacted their oral health leaving them in need of dentist:

I have lost teeth due to my health condition and the required medication and I have had no help from my GP surgery. NHS Dental is a joke. I feel like a non-entity not deserving respect **159011**

March 2022.

And there are experiences which indicate the strain on mental health for those who are unable to get treatment:

I am contacting you as I have not been able to find or even sign up to an NHS waiting list in the last year. I do understand that it is difficult times, but it is really starting to affect me badly. I have a crown front tooth from a childhood accident and trauma in my mouth as a result from the accident. I feel constant stress about not having to be able to get any check-ups and the stress is starting to affect me mentally as well. I am writing and hoping that you will be able to help me. **158196 February 2022.**

No Choice for Patients

Some people have received poor dental care are unable to access alternative services:

I had to call over 20 dentists to find one that was accepting NHS patients. The information on the NHS website about whether a dental practice was accepting NHS patients was often outdated, absent, or in one particularly ridiculous case a practice said they were accepting NHS patients, only to phone up and discover there was a 50-60 week wait list for registration. Once I was able to find a dentist to register at, it was a 6 week wait to be seen. They tried to give me a filling with no anaesthetic, and ever since they did the filling I've had pain in that tooth - I went back the following week after informing them there was an issue with the filling and it was causing me pain, and after having a look they said there was no more they can do. It's been over 6 months now and I'm still experiencing the pain, and it's affecting the way I eat as if anything touches the area, I get a stabbing pain. If I had any choice in the matter, I would change dentist as my experiences with this one has so far been shocking, and my teeth have never

caused me this much pain, but I don't have a choice - there are no NHS dentists in the area taking on new patients. **156594**

January 2022

And for others, sudden service closures have forced them to look elsewhere for treatment but finding nowhere suitable:

My dental practice is suddenly closing, as an NHS patient I can't even get on a waiting list in at least a 20-mile radius! I can't afford private dental care so what am I and thousands of others meant to do? Very difficult to access the help and support. Poor experience of care. [Which of the following best describes your current financial status?] I have just enough for basic necessities and little else. **157640 February 2022**

Challenges in accessing dentistry have led patients to take matters into their own hands:

I have spent the past two and half years trying to register with a NHS dentist, however every time I contact one they either say their NHS lists are full or they are not taking any more NHS patients. A couple have told me to contact them in six months, but when I contact them again, they just say their lists are full. I have already resulted in getting my wife to refill a filling that came out, with some permanent tooth filling stuff bought online. I am not in a rush at the moment as we have solved my current issue, but I don't want to go through that again and would love to be able to get an NHS dentist. I am just hitting a dead end. **158156 February 2022.**

Pressure On Urgent Care Services

Patients requiring urgent treatment have found themselves calling on urgent and emergency care services, placing further pressure on a challenged part of the system:

Right, I just spent 5 hours in A&E, and I don't know what to do now. I've seen a consultant and he suggested codeine - which I'm already taking - and to find a dentist. I must have sent a hundred or more emails to dentists in the area over the last year, with no luck at all. Seriously, 5 hours in A&E for that. I'm going to go to the shed and get my tools out, and rip the bloody tooth out myself, then dial 999. **156551, January 2022**