



Dentistry Report

October 2022

healthwatch
Stoke on Trent

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Background

Healthwatch Stoke-on-Trent is the city's independent health and social care champion. We're here to listen to the experiences of local people using local health and care services and about the issues that matter to the people of Stoke-on-Trent.

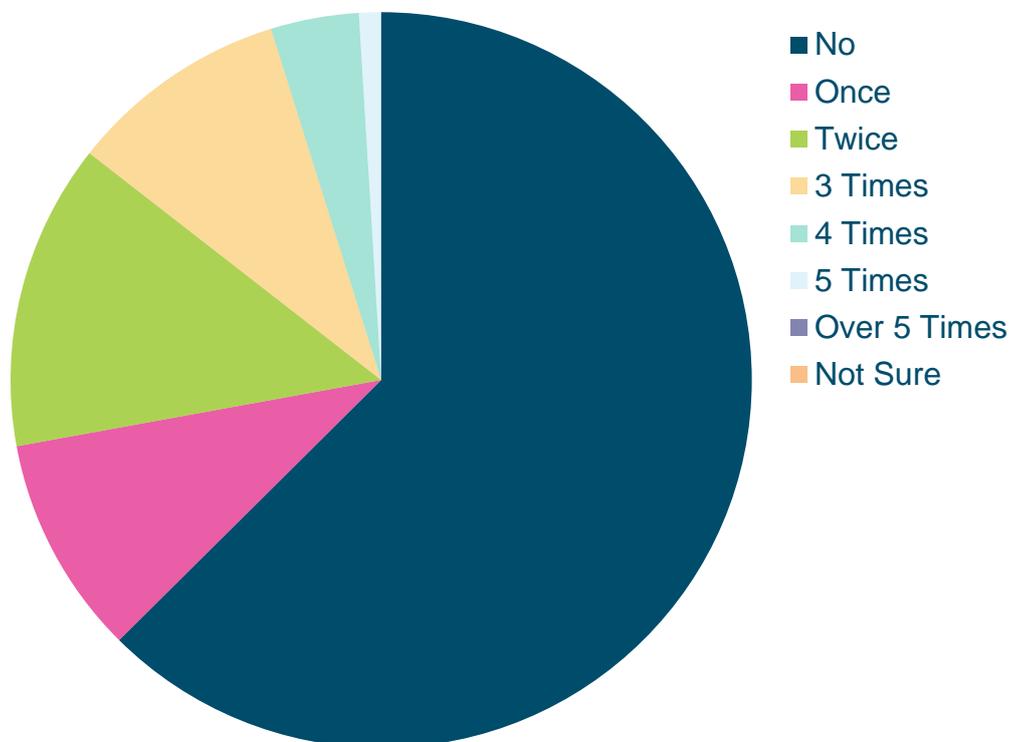
We gather your views to provide the local health and social leaders and decision-makers with evidence of the public experience using local health and social care services. Since 2013, Healthwatch England have reported on the access to NHS dentistry as it has been a recurring issue across England. Recently, following the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increase of NHS dentistry concerns appearing in our local intelligence.

Following the reoccurrence of dentistry concerns in the top intelligence trends, we decided to conduct a survey which ran from May 2022 to June 2022 to collect more local intelligence on NHS dental services. The survey consisted of 5 questions to explore the concerns, along with an opportunity for participants to write any additional comments about their experiences with local NHS dentistry services. The survey was promoted across various digital platform, shared with partner organisations and taken to numerous outreach sessions. It received a total of 104 responses.



Key Findings

1. Have you been able to see a dentist for NHS treatment during the last two years?



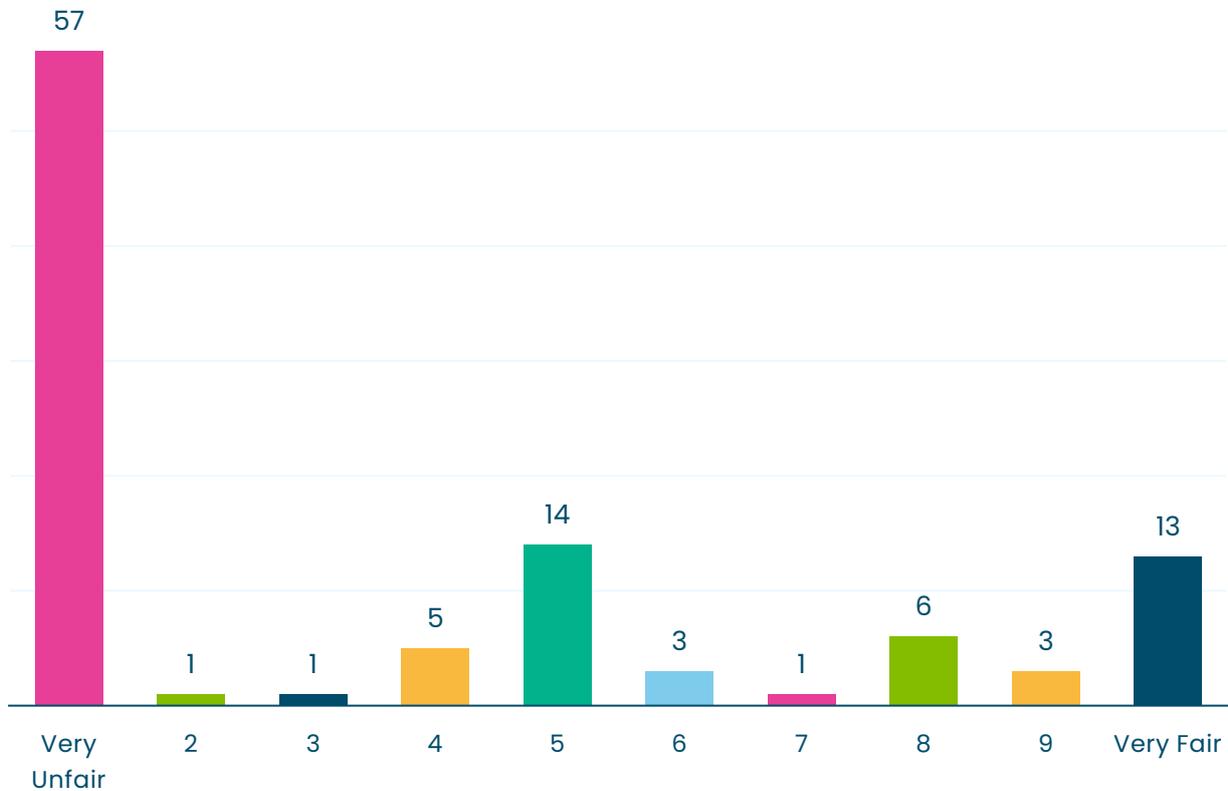
- 1.1. 65 respondents (62.5%) told us that they had not been able to see a dentist for NHS treatment. A total of 39 respondents (37.5%) reported that they had been able to receive NHS dental treatment over the past two years.
- 1.2. Out of the 39 respondents (37.5%) who had accessed a dentist for NHS treatment, 29 respondents (27.9%) had received NHS dental treatment more than once. Meaning 10 respondents (9.6%) had seen a dentist through the NHS once in two years.
- 1.3. 14 respondents (13.5%) had seen a dentist for NHS treatment twice in two years. 10 respondents (9.6%) had attended three times. 4 respondents (3.8%) had attended 4 times. 1 respondent (1%) had attended 5 times.

2. If you were able to see a dentist, were you able to get all the treatment you needed at NHS prices?

- 2.1. 21 respondents (20.2%) reported that they had been able to get all their treatment at the NHS banding costs. The remaining 83 respondents (79.8%) had either not received treatment, could not afford treatment, or had to pay privately for some, or all dental treatment received.

2.2. Of the 83 respondents who had not been able to pay for all their treatment via NHS banding costs. A total of 73 respondents (70.2%) were not able to receive NHS dental treatment. With 10 respondents (9.6%) having paid for their treatment both privately and via the NHS.

3. On a scale from 1 (Very Unfair) to 10 (Very Fair), how happy were you with how much your NHS dental treatment cost.



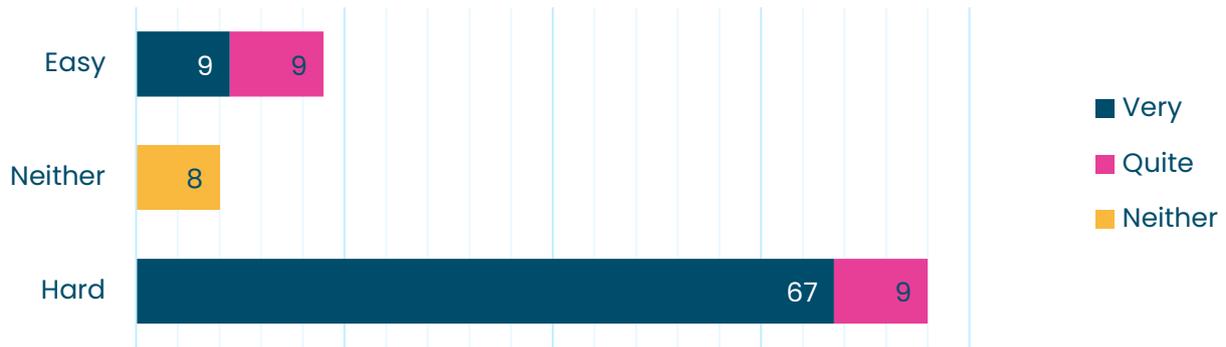
3.1. A total of 78 respondents (75%) placed on the lower half of the scale. 26 respondents (25%) placed themselves on the higher half of the scale.

3.2. 57 respondents (54.8%) felt that NHS dental costs were 'very unfair' and marked themselves on the lowest end of the scale. An additional 21 respondents (20.2%) felt the costs were more unfair, scaling between 2-5.

3.3. 13 respondents (12.5%) found the NHS dental costs to be 'very fair' placing themselves at the highest end of the scale. An additional 13 respondents (12.5%) felt the costs were fairer, placing themselves on the scale between 6-9.

3.4. 17 of the respondents (16.3%) fell into the middle of the scale between 5-6.

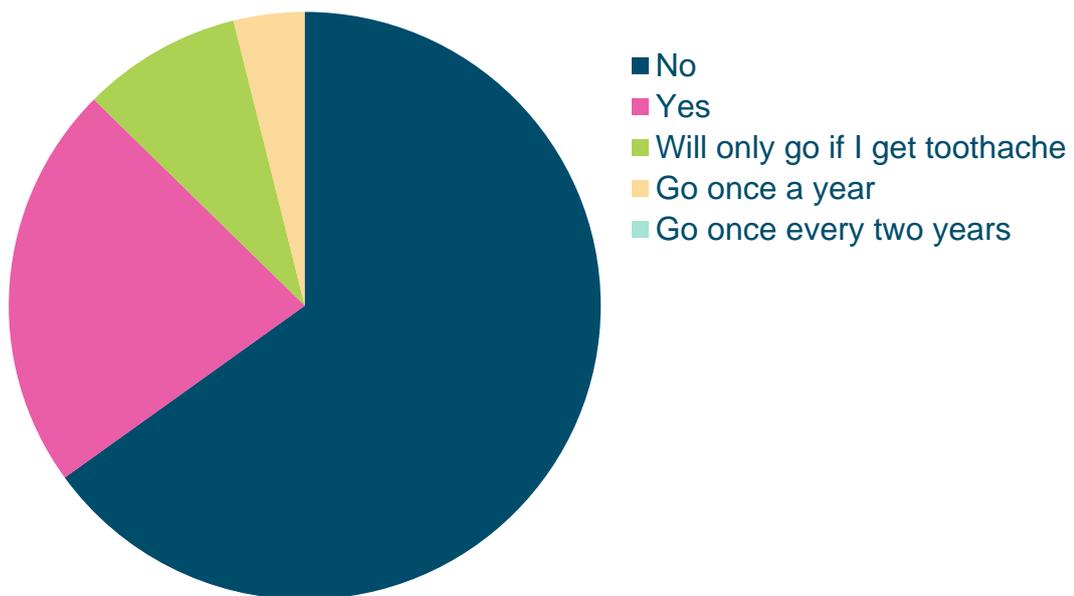
4. How hard did you find it to get an appointment for NHS dental treatment?



- 4.1. A total of 76 respondents (73.1%) reported that it was either 'very hard' or 'quite hard' to get an appointment for NHS dental treatment.
- 4.2. 18 respondents (17.3%) had found getting an appointment for NHS dental treatment either 'very easy' or 'quite easy'.
- 4.3. 8 respondents (7.7%) had reported that it was 'neither hard nor easy' to get an NHS dental treatment appointment.

Please note: A total of 102 responses were received for this question. To maintain consistency throughout this report the percentages have been calculated from a total of 104 responses. Due to the missing data, there is a 1.9% discrepancy.

5. Do the NHS dental treatment prices put you off going to see the dentist as often as is recommended?



- 5.1. 67 respondents (64.4%) did not feel that NHS banding costs for dental treatment has put them off attending the dentist as often as recommended.

- 5.2. 23 respondents (22.1%) reported that they do feel put off wanting to attend a dentist as often as recommended due to the NHS dental treatment costs.
- 5.3. 9 respondents (8.7%) reported that they will only attend a dental check-up if they are experiencing toothache. 4 respondents (3.8%) will only attend a dental check-up once a year.

Please note: A total of 103 responses were received for this question. To maintain consistency throughout this report the percentages have been calculated from a total of 104 responses. Due to the missing data, there is a 1% discrepancy.

Additional Comments

6. 66 respondents (63.5%) left additional comments about NHS dentistry services in Stoke-on-Trent.



"I had been kicked off my dentists list during the pandemic, having not had an appointment in a long time and missing previous appointments due to my disability. I couldn't book one when I needed it."



- 6.1. A total of 49 comments (47.1%) detailed on the difficulties faced when trying to register with an NHS dentist or schedule a dental appointment.
- 6.2. 7 respondents (6.7%) reported having been removed from their dentists NHS register as a result of not attending throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 6.3. 15 people who commented (14.4%) expressed that they are currently experiencing bleeding gums or tooth pain and require dental treatment.



"Nowhere is taking on. Not one dentist in Stoke is taking on NHS patients. I got removed from my dentist because I didn't go for just over 2 years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. I had no idea that they just remove you like that, without communication.

I am suffering with a bad tooth that needs taking out. Nowhere will take it out unless I pay, and I can't afford to sort it out."





"The NHS 'Find a Dentist' website is not very good as it states certain practices are taking on new NHS patients and you phone, but you get told that no they aren't. This is very frustrating."



- 6.4. 13 respondents (12.5%) stated that they could not consider receiving private dental treatment due to the costs. However, 5 respondents (4.8%) reported that they felt driven to receiving private treatment due to issues faced with NHS dentistry.
- 6.5. 10 Comments (9.6%) were able to attend their practice over the last two years and had no complaints to the service. Some detailed that they had been contacted by their dentist when they were due for their regular check-up appointment to get booked in.



"I go to a dentist out of Stoke-on-Trent. I have been going to them for about 26 years. They are a good dentist, and I am grateful I have still got an NHS place in dentistry. Dentistry is in crisis..."



Our Conclusions

Regular check-ups at the dentist are there to help people maintain good oral health by preventing or identifying any dental problems. It is beneficial to treat any dental issues early, as if left unknown and untreated, it can become more challenging to treat in the future. The NHS suggests that people with good oral health should attend a dental check-up once every 12 to 24 months. However, people with more dental problems may need dental check-ups more often.

According to our findings, 32 people confirmed that they would not attend the dentist as often as recommended due to either being put off by the NHS treatment costs or not having tooth pain to indicate that treatment is needed.^[5] These findings suggest that with a review of the NHS dental treatment costs and more information on the importance of oral health, more people may attend dental check-ups as recommended, which could reduce the need for dental treatment.

However, 65 people had reportedly not been able to see a dentist via the NHS within the recommended 12 to 24 months, despite several comments indicating they have poor oral health with the need for treatment.^[1.1] With 76 people who found accessing NHS dental care hard, this also suggests that 11 of those who were able to receive treatment had difficulty obtaining an NHS dental appointment.^[4.1]

This data highlights an imbalance in the supply and demand of NHS dental services, where only 20.2% of people were able to receive all their necessary dental care through the NHS within the last two years. The remaining 79.8% have had to either not receive any dental care or those who could afford to would instead pay for private dental treatment.^[2]

Accessibility appears to impact people's perception of the affordability and fairness of NHS dental treatment costs. Although 67 people found the NHS dental costs do not affect their wanting to attend a dental practice as recommended, 78 people found the pricing unfair despite only 39 of the respondents have been able to receive any treatment via the NHS.^[5.1, 3.1, 1.1] It indicates that a vast majority who reported the costs as unfair had not been able to access NHS dental care within the last two years. With 26 people finding the pricing of treatment fair, 13 of those who received any NHS treatment may have thought the cost of dental treatment to be unfair.^[3.1]

Further comments added that a lack of attendance due to following COVID-19 safety and guidance, those who had previously registered at a local dental practice as NHS patients, had since been removed from the register.^[6.2] However, after highlighting concerns at the Local Dental Network meeting, it clarified that there is a misconception among the public and practices that patients are required to register to receive NHS dental treatment.

Recommendations

Based on our findings, we have the following recommendations to improve the dental services:

- Communication - NHS England and dentists need to provide patients with more accurate and up-to-date information. Particularly with updates on the availability of NHS dental appointments and highlighting the importance of maintaining good oral health through regular check-up appointments.
- Patient registration - NHS England and dentists need to be clear that people don't register with a dentist in the same way as with a GP surgery. Patients are being misled into believing they must be registered in order to receive NHS dental treatment.

Previously Healthwatch England in their report, '**Dentistry and the impact of COVID-19**' Dec 2020, had made similar recommendations for dentistry.

- What needs to change?
 - Clearer information - NHS England and dentists need to provide more accurate and up-to-date information for patients.
 - Patient registration - NHS England and dentists need to be clear that people don't register with a dentist in the same way as with a GP surgery. There is no guarantee of treatment at the same practice as a result.
 - Access to care - The Government must make more resources available to dentists to help reduce the backlog caused by the pandemic.
 - Affordability - The Government and the NHS should review the cost of NHS treatment, as many people struggle to pay the NHS charge, particularly as many people have less money as a result of the pandemic.

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