

# Dentistry in Derbyshire

Our focus on access to  
dentistry 2022-2024


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# Background

Many people in Derbyshire are finding it hard to get the dental care they need. This is because it's not easy to access, and it's often too expensive. This has been one of the main issues people in Derbyshire have been telling us about over the past few years.



"I pulled out one of my back molars in October 2022 because I can't afford to pay privately."

We have found that people in the most deprived areas, and vulnerable communities are usually the most affected. Problems getting dental care have led to many people living in pain. In some extreme cases people have resorted to 'DIY dentistry'.

Since April 2023, dental contracts have been managed locally by the Integrated Care Board (ICB). In Derbyshire the ICB is known as Joined up Care Derbyshire (JUCD).


Dental contracts are how the NHS organises and pays for NHS dental treatment. The NHS pays dental practices to provide NHS dental treatment to patients through a contract.

Some dental practices do both NHS work and private work. There's still a need for more changes to the contract to solve the problems. Healthwatch England has also called for action on this.

Our research has shown that there hasn't been much improvement in how easy it is for new patients to access NHS dental care in Derbyshire. People still aren't happy, and they're saying they're still needing treatment.


Since 2021 our research has focused on making sure the Find a Dentist website is correct and up-to-date. This is important as it is the only way of both decision-makers and the public know how many dentists are accepting NHS patients in Derbyshire.

We have worked hard over the past two years to make decision-makers listen to all of the issues people are telling us. We want to make sure accessible and affordable dental care are top priorities for decision-makers as they have a chance to make a difference.

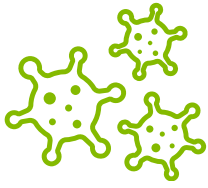


"I'm disabled and suffer extreme fatigue and mobility issues, and can't travel far away for treatment ... the chance of me affording private treatment was in negative figures. My toothpaste came from the food bank.

"Since then I developed gum disease and because of the impossibility of finding NHS treatment my teeth are all falling apart, completely ruining my life ..."



# Why we did the research



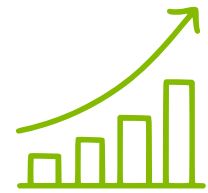
The COVID-19 pandemic impacted NHS dental care. Appointments were missed and certain treatments were not delivered. People were being taken off surgery lists, and many dental practices were moving to provide private only treatments.



During the pandemic recruitment for new dentists became harder. Dental practices struggled to go back to 'business as usual'. This was because of large backlogs of appointments and not enough staff.



We found when doing our **Dental Access Report** in 2021, that it wasn't easy to find an NHS dentist. Dental practices were not updating their information on the NHS Find a Dentist website within 90 days. This meant that information was unreliable making it harder for people.



In 2021, we saw a 50% increase every three months in calls to us about how to find an NHS dentist. In 2022 and 2023 dentistry was the second most talked about health issue people told us about. We helped people to understand their options and signposted them to try to help.



People were often being forced to ring over 30 dental practices. This was very frustrating for people calling, and for dental practices who were getting very frequent calls.



Patients told us that they have pulled their own teeth out as they could no longer live with the pain whilst trying to find NHS treatment. This became known as 'DIY dentistry'.



Whilst oral diseases are almost always preventable, dental decay especially in children remains high in areas of Derbyshire.



Oral health awareness needed a champion to get the voices of local people heard, so we took on this role.

# How we did the research

## Research spotlight on the NHS Find a Dentist website



**Every two months** from September 2021 to November 2023 our volunteers researched the NHS Find a Dentist website.



Our volunteers looked at information on dental practice profiles. This included if they were **accepting new adult and/or children NHS patients**.



We also checked when dental practices had **last updated their profile** on the website.



We contacted dental practices by phone if they had **not updated their profile** within the last 90 days.



We highlighted to dental teams the **importance of having up-to-date information** on the NHS Find a Dentist site.



We also made dental practices aware of their **contractual requirements** to regularly update how many NHS spaces they had on their profile.

We shared our findings with decision-makers every two months. These included:

- Joined up Care Derbyshire, specifically the Director for Primary Care and the Dental Primary Care Team
- All Derbyshire Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Chair of the Local Dental Network and Local Dental Committee
- The Derby & Derbyshire Oral Health Steering Group
- Place Alliance Leads.

During our research, we paid close attention to comments from the public. We made sure to address them and get responses from dental practices and decision-makers.



# What has the research told us?



During our research there have been times when only three practices in Derbyshire have welcomed new adult NHS patients.



The number of practices accepting new patients temporarily improved in November 2022 due to some additional funding for practices.



Seven dental practices stopped their NHS contracts and moved to providing private only dental work. This meant many patients had to try to find alternative NHS treatment



82% of all comments we received from the public were about not being able to find a dentist.

Between 2021-2023 we searched dental practices every two months to see if there were any adult NHS spaces. The table below shows the number of adult NHS dental spaces available in each area from 2021-2023.

	2021		2022						2023					
Area	Sept	Nov	Jan	April	May	July	Oct	Nov	Jan	April	June	July	Oct	Nov
Amber Valley	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0
Bolsover & North East Derbyshire	3	1	1	1	2	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	1	0
Chesterfield	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	2	1	0	0	0	0
Derby City	3	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	2	0
Derbyshire Dales	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	1
Erewash	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	1	1	2	0	0	1
High Peak	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
South Derbyshire	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	0



# What has happened so far?



Because of our work more dentists are now updating the Find a Dentist website.

The number of practices updating whether they have NHS spaces has gone from 59% to 89%. **We are now the best in the country.** In some other counties, 49% of practices are not updating Find a Dentist which means decision-makers cannot see the true picture.



The Local Dental Network Chair worked with NHS Digital to redesign the NHS Find a Dentist website. The changes mean people are now able filter to find practices accepting new patients.



We created a How to Find a Dentist guide. This was to help local people search for NHS dental treatment. The guide also helped people understand what to do in an emergency.

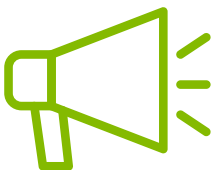


The lack of NHS dental access has been highlighted at Derbyshire's eight Place Alliances.

Place Alliances are a group of decision-makers, from health, care, local organisations, the public and patients. They are there to make sure plans for health care services reflect the views and needs of local people.



In March 2022 we presented our findings to a meeting of Derbyshire MPs. During this meeting we called for changes to dentistry in Derbyshire. We also asked for dental budgets to be protected and to be enough money to help people in Derbyshire get the dental care they need.



Our research has influenced the project work of the Derby & Derbyshire Oral Health Steering Group. These include:

- Projects to raise awareness of how to keep your mouth and teeth healthy
- Targeted oral health information for children and older adults
- Research into teenagers oral health
- Funding for oral health packs for families in need.

# What should happen next?

## What we're going to do next

We will continue to speak with people working and volunteering within health and care. This is to see if the next steps are explored and if they make a real difference for people.

We'll keep working with JUCD and other health decision-makers to make sure that what people say can really shape the future of NHS dentistry in Derbyshire.

## Here are some steps that JUCD and other decision-makers could take to make progress



Offer more appointments on weekends and at other times when it's convenient for people to visit the dentist.



Work closely with dental practices to make sure they regularly update their NHS profile with correct information.



Make good oral health a priority for everyone in Derbyshire.



Make sure that Derbyshire's dental budget is fully protected. This should include money taken back from contracts that aren't performing well (called 'clawback').



Provide support to professionals who can guide people on how to take care of their teeth and gums.

“We were inundated with calls recently from new patients as a dentist in our area retired. We are seeing patients on an emergency basis from 111 or if people call direct. However, it depends on when they ring if we have capacity as we are often seeing our own patients for emergency appointments. It's really hard to know where to direct people as we don't have an out-of-hours service in this area. It's really difficult when you know someone is in need.”

**Practice Manager**



# Our impact

## Our impact has resulted in:



Because of the hard work of our staff and volunteers, dental practices in Derbyshire are now the **best in the country for updating their website information.**



In 2022 Derbyshire MPs attended our dental information session. Afterwards they received our bimonthly research. This accurate picture of dental access in their area has enabled MPs to take action to improve dental access for their local communities



Because of changes to the Find a Dentist website it is now easier to search to find a dentist.



Following a focus on dental access in April 2022 and January 2024, Derby City Health Scrutiny Board is calling for improvements.



In January 2023 we, and other local Healthwatch, provided evidence for the Health & Social Care Committee Inquiry into Dentistry. In December 2023 the government accepted the majority of the committee's recommendations to try to end the 'crisis of access'.



Our evidence helped government ministers to decide what action to take. This included making changes to dental contracts.



People now have a better understanding of how they can find a dentist.

# healthwatch

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