

## **NHS Dentistry in Scotland**

I am grateful for the dentists and dental staff that have worked incredibly hard over the past three years as Scotland has gone through the worst of the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond.

I understand your concerns about the current state of NHS dentistry in Scotland. Recent figures have revealed that 50% of registered patients have not seen an NHS dentist in the past two years. This is particularly the case in rural and deprived areas, while oral health inequalities among children have widened to the worst level on record.

Sadly, the SNP Government has neglected NHS dentistry for far too long. The number of dental practices offering NHS services has shrunk in real terms since before the pandemic began, while the SNP's plan to make NHS dentistry free at the point of use by 2026 is unlikely to be achieved since many dentists do not see a future in the current underfunded model and are reluctant to come to Scotland due to the higher rates of taxation.

The current funding model of NHS dentistry is unsustainable and the new payment system that will come into effect from 1 November falls short of the reform required to make the service fit for purpose. Under the new model the number of payment codes used by dentists will be reduced from 400 to 45 and practices will still be at risk of providing NHS care at a loss when it comes to services like dentures.

Some patients will also have to pay higher charges to receive NHS dental treatment. Furthermore, the new model will continue the 'drill and fill' approach to routine dental procedures that is geared towards saving the Scottish Government money rather than benefiting the patients' dental health.

The Scottish Conservatives have warned since before the pandemic that the funding for NHS dentistry was unsustainable and this new model will not alleviate our concerns. We have repeatedly questioned the SNP Government on its plans for NHS dentistry and have led, and contributed to, debates in the chamber on to prevent the collapse of the service.

We are in contact with the British Dental Association and its local dental committees to discuss how NHS services could be best supported. We are also calling on the SNP Government to guarantee that every Scot will be able to get a dental check-up this year and as clinically required thereafter.

The SNP Government, by contrast, continues to make promises to patients and dental practices. Jenni Minto, the Minister for Public and Women's Health, is not on top of her portfolio and the new funding model demonstrates that she has not listened to the concerns raised by dentists and patients. I would urge the minister to get a grip of the situation and come forward with a credible plan for the long-term future of NHS dentistry in Scotland.

Dentists and patients deserve better. I want to see an NHS dental service that is modern, efficient, and local, and which supports dentists in their role as oral health practitioners. I would urge the SNP Government to support NHS dentistry to ensure that it is financially viable for dentists and provides holistic best-practice care to patients.