



West Cumbria Dental Project

-July 2021-



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About Healthwatch Cumbria

Healthwatch Cumbria (HWC) was established in April 2013 as part of the implementation of the Health and Care Act 2012.

Healthwatch England acts as the national consumer champion for all local Healthwatch organisations, enabling and supporting HWC to bring important issues to the attention of decisions makers nationally.

A key role of HWC is to champion the views of people who use health and care services in Cumbria, seeking to ensure that their experiences inform the improvement of services. HWC are constantly listening, recording and reporting on the views of local people on a wide range of health and care issues, ensuring that people in the county are able to express their views and have a voice in improving their local health and care services.



Background

The dental practice in Cleator Moor closed in 2016 and, since then, only about 70% of its NHS patients have been provided for - at practices between four and 30 miles away. Even now there is still a shortfall of thousands of NHS dental places in the area.

Copeland has significantly higher rates of tooth decay in small children than the rest of the country and the lack of NHS dental care in the area also creates issues for those who are unable to travel or have special dental needs.

Alongside contacts in the community, HWC is helping to come up with a solution, bringing representatives together from the public, health professionals and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) to bring sustainable dental provision to West Cumbria.

Healthwatch exists to represent people's views and HWC is successfully doing this by highlighting the problems faced by members of the public, through listening to the experiences of people in Copeland who are not registered with an NHS dentist. These first hand experiences which have been shared with HWC are being used to raise these issues with the people who commission dental services and shape policy at the highest level.

HWC have been hearing from people who have struggled to get NHS dental treatment because they are not on a dental practice list of patients. As well as those who have had to travel many miles to visit an NHS dentist because they are unable to register with one near where they live.

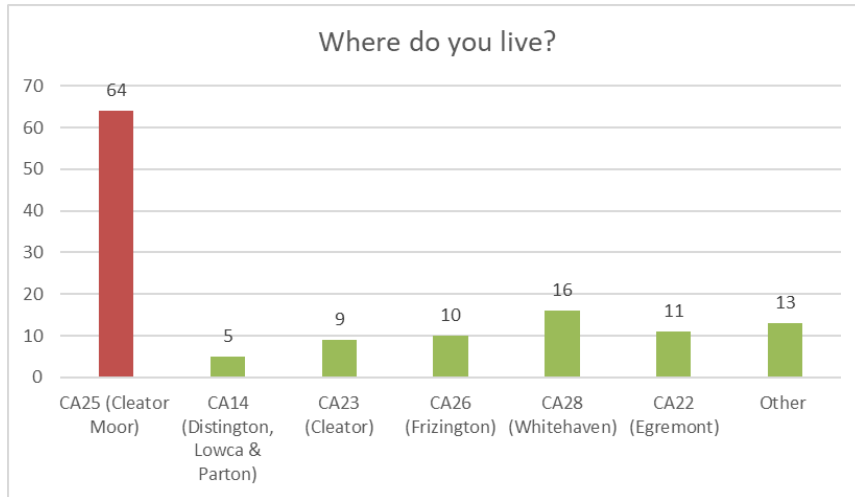
A short questionnaire was designed and produced by HWC for people living in Cleator Moor who are not registered with an NHS dentist, to help paint a clearer picture of the current situation as well as allowing the respondents an opportunity to share their personal experiences and stories. There was an option in the survey for respondents to leave their contact details, if they wished to take part in a case study to further share their experience.

The survey went live on the 27th May 2021, and ran until the 29th June 2021. There was a total of 128 responses. This report will focus on analysing and discussing the results/themes highlighted from these respondents.



Respondents and Location

Between the 27th May 2021 and the 29th June 2021, there was a total of 128 respondents to the 'West Cumbria Dental Project Survey'.

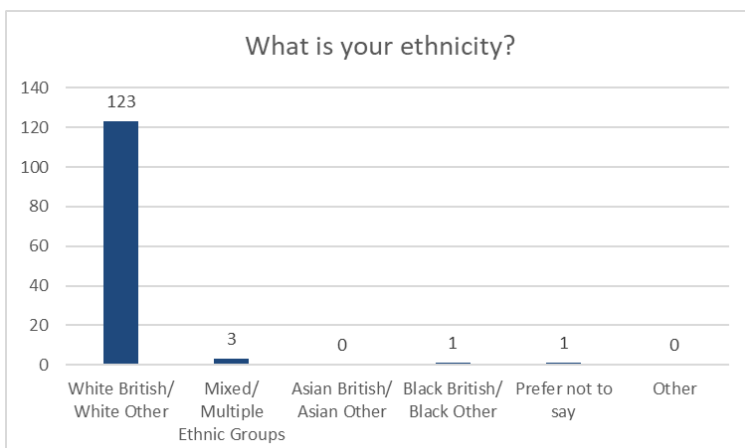
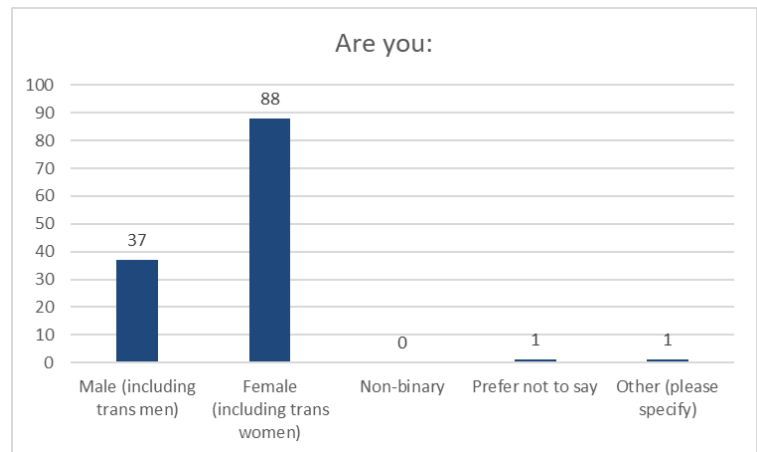
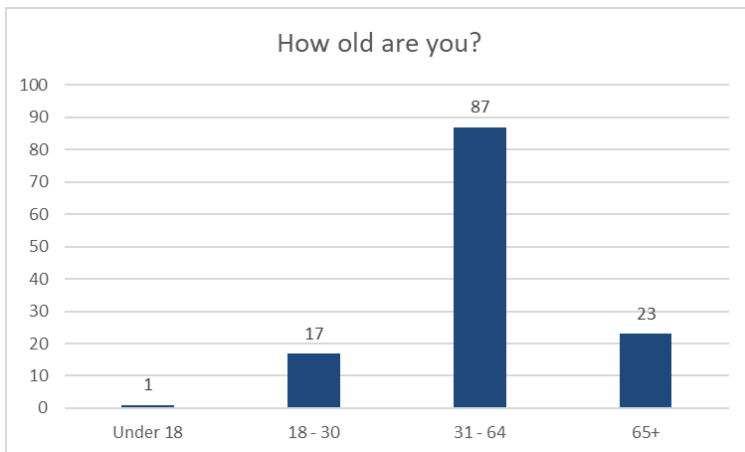


The survey was targeted at those living in Cleator Moor, and out of the 128 respondents 50% (64) stated that they lived in Cleator Moor.

Locations under 'Other' includes: Beckermest, Holmrook and Moor Row



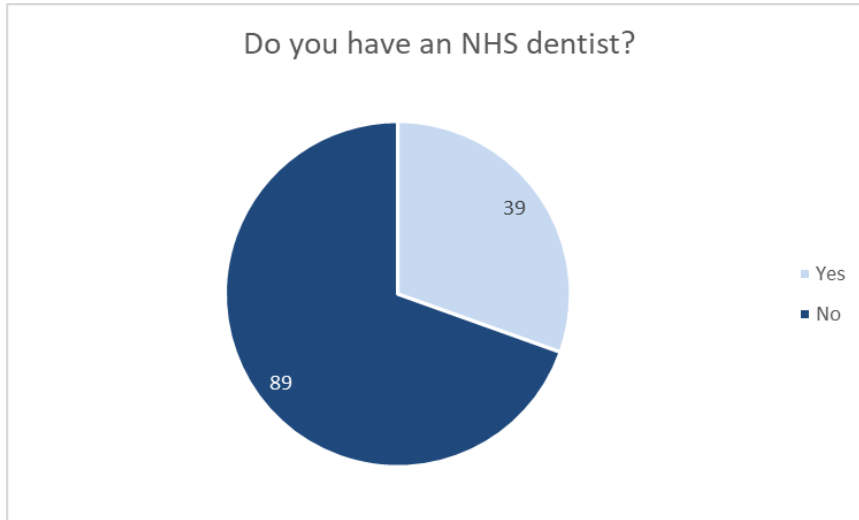
Demographics



The demographics of those respondents living in Cleator Moor follow the trends of the demographics of all respondents, which have been represented by the graphs. With the majority of the respondents being aged between 31 to 64, identify as female and are White British or White Other.



Do you have an NHS dentist?

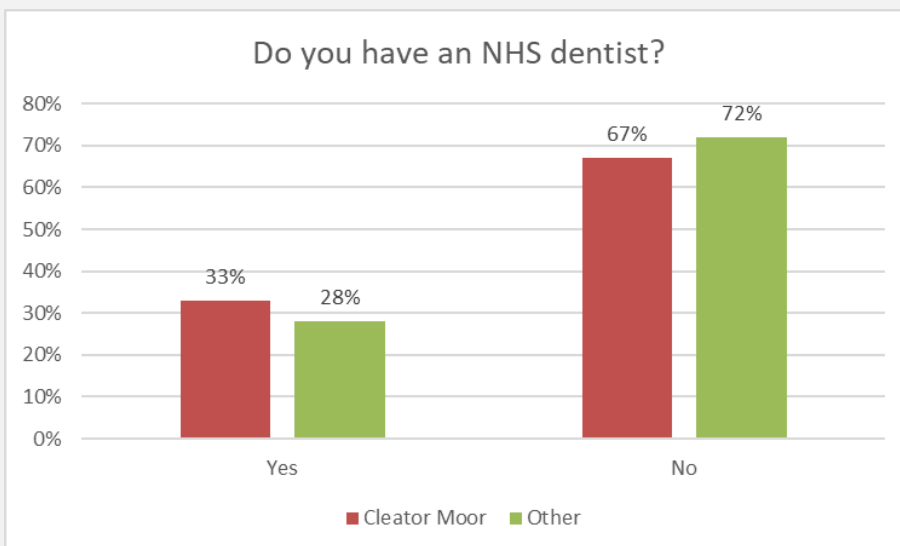
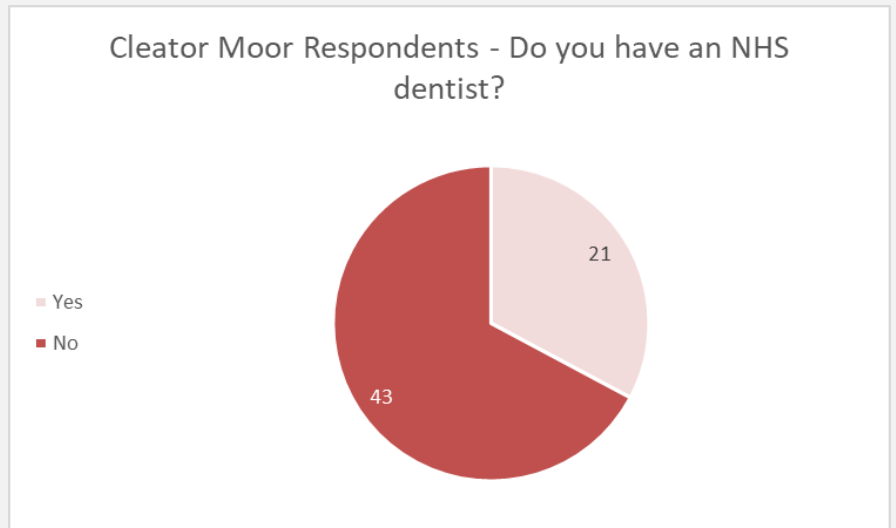


69.5% (89) of respondents said that they have NOT got an NHS dentist.

Of these 89 respondents 76% were last treated by an NHS dentist more than 2 years ago, and 55% have not received any other dental treatment.

Out of the 64 respondents that live in Cleator Moor 67% (43) do NOT have an NHS dentist.

Whilst out of the 64 respondents that declared that they do not live in Cleator Moor, 46 shared that they do not have an NHS dentist. That is 72%!



“I would like a regular dentist. I have been trying to register with dentists for over 2 years now and keep getting told they aren’t taking on.”

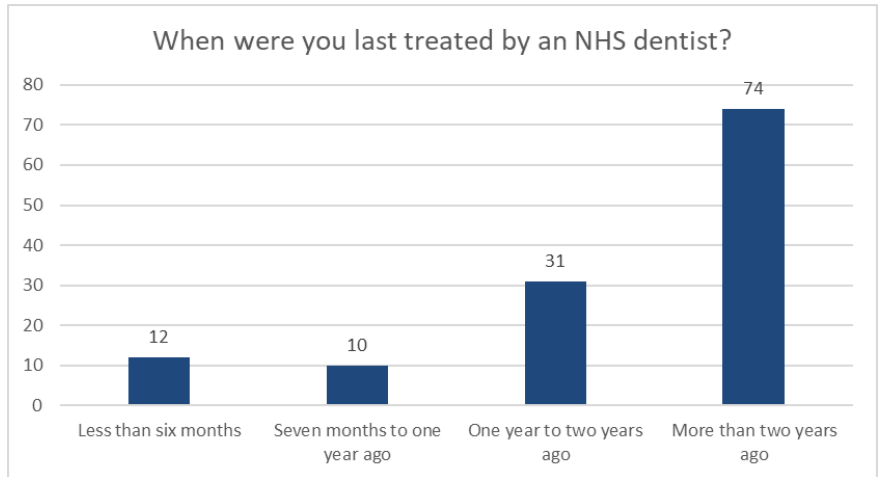


When were you last treated by an NHS dentist?

1 respondent skipped this question

82.5% (105) of respondents shared that they were last treated by an NHS dentist more than a year ago.

In fact, most of the 127 respondents that responded to this question (58%) declared that it has been more than 2 years since they were treated by an NHS dentist.



As a follow up question, where was this treatment, was asked. The following is the top 5 places named:

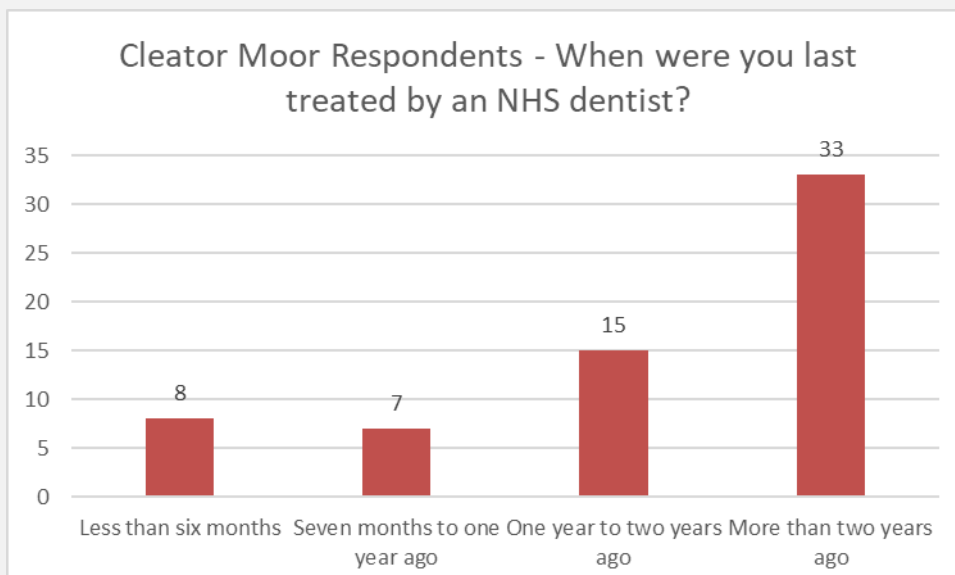
1. Whitehaven
2. Workington
3. Cleator Moor
4. Egremont
5. Cockermouth

Other places that were mentioned, included:

- Carlisle
- Keswick
- Ulverston
- Plymouth
- Oxford

“Haven't been seen by a dentist in about 8 years.”

“Not had dental treatment since 2016.”



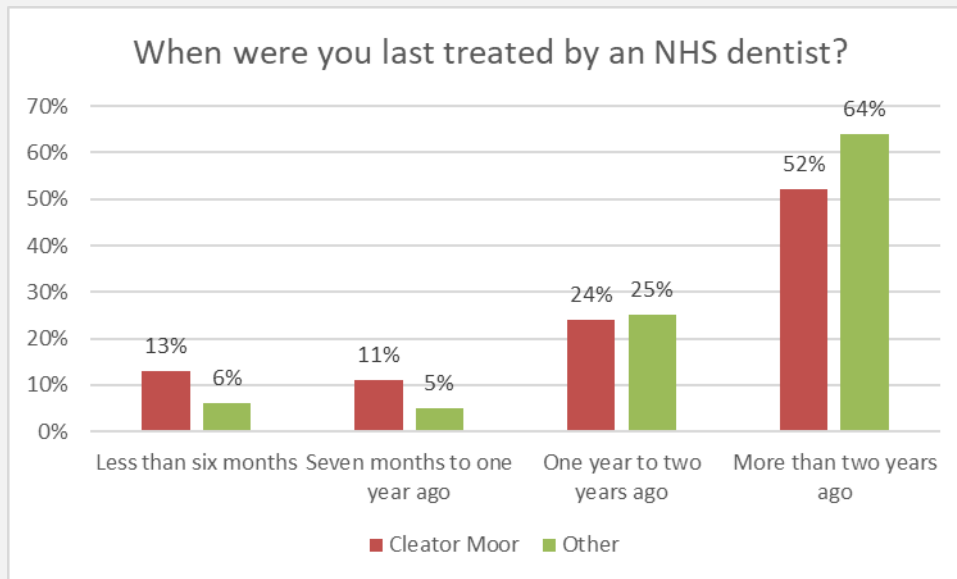
76% (48) of respondents shared that they were last treated by an NHS dentist more than a year ago.

52% declared that it has actually been more than 2 years since they have been treated by an NHS dentist.



When were you last treated by an NHS dentist? Cont.

1 respondent skipped this question



24% of respondents from Cleator Moor were last treated by a NHS dentist less than a year ago. However, out of those respondents that shared that they did not live in Cleator Moor only 11% of them have been treated by an NHS dentist less than a year ago.

76% of respondents that shared that they live in Cleator Moor were treated by an NHS dentist more than a year ago. Whereas, 89% of respondents that do not live in Cleator Moor declared that it had been over a year since the last time they were treated by an NHS dentist.

Thus, this suggests that the problem of not being able to be seen/treated by an NHS dentist is not solely in Cleator Moor but is an issue in the wider surrounding area.

As a follow up question, where was this treatment, was asked. The following is the top 5 places named by residents of Cleator Moor:

1. Whitehaven
2. Workington
3. Cleator Moor
4. Cockermouth
5. Egremont

“Not had check up for over two years. Might not be having to have root canal treatment if was seen by a dentist for check ups.”

“I have lived in Frizington for nearly 4 years and cannot get registered anywhere. Now I have a child and worry about her teeth.”

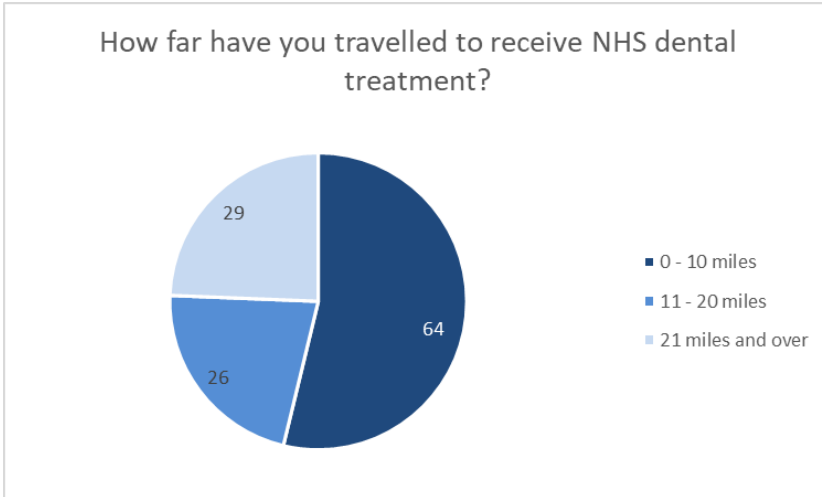
The following are the most common places named by those respondents that do not live in Cleator Moor:

1. Whitehaven
2. Workington
3. Cleator Moor
3. Egremont
3. Keswick
3. Oxford



How far have you travelled to receive NHS dental treatment?

9 respondents skipped this question

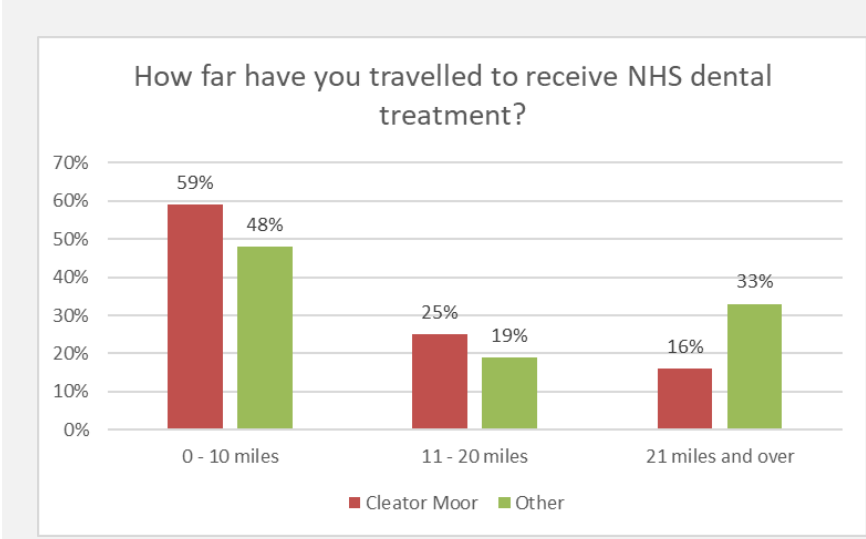
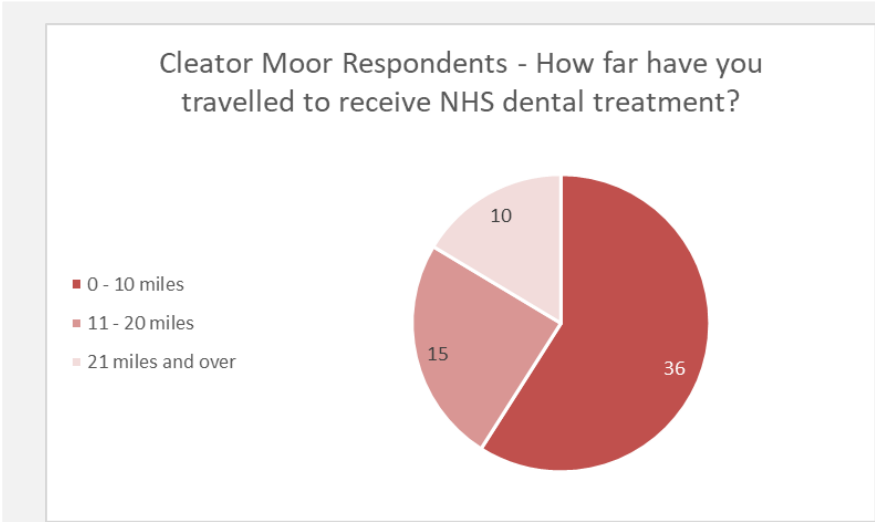


The majority (54%) of respondents travel between 0 and 10 miles for dental treatment.

However, 24% have travelled over 21 miles to get dental treatment.

“Shouldn’t have to travel so far to a dentist. Parking is terrible and have three young children to take.”

“Travelling 28 miles to get treatment and get home again is a struggle.”



Out of the respondents that live in Cleator Moor, most (59%) travel between 0 and 10 miles for dental treatment, however 16% have travelled more than 21 miles.

48% of the respondents that do not live in Cleator Moor travel between 0 and 10 miles for dental treatment, but 33% have travelled more than 21 miles.

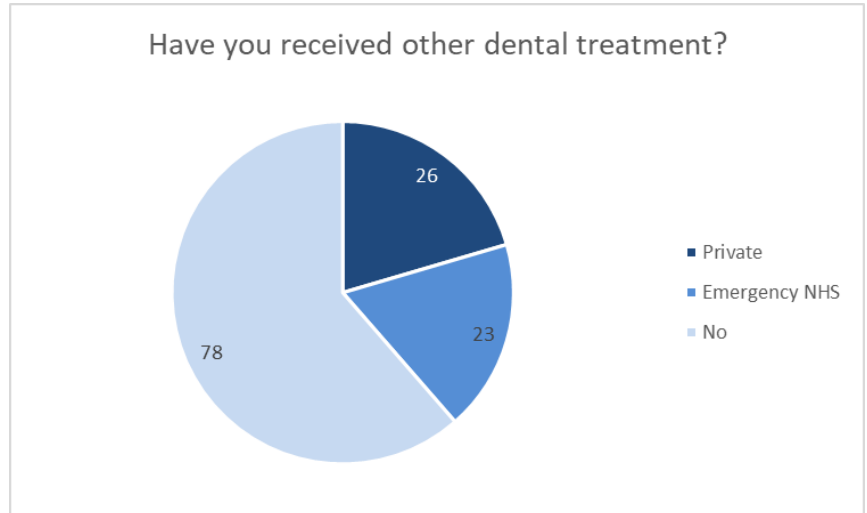


Have you received other dental treatment?

1 respondent skipped this question

61.5% (78) of respondents have not received any other dental treatment.

20.5% of respondents have received private dental treatment, while 18% have accessed emergency NHS dental care.



The following themes were identified from respondents further feedback which gives some insight into the problems people are facing when trying to access dental care in West Cumbria:

- COSTS

Financial limitations was highlighted to be a big issue for those trying to access dental care. The feedback suggested that a lot of individuals were not able to afford private dental treatment, whilst others were forced to go private despite the additional costs. Some of those individuals that are not able to pay for private dental treatments have been relying on emergency NHS instead.

“After Oasis closed in Whitehaven, myself and my family including 4 children couldn't get into a NHS dentist nearby and we have had to rely on emergency treatments as and when we have needed. My son and daughter, now 14 and 16 need desperately to have braces and treatment but it would cost far more than we can afford privately.”

“We moved back to Cumbria in 2013 to look after my mam who had terminal cancer. We haven't been able to get an NHS dentist since we moved. I am a single parent with 2 children I am having to pay privately for.”

- TRAVEL

Several respondents suggested that issues with transport and travelling distances have contributed to them having a limited access to dental treatment. Some shared that travelling long distances with young children is tricky and other respondents shared that because of their age they are not sure how much longer they will be able to drive the long distances to get to non-local dentists. Another respondent shared that the public transport routes do not make it easy to go to the dentists.

“I am struggling to get to Cockermouth for treatment as there is no direct bus route and I have no relative that can take me.”

“Not having a local NHS dentist means I have to travel over 100 to a dentist in County Durham. This is costing money for travel and time. Going to the dentist is now an all day event which is fine at the moment but at 67 and my partners is 71 we don't know how long we will be driving.”



Have you received other dental treatment? Cont.

1 respondent skipped this question

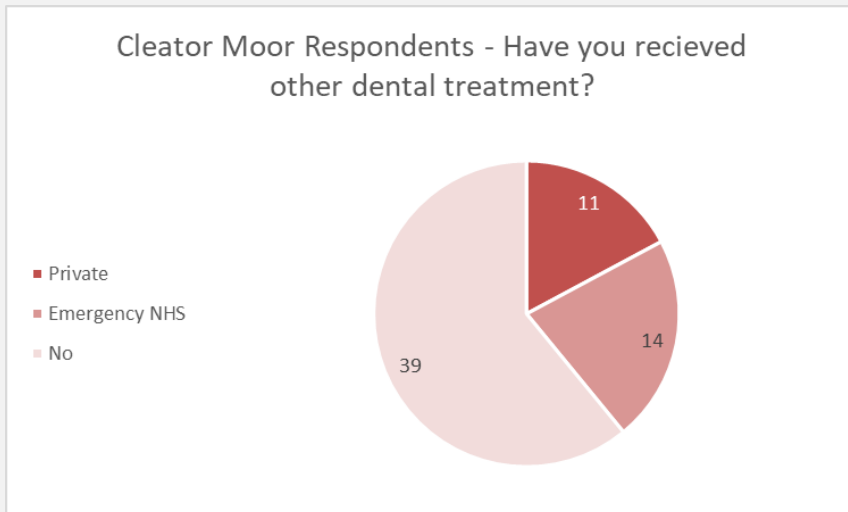
- NO SPACE

A very common issue that was highlighted by 42% of respondents was inability to get into an NHS dentist. Respondents stated that they have tried to get into multiple NHS dentists and have been continuously told that these dentists have no space and thus are not taking on anymore patients.

“Can’t get registered with NHS anywhere in Copeland, my son (8 months old) also can’t get registered anywhere (even at my practice) as the waiting lists are closed. It’s shocking.”

“Moved to Whitehaven 2 years ago (July 2019) and have been unable to sign up with an NHS dentist, have tried numerous times with different places but nowhere is ever taking on.”

“My child is now 6 and has never been the dentist I feel awful about this and ring round most months to try and get her on a list. Me personally have never been to a dentist (except for emergency filling) in over 10 years due to none being available.”

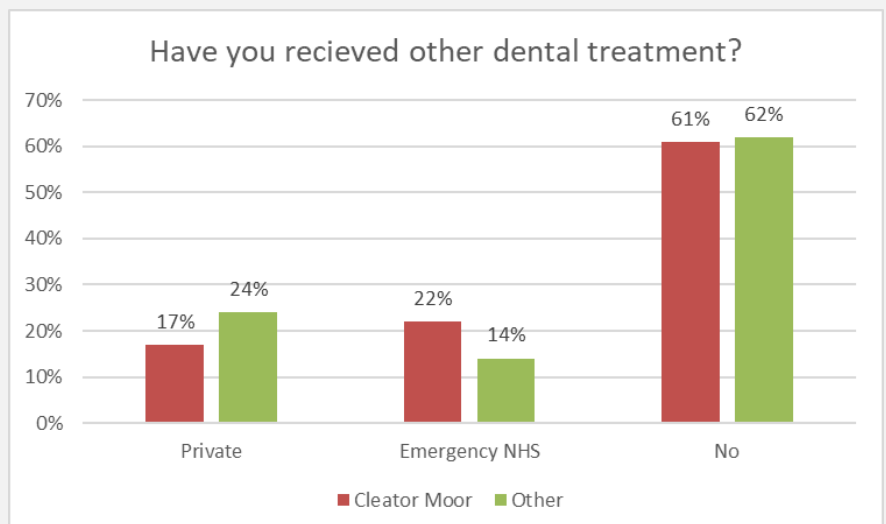


61% (39) of respondents who live in Cleator Moor have not received any other dental treatment.

17% of these respondents have received private dental treatment, while 22% have accessed emergency NHS dental care.

In comparison, a higher percentage of those respondents who do not live in Cleator Moor have accessed private dental care than those who do live in Cleator Moor.

Additionally, a higher percentage of those living in Cleator Moor have accessed emergency NHS dental care than those who do not live in Cleator Moor.





How has not being treated by an NHS dentist affect you or your family? 58 respondents skipped this question

70 respondents shared their personal experiences about the dentistry situation, and the impact it has had on them. There were a lot of feelings of worry, anger and frustration shared by the participants. People talked about the impact this has had on their family (especially concerns about their children's dental treatment), about the physical pain they have been dealing with, the mental health impact (in particular on their self confidence), as well as worries about the long term impact that the lack of dental care will have.

Here is a selection of people's stories that they shared;

"Our teeth are not being looked after, I had no pregnancy/post pregnancy care even though my gums bleed during/after pregnancy. My children's teeth aren't being kept an eye on, my son is going into secondary school could need braces and we can't even get on a dentists list let alone see anyone."

"We are sick of fighting to get registered with a dentist. I've sat time and time again with a list as long as my arm, going through and calling every dentist around here and no one will take me, my partner and my children on. I think it's absolutely disgusting how my child is 6 years old and has never seen a dentist. Me and my 8 year old haven't seen a dentist in over 6 years!!!"

"I have telephoned numerous practices in West Cumbria while attempting to find an NHS dentist for my children and have been turned down at every turn."

"As my teeth and jaw have had multiple abscesses I have been in a great deal of pain, I have resorted to removing some teeth using pliers etc. I have phoned all of the dental practices but have been told that they do not take NHS patients."

"I missed several days of work because of the pain I was in."

"I have had to phone round list of places to try and get us treatment and have ended up taking lots of painkillers or using temporary filling kits from the chemist instead of being able to get treatment."

"I have had on going issues with broken filling not been able to get it fixed, and toothache which still have now, as emergency dentist said infection though antibiotics didn't work, now been told to go Carlisle 30+ miles away to be seen again."

"I only have a top partial denture that doesn't fit properly because of tooth decay and having broken teeth, I only have about six teeth left and it makes me really self conscious about going out in public because it looks terrible."

"Affect self confidence, don't like smiling in case the broken tooth can be seen."

"Luckily had no emergency but you don't know what damage there could be eventually with not being seen for so long."

"I think my teeth are fine at the moment, but are dreading the consequences of what will happen if I have a problem with my teeth."



Summary/ Conclusion

HWC would like to say thank you to all those people who have taken the time to complete our survey, to share their stories with us and to contribute to this valuable piece of social research.

This report has examined the 128 responses to the ‘West Cumbria Dental Project’ survey which ran from the 27th May to the 29th June 2021. The analysis of these results highlighted some key themes and trends:

- Registering for an NHS dentist in the area is very difficult and the majority do not have an NHS dentist.
- Most were last treated by an NHS dentist more than 2 years ago.
- The usual travelling distance for dental treatment is 0 to 10 miles, however, nearly 1 in 4 (24%) travel over 21 miles.
- There is a lot of concern around children accessing dental care, especially with multiple reports of children having never been seen by a dentist.
- Private care is not a suitable solution or appropriate option for many as it is too costly.
- There has been a significant impact on both people’s physical and mental health as a result of the lack of dental care.
- There is a strong desire and need for an NHS dentist in the area.

There was further analysis done to see what those respondents who stated that they lived in Cleator Moor said, as the survey was targeted for this specific demographic. The results of this analysis is that it predominantly followed the trends and themes of the collective 128 survey responses (summarised in the above bullet points).

However, the further analysis of those respondents from Cleator Moor highlighted that the dental issue is not primarily located in Cleator Moor as the results show that in many ways those respondents not from Cleator Moor face a bigger issue in accessing dental care than those that do live in Cleator Moor. It is evident that more respondents not from Cleator Moor don’t have an NHS dentist, more were last seen by a dentist less recently, and more have to travel further to receive dental treatment. Conversely, it was also evident from the results that those that live in Cleator Moor use less private dental care and rely more heavily on emergency care.

The dental practice in Cleator Moor closed in 2016 and, since then, only about 70% of its NHS patients have been provided for, and there continues to be a shortfall of thousands of NHS dental places in the area. The response data to this survey suggests that there has been a knock on effect of this dentist closure to the wider surrounding area. This is because those residents of Cleator Moor have had to try and access dentistry care outside Cleator Moor, which means in these areas it has become more difficult to get access to dental treatment/care as there has been an increase in demand on these services in recent years. Unless this issue is resolved there is a chance that this knock on effect will continue to spread.

The results of this survey also suggest that there is a socio-economic factor which impacts the dentistry situation in Cleator Moor. With respondents indicating that the cost of private dental care is unaffordable and travel costs are a significant issue in terms of accessibility of care. With evidence that highlights that Cleator Moor residents are less likely to have used private dental care and more likely to have used emergency NHS dental treatment, than those respondents that do not live in Cleator Moor. This implies that potentially the issue of lack of dental care for Cleator Moor residents is partly socio-economic.



Case studies

There was an option in the survey for respondents to leave their contact details, if they wished to take part in a case study to further share their experience. Some of the respondents did leave their details and agreed to take part in a case study for the project. The following are a sample:

‘I don’t feel confident about my smile ... I like wearing masks, it hides my teeth. I feel trapped, forgotten about.’

I came back to Cumbria in 2019 and tried to get a dentist, then the pandemic came along, and I didn’t really think about it as I never really had a problem.

Just before Christmas a tooth split, I lost the filling and it’s going rotten. It’s okay if I don’t eat on that side. I’m getting very distressed. I have a cleft palate - a deformed top jaw - and I feel self-conscious.

I don’t feel confident about my smile, it’s the one thing I’m ashamed of. I want it to be the best it can be. I like wearing masks, it hides my teeth. I’m really upset about it, I feel trapped, forgotten about.

I’m entitled to free NHS treatment. I was born with a cleft palate and it’s a life-long condition. I don’t want to seem to be complaining but I don’t drive and it’s £10 to the station by taxi. It would cost £500 for that one tooth. I might pay for that, but I’ve got lots of problems - including plaque - and the rest is going to cost thousands.

I keep phoning dentists up and they’re very nice. The one in Workington really helped - they gave me numbers in Carlisle - but in September they’re going private. There’s lots doing that apparently.

The Queen Street surgery in Whitehaven said they’re not looking to open a new list for two years at least. I was told the nearest dentist is Blackpool.

I’m going to keep phoning dentists in the hope that someone has dropped out just then.

- HWC signposted woman to list of dentists taking on NHS patients, as well as Cumbria County Council patient transport service. Also raised case with Cumbria Public Health, who asked the maxillofacial unit if they could treat her [the answer was no]. As of 28/09/21 she now has an NHS dentist and an appointment coming up. However, the dentist is in Lockerbie, so she hopes the patient transport service [which only operates in the county] can take her to and from Carlisle train station.



Case studies

Tooth decay could lead to life-threatening infection

I last saw a dentist (in Workington) three years ago. I'm supposed to have six-month check-ups because I had endocarditis [a rare and potentially fatal infection of the inner lining of the heart] and the doctor recommended check-ups. I do take extremely good care of my teeth now.

I went to the emergency dentist three years ago, but the dentist refused to do any work until I'd spoken to the doctor. I have to have antibiotics for a week before as a cut could cause infection.

I'd like to get my teeth checked regularly as I fear that it could happen again if something happened to a tooth. I worry it could happen to my children as I have a hereditary bicuspid valve [an abnormality of the aortic valve which makes the heart work harder than it should].

- HWC signposted man to list of dentists taking on NHS patients. Also raised case with Cumbria Public Health to see if they knew anywhere, he could be seen. [Again the answer to their question was negative: that he would have to go through his GP.]

'Because I'm not in pain, doors have been shut in my face'

I'm worried about a crown as I previously had a 'bubble' in the tissue below some of my teeth and had to have several removed. Now I have a plate in my jaw.

It's difficult to live with as it's right at the front, so my teeth are loose, wobbly and I have a problem talking. I worry that it will fall out, or that I'll swallow it. I'm also worried that the void left behind will lead to infection, which can get into the bone and lead to sepsis.

I've phoned round all the NHS dentists but, because I'm not in pain, doors have been shut in my face.

I'm very self-conscious, so the only solution is to get the treatment done. But it's going to cost several hundred pounds to get it done. A private practice, which to be honest has been wonderful, has quoted me £600, which is much less than the £1,000 quoted by another.

If I was in full-time work, it would be a different thing, but I'm a student, I had a little part time job, but I wasn't eligible for the Covid-19 self-employment relief, so I'm living off my partner and Universal Credit. I have no income now.

I've been told I'm the perfect candidate for implants, but I can't afford it, so I have this dental plate. I'm determined to get used to it but it's 'godawful'. I can smile, and I can talk, but I still can't eat properly. And I still have to find the money for adjustments.



Case studies

‘If I go out, I have to be careful what I eat’

I had 14/15 teeth out at the Cumberland Infirmary and now I’ve got partial dentures. When I last had a denture fitting, I had two teeth top and bottom, but now they’ve all gone, and I need full dentures.

If I go out, I have to be careful what I eat - I know what I can and can’t eat now. It looks bloody awful, that’s the worst part of it. It’s easier wearing a mask - it’s okay with my mates, they know.

I last saw a dentist five or six years ago, but I haven’t been able to see one since. I’ve phoned all round Maryport (I don’t have my own transport.)

I’d go private but I really can’t afford it, I’m self-employed and it’s been difficult, especially with Covid. But if I can’t find anywhere to go, then I would. I did notice there’s emergency treatment at the health centre. My sister-in-law goes there, but I’ve been told it’s not for me.

- HWC signposted man to list of dentists taking on NHS patients.

If the children need treatment, will they be seen?

Woman and her family can’t even get on a waiting list. They moved to West Cumbria from another part of the country, where the whole family, including the children, had regular check-ups. Mum is concerned that if they did need treatment, they wouldn’t be able to get it. The family can’t afford to go private unless it was a desperate situation.

Her partner needed emergency treatment as he had a hole/chip in a molar which was causing him pain. He managed to be seen in Whitehaven, approximately half an hour’s drive away.

Pain made woman go ahead with despite rude treatment

In 2019 woman in Cleator Moor managed to find an NHS dentist taking on patients, as she needed to get fillings. She was doubly pleased because it was also close to where she lived. However, she had a bad experience with the dentist, who was rude to her and she did not like the way she was being spoken to. She thought of leaving but she was in a lot of pain, so stayed back and got the procedure done. She thinks that the dentist was being rude to her because she belongs to an ethnic minority.

- HWC signposted her to list of dentists taking on NHS patients, as well as NHS complaints.



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