

UK boosts dentists with cash to ease shortage

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Dentists in England will receive cash to accept new patients amid a critical shortage of state-funded dental care, the UK's public health authority said on Wednesday.

The plan, backed by £200 million (\$235 million) of [government funding](#),

comes as the number of dentists providing care in the state-funded National Health Service (NHS) stands at its lowest level in a decade.

The British Dental Association says around 12 million people are currently looking for an NHS dentist providing free care as increasing numbers of practitioners turn their backs on the NHS in favor of more lucrative private practice.

According to OECD data, the UK has 49 dentists per 100,000 inhabitants—the lowest rate among G7 countries.

"The health service will now introduce a wide range of practical measures to help make it easier for people to see a dentist, from incentivizing dentists to take on new patients, to supporting dentists to be part of the NHS in areas where access is challenging," NHS England chief executive Amanda Pritchard said.

Under the plan public dentists will be given a "new patient" payment of between £15-£50 to treat around a million new patients who have not seen a public dentist in two years or more.

Around 240 dentists will be offered one-off payments of up to £20,000 for working in under-served areas for up to three years.

New ways of delivering care in rural and [coastal areas](#) would be rolled out, including launching "dental vans", to help reach isolated communities.

Nine-year waiting list

UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the plan would help cut waiting lists and put NHS dentistry "on a sustainable footing for the long-term".

The situation received widespread coverage in the British media this week when hundreds were shown queuing in the western city of Bristol after a dental practice said it would be taking on new NHS patients.

Leading dentists said that the queues would be replicated around the country if more practices opened up their appointment books to NHS patients.

In Bridlington, in northern England, locals were told it would take around eight to nine years to get an appointment at the seaside town's only dentist, media reported.

Healthwatch England said patients had reported living with ongoing pain and even resorted to "DIY dentistry" such as pulling out their own teeth.

Shawn Charlwood, chairman of the British Dental Association's General Dental Practice Committee, said the recovery plan was "not worthy of the title".

"It won't halt the exodus from the workforce or offer hope to millions struggling to access care," he said.

"Nothing here meets government's stated ambitions, or makes this service fit for the future."

The BDA has blamed the crisis on under-investment, a backlog caused by cancelled treatment during the coronavirus pandemic and a 2006 reform which changed remuneration for certain dental procedures, making them less attractive to dentists.

Currently, just over 70 percent of dentists offer NHS treatment—and even then the service is limited—a recent parliamentary report noted.

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