

# Croydon residents and dentists work together to highlight needs and communicate services better

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- Healthwatch Croydon surveyed residents on dental service and assesses dental practice websites, working closely with the Croydon Local Dental Committee.
- We found variability in access, with patients having difficulty access when they were in pain and a lack of information and confusion on how services are delivered. However, there was significant satisfaction with NHS services once seen. There were also concerns about costs - even with NHS treatment.
- Our recommendations suggest focusing on service variability and undertaking a local needs assessment, allocation of appointments as well better communication about how dentistry is delivered to giving residents better insight into services.

During the COVID pandemic in 2020, Healthwatch Croydon heard from Croydon residents that they had difficulty accessing and using dental services. As a result, we devised a survey to understand views on how people were accessing services, their experience of services and perceptions of dental services. We also assessed GP practices' websites to see if they met patients needs and expectations. Throughout this time, we have worked closely with the Croydon Local Dental Committee (LDC), to understand how services are delivered and how our insight can improve services. This experience has been profiled in the Integrated Care Journal: <https://integratedcarejournal.com/newsdit-article/7f6d0005cfe999ea002f699c0088d21d/healthwatch-and-croydon-ldc-working-to-highlight-local-patient-needs/>

## These are our findings based on the 156 responses from the survey:

- **There is variability in access:** 49% of respondents found it easy or very easy to access their NHS dentist to enquire about appointments, while 46% found it difficult or very difficult.

- **Most contacted because they had an urgent need or were in pain:** 49% found it difficult or very difficult to get a dental appointment when there was a problem. In emergency situations such as a broken tooth, 38% of respondents found it difficult or very difficult to get a dental appointment.
- **Most found information on websites not that useful:** Only 23% of respondents found information on their dentist's website useful or very useful; with 12% for the NHS website and 7% for other websites.
- **Most rely on the dentist they usually use even if they are not regular attendees:** Most respondents (78%) mostly tried to get help by contacting the dentist they usually use, 16% contacted another dentist, 5% contacted NHS 111 and obtained details for a local dentist, 5% were directed for urgent dental care (after contacting 111).
- **Once they get seen, most are happy with the service they get:** 33% found the dental treatment they received very good, and a further 19% said good compared with 10% who said bad or very bad - just 6% found it very bad.
- **NHS dentistry is much appreciated but there are cost concerns.:** 98% state that it is either important or very important to have regular access to an NHS dentist. Even for NHS services, two thirds are concerned about cost.

### **These are our recommendations which are relevant to providers and commissioners:**

- **Access needs to be less variable:** The problems in the way NHS England commissions NHS dentistry and allocates appointments is causing variability in access to NHS dental services. Some Croydon residents can get an NHS check-up while others cannot access urgent NHS care, yet they live within miles of each other. This needs to be explained and addressed.
- **Undertake a local dental needs assessment:** The current allocation of NHS appointments is based on information that is 16 years out of date. Croydon has seen a population increase of 10% in the last decade causing significant demand challenges which need to be considered under such an assessment. This would help ensure dental unit supply meets current demand.





develop and highlight other health issues like cancer and diabetes at an early stage. Croydon needs dental services that meet demand.”

“We also see the need for much clear information on how dentists deliver the services, to help patients understand use the service better. Early on, Healthwatch Croydon took the decision to collaborate with the Local Dental Committee to explore this issue. We have valued the relationship learning much about the complexities of how services are commissioned and the impact this has for both dentist and patient. We look forward to working with them as part South West London Local Dental Committee, in raising profile of this essential health service, improving information about the services, and helping services meet patient need.”

**Sushil John of the South West London Local Dental Committee said:**

“Dental care is an important part of health and wellbeing and we were pleased that Healthwatch Croydon undertook a report into the experiences of residents accessing care during the pandemic. Dental practices worked hard during the pandemic to provide as much care as possible and it is heartening to hear that those who accessed services were satisfied with their care. Much more needs to be done, however, to place dental services in Croydon on a secure and sustainable footing so that more people can access dental care in a timely manner. We look forward to working with Healthwatch Croydon and other local partners to secure the dental care that Croydon requires and deserves.”

**Sushil’s additional comments on the dental website report:**

“We will support improvements to our members’ websites based on the feedback in Healthwatch Croydon’s report, and welcome all feedback which leads to improved services.”

**Rachel Flowers, Croydon’s director of public health, said:**

“We are aware of the issues around accessing dental services in Croydon, which have been further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing national commissioning issues. We are committed to continuing strategic work with the Local Dental Committee, NHS England and NHS Improvement to reduce oral health inequalities in the borough.”

## Editor's notes

**Healthwatch Croydon** is here to improve the experience that Croydon people have when they need to use health and social care services. We believe that the best way to do this is by listening to patients and service users.

There is a local Healthwatch in every local authority area in England.

Our role is to make sure that that local health and social care services, and the local decision makers, put the experiences of people at the heart of their care.

We are a statutory body - this means that we have a legal status to exist within the Health and Social Care Act 2012. This means decision-makers should listen to us when we give them feedback and make suggestions.

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