



Experiences of Dentistry in Sussex Poll

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healthwatch
in Sussex

Introduction

Our rationale for exploring dentistry experiences in Sussex

Healthwatch in Sussex (Brighton & Hove, East Sussex and West Sussex) have been collaborating over the last two years to develop a Sussex-wide understanding of people's experiences of accessing or seeking to access NHS dental services.

In November 2022, the government and NHS [announced changes](#) to support improvements in dentistry provision. We wanted to learn whether these changes had been implemented and if they led to any change in the experiences of patients and the public in their ability to access NHS dental services when they need them.

We also wanted to gauge the recent experiences of people so that we could share this with NHS England and the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS), as they are the decision-makers responsible for commissioning local NHS dental services in Sussex and help them respond accordingly.

Our aims were to:

1. Determine levels of public satisfaction with local NHS dental services, including accessibility and wait times, quality and availability of information, and quality of services.
2. Assess current and future levels of public confidence in accessing NHS dental services.
3. Identify any barriers that may or have limited people's ability to access NHS dental services.

Tell us your experiences of NHS dentistry since 1st December 2022

Complete our 5 question poll so that we can hear how things are for you.

We want to know:

- Who is trying to use NHS dental services?
- People's levels of satisfaction with NHS dentistry
- Confidence about using NHS dental services in the future

Tell us here:

<https://www.smartsurvey.co.uk/s/HWISDentistryPollJan2023/>



What we did

Between the 1st and 31st January 2023, Healthwatch in Sussex ran a short five question public web-based poll to capture a snapshot of people's experiences of NHS dental services in Sussex since 1st December 2022.

We focused on:

1. Who is trying to use NHS dental services?
2. People's levels of satisfaction with NHS dentistry
3. Confidence about using NHS dental services in the future

Our poll was widely promoted through newsletters, bulletins, social media, staff, volunteers and partner networks.

220 responses were received.

We heard from 81 people in Brighton & Hove, 107 in East Sussex and 28 in West Sussex. 4 responses were unspecified locations.

This report summarises the experiences of the respondents and identifies our key findings.

All percentages shown in this report are as a proportion of all 220 respondents unless otherwise stated would



What we heard – Our key findings


What you told us about experiences of Dentistry in Sussex since 1st December 2022

- We heard that **most people (68.6%)** were **accessing dentistry on their own behalf**, with **30.0% supporting others** to do so (children, family members, friends or as carers) and in a few cases **(1.4%) staff/case workers were supporting** people to access to dental services.
 - Most people **(62.3%) were Not Confident** about their **ability to access NHS dental services** over the next 12 months, either for themselves or others. A quarter **(25.0%) were Very Confident/Quite Confident**.
 - Nearly half of the people we heard from **(45.0%)** told us they were **Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied** about their **ability to find a dentist offering NHS treatments**.
 - More than two-in-five **(41.8%)** were **Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied** with **the waiting times to see someone** [NHS dental services].
 - Over a third of respondents **(35.9%)** were **Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied** with **information on services being accurate and up-to-date**.
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What we heard – Our key findings

What you told us about experiences of Dentistry in Sussex since 1st December 2022

- Once accessed, **more people were Satisfied/Very Satisfied (29.5%)** than **Dissatisfied/Very Dissatisfied (17.8%)** with the **treatment they received.**
 - **25.5%** had **accessed NHS dental treatment without any issues**, but **40.9%** of respondents were **unable to receive NHS dental treatment** as they had been unable to find dentists able to offer it.
 - Nearly **one-in-fourteen people (6.8%)** needed dental treatment but were **unable to afford to pay the NHS dental charges.**
 - Approximately one-fifth of people (**21.8%**) told us they had **paid for treatment privately** because they had been unable to find or access a dentist able to provide NHS treatment.
 - Some people (**4.5%**) had **paid for private** dental services, so they were able **to receive an appointment or treatment faster.**
 - Seven people (**3.2%**) told us that they had **paid for treatment privately** so that their **child could access NHS dental services.**
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NHS Sussex response to our findings:

- NHS Sussex is developing a long and short-term dental plan to develop services which are accessible for local people and sustainable for dental providers. The Dental Plan will be launched later this year and sets out our priorities for the next few years as we take on full responsibility of dental commissioning from NHS England.
 - We will be engaging with dental professionals to identify problems and explore areas of improvement to help inform the plan.
 - We are working in collaboration with public health teams in Sussex to assess the oral health needs of our population and work on preventive messaging to ensure better oral health for everybody and prevent the need for treatment.
 - We will be working alongside Healthwatch to engage with the public in a variety of ways to understand the problems patients have faced and continue to face when accessing NHS Dentistry.
 - We will be working with health and care partners across Sussex to address inequality of access to ensure all vulnerable groups have access to improved dental care
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NHS Sussex response to our findings:

“Whilst we know that many people in Sussex are able to access their first choice of dentist and that we have a higher number of dentists for our population than other areas in the country, feedback from the public and patients highlights that some people are finding it hard to get the care they need.

A lot of work is taking place to address this, and we welcome the findings of this insight from Healthwatch as we develop plans across Sussex to improve access and address inequalities across our communities as a key priority for health and care partners in Sussex this year.

We will ensure this feedback is central to our work as we work with dental providers this year to set out immediate and longer-term areas of improvement.”

Dr Charlotte Keeble

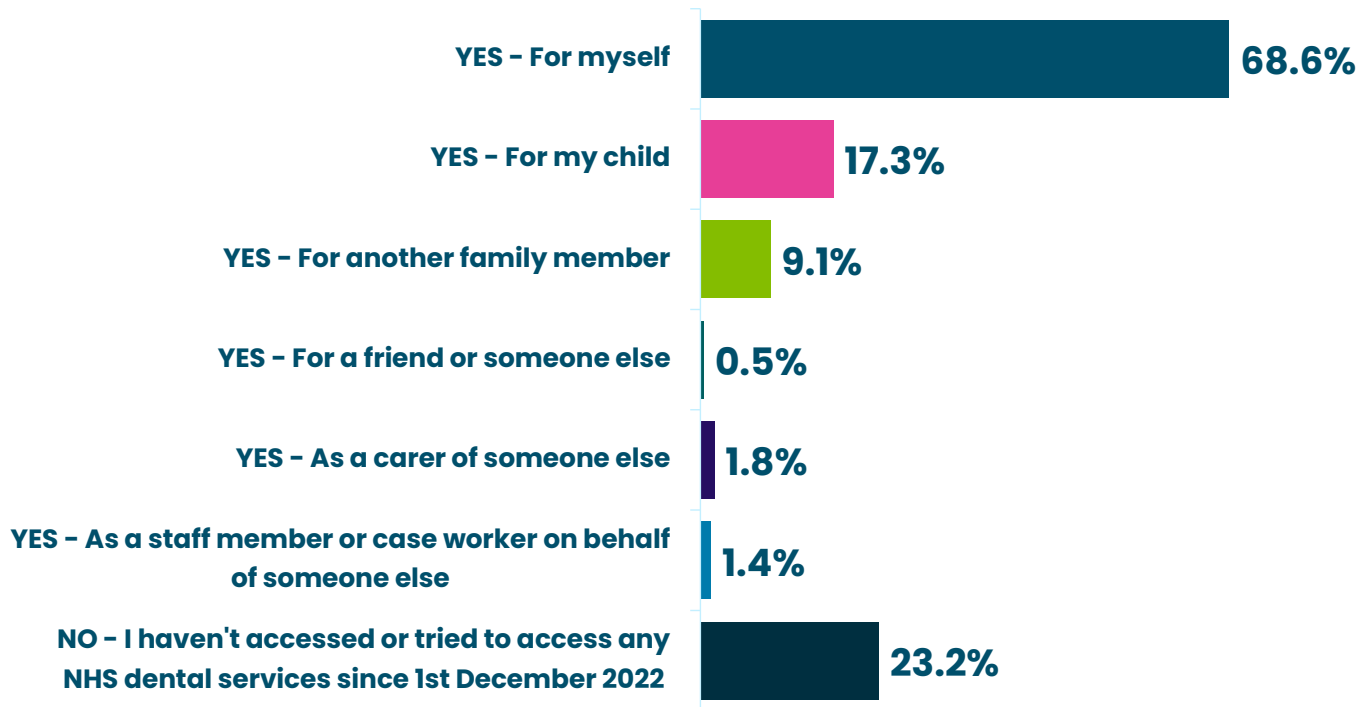
Pharmacy, Optometry and Dentistry lead for Delegated Commissioning



What you told us about dentistry services in Sussex

Your experiences of dentistry in Sussex since 1st December 2022

Have you accessed or tried to access any NHS dental services since 1st December 2022?

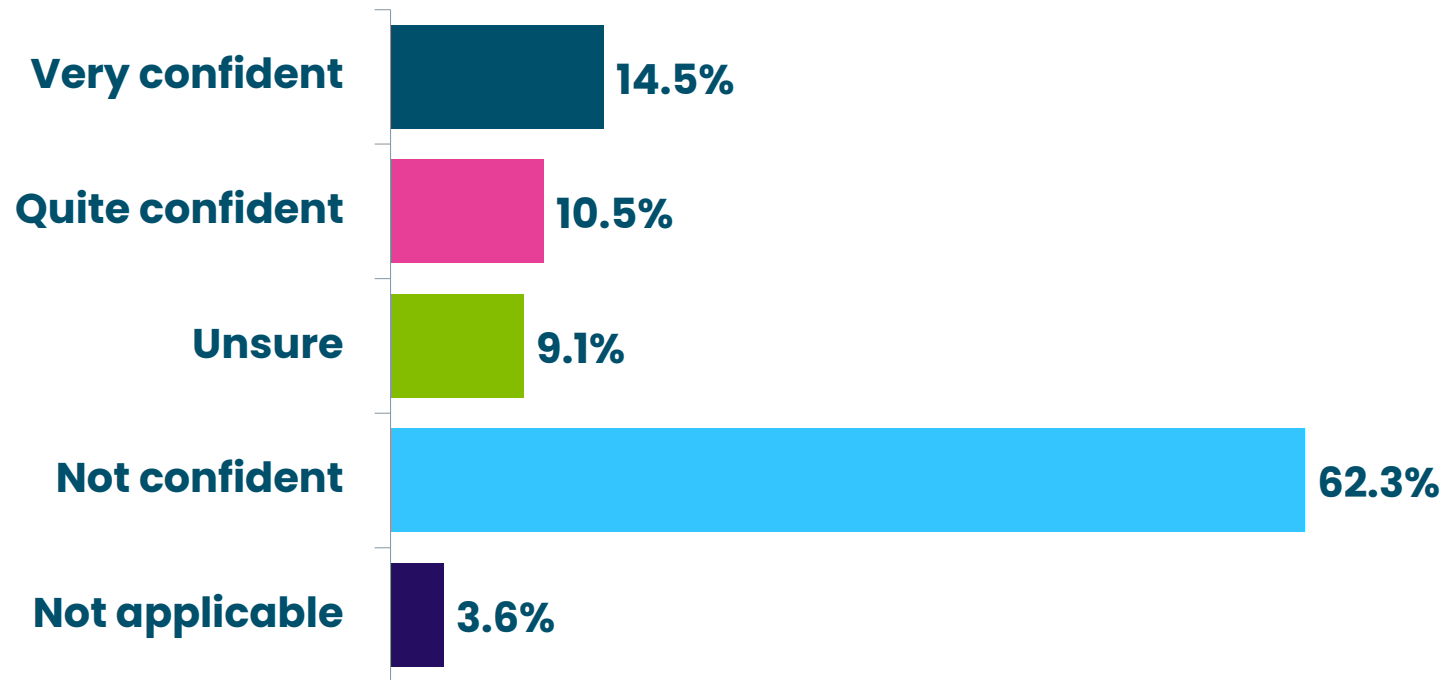


Please note people could tick more than one answer. Percentages are shown as a proportion of all 220 poll respondents.

What you told us about dentistry services in Sussex

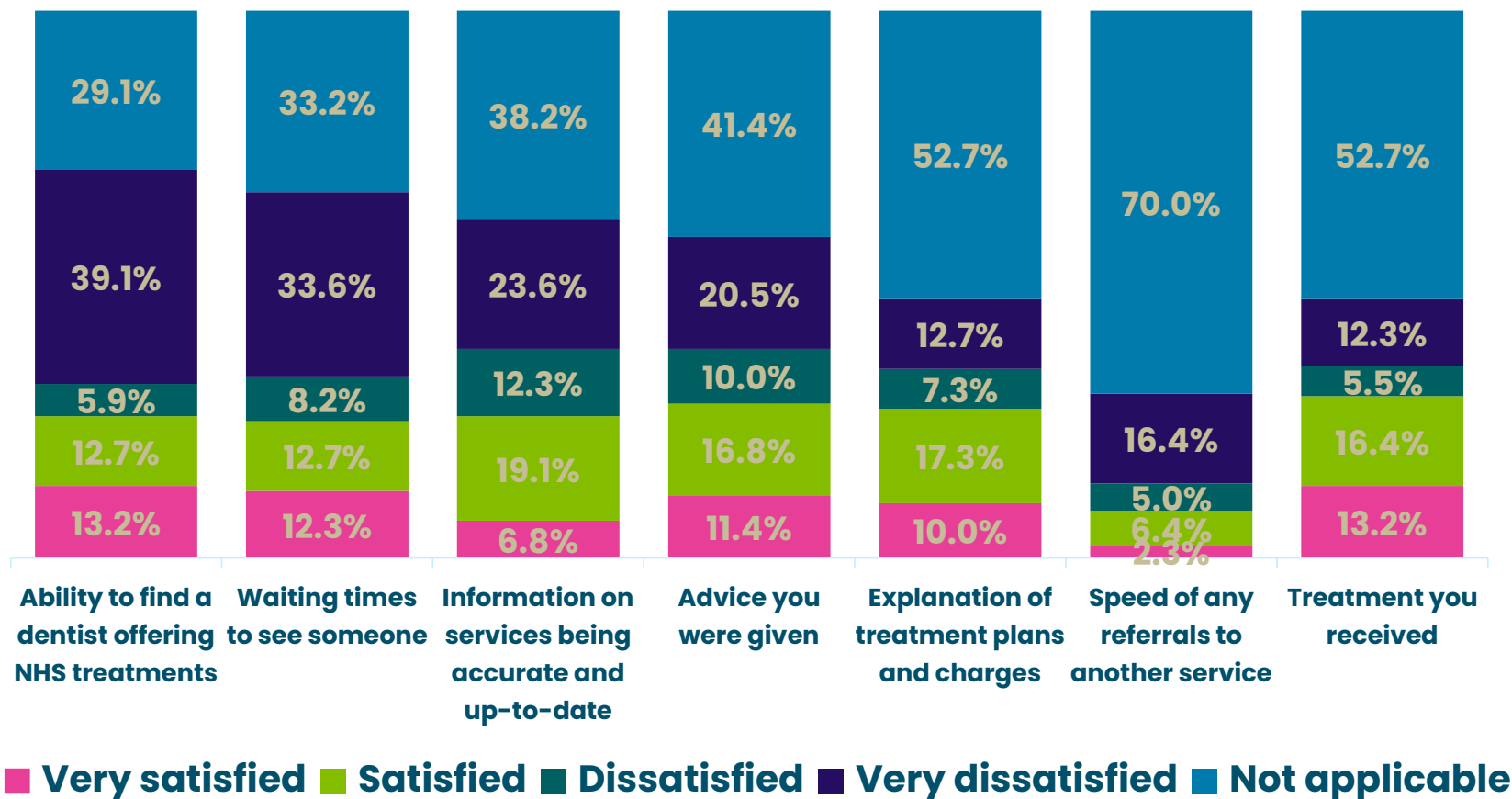
Your experiences of dentistry in Sussex since 1st December 2022

Thinking about the next 12 months, how confident do you currently feel that you will be able to access NHS dental services for yourself or on behalf of someone else when you need them?



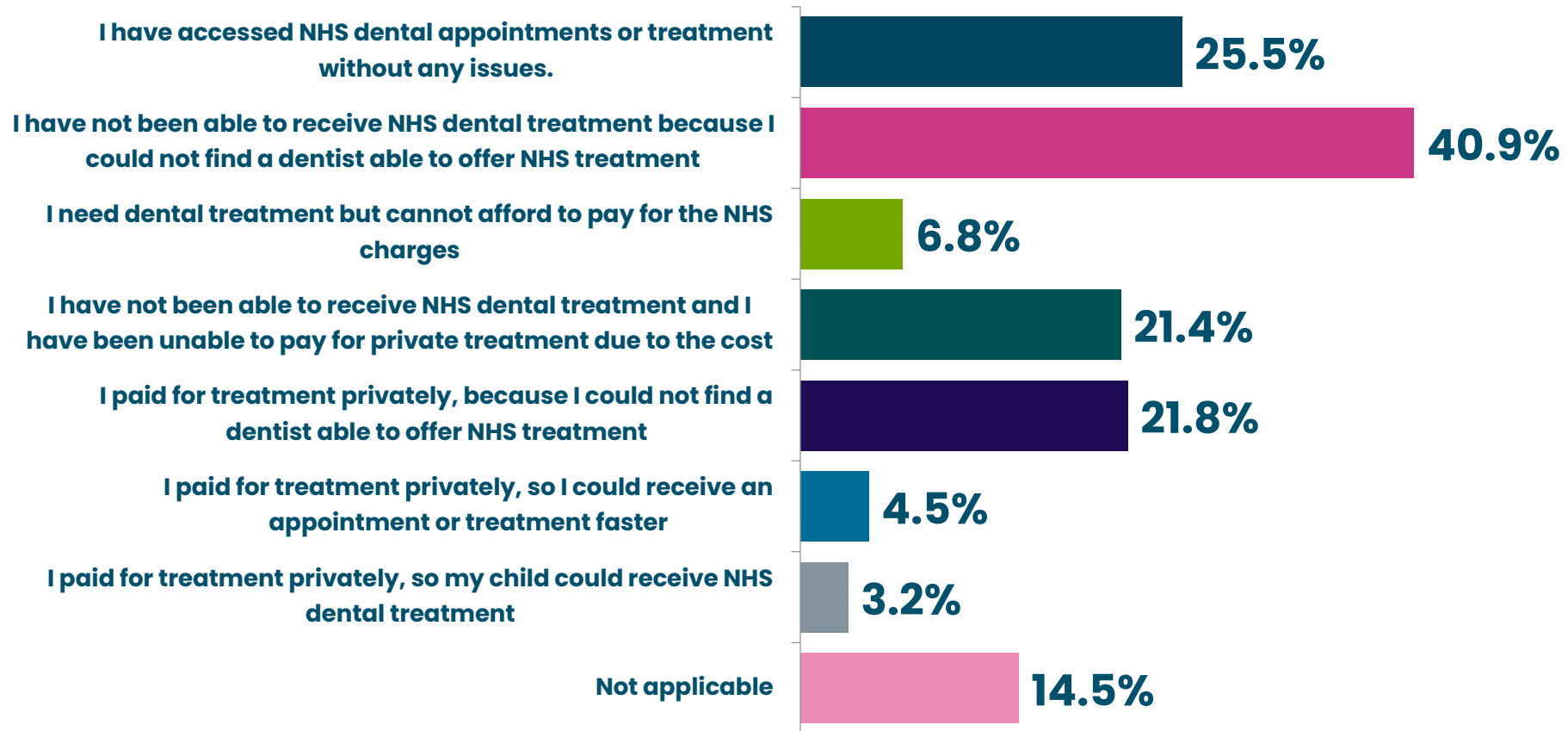
What you told us about dentistry services in Sussex

If you answered YES to Q2, how satisfied were you with your experience of NHS dental services?

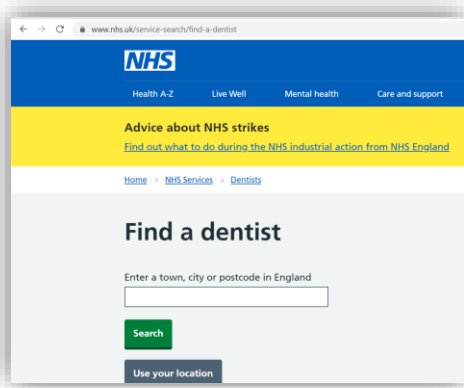


Please tell us if you have experienced any of the following since 1st December 2022?

Please tick all that apply



Please note people could tick more than one answer. Percentages are shown as a proportion of all 211 poll respondents.



What we also did

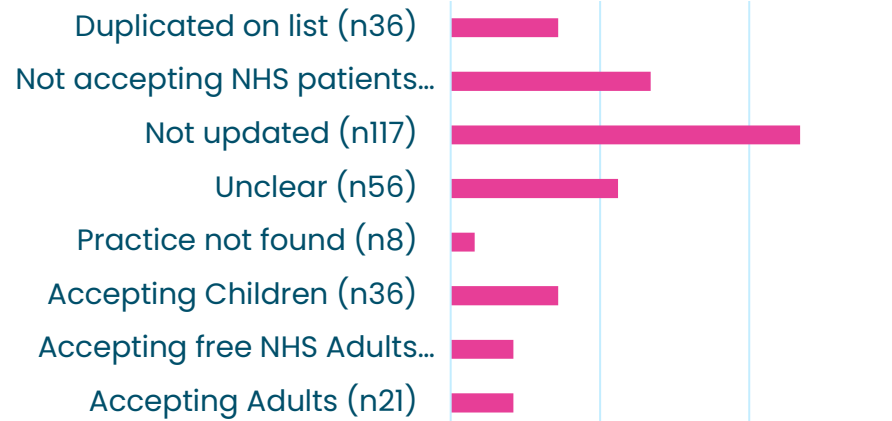
Desktop research carried out in the second week of January 2023 looked at NHS dental practices' compliance in updating their information on NHS.uk. Up-to-date information enables people to quickly know if a practice is accepting NHS patients.

Using a spreadsheet of NHS dental providers (supplied by NHS Sussex) Healthwatch volunteers looked at [NHS.uk](https://www.nhs.uk) to see how well the requirement (opposite) had been adhered to.

In November 2022, Department of Health and Social Care announced:

"...we are making the updating of the NHS website and Directory of Services a requirement in legislation for dental practices. This will make it easier for patients to find up to date information on NHS dentistry and for services such as NHS 111 and dental helplines to refer patients to practices with capacity."

Status of accepting NHS patients



Of the 320 dental practice entries for Sussex, we found **only 21 practices** (6.6%) had up-to-date listings saying they **were taking on adults** and **36** (11.3%) **were taking on children as NHS patients.**



Our conclusions and recommendations



Conclusions

It is clear from the feedback given by Sussex residents to our poll that experiences of NHS dentistry are mixed.


It is positive to hear that some local people manage to access NHS dentistry with minimal issues or delays, and that for a majority of people the quality of the treatment they receive is good, once services can be accessed.

However, it is concerning that for many people a significant number of issues continue to affect their ability to access NHS dental appointments and treatment in a timely way, despite changes recently implemented by NHS England.

We heard that many people continue to struggle to find dentists accepting new NHS patients, and even then, delays and wait times can be long. In part, people struggle because there is inconsistency of information on which practices offer NHS services and which have capacity.

Some people have told us that they have resorted to paying for appointments/treatment privately so they can access services faster or because they have no alternative, rather than through choice.

Most concerning is those people unable to afford either NHS or private dental treatment, even where they are able to access it. It is worrying that those on the lowest incomes may be disproportionately affected, potentially leading to worse health outcomes.





Our recommendations on dentistry:

Based on the findings of our 2023 dental poll, Healthwatch in Sussex have identified the following recommendations:

1. Healthwatch in Sussex to share these findings alongside other intelligence and insight as part of its contribution to the work undertaken by NHS Sussex to map all patient/provider/community/partner dental insight in developing and delivering its 2023-24 Dentistry Stakeholder and Engagement Plan .
2. Healthwatch in Sussex to share these findings with NHS Sussex, other members of the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS) and Local Dental Committees to inform activity related to oral health, health inequalities and service commissioning.

Next Steps:

- Healthwatch in Sussex will continue to monitor public and patient experiences of dentistry in order to inform local and national decision-making.
 - Healthwatch in Sussex will share these findings with Healthwatch England as part of a national approach to gathering insight on experiences of dental services, and inform their dialogue with the Department for Health and Social Care and NHS England to deliver development and change.
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