

## **Dental access and oral health improvement programme**

### **Communications and engagement plan**

#### **1. Introduction**

This report outlines the background to the development of a communications and engagement plan which will support primary care dental access in Lancashire and South Cumbria. The communications and engagement plan also aims to improve awareness of oral hygiene and contribute to a reduction in prevalence of tooth decay.

#### **2. Background**

##### **Access**

**2.1** Following the delegation of primary dental services to ICBs in April 2023, access to dental services remains an issue for patients across Lancashire and South Cumbria. Access to services is also one of the main reasons cited in dental complaints to the integrated care board (ICB).

**2.2** The NHS only receives funding for 60 per cent of the population to receive NHS dentistry, however the decline in oral health since the COVID-19 pandemic means the level of funding received in reality is currently only sufficient for around 50 per cent of the population to be able to access routine NHS dental care.

**2.3** In areas of higher deprivation, dentists report seeing a lot more patients suffering from poor oral health and tooth decay, often leaving seeking help for oral health issues to the very last minute. The dental access and oral health improvement programme recognises this and one of the key aims is to target support at those areas where it is most needed.

##### **Oral health in children**

**2.4** Tooth decay in children aged under five in the north-west of England is higher than the England average.

**2.5** Tooth decay remains the number one reason for young children to be admitted to hospital for an operation to have teeth removed. The number of operations for children having teeth removed is higher in the north-west than the England average.

**2.6** Current figures show that one in five children in the UK require teeth removals, however in the north-west this is one in three children.

##### **Communications and engagement plan**

**3.1** The ICB's communication and engagement plan aims to outline the communications and engagement element of the ICB's dental access programme. It will act as a repository for all communications and engagement collateral and outline the initiatives intended to support this project.

**3.2** There are three broad approaches for communications and engagement to support this programme.

- Developing the communications associated with the programme which will include:
  - Communications for patients – what they can access, how to access services, oral health and self-care
  - Communications for health and social care providers –fundamentals of oral health and patient self-care, making every contact count, fostering an oral health prevention focussed culture
- Developing a narrative to engage with and support the management of wider stakeholders and lobbying for change
- Developing and implementing a patient engagement plan to support the co-production of services

**3.3** The campaign will launch in December 2023 and run throughout 2024.

**3.4** Evaluation and monitoring will be an iterative process with an evaluation report being published in December 2024. Metrics for evaluation are yet to be determined.

The committee is asked to note the contents of the communications and engagement plan to support dental access and oral hygiene.

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