

6. Why can't I see a dentist?

In England, 8 million people are now struggling to find an NHS dentist. 9 in 10 NHS dental practices are closed to new adult patients; in some areas it is almost impossible to register. Charges for dental treatment (introduced in 1950s) are an added barrier to people getting the care they need. Some are taking their own teeth out. Oral health is deteriorating. What has happened to dentistry graphically illustrates where current health policy is leading the whole NHS. A controversial contract imposed in 2006 limited dental practices in the amount of NHS care they provided. Good, preventive dental care was not funded. Some dentists started turning NHS patients away.

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

- Dentistry was one of the founding pillars of the NHS and significantly improved oral health
- In the 1980/90s, the dental profession was pushed into the mixed NHS/private economy, creating an NHS dental workforce crisis
- The overall number of dentists now is the lowest for a decade
- Dentists in England and Wales saw taxable income fall by 35% over 10 years from 2006
- Across the UK, there were 1,038 fewer dentists working in NHS primary care in 2020/21 than there were in 2019/20
- Smaller practices are being priced out and taken over by large dental corporations
- The impacts of poor oral health disproportionately affect the most vulnerable and socially disadvantaged individuals and groups in society
- The Faculty of Dental Surgery is seriously concerned about the state of children's oral health (a third of five-year-olds are suffering from tooth decay)
- Tooth extraction for dental decay is the commonest reason for 5-9-year-olds in England to be admitted to hospital, costing the NHS £50 million per year. Over 60,000 children aged 0-19 were admitted for teeth removal in 2015/2016

WHAT MUST HAPPEN NOW?

- More dentists, dental nurses and hygienists must be trained urgently
- A new contract should support dentists to provide a full range of treatments on the NHS and be patient-focused and preventive
- The contract should be payment per numbers of patients, and charging must be abolished
- Dentists should be co-located with General Practitioners in neighbourhood health centres where the staff work as public servants for a public service