



**Lancashire and  
South Cumbria**  
Integrated Care Board

# Dental access and oral health improvement programme

Communications and engagement plan

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## Purpose

This 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.

## Overview

The commissioning of dental services was delegated to integrated care boards from NHS England on 1 April 2023. Soon after, the ICB’s primary care leads outlined a project aimed at improving access and public attitudes to dental services for patients living across the region.

Dental access and oral health improvement programme leads have outlined what they expect from the communications and engagement project as follows:

- 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

This will be achieved in the following ways:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the communications               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communications for patients</li> </ul> </li> </ul>                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of comms messages and materials outlined within comms and engagement plan</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communications for health and social care providers</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of an ICB intranet alongside messages and materials outlined within comms and engagement plan</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing a narrative to engage with and support management of stakeholders ...</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing of comms messages and materials outlined within comms and engagement plan</li> </ul>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ... and lobbying for change (lobbying contract setters on how to improve working environment for staff and improve service offer to patients)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating engagement opportunities with dental staff and clinicians</li> </ul>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing and implementing patient engagement plan to support the co-production of services</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To run alongside the staff engagement – organise patient engagement opportunities</li> <li>• Produce report of engagement with both staff and patients for feeding upwards</li> </ul> |

A key component of this work will be communications and engagement with the public, including providing a better understanding of how NHS dental services are commissioned and provided, and busting some of the myths around dental service provision. Additionally, reinforced messaging around dental self-care will be prioritised.

The delegation to the ICB, which means all routine primary care services are commissioned by the same organisation, provides an opportunity for the NHS to strengthen its messaging and improve the public understanding and perception of these services.

## Communications / engagement objective

- To improve public understanding of dental services and how they are commissioned.
- To support the ICB in improving access to dental services across Lancashire and South Cumbria.
- Develop an ICB database of contacts and a method of providing updates to dental staff and professionals.
- Support dental professionals and staff to lobby for changes to the dental contract to improve the working environment and services.
- To enable patients to input into dental services transformation.

## Audiences

- General public
- Dental staff and clinicians
- Other clinical staff as relevant
- Local media
- Key stakeholders:
  - Local authorities
  - HOSCs
  - MPs
  - Healthwatch
  - VCFSE

## Tactics

Tactics that will be employed in the delivery of communications to patients, staff and stakeholders includes:

- Patients
  - Development of dedicated webpage focusing on three key areas:
    - How and when to access services
    - Mythbusting
    - Dental self care
  - Proactive social media messaging
  - Press releases
  - Use of key messages to respond to queries and comments at patient engagement events
  - Facilitation of engagement events focused on dental services
- Staff
  - Implementation and promotion of primary care intranet with dedicated dental page
  - Facilitation of engagement focus groups around how changes to the dental contract can improve services and the working environment

- Key stakeholders (as identified above)
  - Letters
  - Stakeholder bulletin
- Local media
  - Press releases
  - Media monitoring
  - Social media monitoring

## Key messages

The key messages are split into themes and will support communicating with the public around:

- The dental access and oral health improvement programme and its main objectives
- Accessing dental services
- Looking after their own oral health (This will be structured to begin with lifestyle choices before teeth brushing)

## Dental access and oral health improvement programme

- NHS Lancashire and South Cumbria has launched its dental access and oral health improvement programme to improve access to primary care dental services in the high street and to improve oral health.
- Primary care dental services includes:
  - Routine care for people who require a check-up and any follow-up care.
  - Urgent dental care for those in immediate need of support.
- The programme will look to prioritise the areas of Lancashire and South Cumbria with the greatest need for dental access and oral health support. It will also aim to reduce inequalities in dental access and oral health across the region.
- The programme will focus on where investment should be prioritised, improving patient pathways, communications to the public and to staff, supporting retention and recruitment of the dental workforce and contract management.

## Accessing dental services

- It is important to have regular dental check-ups even if you are not experiencing any pain or symptoms. If you wait until a cavity hurts, it may be too late to save the tooth. Regular check-ups with a dentist will identify issues early and help to keep your mouth healthy and disease-free. Dentists also carry out regular checks for mouth cancers.
- How often you need to see the dentist depends on your individual need. Those at highest risk may be recalled every three months, while children at lowest risk will be invited every 12 months and low-risk adults may only be invited to visit their dentist every two years.
- Children should be taken to the dentist when their first tooth emerges at about six months old, or at least by their first birthday.
- If you need to find a dentist for routine and ongoing care, use the NHS 'find a dentist' service at <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>
- NHS dental services are charged in three bands:

- Band 1: £25.80 – covers an examination, diagnosis and advice. If necessary, it also includes X-rays, a scale and polish (if clinically needed), and planning for further treatment.
- Band 2: £70.70 – covers all treatment included in Band 1, plus additional treatment, such as fillings, root canal treatment and removing teeth (extractions).
- Band 3: £306.80 – covers all treatment included in Bands 1 and 2, plus more complex procedures, such as crowns, dentures and bridges.
- Free NHS dental services are only available to those aged under 18 (or under 19 if in full-time education), pregnant women or women who have had a baby in the last 12 months, people being treated in an NHS hospital by a hospital dentist and those on low-income benefits.
- The NHS only receives funding for 60 per cent of the population to receive NHS dentistry, therefore it is not possible for everyone in the UK to receive NHS dental treatment.
- While very few dentists may be accepting new NHS patients at the moment, they will all accept patients privately. Most dentists offer a payment plan that will ensure all routine care is carried out at a cost not too dissimilar to NHS services.
- Unlike GP practices, nobody is registered with a dentist. By completing a registration form at your dentist you are simply being added to their database, however this does not provide guaranteed access to an appointment.
- If you need to access a dentist in an emergency or out of normal hours, use NHS111 by visiting [111.nhs.uk](http://111.nhs.uk) or call 111.
- Urgent dental treatment is charged at £25.80 (unless you are entitled to free NHS dental treatment).
- The Lancashire and South Cumbria dental helpline can also provide advice, support and an appointment where required. It is charged at your local rate. Call 0300 1234010.
- You should only go to A&E if you are suffering from severe pain, heavy bleeding or have injuries to the face, mouth or teeth.

## Oral self care

### Looking after your teeth before picking up a toothbrush

- Teeth do not develop decay or die off naturally. Almost all dental diseases are preventable through a healthy lifestyle and good oral hygiene routine.
- You can improve your oral health – and health in general – by cutting down on sugar, not smoking and limiting the amount of alcohol you drink.
- Sugary food and drinks are one of the main causes of tooth decay. Bacteria in your mouth react with the sugars causing acid. This acid then dissolves the tooth surface, and is the first stage of tooth decay.
- There are hidden sugars in many foods. For example, raisins, dried fruits and fresh fruit juice contain hidden sugars and can be a major cause of decay, especially in young children – so they are best just eaten at mealtimes. There is also sugar in foods such as bread, tomato ketchup, flavoured yoghurts, cereal bars and fruit smoothies.
- Fizzy drinks are carbonated and are acidic. Therefore even in diet fizzy drinks, the acid can wear away the enamel that protects your teeth, causing toothwear and make them more prone to decay.

## Teeth brushing and flossing advice for adults

- The best way to make sure you have healthy teeth and minimise your need to go to the dentist is to look after your teeth at home.
- Brush your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste (containing 1,350 to 1,500ppm of fluoride).
  - Brush your teeth for two minutes twice a day – once last thing at night and on at least one other occasion during the day – to remove plaque and prevent gum disease and tooth decay.
  - Before bed is the most important time to brush your teeth. While we sleep our teeth are the most prone to decay and so brushing before going to bed removes bits of food and bacteria.
  - Avoid brushing too hard as this can cause damage to the enamel that protects teeth and causes gums to recede. We recommend using a soft, small-headed toothbrush and don't press on too hard.
  - After brushing, spit don't rinse. Rinsing washes away the concentrated fluoride that remains on your teeth after spitting out excess toothpaste.
  - If your gums bleed while brushing your teeth, this is not a sign you are brushing too hard. Gums bleed because of plaque and bacteria on your teeth, so bleeding is a sign to brush more. Regular brushing will reduce the plaque and bacteria and promote healthy gums, which should reduce bleeding when brushing.
  - More advice on brushing your teeth can be found here:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-teeth-and-gums/how-to-keep-your-teeth-clean/>
- Floss between your teeth as part of your daily oral health routine.
  - Use a gentle rocking motion to guide the floss between your teeth. Do not snap the floss into the gums.
  - When the floss reaches your gumline, curve it into a C-shape against a tooth until you feel resistance.
  - Hold the floss against the tooth. Gently scrape the side of the tooth, moving the floss away from the gum. Repeat on the other side of the gap, along the side of the next tooth.
  - When flossing for the first time your gums may bleed. This is normal and should stop as your gums become healthier.
  - More advice on dental flossing can be found here:  
<https://www.nhs.uk/common-health-questions/dental-health/why-should-i-use-dental-floss/>
- Looking after your teeth is important as there are links between oral health and a wide range of general health conditions, such as diabetes, high blood pressure and dementia.

## What is fluoride?

- Fluoride is a naturally occurring mineral that occurs in bones and teeth. It is also found naturally in water, soil, plants, rocks, and food and drinks such as beer, fish and tea.
- It is most recognised for being used in toothpaste and water, to prevent tooth decay and build strong teeth and bones.
- Fluoride occurs naturally in water in some areas and is artificially added to water supplies in some parts of England. Fluoride can also be added to milk and salt.
- Fluoridated toothpastes have helped to reduce tooth decay rates around the world.

### How does fluoride work?

- Fluoride strengthens teeth and reduces the risk of tooth decay. The fluoride in toothpaste works in different ways, it can:
  - Re-mineralise tooth enamel (the hard outer layer of teeth).
  - Reverse or slow down early tooth decay.
  - Strengthen the enamel on teeth to prevent new decay.
  - Protect teeth from decay-causing bacteria in plaque.
- It is important fluoride from the toothpaste stays on the teeth for as long as possible, which is why we advise just to spit out and not to rinse or use mouthwash after brushing – as this will wash all the protective fluoride away.
- Toothpastes containing 1350 to 1500ppm fluoride are the most effective. Your dentist may prescribe a higher strength toothpaste if you or your child is at increased risk of tooth decay.
- Dentists can also provide high-strength fluoride varnish which is recommended to be used on all children at least every six months and can be also used for adults at increased risk of tooth decay.

### Dental self care for children

- Tooth decay in children aged under five in the north west is higher than the England average.
- 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.
  - 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.
- Tooth decay is preventable and simple daily behaviours can prevent decay from occurring.
- To prevent tooth decay in children:
  - Reduce the amount and frequency of foods and drinks that contain sugars.
  - Brush teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste last thing at night and at least one other occasion.
    - Under 3s should use a smear of toothpaste.
    - 3-6-year-olds should use a pea sized amount.
    - Children and young people seven years and older should continue brushing with a fluoride paste
  - After brushing spit out, do not rinse.
  - Children's brushing should be supervised up to the age of at least seven years.
  - Take your child to the dentist when the first tooth appears, at about six months, and then on a regular basis.



## Timescales

(Subject to change)

|                |  |  |
|----------------|--|--|
| September 2023 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement of key messages</li> </ul>  |  |
| October 2023   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementation of updated website content</li> </ul>  |  |
| December 2023  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of communications campaign re the dental access and oral health improvement programme</li> </ul> |  |
| December 2023  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of oral health improvement public campaign using newly produced creatives</li> </ul>             |  |
| 2024 tbc       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of ICB dental intranet</li> <li>• Development of bank of dental contacts across LSC</li> </ul>   |  |
| 2024 tbc       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch of public engagement exercise around dental services</li> </ul>                                  |  |

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
|  | Complete                 |
|  | On track/not yet started |
|  | Delayed                  |

## Website copy

Visit [NHS England's website](https://www.nhs.uk) to find a dentist near you.

### Need urgent dental advice?

For urgent dental treatment or advice please contact your usual dental practice in the first instance. Alternatively, the Lancashire and South Cumbria dental helpline can also provide advice, support and an appointment where required. It is charged at your local rate. Call 0300 1234010 between 8am and 9pm Monday to Friday, 10am to 5pm weekends and bank holidays.

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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. It is therefore not possible for everyone in the UK to receive NHS dental treatment.

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Teeth do not develop decay or die off naturally. Almost all dental diseases are preventable through a healthy lifestyle and good oral hygiene routine.

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