

NHS DENTISTRY BRIEFING

January 2022

Introduction

Lack of access to NHS dentistry has intensified, nationally and locally, as an issue for people over the last 18 months. Healthwatch England latest research (informed by West Sussex insight) is a stark reminder that it is an issue decision-makers must react to now, to protect our health.

Not only have we seen a large increase in the volume of feedback and a huge increase in the amount of negative sentiment in our evidence, but, more strikingly, we have noted a continuation of this trend over time. This briefing shares common themes and examples of this insight.

These issues are not occurring in isolated pockets. People in every corner of West Sussex are struggling to get the dental treatment they need when they need it. That is why Healthwatch is again calling on the Government and NHS England to speed up dental contract reform and provide significant and sustained funding to tackle the underlying problems of dental access and affordability.

It is not just Healthwatch witnessing these concerns. Reports from bodies across the health sector tell the same story.

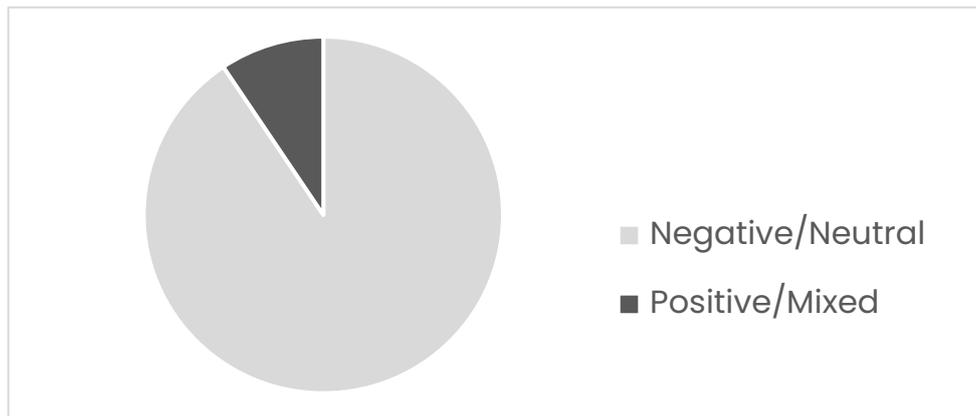
In October, the Care Quality Commission, in the annual 'State of health care and social care' [report](#), also highlighted problems that children and young people had in accessing routine dental care during the pandemic.

https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20211021_stateofcare2021_print.pdf

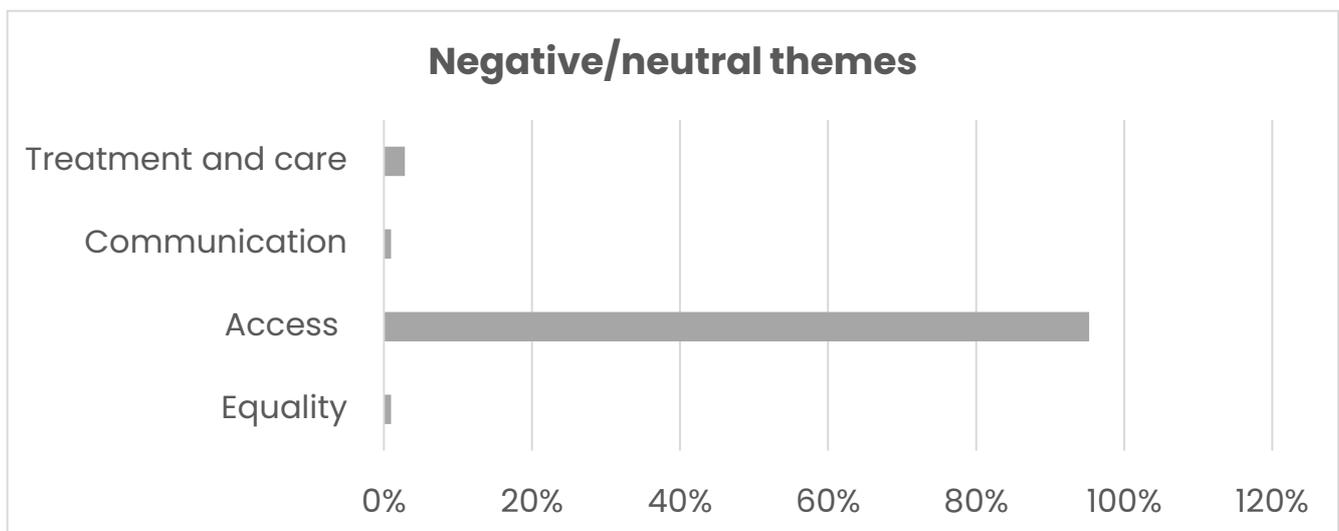
What does our recent insight show?

Here we detail the experience-based insight gathered by from August to 2 December 2021. This insight was shared with us directly, rather than resulting from a project or survey. This is from a total of 110 themed records.

Sentiment has remained roughly similar to previous briefings.



(Graph shows insight is 97% negative and only 3% positive.)



(Graph shows the themes of the negative insight. Equality 1%, Access 95%, Communication 1%, Treatment and Care 3%.)

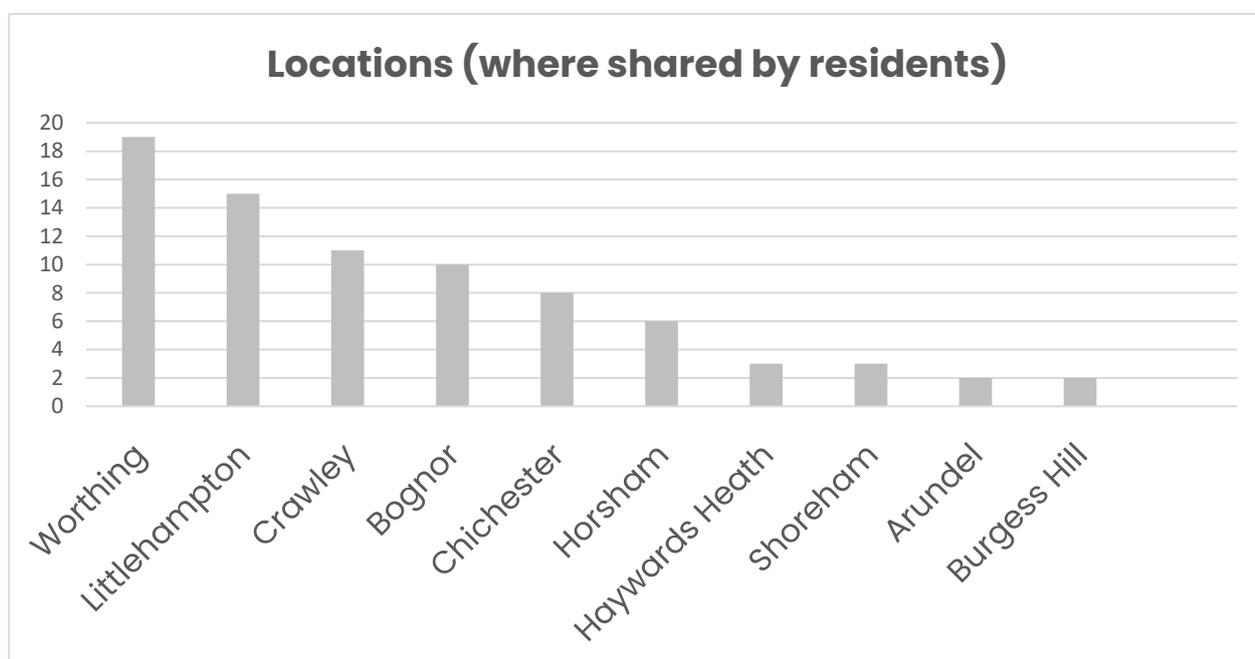
Access to NHS dental care remains the key theme.

I have a terrible pain which combined with a headache and ear pain. I'm taking 6-8 painkillers daily and I've tried to book an appointment calling all the emergency phones. Finally, I couldn't succeed because no one answered!

(Horsham District Resident, September 2021 – 00158987)

I've called about 50 dentists this morning and no one seems to be taking on new NHS patients. I'm happy to travel, just urgently need an appointment.

(West Sussex Resident, October 2021 – 00159900)



(Graph shows the top ten locations where people have struggled to get access to NHS dental care. From highest to lowest: Worthing, Littlehampton, Crawley, Bognor, Chichester, Horsham, Haywards Heath, Shoreham, Arundel and Burgess Hill.)

We are pleased to note that [Dentaid](#) has recently been commissioned to support Littlehampton residents access dental care.

We are also pleased to note that the Operating Standard for Quarter 4 of 2021-2022 requires NHS contracted dental practices to deliver 85% of the *units of dental activities* to maintain funding.

Pregnant women continue not getting access to the dental support they need on the NHS, instead some are having to pay when they believed they would receive free treatment.

I was 18 weeks pregnant when I had dentist treatment. I have obtained a maternity exemption certificate for free NHS prescriptions and treatments. I was scheduled for treatment in August at (Crawley) dental practice, it was agreed that I would require a root canal and was charged £494.

I was told by a midwife prior to claiming that the exemption card covered dental treatment as well as free prescriptions. However, when speaking to the practice they explained their practice is small, the NHS funding they receive is a very small proportion for the whole surgery, so they were unable to claim using my exemption certificate. And I would have to pay for the treatment.

(Crawley resident, August 2021 – 00158416)

Children are missing out on dental treatment; we have seen an increase in parents making enquiries as they are struggling to access check-ups or NHS dental care for their child/children.

I am trying to find a dentist – ideally in Horsham as that’s where my children are at school, who take on NHS child patients could you please help me find one as everyone I contact either ignores me or tells me no it’s £50 per child!

(Horsham resident, October 2021 – 00159760)

My 17 year old needs a root canal filling in his front tooth after visiting an emergency dentist, but I have phoned every dentist in West Sussex, but no one will see him, how do I get his teeth sorted out.

(West Sussex resident, November 2021 – 00160678)

People continue to find themselves being ‘deregistered’ (as they perceive it or have been told by the dental practice).

People are also reporting that **children are being disassociated from practices.**

The caller rang as her partner is struggling to find an NHS dentist. He was previously a patient at (name given) Dental Practice but was removed as he hadn't attended in 3 years. (1 appointment cancelled by him and the other cancelled by the practice, both due to Covid). He has spoken to the practice manager, but the caller reported they were not interested. She said her partner needs treatment.

(Horsham District Resident, August 2021 – 00157901)

The **cost of accessing dental care remains an issue** for people who have contacted us.

I have been with the same dentist on NHS my whole life, but this practice is only reachable by car, so have relied on my mum to get me there. I moved away from home and was unsuccessful in finding a new dentist near me which would accept NHS patients.

I have recently moved back home temporarily, and my mum booked me an appointment at the dentist I have visited since childhood. I was not informed that I was now taken off the NHS list and was charged £87 rather than £23.30 and on top of this £5 PPE fee!!

I am a low paid teaching assistant and cannot get any other dental treatment. The experience reduced me to tears. Could you let me know what are my rights in this situation?

(West Sussex Resident, August 2021 – 00158500)