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South Glamorgan Community Health Council

# **NHS Dental Service Availability in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan**

22<sup>nd</sup> December 2021



# **Accessible formats**

This report is also available in Welsh.

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# About the Community Health Councils (CHCs)

CHCs are the independent watchdog of the National Health Service (NHS) within Wales. CHCs encourage and support people to have a voice in the design and delivery of NHS services.

CHCs work with the NHS, inspection and regulatory bodies. CHCs provide an important link between those who plan and deliver NHS services, those who inspect and regulate it and those who use it.

CHCs hear from the public in many different ways. Before the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs regularly visited NHS services to hear from people while they were receiving care and treatment. CHCs also heard from people at local community events, and through community representatives and groups.

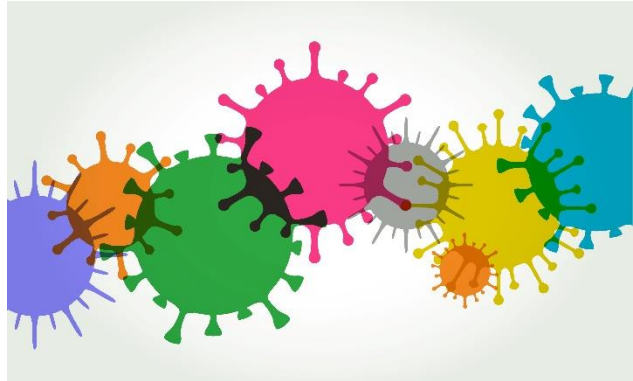
Since the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs have focused on engaging with people in different ways.

This includes surveys, apps, videoconferencing and social media to hear from people directly about their views and experiences of NHS services as well as through community groups.

There are 7 CHCs in Wales. Each one represents the “patient and public” voice in a different part of Wales.

# Introduction & Background

In March 2020, the Covid-19 pandemic caused unimaginable disruption to all aspects of everyday life, including access to Healthcare services.



Dentistry services were severely impacted due to the nature of the procedures carried out. Most procedures are aerosol generating with Dental practitioners required to work in close proximity to their patients.

Requirements introduced with regards to social distancing, PPE and infection control greatly reduced the capacity of Dental Practices in terms of the number of patients that could be seen in any given day.

In October 2020, the South Glamorgan CHC undertook a '*Dental Secret Shopper*' exercise in order to determine the availability of access to NHS Dental services in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan.

The results gathered at the time of the exercise indicated that there were no NHS Dental Practices in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan who were able to offer any NHS appointments to our members when called.

Following the conclusion of the exercise, the CHC determined that a comparable exercise would be completed 12 months after the initial exercise, to determine if any improvements in access could be measured.

Following the conclusion of our initial exercise, a number of changes occurred to the landscape of Dental services in Wales in an attempt to improve access to NHS Dental services.

Contractual changes were introduced which require Dental Practices to provide a certain number of emergency appointments to '*unseen patients*' requiring emergency treatment, who seek treatment via Cardiff & Vale UHB, in order to receive their full contract value payment.

In addition, in December 2020 Welsh Government instructed all Dental Practices in Wales to start accepting new '*unseen patients*' at a rate of 2 patients per week per £165,000 contract value held. Patients would not only been seen for an initial consultation, but then would be able to access their allocated NHS Dental Practice on a regular basis for care and treatment.

Alongside this, in May 2021 Cardiff & Vale UHB launched a centralised waiting list for patients who were attempting to access NHS Dentistry services but were unable to do so, in order to measure and manage the level of need for NHS Dentistry services across Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan. Dental Practices would then be able to take new '*unseen patients*' from this list when their capacity allowed.

Following these changes, the CHC recognised the importance of gaining patient feedback and experiences alongside our own investigations into availability, and so a Dental Survey was devised and published online for members of the public to complete.

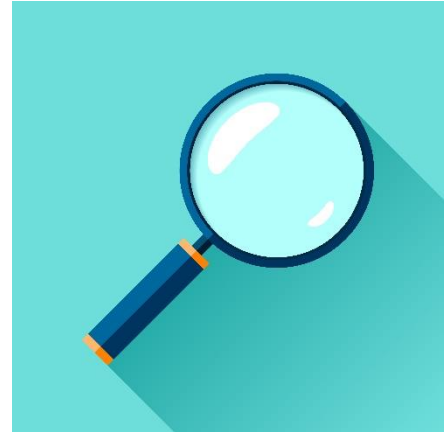
The purpose of this report is to communicate the findings of the South Glamorgan CHC's '*secret shopper*' exercise, along with the views of the public we have heard from. The CHC would like to

take this opportunity to thank the NHS and its staff for their hard work and dedication over the last 18 months, to continuing to support and care for patients and the public in our local area.

# What we did

## Secret Shopper Exercise

The South Glamorgan CHC obtained the contact details for each NHS Dental Practice in the Cardiff & Vale of Glamorgan localities from the Cardiff & Vale University Health Board (UHB) website, which totalled a number of 63 Practices. It was noted that five of the Practices included in our 2020 exercise were no longer listed on the UHB website. A telephone number was omitted from one of the Practices listed and so the telephone number was obtained from *Google*. An additional three practices listed were noted as being 'Specialist Orthodontic Practice' by referral from your general dentist only' and so were not included in this exercise.



The CHC then endeavoured to contact by phone, every Dental Practice in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan that offers NHS Dental services, to determine the availability of access to NHS Dental services.

In the scenario used, our volunteer members were calling to request an appointment on behalf of a friend or family member who was suffering dental pain. The patient in question was not currently seeing an NHS Dentist for care and treatment on a regular basis, and was attempting to access NHS Dental services.

Our members asked the following questions:

- Is the practice accepting new NHS patients?



- If the practice is accepting new NHS patients, how long would a new patient have to wait for an appointment?
- If the practice is not accepting new NHS patients, would the patient be able to be seen privately?
- If the practice was able to see the patient privately, how long would a new private patient have to wait for an appointment?

The scrutiny of Private Health services is not within the remit of the South Glamorgan CHC. The rationale for asking this question was based upon feedback from the public that it was implied they could be seen quicker if they opted for private treatment. The information gathered with regards to the availability of Private services was done so in order to provide comparison data for the availability of NHS services, and to provide a fuller picture with regards to patient choice in the area.

Our members also made note of whether each NHS Dental Practice provided information regarding the UHB's centralised patient waiting list, if the Practice was unable to offer an NHS appointment on request.



## Dental Survey

The CHC devised a 'Dental Survey' to gain feedback and insight from patients and the public on their experiences when accessing NHS Dental services in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan.

The survey was made available for completion on our website, and publicised through our Facebook and Twitter social media channels, and our weekly 3<sup>rd</sup> Sector briefing.

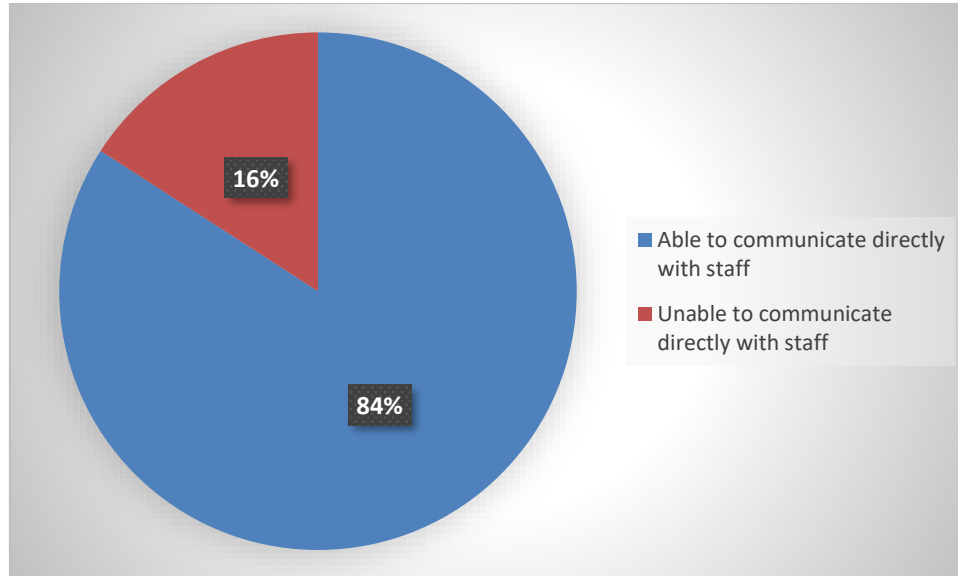
The survey was available for completion from 16<sup>th</sup> August 2021 through to 11<sup>th</sup> October 2021 and asked questions around the following key areas:

- Ability to access regular and routine NHS Dental services prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ability to access urgent NHS Dental treatment prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ability to communicate with patients' regular NHS Dental Practice during the Covid-19 pandemic and the methods used.
- Ability to access urgent NHS Dental treatment through patients' regular NHS Dentist during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Ability to access urgent NHS Dental treatment when not regularly accessing NHS Dental Services.
- Suggestions for improvement for NHS Dental Services in the local community.



# Who we are hearing from

## Secret Shopper Exercise



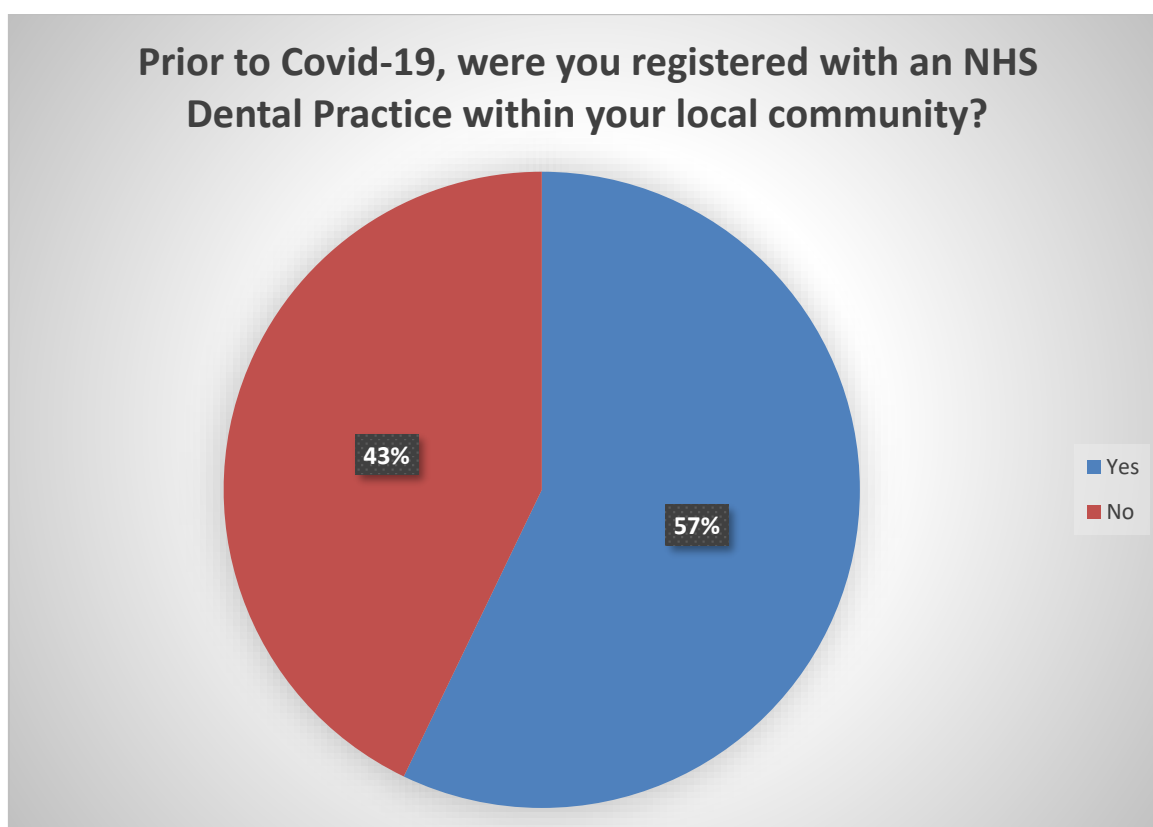
During the course of the exercise, our members spoke to 53 Dental Practices listed on the UHB's website. There were 10 practices that were contacted, where our members were unable to speak directly to a member of staff for a number of reasons detailed below:

- In the case of 6 of these Practices, our calls were transferred directly to an answerphone to leave a message.
- In the case of 2 of the Practices contacted, our calls were met with an engaged tone with one call to one Practice finally ringing through but was not answered.
- In the case of 1 Practice, our call was repeatedly directed to an automated message suggesting we call back later.
- In the case of 1 Practice, our call was directed to an automated message which gave details of the UHB's Centralised Waiting List.

## Dental Survey

Our survey was open for completion to all residents of Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan, or anyone who is a patient of an NHS Dental Practice located in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan.

In total we received 133 responses to our online survey although not everyone completed every question.



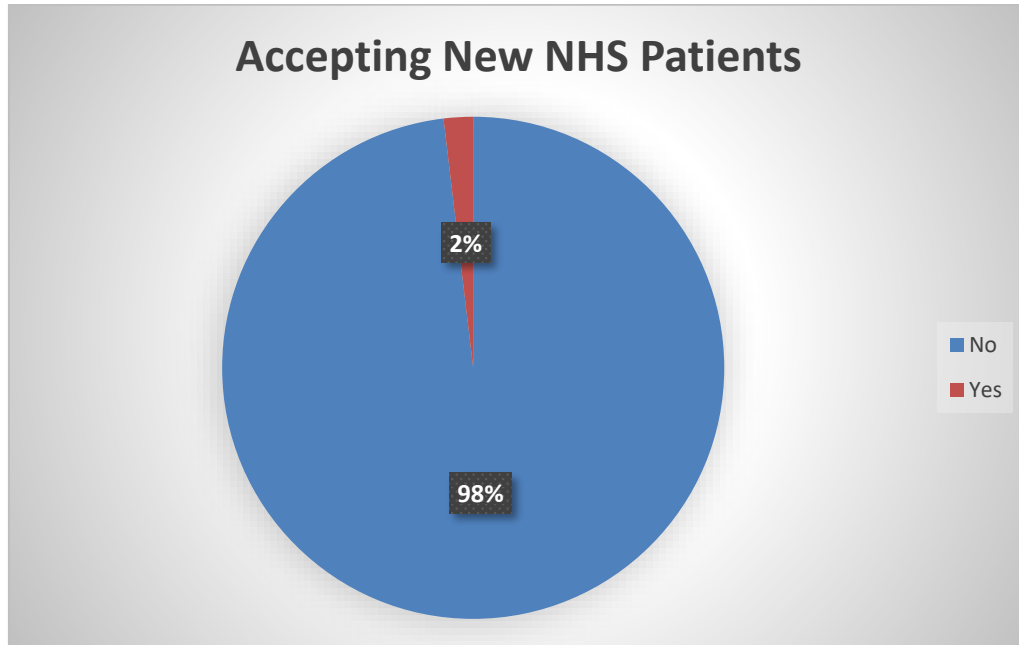
76 (57%) of respondents were 'registered' with an NHS Dental Practice prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

57 (43%) of respondents were 'not registered' with an NHS Dental Practice prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

# What we heard

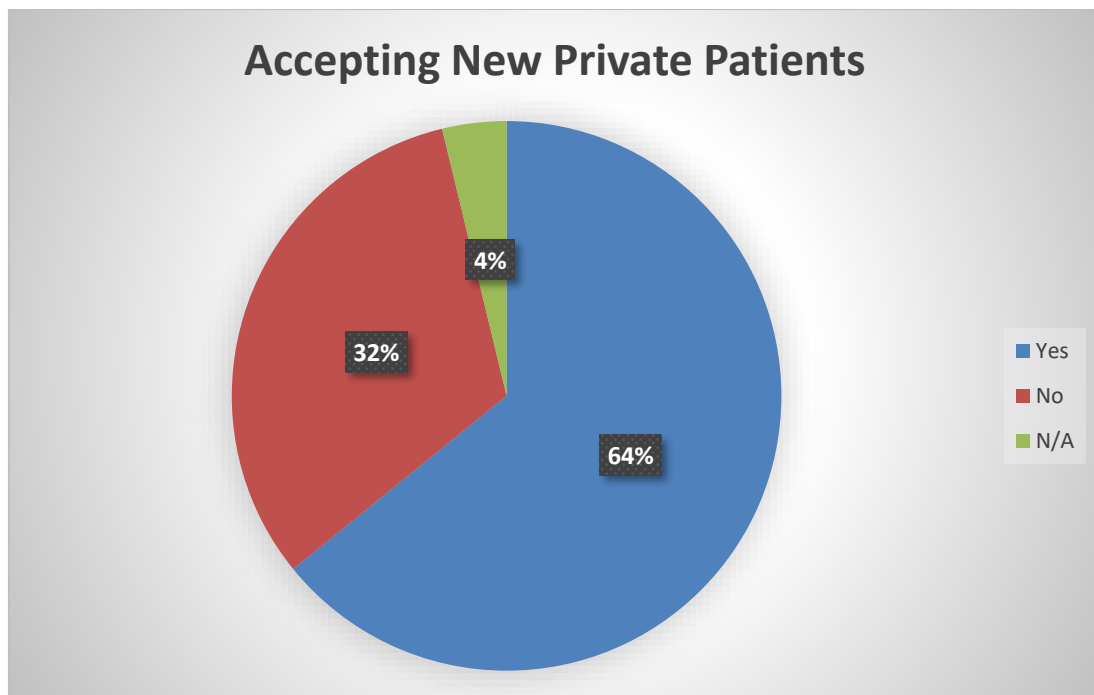
## Secret Shopper Exercise

### Access



Of the 53 Practices we spoke to, only one Practice confirmed that they were actively seeing new NHS patients. Practice staff informed us that the Practice accepts two new NHS patients per week for an appointment on Monday morning. Patients must call at 9am in order to '*register*'.

Another Practice confirmed that they would be seeing new NHS patients in the New Year and offered to take a contact telephone number in order that they could get back in touch, to let us know when they began seeing new patients. As this would not have been appropriate in this case, the offer was politely declined.

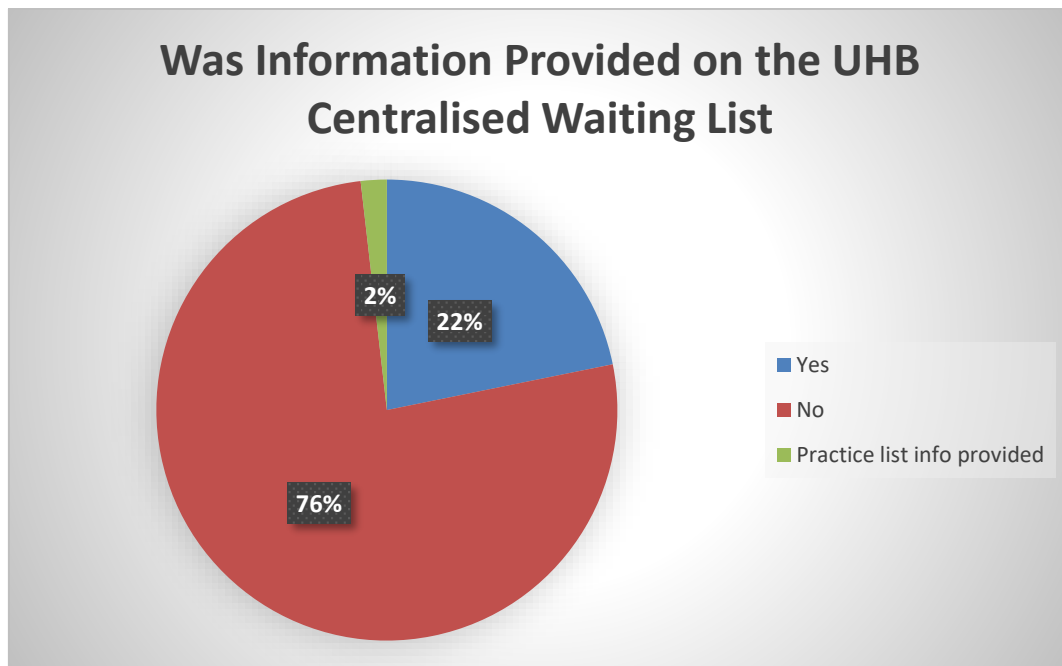


Of the 53 Practices contacted, two Practices do not provide treatment on a privately funded basis. 34 Practices confirmed that they were accepting new patients on a 'Private' basis. The length of wait for a 'Private' appointment varied from 'next day' through to February 2022.

One other Practice confirmed that they may be taking on new 'Private' patients and to check back in December 2021.

One Practice confirmed that they would be taking on new 'Private' patients in the New Year, and offered to take a contact telephone number in order that they could get back in touch, to let us know when they began seeing new patients. As this would not have been appropriate in this case, the offer was politely declined.

## Centralised Waiting List



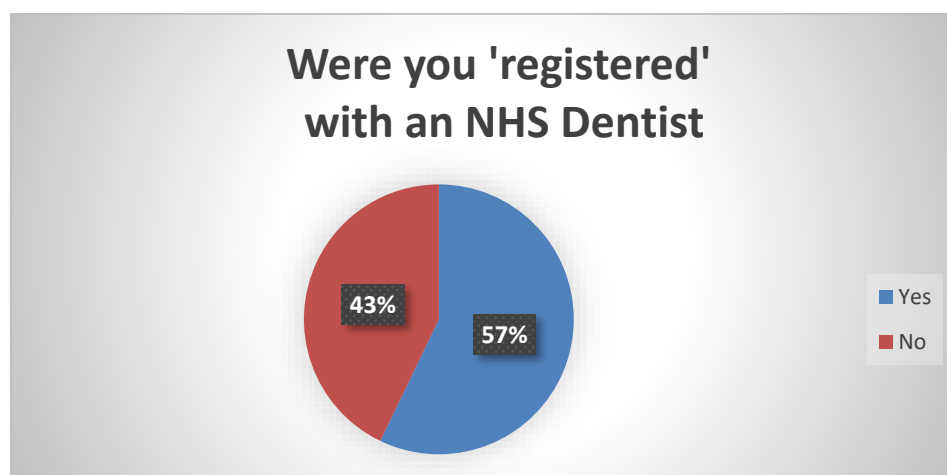
With regards to the new UHB centralised waiting list for patients seeking an NHS Dentist, only 11 Practices of the 53 that were spoken to provided our members with any information on this, although it appears that not all Practices are choosing to make use of this list.

In addition to these 11 Practices, one Practice we were unable to speak to directly, provided information on the centralised waiting list via its' recorded telephone message

One Practice invited us to join a waiting list that the Practice itself held for patients wishing to be seen and treated under the NHS, again, this would not have been appropriate under the circumstances and so the offer was politely declined.

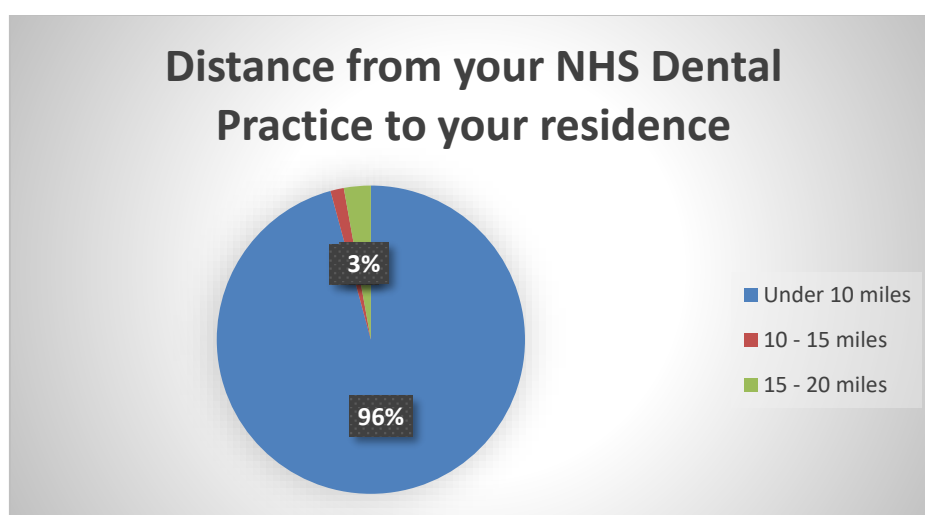
## Dental Survey

### Pre-Covid



Prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, 76 (57%) of respondents were 'registered' with an NHS Dental Practice.

57 (43%) of respondents were not 'registered' with an NHS Dental Practice.



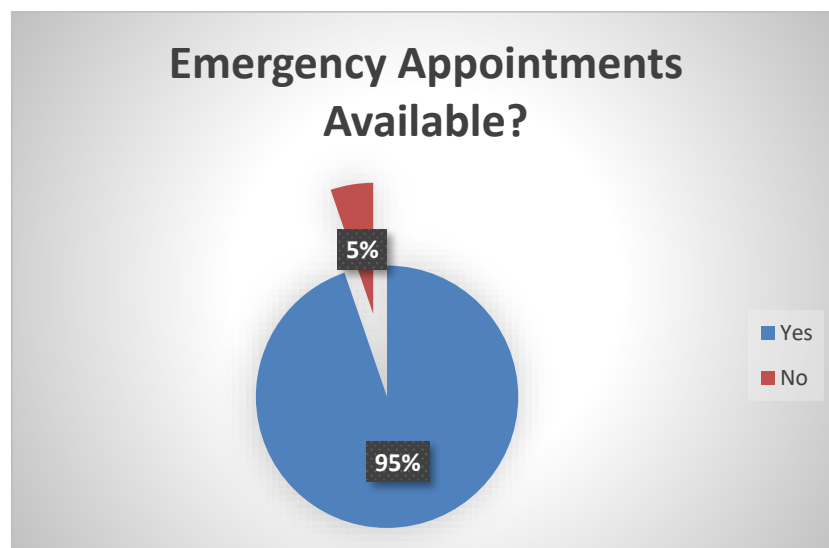
Of those registered with an NHS Dental Practice who answered this question, 68 (96%) of respondents were registered with a Practice within 10 miles of their residence.



We questioned those respondents 'registered' with an NHS Practice, on their ability to access both routine care appointments and emergency treatment prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.

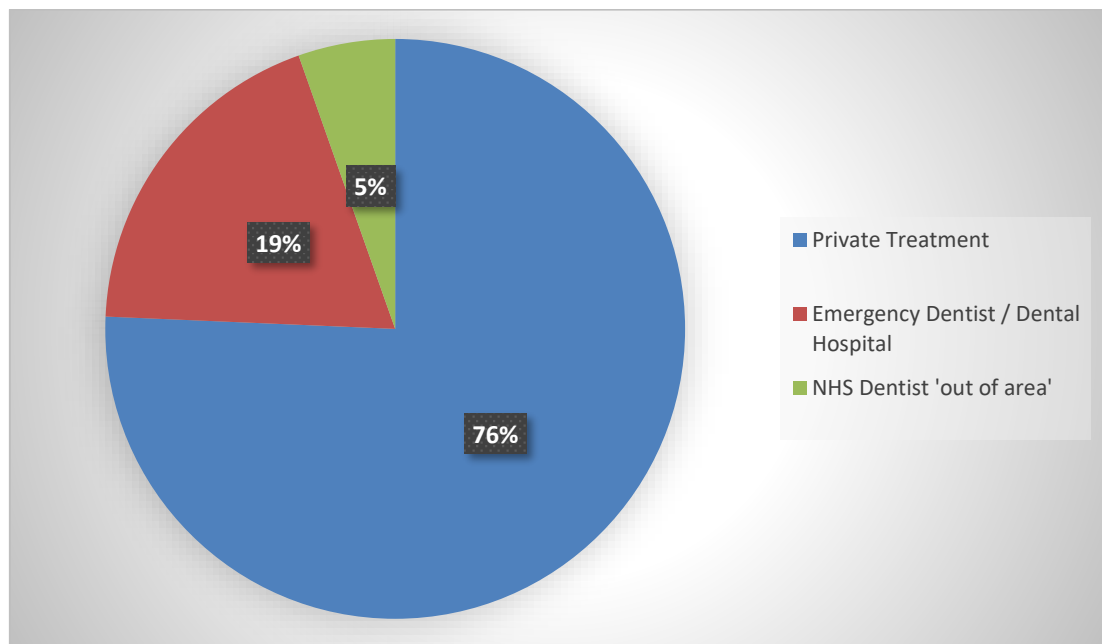


73 (96%) of respondents confirmed they were able to access routine Dental appointments.



72 (95%) of respondents confirmed they were able to access emergency Dental appointments.

For those 57 patients who were not 'registered' with an NHS Dentist prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, we enquired if they had used alternative Dental care services as a result of there being no NHS Dental Practice available to 'register' with in their local community.



7 (19%) of respondents sought treatment from an 'Emergency Dentist' or the University Dental Hospital in Cardiff.

28 (76%) of respondents sought privately funded treatment.

2 (5%) of respondents saw an NHS Dentist who was not located in their local area.

## During Covid-19

The CHC sought information from survey respondents, with regards to their ability to effectively communicate with their NHS Dental Practice via telephone during the Covid-19 pandemic.

71 (55%) of respondents reported being able to effectively communicate with their NHS Dental Practice via telephone.



58 (45%) of respondents reported not being able to communicate effectively with their NHS Dental Practice via telephone.

Of those who responded negatively to the above question, there were a number of different explanations provided for their response. 34 (64%) of respondents who answered this question reported not being 'registered' with an NHS Dental Practice. Other patients reported issues with their Practice not answering calls, only seeing emergency patients at present or calls being directed straight to an answerphone message.

*No reply. Had to go to surgery to make*

*Cannot register with an NHS dentist, can't be seen by the dental hospital either. Getting ridiculous!!*

*Practice is only dealing with emergencies at present.*

*They don't answer it goes to answer phone.*

The CHC also requested information from survey respondents with regards to their ability to effectively communicate with their NHS Dental Practice via email during the Covid-19 pandemic.

40 (32%) of respondents reported being able to communicate effectively with their NHS Dental Practice via email.

84 (68%) of respondents reported that they were unable to communicate effectively with their NHS Dental Practice via email.

Of those who responded negatively to the above question, the majority were not 'registered' with an NHS Dental Practice.

Other patients confirmed that their Practice does not offer this as a way of communication or that they are not comfortable with the technology required. Others reported never having tried to communicate with their Practice via email, and for a small number of patients, disappointingly, their emails went unanswered.



*I'm not a good tech person not got the app.*

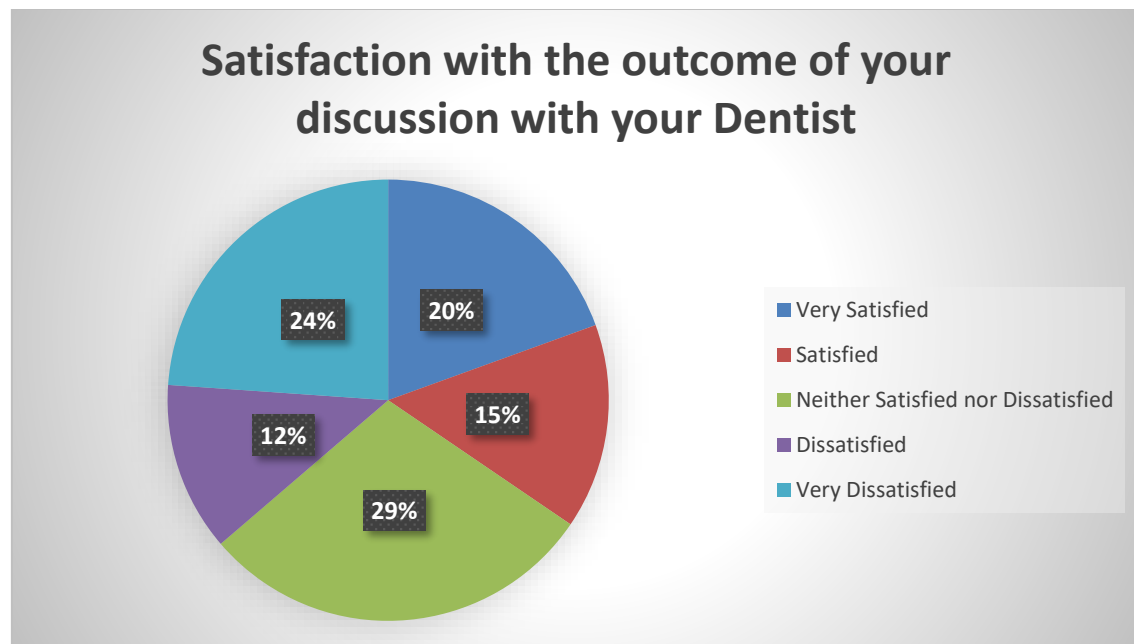
*I haven't tried*

*Multiple emails sent never had a reply.*

*I'm not aware that they offer email as a method of*

*Emailed and no reply to many*

We asked respondents to rate their satisfaction with regards to the discussion they had with their Dental Practice.



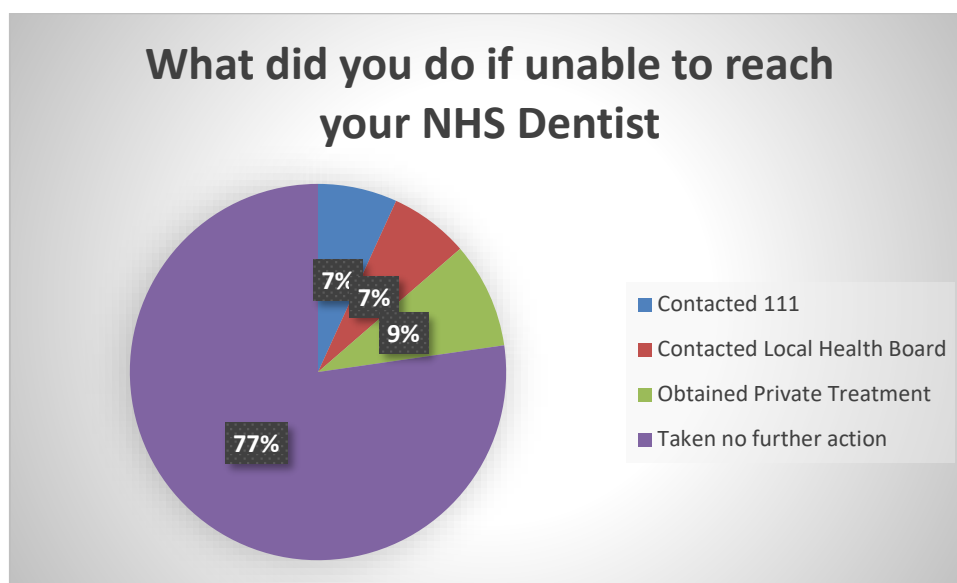
39 (35%) of respondents reported they were either very satisfied or satisfied with the outcome of their discussion with their Dentist.

33 (29%) of respondents reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the outcome of their discussion with their Dentist.

41 (36%) of respondents reported that they were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the outcome of their discussion with their Dentist.

We asked respondents to inform us if they had been unable to reach their NHS Dentist, and if so, what have they done with regards to seeking Dental care services.

44 (36%) or respondents to this question confirmed they had been unable to reach their NHS Dental Practice.



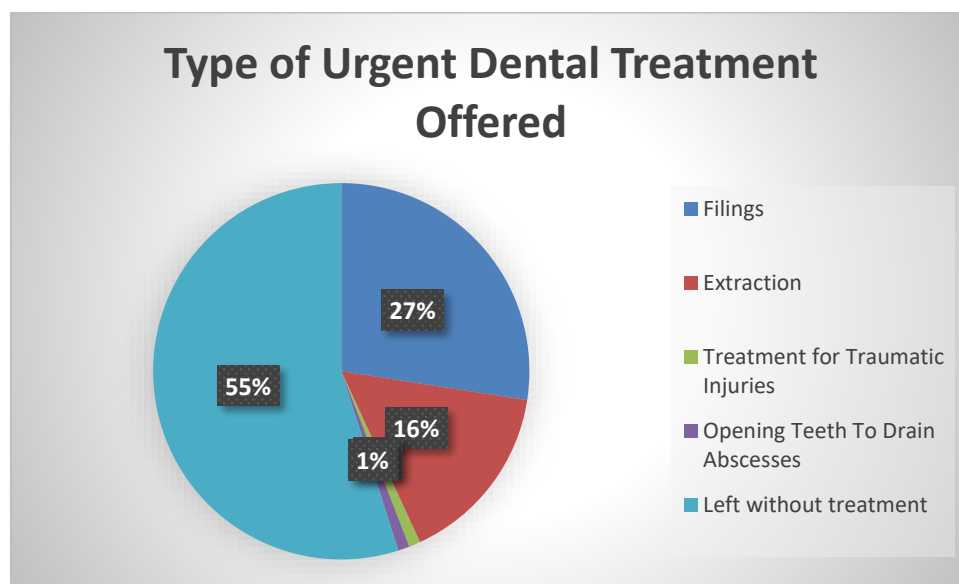
As a result of this, 3 respondents explained they had contacted 111, 3 respondents reported they had contacted the local Health Board, 4 respondents obtained privately funded Dental Treatment, while the remaining respondents had taken no further action with regards to seeking Dental treatment.

We also questioned respondents on whether they had attempted to access emergency Dental care from their NHS Dentist.

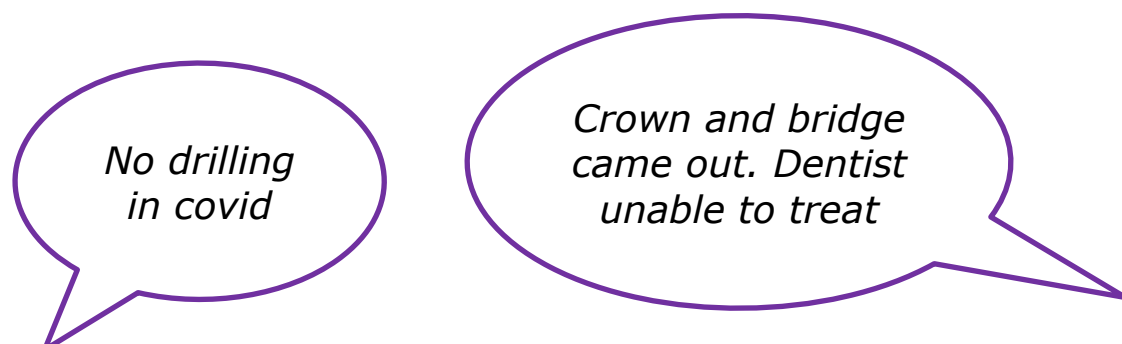
51 respondents confirmed they had attempted to access emergency dental care from their NHS Dentist, 5 received advice, 21 received urgent treatment at their Practice, 5 were referred to an Urgent Dental Treatment Centre, 4 were prescribed medication, 16 responded 'other'. For those that responded 'other' a number of respondents provided further

explanation for this by explaining they don't have an NHS Dentist. Other patients reported receiving no help or assurance from their Dental Practice, with one patient attending Hospital as an emergency.

We also questioned respondents on the type of urgent Dental treatment they had been offered.



Of the 102 respondents who answered this question, 56 (55%) of respondents confirmed that they had been left without treatment, with the majority of those going on to explain that they are not 'registered' with an NHS Dentist. A number of respondents who were 'registered' with an NHS Dentist had also been left without treatment and provided the following additional information around this:



*I need front teeth repairing post accident (booked in beginning of 1st lockdown) they won't as not painful. Then dentist wrote to say she's only seeing private patients so to remain NHS have to swap. New dentist (same practice) won't book repair until I've had standard appointment to see the issue.*

*Dentist unable to offer appointment of any kind*

*March 2020 was due route canal treatment appointment was cancelled and then never heard from the dentist again.*

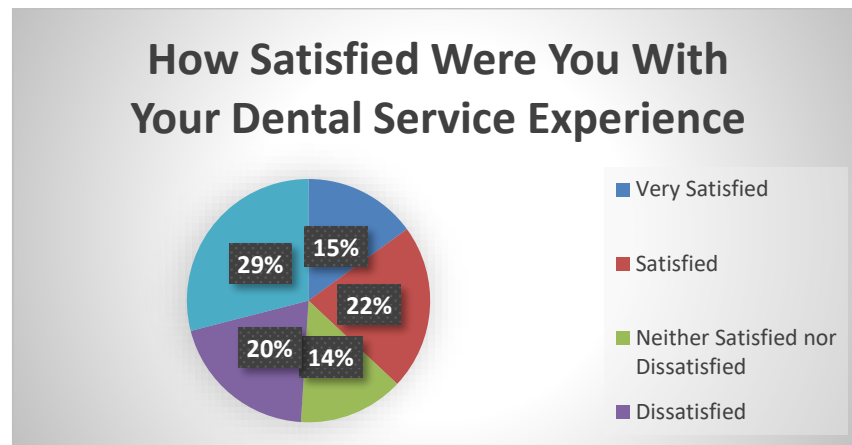
*I am bariatric patient, nowhere offers that service apart from the dental hospital or so I've been told anyway - so I'm on a waiting list to have several fillings and a wisdom tooth removal.*

*Dentist unable or unwilling to see me before November. I ended up paying for private care*

*waiting for my situation to become bad enough to merit an emergency appointment*



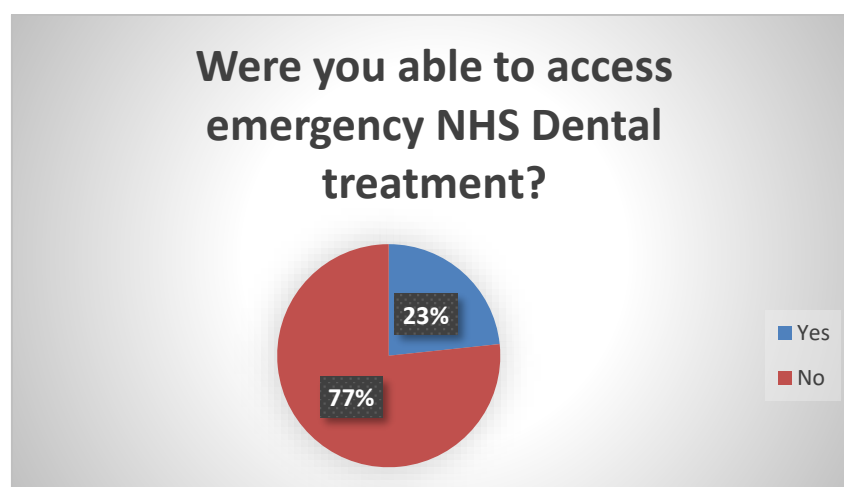
For those patients 'registered' with an NHS Dentist, we asked them to rate their satisfaction with regards to their Dental Service experience.



27 (37%) of respondents were either very satisfied or satisfied with their Dental experience.

49 (34%) of respondents were either very dissatisfied or dissatisfied with their Dental experience.

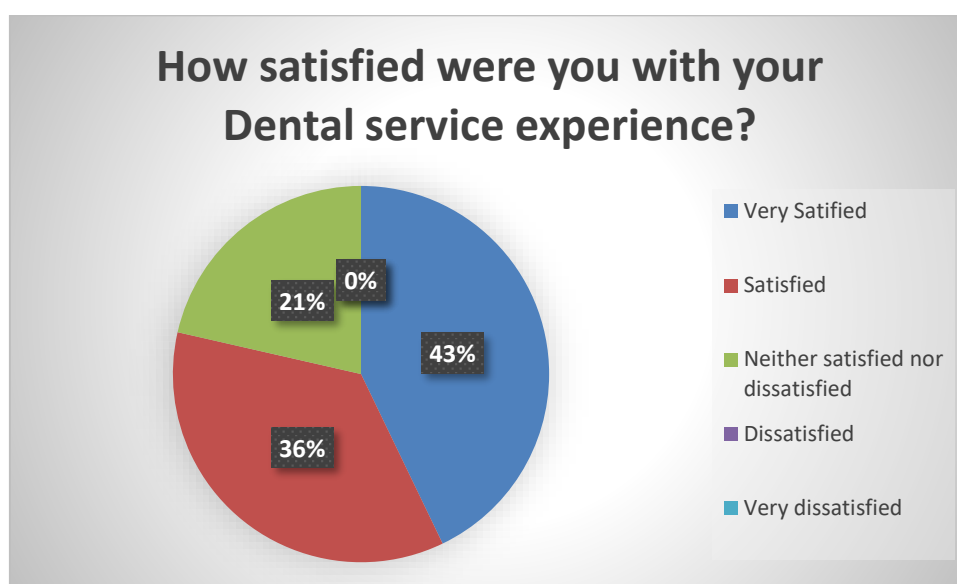
For those patients who are not 'registered' with an NHS Dentist, we enquired as to whether they had been able to receive emergency NHS Dental care.



14 (23%) of respondents reported they had been able to access emergency NHS Dental treatment.

46 (77%) of respondents reported that they had not been able to access emergency NHS Dental treatment.

For those 'unregistered' patients who had been able to receive emergency NHS Dental treatment, we asked them to rate their satisfaction with their experience



It should be noted that no patients who were not 'registered' with an NHS Dentist, who received emergency NHS Dental treatment, reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their Dental service experience.



Finally, our survey asked respondents to provide feedback on ways that NHS Dental care services in the local community could be improved.

The following suggestions were provided:

- Provide more NHS Dental Practices.
- Provide services for Bariatric Patients in the community.
- Open up routine appointments for check up's.
- Provide better information and signposting as to how to receive NHS treatment and where to find an NHS Dentist accepting new patients.
- Dental Practices to answer phone calls.

*Unfortunately  
my dentist has  
been too busy  
for non  
emergency  
appointments*

*More availability  
of NHS dentists  
and more access  
to where and how  
to find a dentist  
with spaces.*

*By taking on extra patients when in need and maybe building more nhs practices in our area to cover the community.*

*Make bariatric services more accessible to all.*

*better signposting as to how to receive treatment*

*Start opening up appointments, I was told March 2022 is next time myself and family can have a check up , yet none of us have seen a*

*More NHS dentists available. I have lived in Cardiff for 10 years and still haven't managed to sign up to an NHS dentist.*

*If I had been able to visit a dentist regularly, I would not have lost 3 teeth, and now my mouth is changing shape causing further problems!*

# Learning from what we heard

From the data gathered during our 'secret shopper' exercise, there has been an improvement with regards to access compared to October 2020. 1 Practice is now actively seeing new NHS patients with another due to do so in the New Year.

The introduction of the UHB centralised waiting list is welcome, allowing the UHB to better measure and understand the unmet demand for NHS Dental services across Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan. Unfortunately, this information is not consistently being disseminated, with only 11 Dental Practices informing our members of the existence of this list and how to join it.

The CHC would like to see all Dental Practices in Cardiff & the Vale of Glamorgan utilising this centralised waiting list and providing information on how to join this waiting list, to any patients who call their Practice seeking NHS care, if the Practice does not have the capacity to provide this care at the time of request. Although we do respect that each Practice is free to decide on an individual business basis whether they make use of this list or not.

The CHC would also like to see this information publicised through the UHB's website and social media channels. In order to utilise the waiting list to its fullest potential, and accurately measure the unmet need for Dental services, all patients who require access to an NHS Dentist must be aware of the waiting list and noted on it.

Although there have been improvements noted, it is also important to note that lack of access to NHS Dental services means patients who have the financial means, are being forced to seek privately funded Dental services. Of even more concern are those patients who are not in a financial position to be able to do this. These patients are being left without access to

regular Dental care, being forced to wait until any issue reaches a critical stage before then being able to seek emergency NHS Dental care.

For those patients who do have regular access to an NHS Dentist, there is still a great variety in the range of services that are currently available. Some patients reported access to routine appointments with a Hygienist, whilst other Practices continue to only offer emergency appointments.

The CHC understands this variety between Practices can be attributed to a number of different factors. Each Practice faces its own challenges with regards to implementing Welsh Government Covid Guidelines around social distancing and infection control, with staff recruitment issues also causing difficulties. The CHC understands that each Practice is prioritising appointments and services offered based on the clinical need of their patients.

On 17<sup>th</sup> November 2021 Eluned Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services published a written statement 'NHS Dentistry – additional funding for access to NHS dental services'

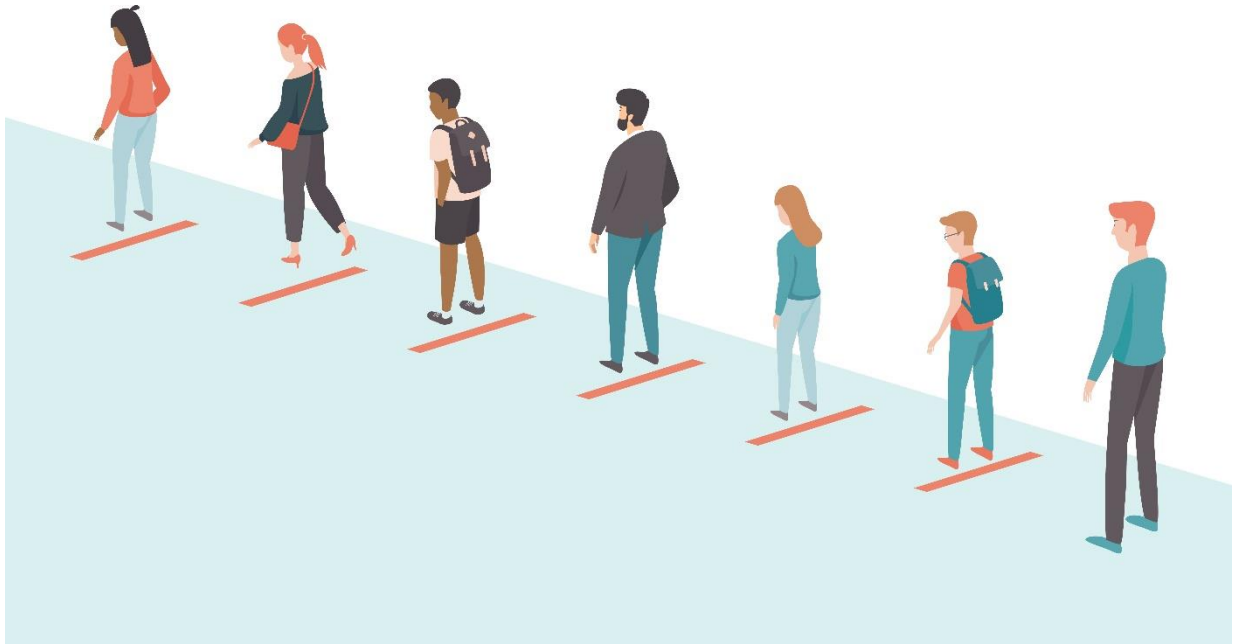
In this statement she announced an allocation of up to £3m to Health Boards in Wales in 2021-2022 in order to *"expedite the recovery of services and bolster urgent and emergency care"*

In addition, she announced recurrent funding of £2m from 2022-23 *"to allow Health Boards to increase access and capacity needs over the medium term. Health Boards will be able to invest this funding in NHS dental services to address local needs and issues"*

It is the hope of the South Glamorgan CHC that the changes already implemented with regards to the Dental Contract and centralised waiting list, along-side the announcement of more funding in the short and long term from Welsh Government, will

continue to drive improvements in terms of patients' ability to access NHS Dental services in their local community.

If you would like to join the Cardiff & Vale UHB centralised waiting list for patients seeking NHS Dental treatment, please email [Cardiffandvale.Gds@wales.nhs.uk](mailto:Cardiffandvale.Gds@wales.nhs.uk)



# Thanks

We thank everyone who took the time to share their views and experiences with us about their health and care services and to share their ideas.

We hope the feedback people have taken time to share influences healthcare services to recognise and value what they do well – and take action where they need to as quickly as they can to make things better.



# Feedback

We'd love to hear what you think about this publication, and any suggestions about how we could have improved it, so we can use this to make our future work better.

This report is available in Welsh and English.



## Contact details



CIC De Morgannwg / South Glamorgan CHC  
Canolfan Fusnes Pro Copy (Cefn)/ Pro Copy  
Business Centre (Rear)  
Parc Ty Glas  
Llanishen  
Caerdydd / Cardiff  
CF14 5DU



02920 750112



[SouthGlam.chiefofficer@waleschc.org.uk](mailto:SouthGlam.chiefofficer@waleschc.org.uk)



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If you write to us in Welsh, we will answer in Welsh. This will not lead to a delay in responding to your correspondence.

We welcome telephone calls in Welsh.

**South Glamorgan Community Health Council**