

Date: 28th November 2024

NHS 24's response to the questions posed by the Convener of the Scottish Parliament's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee in relation to its scrutiny of Dentistry in Scotland.

NHS provision:

- **Have dentists increased NHS provision in the last 2 years? If not, could you describe any barriers which have prevented this from happening?**

There are two measures of access to dental services- registration and participation. Registration refers to a patient being included on a dentists' list. This affords them access to urgent, unscheduled dental care (within 24 hours). Participation is contact for a dental examination (check-up) and dental treatment. Due to the lifelong nature of dental registration, dental participation is a more accurate marker of access to, and use of, dental services.

While the adult and child registrations have remained fairly constant over time, the participation rates have fallen from nearly 70% in 2019 to 55% in June 2024. PHS will provide stats on the rise in either registration or participation.

Access to primary care dental services affects the dental health of the population. As the dental health deteriorates, and access becomes more problematic, patients seeking out of hours care increases. If patients struggle to access care in primary care, they will present to other services. The Scottish Emergency Dental Service NHS24 has seen an increase in volume and complexity of calls. For two years, until August 2022, the SEDS service benefitted from having dentists as part of the team. The addition of the dentists saw patients benefitting from a remote prescribing service, a bespoke trauma service and Near- me consultations. There was also a dramatic decrease in the numbers of dental patients being assigned to Emergency Departments.

- **Is there evidence of new dentists setting up practices and offering NHS services? If not, why not?**

There is evidence, nationally, of new NHS Dental Practices opening since the Scottish Government payment reform implementation of 1st November 2023. These are in different Health Boards across Scotland.

- **Do you have any views on the [Scottish Dental Access Initiative](#) and whether it has been successful in facilitating the establishment or expansion of NHS dental provision?**

There has been some use of the Scottish Dental Access Initiative scheme across Scotland, in the designated areas, described in the CEL. This initiative does not affect the SEDS service.

- **Has there been any increase in registrations with the public dental service in your board area?**

The SEDS service is a national out of hours service and therefore does not have an associated PDS service.

Prevention and improvement

- **Is there evidence to suggest dentists are doing more to focus on prevention in NHS dentistry?**

As the SEDS service is an out of hours service for emergency or urgent dental care, we do not have a focus on prevention. However, in general dental services, the new Determination 1 has an item for “Preventive Care” included for the first time.

- **To what extent is the [Oral Health Improvement Plan, 2018](#), still driving reforms in dentistry?**

The Scottish Government Oral Health Improvement Plan does appear to be driving reform at National level, but that would sit with the CDO.

- **What are your hopes and expectations of what the Scottish budget 2025-26 may deliver in relation to dentistry when it is published on 4 December 2024?**

In these difficult financial times, every service is struggling for maintaining budgets and continued investment. For long term improvement in health, and to meaningfully address the continued and persistent oral health inequalities, the investment must be “upstream” at national, prevention level with appropriate funding for the Oral Health Improvement Programmes.

In terms of treating the continued dental disease in the out of hours, investment in employing dentists in the NHS24 SEDS service must be re- examined, in order to provide the gold standard service, we had in 2020-22.