



**North East and
North Cumbria**

Update on NHS Dentistry

Durham Scrutiny Committee

18 November 2024

Summary Overview of NHS Dentistry

- NHS England delegated responsibility for the commissioning of NHS dentistry to the North East and North Cumbria Integrated Care Board (ICB) effective from 1 April 2023.
- NHS Dentistry services MUST operate in accordance with **Nationally set Government Regulation (2006)**
- Under NHS Dentistry national regulation there is **no 'formal registration' of patients** with dental practices as part of their NHS Dentistry offer, patients can therefore approach any dental practice offering NHS care for access.
- Dental contracts and provision is **activity and demand led** with the expectation practices deliver courses of treatment with **recall intervals appropriate to clinical need** and manage their available commissioned capacity to best meet both local demand and the clinical needs of patients presenting to their practice.
- The contract regulations set out the contract currency which is measured in **units of dental activity (UDAs)** that are attributable to a **'banded' course of treatment prescribed under the regulations**.
- **North East and North Cumbria ICB do not commission private dental services**, however, NHS dental regulations do not prohibit the provision of private dentistry by NHS Dental Practices.
- The prolonged **COVID- 19 pandemic period** required NHS Dental Practices to follow strict Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) guidance which significantly restricted levels of access to dental care. As a result, **backlog demand for dental care remains high with the urgency and increased complexity of patient clinical presentations** further impacting the ability for the NHS Dental Care system to return back to pre-COVID operational norms.

NHS Commissioned capacity – County Durham

Commissioned general dental access @ 1 November 2024* Units of Dental Activity (UDAs)

NHS General Dental Service contracts	UDAs commissioned
47	705,348

Recent changes not yet reflected in the above position:

- The provider of the following two contracts (Mr M A Quraishi) has recently given notice to terminate their NHS contracts:
 - Burgess and Hyder Bowburn – NHS contract to end effective 31 January 2025 – 7,416 UDAs
 - Burgess and Hyder Spennymoor – NHS contract to end effect 31 January 2025 – 12,000 UDAs

Urgent Dental Care Services in County Durham

Service Type	Provider and site location
NHS 111 Integrated Clinical Assessment Service (DCAS)	<p>NENC wide:</p> <p>NEAS & Dencall – NHS 111 Call Centre ‘Newburn’)</p> <p>Operates Mon through to Thursday 18:00 to 09:00, weekends (Friday 18:00 through to Monday 09:00) and all bank holidays</p>
NHS 111 Dedicated ‘In hours’ Direct booking hubs	<p>Dedicated NHS 111 urgent care direct booking capacity into unscheduled urgent care in hour access centres location in Coxhoe and Peterlee</p> <p>Can only be accessed via NHS 111</p>
NHS 111 Dedicated ‘Out of Hours’ Direct Booking Treatment Services.	<p>Dedicated NHS 111 emergency care out of hours service provided from University Hospital North Durham (UHND)</p> <p>Can only be accessed via NHS 111</p>

Notes:

- Treatment services operate between 18:00 to 23:00 Monday to Friday (on-call basis) 09:00 to 23:00 Weekends and all bank holidays as a combination of fixed clinics on-call).
- Additional OOHrs dental treatment capacity commissioned from all providers across the North East in 2023-24 and 2024-25.

There are significant challenges to people accessing dentistry in North East & North Cumbria (NENC)

- Situation in County Durham reflective of a national crisis in NHS Dentistry which has been heavily impacted by several factors including:
 - Dental services have struggled to recover from the impact of covid
 - Significant challenges with recruitment and retention of dentists (and increasingly dental nurses).
- There is widespread recognition that the national dental contract requires reform - UDA system not seen as attractive by the dental market (providers and dental performers). See links below to House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee Report from their inquiry into dentistry published July 2023 and the previous Government's response published in December 2023:
 - [NHS dentistry \(parliament.uk\)](#)
 - [NHS Dentistry: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2022-23 \(parliament.uk\)](#)
- We are regularly seeing dental providers giving notice on their NHS contracts as they are unable to meet local demand and the provision we have commissioned from them.
- This means local people across the NENC are experiencing problems accessing NHS dentists – areas of particular challenge include N Cumbria, North Northumberland, Darlington, parts of Co Durham and Sunderland.

National Dental Recovery Plan

Key elements of previous Government's plan published in February 2024:

- Increase in minimum UDA rate from £23 to £28 from April 2024.
- New patient premium - payment via UDA credits of between £15-£50 (depending on treatment need) paid in activity credits – patients not seen within the last 24 months (March 2024 to end of March 2025).
- 'Golden Hello' payment – one-off payment for up to 240 dentists across the country to work in under-served areas for up to three years. Being considered locally as part of wider NENC Dental Recovery Programme
- Oral health promotion and prevention initiatives:
 - Launch 'Smile for Life', a major new focus on prevention and good oral health in young children, to be delivered via nurseries and other settings providing Start for Life services and promoted by Family Hubs.
 - Introduce dental outreach to primary schools in under-served areas to provide fluoride varnish treatments and advice.
- Take forward a consultation on expanding fluoridation of water to the north-east of England – a highly effective public health measure. Awaiting outcome of consultation exercise.
- Various workforce commitments, eg expand dental undergraduate training places, increase the number of dental care professionals, promote therapist led models of care, increase exam capacity for overseas-qualified dentists and make it easier for them to work in the NHS.

New Government commitment:

- Funding for an additional 700,000 urgent care appointments.
- Further detail on new Government's plan awaited.

Local approach to tackling challenges

Improving access to dentistry will not be a quick fix

We are tackling this in three streams:



Immediate actions to stabilise services



A more strategic approach to workforce and service delivery



Developing an oral health strategy to improve oral health and reduce the pressure on dentistry

Local actions undertaken (2)

- **Significant ICB investment** in dental provision:
£3.8m made available in 2023/24 and £3.6m available in 2024-25 to:
 - Increase NHS 111 dental clinical assessment capacity
 - Increase out of hours dental treatment services
 - Extend access arrangements to provide additional appointments targeting patients in greatest clinical need:
 - 12,706 appointments commissioned for 2024-25 from 14 practices
- Funding made available to enable an Opportunity for practices to be paid for **additional units of dental activity** (UDAs) up to 110% of their NHS contracted levels where they have the NHS workforce capacity to do so.
- All practices benefiting from the National Reform new patient premium scheme 2024-25 offering additional UDA credits where practices choose to see new patients.
- **Local minimum UDA rate uplift** to £31.46 (+£3.46 above the nationally set £28 minimum already implemented).

Local actions undertaken (2)

- **Local commissioning of lost UDAs** will continue to be attempted with existing local NHS dental practices where they have the workforce, capacity and interest in expanding their NHS general dental access provision.
- Two short-term **Urgent Dental Access Centres** (UDACs) have been commissioned as pilots in Darlington and Carlisle. The UDAC model could provide an enhanced and more reliable local solution to provision of directly accessible in-hours urgent dental care for patients. If successful, the ICB would look to commission UDAC services across the ICB including within County Durham.
- **Formal procurement process** recently completed to re-commission replacement NHS Dentistry general dental access contracts across NENC including two new contracts for County Durham. Discussion are on-going with the preferred provider and we hope to be in a position to provide further information in next couple of months.
- Increased local investment in 2024-25 into **specialist orthodontic services** to secure additional treatment capacity to reduce waiting times for children (additional 451 children referred to to commence orthodontic treatment before the end of March 2025).
- Oral health promotion plan agreed with CDDFT oral health promotion team.
- Funding made available for purchase of resources to support the supervised toothbrushing programme.

Oral health initiatives - County Durham

- Supervised Toothbrushing Activity - position as at April 2024

Number of participating pre-schools	Number participating	Number of children
Pre-schools	43	3115
Schools	72	4396

- Staff trained – position as at April 2024

Settings	Number of staff Trained
Residential Care	85
Supported Living for LD (Adults & children)	190
HVs and Early Years, Public Health nurses, Health and social care workers	34

Next Steps

- Undertake further local commissioning/formal procurement to replace capacity lost from contract hand backs where possible. Proposals currently being developed to also include potential role out of UDAC model.
- Further transformation and sustainability plans building on the increased min UDA rate, ie open and discretionary offer to practice that take part in an audit to assess the true cost of delivery of NHS dental care, prioritising 'at risk' practices in the most deprived parts of our region and/or where there are significant access challenges with additional funding made available to support this process.
- All practices will benefit from the National Reform **new patient premium scheme** 2024-25 which offers additional UDA credits where practices choose to see new patients.
- Work with system partners to progress development of an oral health strategy to improve oral health and reduce pressure on dentistry.
- Engage with NHS England Regional Workforce, Training and Education Directorate to support the work they are doing to improve workforce recruitment, training and education and the local implementation of the National Dental Workforce Plan.
- Engage with NHS England regional and national teams to influence national dental system reform.

Advice/signposting for patients

- Patients are not registered with a dentist in the same way as GP practices – you can therefore contact any NHS dental practice to access care.
- As independent contractors, dental practice are responsible for managing their appointment books and are best placed to advise on the capacity they have available to take on new patients.
- Practices providing NHS treatment are listed on www.nhs.uk. Practices are responsible for keeping the website updated and whilst it may currently indicate they are not taking on new patients, we would advise that patients do contact them to check the latest position on availability of routine appointments.
- Dental practices are being **encouraged to prioritise patients for treatment based on clinical need and urgency**, therefore appointments for some **routine treatments**, such as dental check-ups, may therefore still be delayed. Some practices are operating waiting lists to manage those patients requesting routine NHS dental care.
- If your teeth and gums are healthy – a **check-up, or scale and polish may not be needed every 6 months.**

Advice for patients with an urgent dental treatment need

- If you develop an **urgent dental issue** telephone your regular dental practice (or any NHS practice if you don't have a regular dentist).
- It is important that when you ring the practice, you fully explain the nature of your dental problem so that the urgency of your dental treatment need can be determined.
- If the practice is unable to offer an appointment because their NHS urgent access slots have already been taken up, they will advise you to ring another NHS dental practice, or alternatively you can visit www.111.nhs or call 111.
- The NHS111 health advisor will undertake a clinical triage and where the dental need is deemed to be clinically urgent, an appointment will be made at the nearest in-hours urgent dental care hub, or alternatively depending on the time of the call, into the dental out of hours treatment services.
- If the issue is not deemed urgent, patients will be signposted to another NHS dental practice and/or given self-care advice until an appointment can be offered.
- You should be advised to make contact again if your situation changes/worsens.