



Reviewing patient experience of dental services in Redbridge

Supplementary findings:
online patient survey

July - December 2021



Reviewing patient experience of dental services in Redbridge

Introduction

This is the first in a series of supplementary reports and details our online dental survey responses.

Online Survey

We created an online survey which was shared with local communities and stakeholders. The survey was developed to encourage as many people as possible to complete and was shared through hospital trusts, with GP Practices, Councillors, community groups and on social media.

Over the last year local people have been telling us that they have been finding it difficult to access dentists in Redbridge. We began hearing concerns through our signposting service and via responses to our Covid-19 questionnaire and feedback shared from local community groups via online meetings¹.

We were also interested in identifying whether there was a disparity between access to NHS and private appointments

Survey Strengths and Limitations

We were pleased that our survey received responses from people living in most postcode areas in the borough (11 out of 14 postcode areas) showing a strong geographical reach.

At 58%, most of our survey respondents were from a White British (English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh) background which is not reflective of the demographics of the borough².

We did not receive as many responses from other ethnicities as we would have hoped, although there has been a slight increase in diversity, compared to other surveys we have conducted over the last year. This information will be used to identify and expand our reach across Redbridge, to ensure we are able to offer engagement opportunities that are accessible to more communities.

¹ http://healthwatchredbridge.co.uk/sites/default/files/healthwatch_redbridge_covid-19_report_18.12.20.pdf

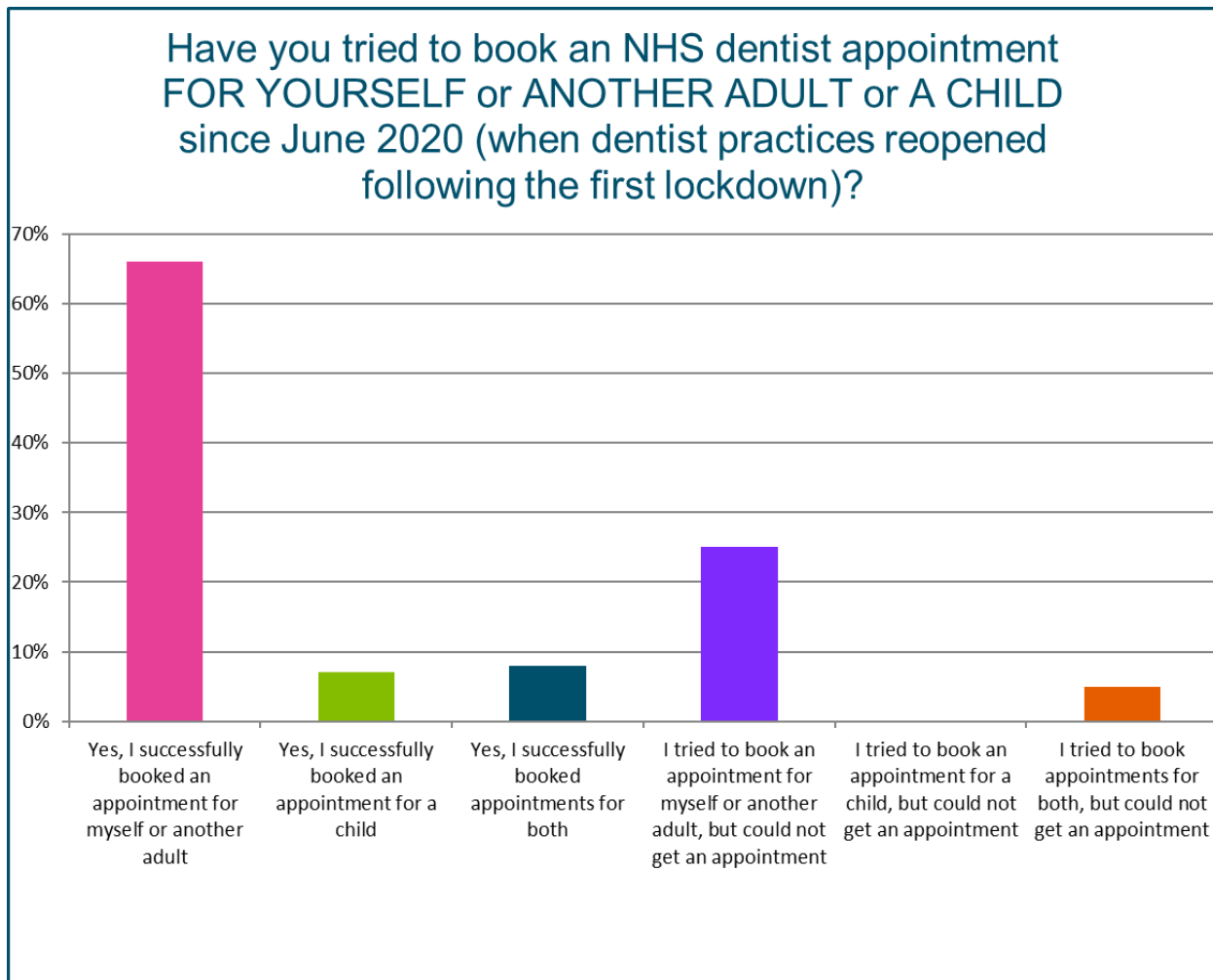
² [Redbridge - 2011 Census results](#)

Reviewing patient experience of dental services in Redbridge: online survey findings

Survey Findings

Our online survey was open between 23rd July - 30th September 2021. We received **61** responses to our online survey.

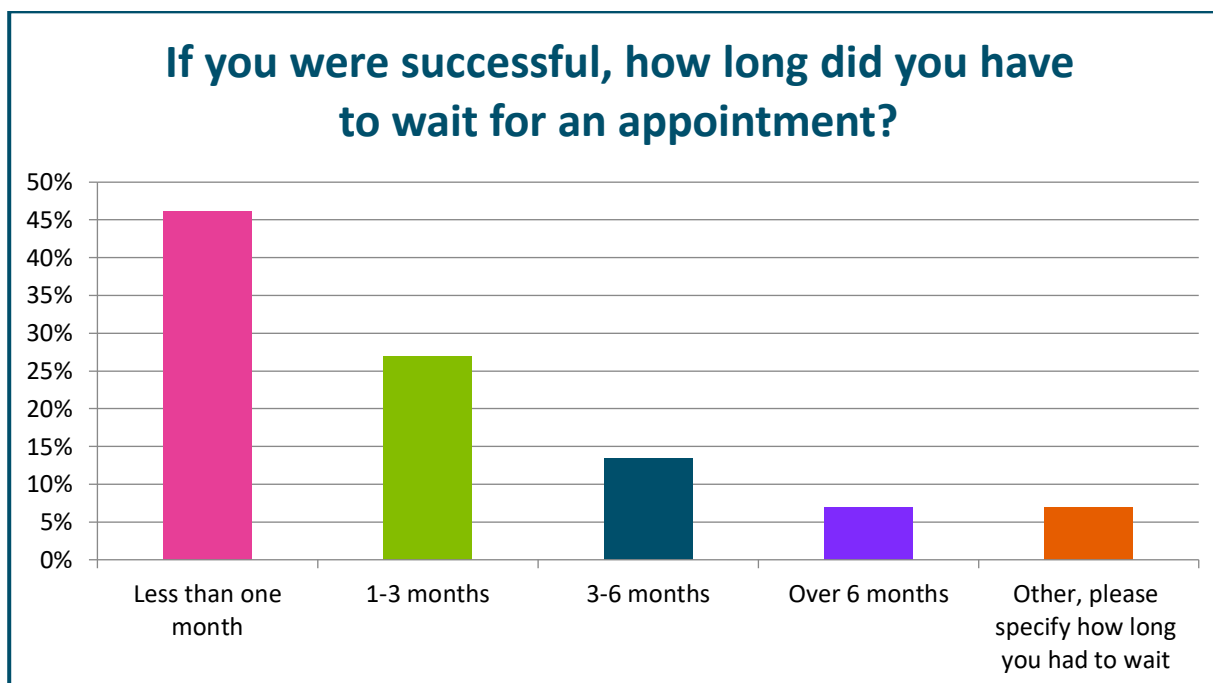
Booking an NHS dentist appointment: 60 responses



Graph 1 - NB: Total is more than 100% as people could tick more than one option, for example, they may have been able to successfully book an appointment for a child, but not for themselves.

- Two thirds of respondents, **66%**, (**40 people**) successfully booked an appointment for themselves or another adult.
- One quarter, **25%**, (**15**) were unable to book an appointment for themselves or another adult. These were for a mixture of routine and emergency appointments.
- Very few appointments were booked for children, although it appears from the responses that these were able to be booked.

NHS Dentist appointments - waiting times: 61 responses



Graph 2 - NB This question was not applicable to all, hence the slightly lower response rate.

Nearly half, **46% (24)** of respondents told us they waited less than a month for their appointment.

However, **27% (15)** told us they waited one-three months for an appointment with a further **27% (15 people)** waiting more than three months for their appointment³.

For some people, the delay in any dental treatment can have an additional impact on someone's health. One respondent told us the delay led to "more problems with teeth."



'Both appointments had a year's wait because of Covid.'

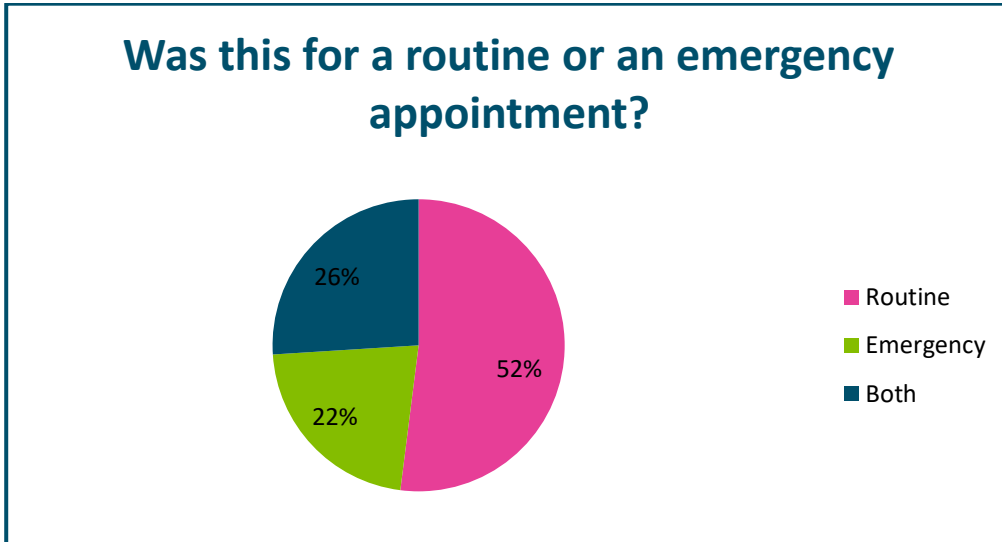
'I was unable to get an appointment for either an adult or my children until April 2021.'

Comment

Long waits for dental treatment can be debilitating and have an impact on a person's mental health. Waiting for treatment can lead to further medical issues, diagnoses, and eventual treatment being delayed and having a greater impact than the initial dental problem.

³ Please note: Waiting times pre-Covid were not known when this report was published.

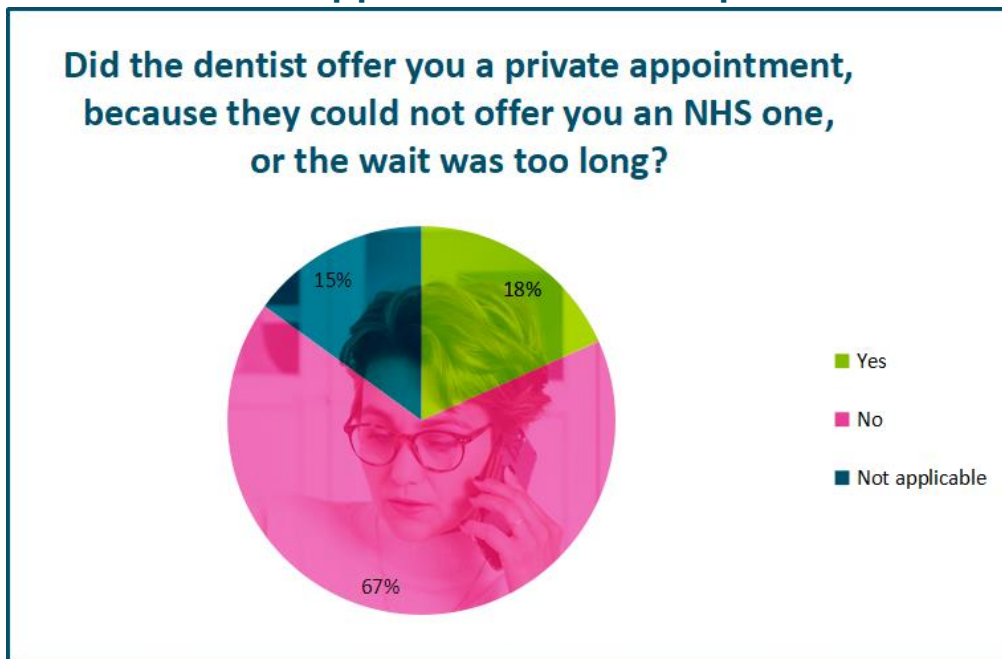
Routine or Emergency Appointment: 61 responses



Pie Chart 1

Just over half of respondents, **52% (31)** were trying to book a routine appointment, **22% (13)** were booking an emergency, and **26% (16)** were trying to book appointments for both. All the emergency appointments were required for adults.

Private or NHS appointment? 60 responses



Pie Chart 2

Just over two thirds, **67% (40)** told us they were not offered a private appointment, whilst **18% (11)** were offered one.



'Booked child NHS appointment but was advised to book adult private appointment.'

Booking a private appointment: 58 responses



Pie Chart 3: **Question not applicable to all respondents.*

We heard from **10% (6 people)** that they had to book a private dentist appointment because they could not book an NHS appointment, or the wait was too long.

Although a small number, the impact for individuals was enormous and resulted in a number of comments being received:



'I was told due to no NHS appointment available I was told to go private and have pay for a service that was very expensive and one that I could not afford so had to take a loan out to cover the cost.'



'Eventually the tooth became so loose I pulled it out myself.'

'We were managing the issue with over-the-counter remedies.'

'Not able to afford private so just didn't bother.'



Comment

It is appalling to think someone has had to perform DIY dentistry because they are either unable to afford treatment or are having to take out loans in order to be able to receive treatment.

There are several examples of the growing disparity between those who can and cannot afford treatment.

Was alternative advice offered?

We were keen to find out what, if any, alternative suggestions, or advice, practices were giving patients if they could not offer them an NHS appointment.

We received 17 responses to this question. Of these, 6 (35%) told us they were not given any alternative suggestions or advice.



No, they just said nothing was available and I probably wouldn't find anything local.

Two people were advised to buy over the counter remedies to repair their own teeth.



I was told I could buy dental glue to fix my crown

Told to go to Boots and buy some temporary filling. I did, it lasted 36 hours. Absolutely useless product.

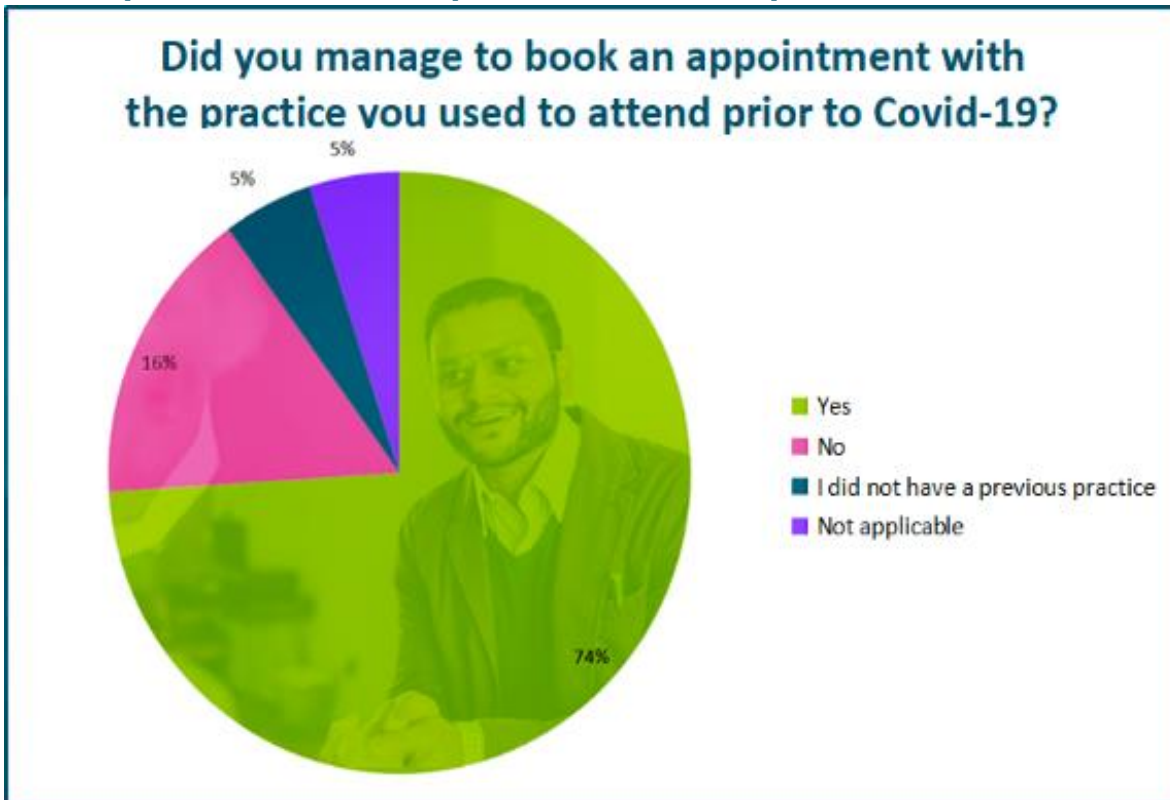
Two people were advised to book private appointments.

One person was advised to ring NHS111 to try to book an emergency appointment.

Comment

When an immediate appointment is unavailable within the practice, consistent information on alternative options or suggested treatment routes should be offered.

Same practice or new practice? 55 responses



Pie Chart 4: *Question not applicable to all respondents.

We wanted to find out if people had to book an appointment with a different practice. Nine people (16%) told us they were unable to book an appointment with the practice they used to attend prior to Covid-19, but almost two thirds (74%) could.

Contacting other practices: 10 responses



Graph 3: *Question not applicable to all respondents.



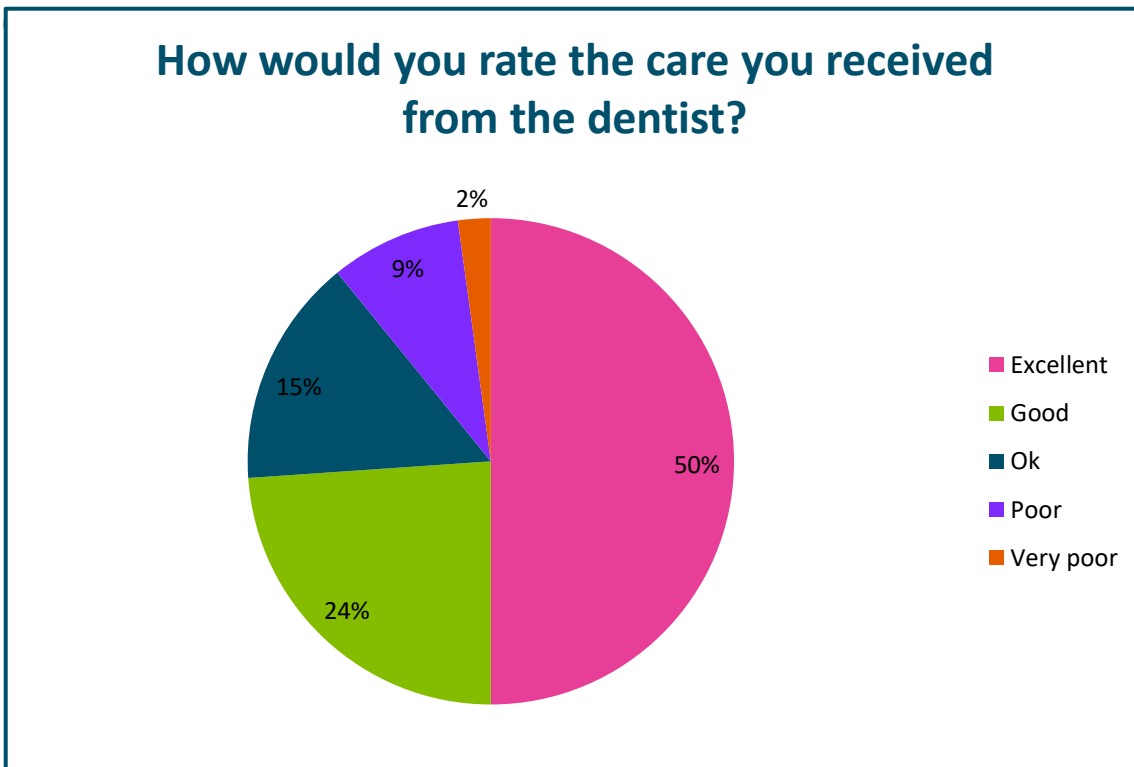
'I tried 8 but none had appointments in the next six months.'

'I called 111 and they directed me to a practice that could take an emergency appt.'

'Gave up.'



Care received: 46 responses



Pie Chart 5

Nearly three quarters of respondents felt the care they received was “excellent”, 50% (23) or “good”, 24% (11).



'Treatment from the dentist is always good.'

'Very understanding dentist, gave good advice for the emergency and some things to consider for long term dental care.'

1 in 4 (26%, 5 people) rated their care as “poor”, or “very poor”. Some respondents told us they either felt they were over charged, explained that treatments had not lasted and had to be repeated or they had to provide their own treatment because they were unable to book an appointment, therefore they reported that they felt they did not receive any care at all.



‘The temporary filling cost me over £20 but it fell off within 24 hours, so I had to rebook further appointment and she charged me the same amount of money for the same filling.’

*‘I was over-charged.....
I was in a lot of pain.’*



Contacting the dentist

We are aware through our Signposting service and other projects we have conducted, that people can find it difficult to get through/get an answer to some services by telephone. We wanted to find out what it was like trying to get through to or get an answer from dental practices.

Half of the people who responded to this question (22 out of 45) told us they had no problem getting through/getting an answer. With a further four indicating that it took them a couple of attempts to get an answer.



‘I got through straight away.’

Eight people (18%) told us it took them several attempts before anyone responded to the telephone. For some people this was a frustrating experience.



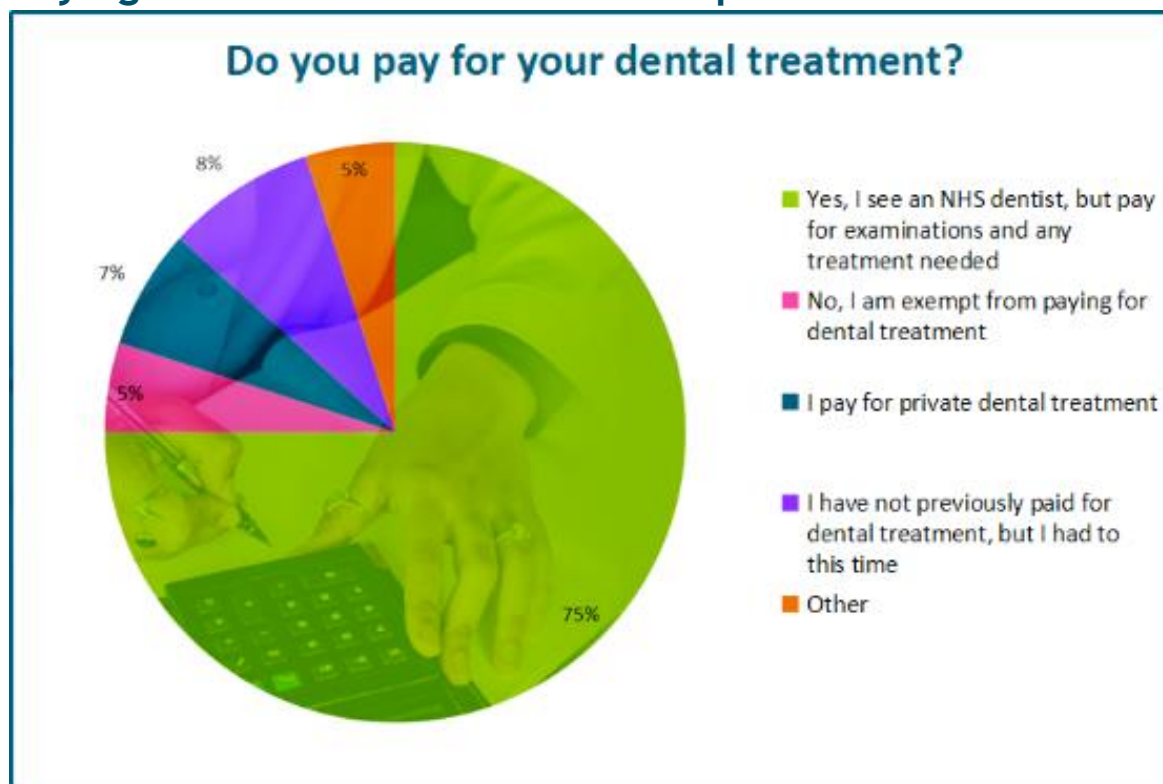
‘Had to call several times before being attended to. Message said I could leave my number for call back but could hold if I wanted. However, then phone just cut off very frustrating.’

Five people (11%) described a long wait or having to make multiple attempts before they managed to speak to someone.



'Took forever to get answer on phone, tried several days.'

Paying for dental treatment: 60 responses



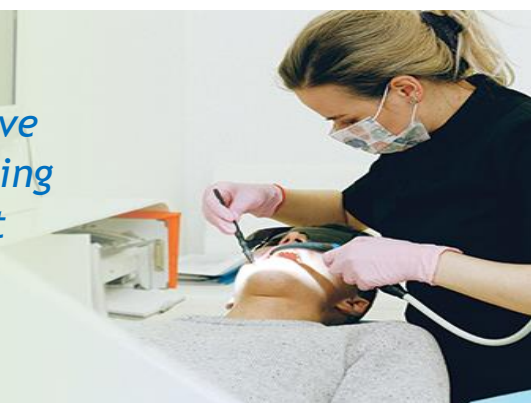
Pie Chart 7

Five people told us that they have not previously had to pay for treatment but had to this time.

- One person told us they paid for private, emergency treatment as they could not access an NHS appointment
- One told us they had to have a tooth removed which cost £180
- One told us:



'I had my temporary filling done and the dentist said I have to pay over £20.00 for the filling as it is an urgent appointment and due to covid they are not booking any appointment for NHS treatment.'



Paying for dental treatment - barriers: 59 responses



Pie Chart 8

Over a third of respondents, 37% (22) told us that the cost of dental treatment had been a barrier to accessing care.

We were keen to understand if this affected any specific age groups or people from certain ethnic backgrounds more than others.

Age	Yes, the cost of treatment has stopped me getting treatment	%	Overall survey respondents % age
25-49	8	36%	23%
50-64	5	23%	30%
65-79	8	36%	44%
Prefer not to say	1	5%	3%
Total	22	100%	100%

Table 1: Breakdown by age where respondents told us the cost of treatment had stopped them booking treatment

Ethnic background	Yes, the cost of treatment has stopped me getting treatment	%	Overall survey respondents % ethnicity
Asian/Asian British: Bangladeshi	2	9%	3.5%
Asian/Asian British: Chinese	0	0	1.5%
Asian/Asian British: Indian	1	4.5%	7%
Asian/Asian British: Pakistani	2	9%	5%
Black/Black British: African	1	4.5%	1.5%
Black/Black British: Caribbean	1	4.5%	3.5%
Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups: Black African and White	0	0	1.5%
White: British/English/Northern Irish/Scottish/Welsh	9	41%	58.5%
White: Irish	0	0	3.5%
White: Any other White background	1	4.5%	3.5%
Any other ethnic group	2	9%	1.5%
Prefer not to say	3	14%	6.5%
Zoroastrianism	0	0	1.5%
Filipino	0	0	1.5%
Total	22	100%	100%

Table 2: Breakdown by ethnicity where respondents told us the cost of treatment had stopped them booking treatment

There was an even spread over the categories of age and ethnicity however, it should be noted that the responses were low. Some comments received gave an insight into the impact of costs for private treatment and the knock-on effect for people who are unable to afford this:



'Cost are too expensive, and I can't afford it.'

'Sometimes I just can't afford it - and wonder how other pensioners do.'

'Too expensive when it's a choice to pay bills or see a dentist.'



Comment

Some patients are faced with incredibly tough decisions; having to decide between seeing a dentist and paying their bills which would mean not having the necessary treatment.

There are major concerns that our current NHS Dental system has created health inequalities that will have an impact on current and future generations⁴.

Some people who told us the cost did not stop them getting treatment, still commented on the expense of it:



'It doesn't stop me, but I do find it expensive.'

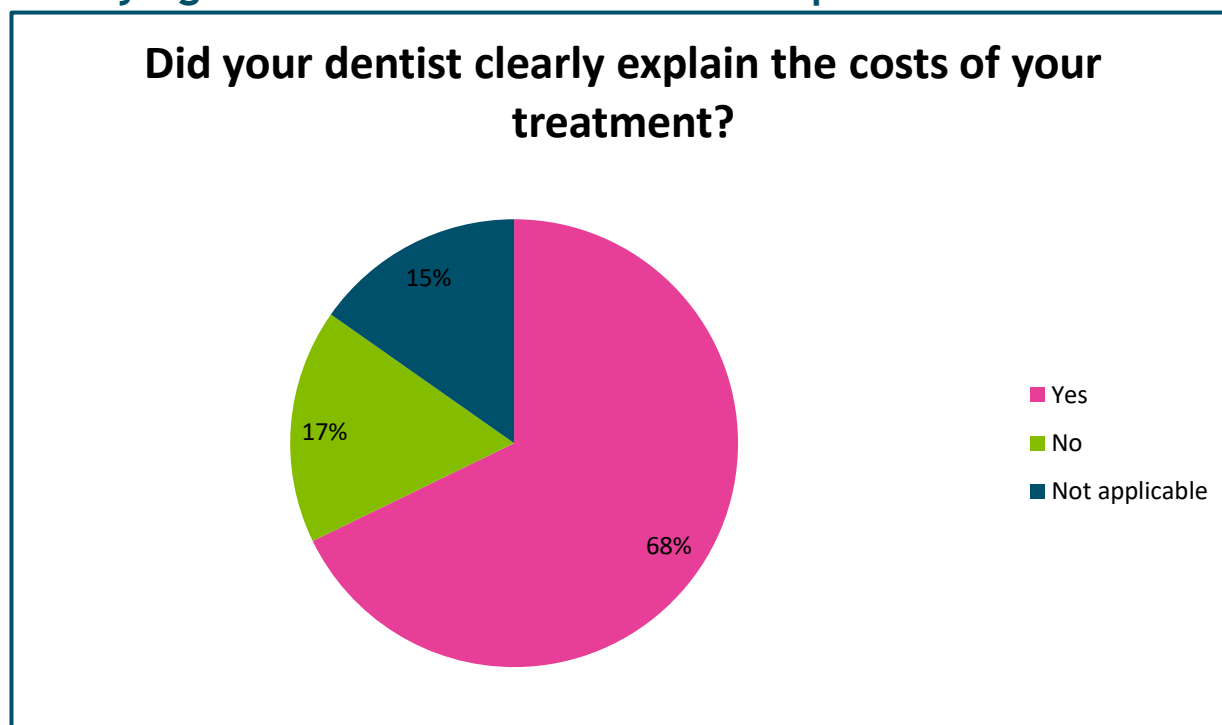
'I have to have a bridge fitted, which is going to cost £2600 (I was told they can arrange interest free loan) still got to pay for it !!!'



'It has not stopped me getting treatment, but I did wait to have some major to save money for the treatment and I am well aware that many people would not be able to afford this treatment at all.'

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inequalities-in-oral-health-in-england/inequalities-in-oral-health-in-england-summary>

Clarifying the costs of treatment: 59 responses



Pie Chart 9

Whilst most people, **68% (40)** told us the dentist had clearly explained the cost of treatment, some people, **17% (10)** felt that the dentist had not clearly explained the cost of treatment to them.



'Yes, the costs were clearly explained, and I was able to pay for the treatment in stages.'

'It was only after treating me she informed me that it is not on NHS, so I had to pay twice for the same filling within 48 hours.'

Comment

Dental charges can be confusing, particularly where treatments are on different NHS charging bands⁵. should be clearly explained to every patient, however not every patient will understand an initial discussion.

Information should be clearly discussed, and every patient should be provided with a written treatment plan and quotation. All information should be accessible to the patient and their carer (if appropriate).

⁵ <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/dental-costs/understanding-nhs-dental-charges/>

Any other comments: 32 responses

Respondents were asked if they had any other thoughts regarding their experiences with dentists. About half of respondents provided additional comments.

Care

The area with the most positive responses was care (**9 comments, 28%**).



*‘Very satisfied with the treatment....
...once seen by dentist very happy with experience.’*

There were two negative comments regarding care. One respondents’ comments suggested they did not receive the care they wanted to. Another respondent was happy with the treatment at their usual dentist but felt they had not received a good experience when they were referred elsewhere for treatment that required sedation.

Cost of dental treatment

The area with the most negative comments related to the cost of dental treatment (**seven comments, 22%**).

As we have seen earlier in this report, people told us how expensive it can be when they have to pay for private treatment. We also heard more about how this can be a barrier for some people and can have a devastating effect:



‘Cost issues are vital for me. Currently, I am unable to chew my food and am plodding on with soft food and being very careful not to break the tooth the crown is sitting on. I have lost some weight.’

Two people felt that dentists are utilising the Covid-19 situation in order to gain more of a private income.



'A lot of these Dentist are using Covid as an excuse not to treat on the NHS and make money private.'

'For obvious reasons, the dentists prefer private patients and have limited services/appointments for NHS patients.'



One person said:



'Government need to significantly increase funding. Preventative dentistry is cheaper than leaving problems to get so bad.'

Access and Appointments

Comments relating to access (four) and appointments (four) were all negative. This comment summed up people's experiences:



'Very difficult to contact or make appointments.'

One person commented that they thought there are not enough NHS dentists. Another person told us:



'Access is patchy, and it should be easier to register with NHS dentists especially if you ever move. A helpful list of local dentists accepting NHS patients should be readily available.'

Covid Safety Measures

We received four positive comments relating to Covid safety measures. In all of the comments people told us they felt safe attending dentist practices.



'Everything felt extremely safe from the hygiene point of view:

- online health form to complete before appointment*
- gaps between appointments*
- use of PPE. sanitizer, ventilation'*



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