

Access to NHS Dentistry

Listening to Sefton residents (2021)



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Who we are

We are your health and social care champion. If you use GPs and Hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, care homes or other support services, we want to hear about your experiences. We have the power to make sure leaders and other decision makers listen to your feedback and improve standards of care. We also help people to find reliable and trustworthy information and advice and have an independent Complaints Advocacy Service, to support residents who may need help to make a complaint about an NHS service.

Listening to you

We have continued to listen to you about your experiences and problems accessing NHS dental treatment from local dentists in Sefton. Up until Covid-19, difficulty registering with an NHS dentist was an ongoing concern in north Sefton. For several years, and specifically during the summer, our Signposting and Information Service received a large volume of calls from people desperate to find an NHS dentist in Southport.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, this is now an issue affecting you no matter where you live in the borough, with residents from south Sefton contacting us too.

The national picture

Access to NHS dental care continues to be a problem for people across England with Healthwatch England recording a 22% rise in calls and complaints about dentistry between January and March 2021. Healthwatch England's review of 1,375 people's experiences found a lack of consistency across the country when it comes to accessing a dental appointment. Whilst some people were asked to wait an unreasonable time of up to three years for an NHS appointment, those able to afford private care could get an appointment within a week (Healthwatch England, 2021).

Dentistry during Covid-19

According to the British Dental Association, routine dentistry during COVID-19 requires the correct social distancing measures and personal protective equipment to be put in place.

Many practices are still catching up from when they were closed during the first national lockdown and for those delivering NHS care, this has created a backlog.

Dentists have to ensure that they have enhanced disinfection procedures in place, the time taken to put on and take off PPE (personal protective equipment), the time taken to clear the air after a water based dental treatment and social distancing means that, although practices are open during their usual hours, they can accommodate fewer patients than before.

Registering with a dentist

There is no need to register with a dentist in the same way as with a GP because you are not bound to a catchment area.

People need to find a dental surgery that is convenient for them, and phone them to see if there are any appointments available.

Dental surgeries will not always have the capacity to take on new NHS patients. You may have to join a waiting list, look for a different dentist who is taking on new NHS patients, or be seen privately.

Once you find a dental surgery, you may have to fill in a registration form at your first visit which is just to add you to their patient database. This does not mean you have guaranteed access to an NHS dental appointment in the future (NHS, 2019).

What your experiences were during lockdown. What you shared.

This year, we ran a short poll and invited our members and residents to tell us about their experiences of accessing NHS dental care.

60 local residents took the time to answer the questions.

You will be able to see at the back of the report, a list of dentists which patients were registered with at the time of taking part in the short poll. (page 12)

57 residents told us that prior to the pandemic they were registered with a dentist for NHS treatment with 3 residents not being registered.



All **60** residents told us that they were looking for treatment for an adult, with **5** also seeking treatment for a child.

51 residents (85%) told us that they knew that their dental practice was open. **8** (13%) residents did not know if their practice was open. One resident didn't answer the question.



37 (of the 51 residents) had made contact with their dental practice. **16** had been contacted by their practice to book in an appointment. **25** residents wanted an appointment for routine treatment (check up) **25** residents needed emergency treatment.

Emergency treatment

23 residents were offered treatment by their own dental practice. One resident was referred to the emergency dental line and one to Liverpool Dental Hospital.

In reviewing the experiences which you shared with us about accessing emergency treatment, there were many positive experiences about how you were able to receive emergency treatment from your own practice and how fast appointments had been made for you.



Both my husband and I have needed emergency treatment during lock down and were both seen promptly and treated.



I required emergency treatment last August and was seen subsequently for at least 3 further appointments up until October 2020 and treated.

 *I was given an immediate appointment and had an x ray and a filling. I was very pleased with my treatment*

You did share concerns about having to have extractions (teeth removed) when accessing emergency treatment rather than being offered alternative treatments.

One of the experiences shared told us that they had to pay for private treatment in order to access treatment.

 *I was appalled when I was told my dental practice were unable to see me. I needed treatment for dry socket as well as other things but have ended up paying nearly £400 for treatment which would have cost under £60 at my registered NHS dentist.*


When we asked you about how you had found accessing your regular dental practice, during the pandemic, your feedback related to the key themes below:

Safe

(asked to wait outside/ clear instructions/
temperature checks/ use of PPE)

Routine check ups not available

Friendly staff

 *Very well organised and very well communicated about how they were managing appointments and treatment. I felt completely safe as I phoned from outside to say I was here for my appointment. I waited for approximately 5 minutes and was phoned to tell me to come in.*



Now: Ongoing issues with registering with a dentist.

During the pandemic (between March 2020 and August 2021), we have supported **398** residents to access information and individual support with access to NHS dental care. **209** of you contacting us were looking for emergency dental treatment as well as trying to find out why they couldn't register with a local dentist to access NHS dental treatment. Healthwatch England, our national body, published a report warning of a crisis in dentistry. The report can be found here: <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/report/2021-05-24/dentistry-during-covid-19-insight-briefing>

On a regular basis, our Signposting and Information Officer contacts every dental practice based in Sefton to gain the latest updates and find out if they are taking on new NHS patients for dental treatment. Due to the high demand in calls and knowing about limited access, we posted the information onto our website.



Are you looking for a Sefton based dentist who can register you for NHS treatment?

We are receiving a high demand in calls to our Signposting & Information service from local residents who are struggling to register with a local dental practice who are registering new patients for NHS treatment.

We have recently contacted all dentists located in the borough of Sefton and there is limited access for those who are looking to register. We do have information however on dental waiting lists and how practices would like you to contact them and you can find the latest information [here](#).

If you require emergency dental treatment, please contact the Cheshire & Merseyside Emergency Dental Service on: **0161 476 9651**

How we have helped you.

August 2021

Living Well Sefton referred a Southport resident to us who desperately needed a tooth extraction and felt that they had exhausted all avenues of help. They had been in extreme pain for two weeks and had been trying to get an appointment via the emergency dental service. With the support of two neighbours, they had tried to ring and secure an appointment without success. The resident suffered from angina and the pain and stress were becoming unbearable.


They telephoned the Royal Liverpool University Dental Hospital and were told that they were accepting walk-in patients, so travelled there from Southport. They filled in paperwork and waited for about 2 hours, still in extreme pain, to be told that they could not have an extraction as the students were not back until September. They then had to travel home extremely distressed, exhausted and still with no relief from pain. They were very low and getting to a desperate state due to the pain and no sight of any solution to it.

We contacted NHS England (we have a pathway for patients in extreme pain) and an emergency appointment was arranged at Houghton Street Dental Practice the following day.

We spoke with the resident following the extraction, who was delighted, relieved and utterly grateful to have had the procedure done. She felt she had received an excellent service from both us and the dentist concerned, she could not praise and thank us enough.

Impact on health and well being.

One resident we have supported shared:

 *As you know this saga has dragged on for a very long time now, I have been in constant pain and all aspects of my life have been affected. This includes the loss of my employment as I was no longer able to safely operate heavy plant and machinery due to losing my inability to fully concentrate on what I was doing (because of the constant and severe toothache). Thanks again and yes I'll definitely let you know how I get on. I'm just so relieved that something is happening!*

What we have achieved locally.

In Sefton we have been raising your feedback about access to NHS Dental treatment with local NHS leaders so they know what issues are affecting you and other Sefton residents and use them to find solutions to the challenges we are facing with access to NHS dental care. Our Signposting and Information Officer, Mandy, continues to take your calls and answer your emails to support you and provide up to date information. We have also been sharing your feedback with our national body, Healthwatch England.

We also escalated the issue to our local Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny committee. We have two seats on the committee. Local elected members on the committee, review and challenge decisions taken by the council and its partners (e.g. NHS, Police). During September, NHS England were asked to attend to update on dental access.

We were told that extra funding has been put into the existing emergency dental telephone triage and advice helpline (0161 476 9651). Patients who receive emergency dental treatment and require further follow ups will remain as a patient with their local urgent care dentist until their treatment is complete.

We were also told that NHS England is working closely with dental practices, the local dental committees to try and resolve the local challenges which are also felt widely across other parts of England.

We have a meeting every three months with NHS England and other local Healthwatch organisations across Cheshire and Merseyside to share the key themes which you are sharing with us and to listen to them on their work to improve access to services.

What we have achieved nationally.

In June last year, Healthwatch England received a 450% increase in negative experiences about access to dentistry.

With your feedback, we (the Healthwatch network) have been able to help move dentistry up the agenda over the last year and outline how thousands of people have struggled to access or afford NHS dental care. Our findings helped encourage MPs across the country to raise the issue in Parliament.

Our findings informed MPs across the country who raised the issue in Parliament. This contributed to Minister Jo Churchill committing to draw up reform plans by April 2022. In the meantime, NHS England and Department of Health and Social Care wrote to all dentists to update information about the care available on the NHS website, following one of our recommendations.

And we haven't stopped there. We are determined to keep this issue front and centre of decision makers' minds. Which is why we've made sure the issue has been raised repeatedly through an array of parliamentary interventions and media headlines.

Healthwatch England has called on the Government to make it a legal requirement of the dental contract to regularly update the information on their websites and on NHS.UK. We also called on NHS England to ensure that their "Find a dentist" website is kept up to date.

Healthwatch England has also called on the Government to make more resources available to the dental sector to help them clear the backlog. We also asked the Government and the NHS to review the cost of NHS dental treatments, as there are a lot of people who have lost their jobs and have less money, but we believe everyone should be able to access the dental treatment they need.

How can you help us?

Share your stories and experiences with us.

- ✓ We would like you to share any feedback you have about accessing local NHS dental services with us. Share this on our website (www.healthwatchsefton.co.uk/services/), give us a call on 0800 206 1304 or email us (info@healthwatchsefton.co.uk)
- ✓ It's really quick and easy to share your stories and experiences and they will remain anonymous.

Access information, support and guidance.

- ✓ Get in touch with Mandy, our Signposting and Information Officer who can provide you with up to date information to access NHS dental care/ support with your individual case.

Get involved.

- ✓ You can join us to receive regular updates about both local and national health and care services. Sign up online (<https://healthwatchsefton.co.uk/get-involved/online-membership/>) or give us a call on 0800 206 1304.

Recommend us to your friends and family.

Our short poll – What dentists did this include.

Name of the practice Southport and Formby localities	How many patients commented in the poll
Ainsdale Dental Practice	1
Bupa Dental Care/ Churchtown Dental	8
Bupa Oasis Dental Care	4
Crown Dental Surgery	3
Elbow Lane Dental Practice	3
Fairfield Dental Surgery	1
Houghton Street Dental Practice	1
Hyslop Dental & Implant clinic	5
Old Mill lane dental practice (My Dentist)	3
Roe Lane Dental (My Dentist)	1
Southport House Dental Surgery	2
The village dental practice	2
TOTAL	34

Name of the practice South Sefton locality	How many patients commented in the poll
Bootle Dental Centre (My Dentist)	3
Bupa/ Oasis Dental Care (Crosby)	3
Chu & Tsao Dental Group Dental Practice	1
Crosby Village Dental practice	2
Healthy smiles	1
Hightown Dental Practice	2
Jones and Raw Dental Practice	1
Kingsway Dental	5
Marion Square Dental	1
Sefton Dental Centre	2
Thornton Dental Practice	1
Town Hall Dental Practice (My Dentist)	1
TOTAL	23

healthwatch

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