



Primary Care: What people have told us about dentistry

November 2022 to April 2023

Overview

This report summarises the feedback received from people via [Healthwatch Kent](#), [Healthwatch Medway](#) and [Kent and Medway Voice](#) about their experiences of primary care dentistry from November 2022 to April 2023. This includes 34 separate pieces of feedback. As most feedback came from people who contacted us proactively, it was more likely to be negative. Nonetheless, no positive feedback was received during this period.

The most frequent theme in people’s feedback was access to services, which occurred in 90% of cases. Cost and funding of services was the second most common theme, occurring in 28% of cases, and health inequalities was third most common at 25%. Another frequent theme was impact on lifestyle and wellbeing (18%). This report summarises these key themes and provides illustrative examples. The number of pieces of feedback for each theme is noted in brackets in the report headings and displayed in the chart below.

How many times did each theme occur in people's feedback?



Access to services (29)

The largest trend within our data orientates around patients having difficulty in finding and registering with an NHS dentist. Many patients that are facing this issue also mention the difficulty in being able to afford private care, with a notable amount stating they simply cannot afford private treatment.

- “It is a concern that the NHS say on their website that it is important for people to have good oral health but it is impossible to register with an NHS dentist.”



- "I rang every practice within range of my home. Only one was even taking on new NHS patients and that was not offering any appointments earlier than November 2023, an 11-month wait."

Cost and funding of services (9)

The second largest trend identified within our data relates to cost and funding of services. Some patients have mentioned being unsure as to what they are expected to pay as an NHS patient. Additionally, patients are stating they are unable to afford private treatment and are being quoted very high prices for what used to be regular work.

- An individual said they spoke with a private dentist and was quoted approximately £2600 for the work required. They could not afford this and asked their dentist to put them on the NHS waiting list. However, they were told there was a wait of at least 12 months.
- "They told me I need to have all of my teeth out and false ones put in. They said it would cost £900 just to have my teeth out. I can't afford £900 to have no teeth. I have been trying for about two to three years to get a dentist to help me and no one will. My mental health has gotten so bad and I feel so depressed. All I need is for someone to help me."

Health inequalities (8)

Our third most prevalent trend relates to health inequalities. Much of this feedback ties in with access to services and costs of treatment – we are seeing that those who are financially worse off are struggling to afford private treatment.

- An individual on benefits said, "Paying £75 for that treatment is expensive."
- A serving member of the military was trying to find their children an NHS dentist, but none were accepting new patients and one had a three-year waiting list. However, they could book them in for a private check-up within a few days. The individual said that it was likely they would have moved before their children reached the top of the waiting list. They questioned why dentists could prioritise private care over NHS care where children were concerned.

Impact on lifestyle and wellbeing (6)

Various individuals mentioned how lack of access to NHS dentistry and being unable to afford private care was impacting their lifestyle and wellbeing.

- An individual had ongoing issues with their teeth found it "impossible to register with an NHS dentist" and could not afford private treatment. They said this impacted their work and their life as they needed time off work.
- An individual with extreme anxiety had been unable to find a dentist for three years because none in their area were accepting NHS patients and they could not afford private treatment. As they could not see a dentist when they first had a problem with their tooth, they needed further work and possibly multiple extractions. The stress of phoning dentists caused them severe anxiety and the problems with their teeth had further impacted their mental health.