

Accessing dentistry services since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic

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Background

Lack of access to NHS dentistry has intensified as an issue for people over the last 18 months. Nationally, Healthwatch England have seen a large increase in the volume of feedback and a huge increase in the amount of negative sentiment ([Healthwatch England, 2021](#)).

In Sutton, we have also seen a large increase in the volume of enquiries from residents struggling to access local NHS dentistry services.

In response to this, we contacted all 36 dental practices in and around the London Borough of Sutton to identify the practices taking on new patients and to find out the average waiting times for accessing routine and emergency appointments. Since the publication of the [report](#), we have been able to help signpost residents to local NHS dentists accepting patients, but we have had varying levels of success.

What we did

We created a survey to gather feedback from Sutton residents who had either used, or tried to use, any type of dental service since March 2020.

We liaised with the Local Dentistry Committee and NHS South West London Clinical Commissioning Group to develop the questions needed to capture the information we need to improve support locally.

The survey was available between 21st January 2022 to 21st March 2022. It was promoted online via social media, e-bulletins and on our website. We also asked Sutton Council, the local NHS and our partners in the voluntary sector to share our survey in their newsletters and social media channels.

In addition to this, we sent a paper copy of our survey to our members who are not online.

We received 98 responses.

Key findings

1. All respondents who tried to register with a dentist after March 2020 told us that they were unable to register because they contacted surgeries but they were not accepting NHS patients.
2. Almost 1 in 5 respondents who were registered with a dentist told us that they wanted to register as an NHS patient but they could only be registered as a private patient.
3. There has been a significant decline in the number of people who were able to register as an NHS patient when they wanted to after the pandemic started.
4. More than 1 in 4 respondents who had attempted to book a routine appointment had to wait 1 month or more for an appointment.
5. 13% of respondents who had attempted to book an emergency appointment were unable to get an appointment.

Recommendations

Recommendations will be developed using the key findings above. They will be created in consultation with key stakeholders including:

- Local Dentistry Committee
- South West London Clinical Commissioning Group
- Local dentist practice managers and staff
- Relevant voluntary and community groups
- Residents who have access, or tried to access, dentistry services since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We will also share this report with Healthwatch England who are working on the national issue of accessing dentistry services.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to everyone who took part in our survey.

Thank you to Healthwatch Richmond for sharing their survey questions and methodology with us.

Thank you to Martin Skipper and Jayendra Patel at the Local Dentistry Committee, and Aishling Cahill at South West London Clinical Commissioning Group for their help in the development of the survey questions.

Thank you to our volunteers for their feedback when testing out the survey.



healthwatch
Sutton

Healthwatch Sutton
Granfers Community Centre
73-79 Oakhill Road
Sutton
SM1 3AA

www.healthwatchsutton.org.uk
t: 020 8641 9540
e: info@healthwatchsutton.org.uk
📱 @HW_Sutton
📘 [Facebook.com/healthwatchsutton](https://www.facebook.com/healthwatchsutton)