



# Dental care in Enfield

April 2023

**healthwatch**  
Enfield

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## 1. Introduction

Healthwatch Enfield is the ‘consumer champion’ for users of local health and care services. We listen to the experiences of people across the borough, and ensure that their collective feedback is heard by service providers and commissioners, to make sure that local services best meet local needs.

During July 2021 - June 2022 we received several calls via our signposting service regarding local residents not being able to register as an NHS patient for dental treatment. We decided to contact all the dental practices in Enfield (43) to find out whether they were registering new NHS patients and if so, did they have a waiting list. Our findings are detailed on the next few pages.

## 2. Executive Summary of Findings

During December 2022 - January 2023 we contacted the 43 dental practices in Enfield, as part of our research project. Findings are summarized below:

### Findings from Research

#### NHS Dental Access:

- All postcode areas have 3 dental practices or more, with the greatest coverage in N13 and N14 - each with 7.
- For adults, we found that around a quarter of respondents (9 practices, 23%) are currently accepting patients on the NHS. 3 of these practices have a waiting list.
- Locally, N11 and N18 have the widest NHS coverage for adults, while EN3, N9 and N14 currently have no NHS provision.
- 16 respondents (41%) are currently accepting children for NHS treatment. N21 has the widest coverage, while N9 has the least.
- All respondents (32 practices, 100%) are open Monday to Wednesday, with the vast majority (31, 96%) also open on Thursday and Friday. Fewer than a third (10 practices, 31%) have weekend provision with no practices open on Sunday.
- Just 3 practices offer an evening service.

During July 2021 to December 2022, an 18 month period, we received enquiries from 42 local people - who needed assistance in securing dental treatment on the NHS.

The volume of enquiries received over the last 6 months (July - December 2022) has dropped considerably, compared with July 2021 - June 2022. This corresponds with similar declines in other localities across London, however we are unsure whether decreasing enquiries are due to better access, people seeking advice from other agencies (rather than Healthwatch) or perhaps given the difficulties faced - simply giving up on access.

## Enquiries from Local People

### What are the issues?

- The vast majority of enquirers had been unsuccessful in finding NHS treatment locally, for themselves or family members, in some cases after making many enquiries (over 20 in one instance) and over several days.
- We are told that publicly available information, such as on the NHS website has been inadequate, and that content on local practice websites is often out-of-date or inaccurate. Support and advice services including NHS 111 have not been able to help.
- Those without NHS cover include new patients not yet in the system, and a large number who have been de-registered by their practice and now obliged to pay.

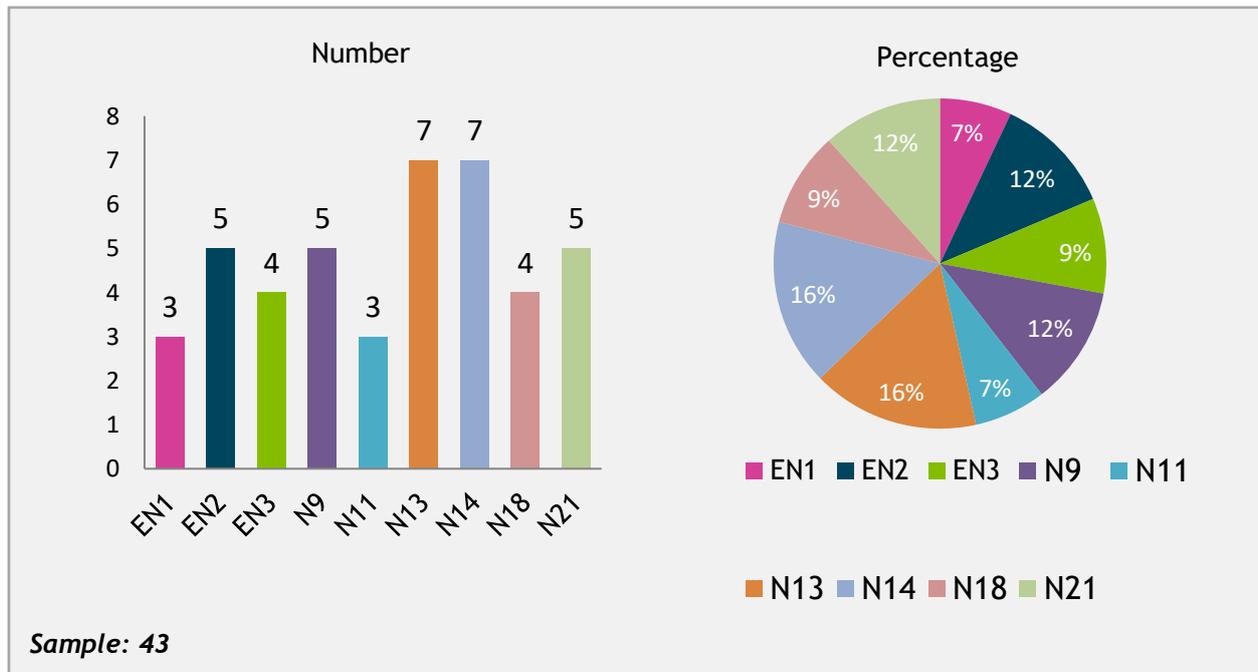
### Who is most affected?

- We have received numerous enquiries from local people on benefits and parents on low income seeking treatment for their children.
- Other groups with particular difficulties or concerns include older people, those with dementia, the physical or learning disabled, pregnant women and new mums.

## 3. Healthwatch Research

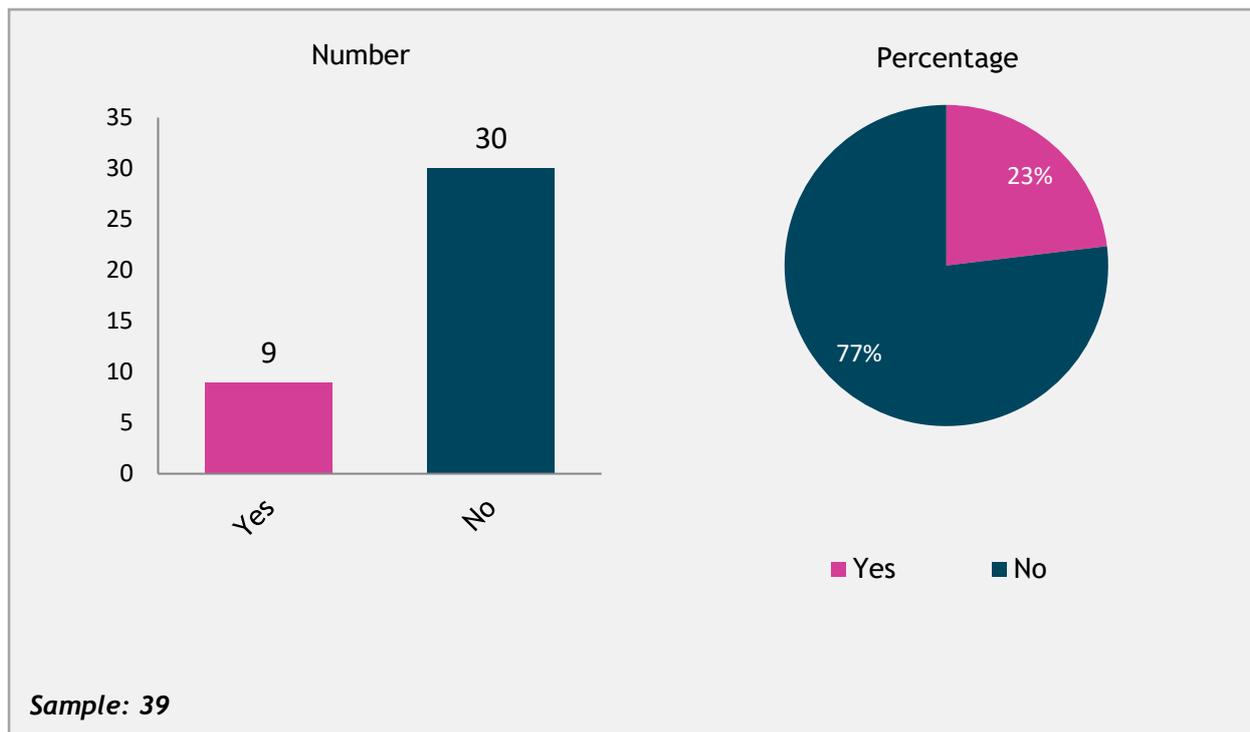
During December 2022 - January 2023 we contacted 43 dental practices in Enfield, as part of a research project. The aim was to assess coverage of NHS dentistry around the borough, for adults and children.

### 3.1 Location of Dentists



All postcode areas have 3 dental practices or more, with the greatest coverage in N13 and N14 - each with 7.

### 3.2 NHS Treatment for Adults



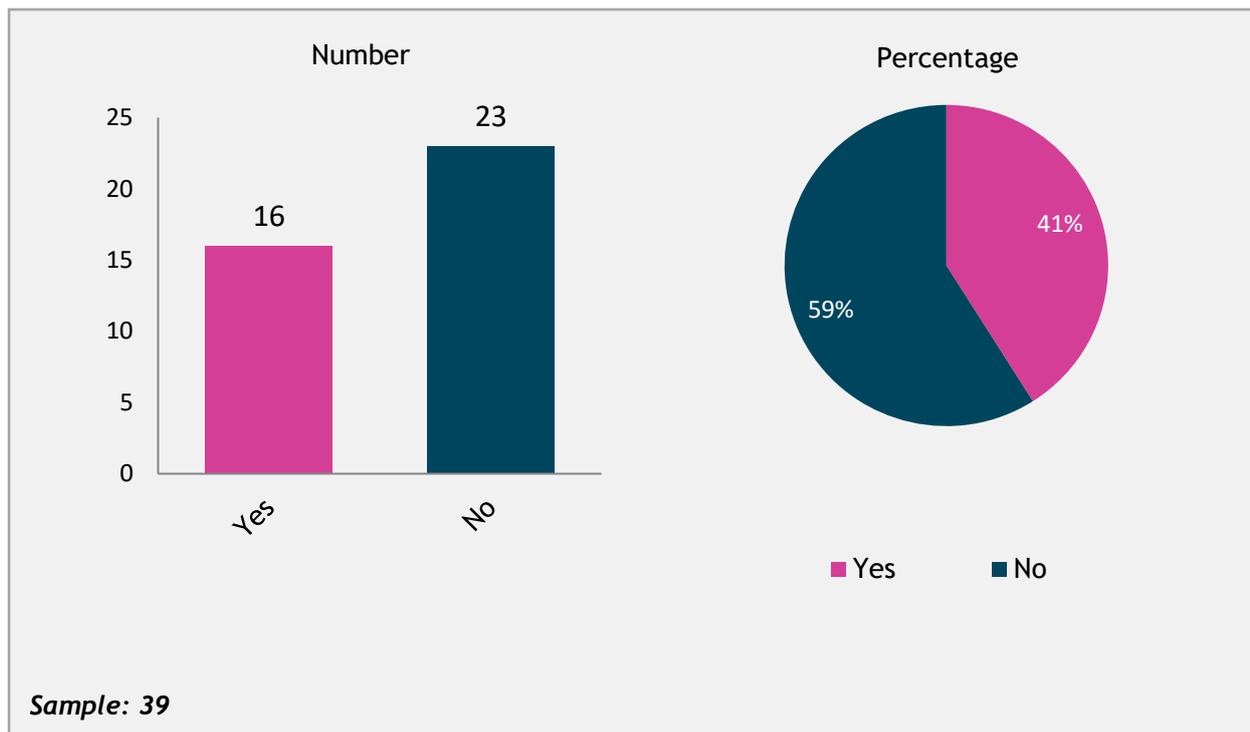
For adults, we found that around a quarter of respondents (9 practices, 23%) are currently accepting patients on the NHS. 3 of these practices have a waiting list for treatment.

#### 3.2.1 By Locality: NHS Treatment for Adults

	% Yes
N11, N18	50%
N13	43%
N1	33%
EN2	25%
All Postcodes (Baseline)	23%
N21	20%
EN3, N9, N14	0%

Locally, N11 and N18 have the widest NHS coverage for adults, while EN3, N9 and N14 currently have no NHS provision.

### 3.3 NHS Treatment for Children



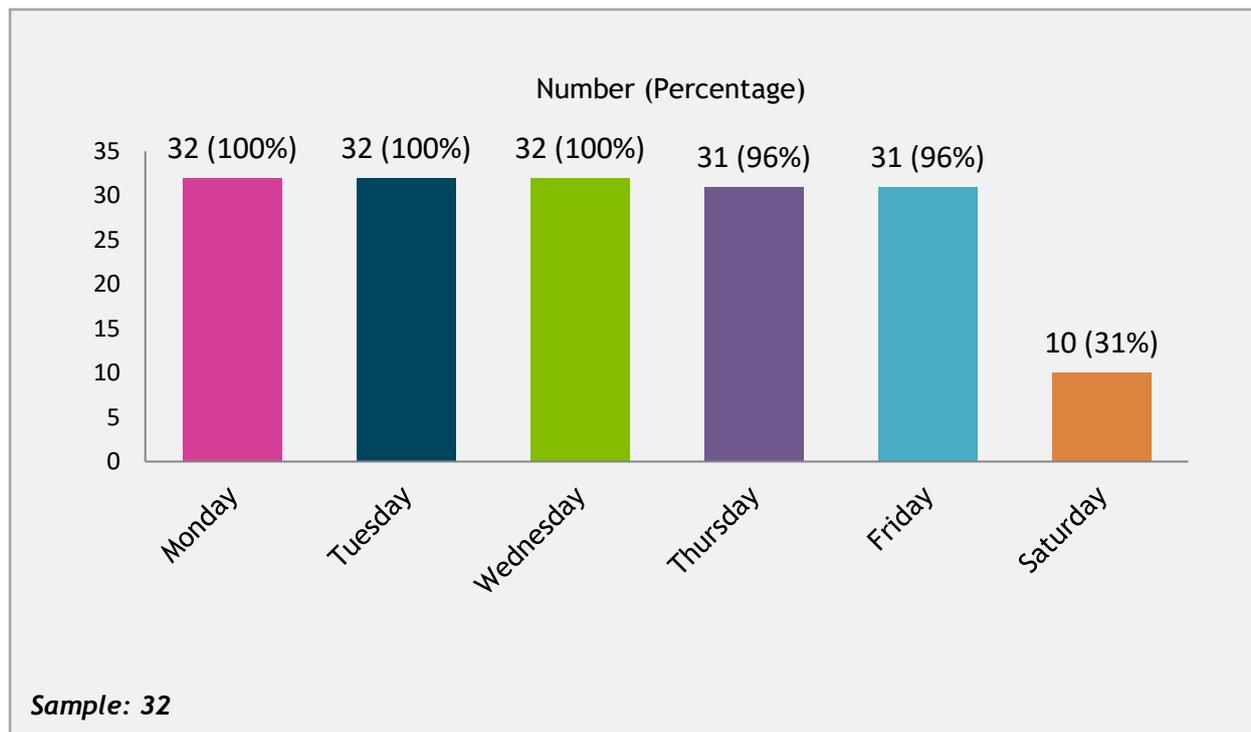
16 respondents (41%) are currently accepting children for NHS treatment.

#### 3.3.1 By Locality: NHS Treatment for Children

	% Yes
N21	60%
EN2, N11, N18	50%
N13	43%
All Postcodes (Baseline)	41%
EN1, EN3, N14	33%
N9	20%

N21 has the widest coverage for children, while N9 has the least.

### 3.4 Opening Times



All respondents (32 practices, 100%) are open Monday to Wednesday, with the vast majority (31, 96%) also open on Thursday and Friday. Fewer than a third (10 practices, 31%) have a weekend provision with no practices open on Sunday.

On opening times, the majority of practices close at either 5.30pm or 6.00pm, with just 3 offering an evening service.

## 4. Information & Signposting

During July 2021 to December 2022, an 18 month period, we received enquiries from 42 local people - who needed assistance in securing dental treatment on the NHS.

### What are the issues?

The vast majority had been unsuccessful in finding treatment locally, for themselves or family members, in some cases after making many enquiries (over 20 in one instance) and over several days.

We are told that publicly available information, such as on the NHS website has been inadequate, and that content on local practice websites is often out-of-date or inaccurate. Support and advice services including NHS 111 have not been able to help.

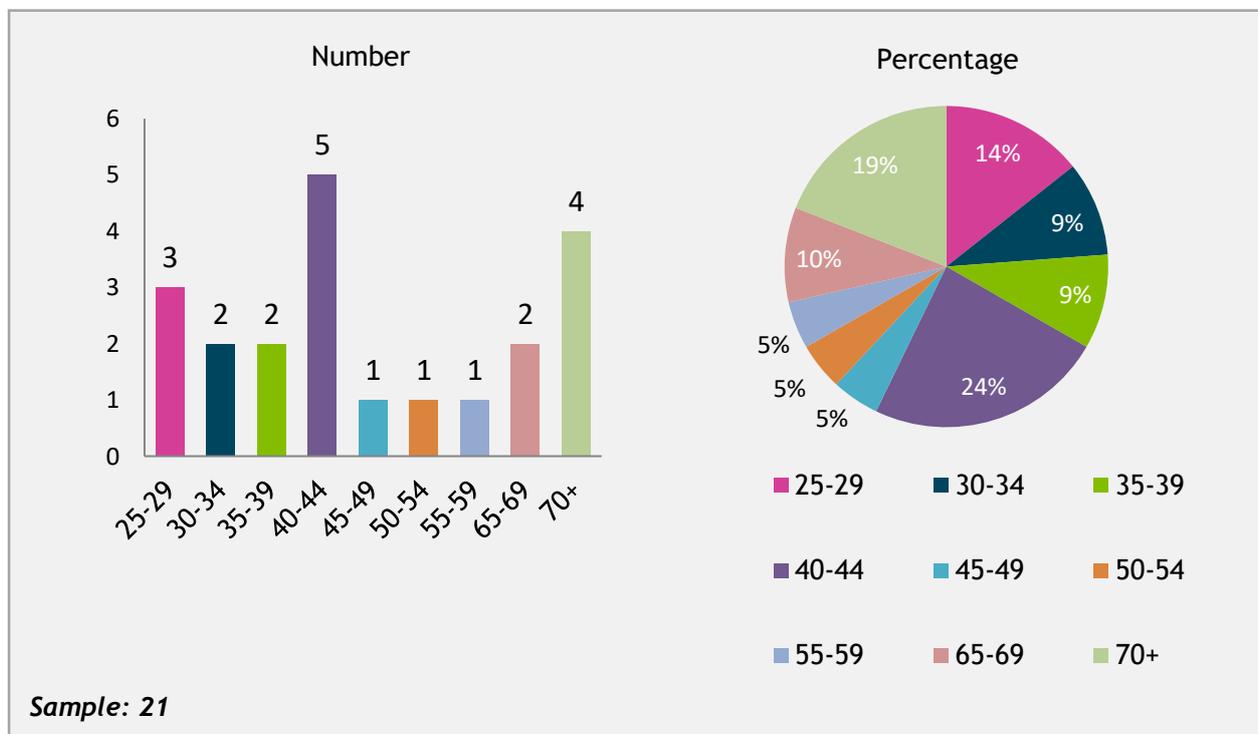
Those without NHS cover include new patients not yet in the system, and a large number who have been de-registered by their practice and now obliged to pay.

The treatment needed varies widely - including for wisdom tooth extraction, replacing dentures, caps and implants, oral (mouth related) issues, and routine check-ups and polishing. Lack of treatment is causing anxiety, and for some wider depression.

### Who is most affected?

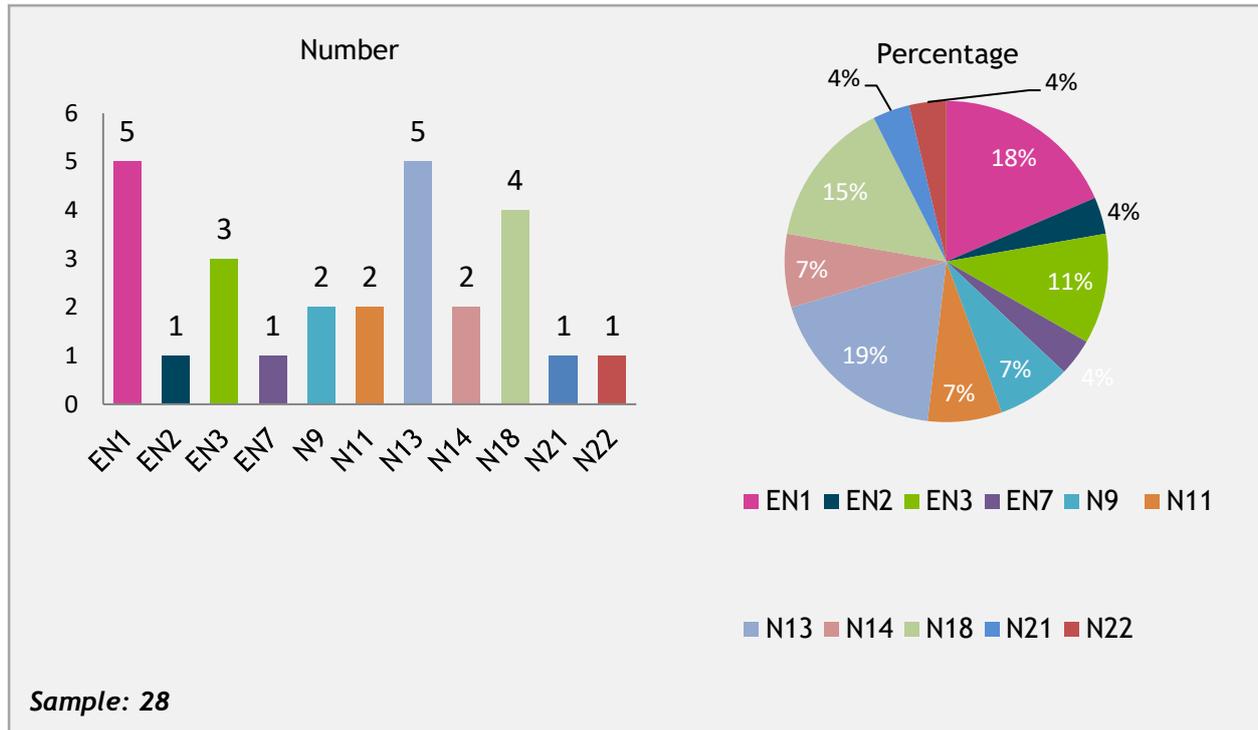
We have received numerous enquiries from local people on benefits and parents on low income seeking treatment for their children. Other groups with particular difficulties or concerns include older people, those with dementia, the physical or learning disabled, pregnant women and new mums.

#### 4.1 Who is most affected - Age



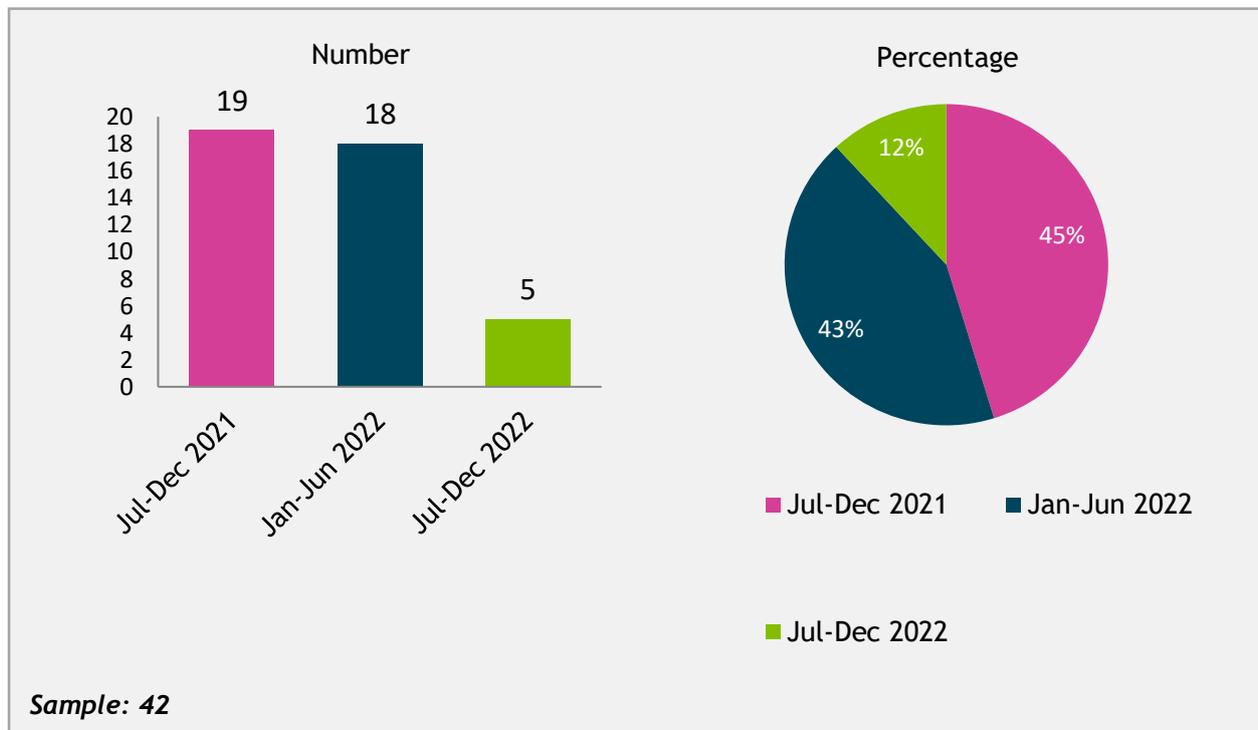
Middle aged (40 - 44) and older people (70+) are most likely to have experienced difficulty in finding an NHS dentist.

#### 4.2 Who is most affected - Locality



Residents of EN1, N13 and N18 are most likely to have experienced difficulty, compared with those in other localities.

#### 4.3 Enquiries about NHS Dentistry



The volume of enquiries received over the last 6 months (July - December 2022) has dropped considerably, compared with July 2021 - June 2022.

## 5. Local News Stories

Local newspaper the Enfield Dispatch has run several stories on local dentistry.

Their [most recent article](#), published in September 2022 reports that:

### In the Enfield Dispatch

#### Points to consider...

- Figures from NHS Digital reveal just 35.9% of adults in the borough saw a dentist during the 24 months to June 2022 - a drop of almost ten percentage points since 2018/19, when the figure was 45.6%.
- Fewer than half of children in Enfield (43%) saw an NHS dentist in the recommended two-year period. This still marks an improvement on the previous year, when the figure was 32.1%.
- Recent research by the BBC revealed nine in ten dental practices said they were unable to take on new adult patients on the NHS. According to the report, published in August, some people are pulling out their own teeth and resorting to other do-it-yourself treatments as they are unable to find affordable care.
- In NHS North Central London, which covers five boroughs including Enfield, there were 58 dentists per 100,000 people in 2021/22, which is higher than the England average of 43.
- After what it called a “decade of savage” cuts, the British Dental Association estimates it would take an extra £880million a year to restore resources to 2010 levels.

## 6. Recommendations

Healthwatch Enfield would like to better understand the impact on children and more vulnerable groups, work towards access that is more equitable, encourage service providers to be more transparent, considerate and supportive, and urge the NHS to make it easier to access support and treatment, as needed.

Based on the findings in this report, we make the following recommendations:

### Recommendations, Based on Findings

#### 6.1 Children’s Services

We are particularly concerned about the lack of NHS access for children - which clearly disadvantages those from poorer families, who simply lack the resource or support to get their children treated. Not only does this widen health inequalities

for the youngest in our borough - it also places parents under (often considerable) pressure.

Barriers to local access for children should be clearly identified and defined. To achieve this, agencies with a duty of care such as NHS England, Public Health, Service Providers and Children's Organisations should:

- When conducting research, take every opportunity to engage with local parents and carers. Healthwatch Enfield can assist with this.
- Publicise existing research more widely, so that professionals are better-placed to identify (and triangulate) local trends and issues. Reports should be easily accessible on websites, and shared as broadly as possible - such as with parents groups, schools and other children's institutions, as well as with health professionals.

A lack of dental access will have wider impact on children's health. We would also like to see:

- An input from GPs and Schools - in surveying levels of dental access of their patients and students. We need to establish who is not being seen, and why.

## **6.2 Wider Support**

We have received numerous enquiries from local people on benefits, older people, those with dementia, the physical or learning disabled, pregnant women and new mums.

When engaging with residents with a support or cultural need, agencies and organisations with a health or wellbeing remit should:

- Ask about dental access in addition to the key topic, if possible (this could be a simple 'when did you last access' question). As outlined previously, a lack of dentistry often has wider health consequences.

## **6.3 Dental Service Providers - Greater Transparency and Support**

It is commonly reported that patients have been de-registered for NHS treatment without notification, and that information on websites can be inaccurate or misleading. Many patients have simply been 'turned away' without any support.

Dentists should do their best, to ensure that:

- Publicly available information, especially on websites - is up-to-date and concise on any NHS offer, what it specifically covers.
- Patients are sent notification if being de-registered. If not possible due to cost, a general statement could be published.

- Those with an urgent need, in a crisis, or seeking treatment for children are offered signposting information, and not simply turned away. Dentists do have a duty of care.

#### 6.4 The NHS - Greater Awareness of Support

Those getting in touch with Healthwatch Enfield, have typically done so as a 'last resort', having already contacted many dentists and agencies without resolution. If public information was more effective, this would simply not be the case.

NHS England, and agencies with a local dental remit should:

- Ensure that information is widely accessible on the internet and easily found on search engines.
- Online information is clear, comprehensive and in one place, so that patients can get all they need with one visit.
- Produce accessible versions of key publicity, in accordance with the Accessible Information Standard.
- Have leaflets and posters available in wider community settings, health services and children's institutions.

## 7. Distribution and Comment

This report is available to the general public, and is shared with our statutory and community partners. Accessible formats are available.

If you have any comments on this report or wish to share your views and experiences, please contact us.

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Fewer than half of children in Enfield (43%) saw an NHS dentist in the recommended two-year period.

This still marks an improvement on the previous year (2021), when the figure was 32.1%.



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