The Missing Piece
The BDA’s manifesto for oral health 2019
Dentistry can no longer be the missing piece in our health service

We keep seeing the results...

Tooth decay - a wholly preventable disease - remains the number one reason for child hospital admissions. Oral cancers claim more lives than cervical and testicular cancers combined, but don’t make headlines.

We have a funding system designed to discourage participation, we have care home residents lacking access to basic services, we have families facing epic journeys to access the basic care they need.

And on the front line it is the dentists who go over and above for the NHS who are left unsupported, paying the price through low morale.

Health inequalities run deep, while the very future of NHS dentistry is in now doubt.

As the voice of dentists and dental students, the British Dental Association believes it is high time for a joined-up approach:

A valued workforce

Provide support to attract and retain talent. Make NHS dentists part of the NHS family, through tried-and-tested initiatives that recognise and reward commitment.

Remove barriers to care

Tackle the obstacles standing in the way of patient care, through a long-term funding settlement for NHS dentistry.

Put prevention first

Invest to save, by tackling inequalities, and focusing on prevention - not just cure.

We are proud to be dentists. Being leaders of the dental team, we continue to deliver for patients in the face of real challenges. We know that together, we can do so much more.

Child tooth extractions now cost £40m a year.
A valued workforce

Take action to attract and retain talent. Make NHS dentists part of the NHS family, through tried-and-tested initiatives that recognise and reward commitment.

The next government must:

- **Revamp contracts**

  Abandon the appalling 2006 NHS English dental contract once and for all in favour of a system with prevention, not targets, at its heart. Restore patient registration to ensure continuity of care for patients.

- **Safeguard pensions**

  Extend the same tax flexibilities offered to medics for the NHS Pension Scheme to stop dentists being forced out of the workforce.

- **End a decade of pay cuts**

  Commit to above-inflation pay uplifts, and draw a line under a 35% fall in real incomes that have no parallel in the public sector. Ensure these are passed on to all dentists.

- **Reward commitment to the NHS**

  Reintroduce commitment payments in general dental practice, and roll out programmes that have succeeded in addressing acute recruitment and access problems in other NHS services. Extend state-backed indemnity to cover NHS dental services – equivalent to our medical colleagues.

- **Tackle over-regulation**

  End the culture of fear that encourages ‘defensive dentistry’ through legislation to deliver ‘right touch’ regulation.

Half of dentists plan to reduce hours thanks to NHS Pension changes

75% of NHS practices are struggling to fill vacancies
Remove barriers to care

Remove the obstacles standing in the way of patient care through a long-term funding settlement for NHS dentistry.

The next government must:

• **End the budget freeze**

End the decade-long squeeze on budgets, and provide funding that keeps pace with demand. Ringfence and reinvest funds lost when dentists do not hit their targets, so budget allocated to NHS dentistry is spent on NHS dentistry. Ensure the service has support to cover the costs of a phase-down of dental amalgam.

• **Re-evaluate patient charges**

End inflation-busting patient charge increases, and maintain charges as a stable or declining proportion of the NHS budget. Charges are the wrong way to fund NHS dentistry. Extend and simplify exemptions, to ensure free care is available to those who need it.

• **End unfair fines**

Scrap the heavy-handed NHS fines system in England: stop punishing innocent people, vulnerable patients and their carers, and those who have made honest mistakes. Deliver a fair and focused approach to NHS fraud.

• **Scrap competitive tendering**

End the wasteful competition within NHS dentistry that has encouraged a ‘race to the bottom’, wasting precious clinical time and impacted hugely on patient care.

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NHS dentistry funds care for barely half the population

NHS dentistry operates on less budget than it received in 2010
Put prevention first

Invest to save: tackle inequalities and focus on prevention, not just cure

The next government must:

- Set children up for a lifetime of good oral health

Tackle inequalities head on and give all children the best start through a national programme including supervised brushing. Ringfence proceeds from an expanded Soft Drinks Industry Levy to support these initiatives.

- Give adults and older people the care that they need

Integrate oral health into adult social care, with properly resourced mainstream and dedicated provision. Support a national campaign to encourage dental attendance and oral health best practice for all.

- Don’t abandon oral health surveys

Guarantee the future of high quality national research to ensure that a strong evidence base underpins all future investment in dentistry.

- Step up the fight on oral cancer

Recognise the dental workforce as the first line in the battle against oral cancers. Keep a common-sense approach to recall intervals to support early detection, and deliver a catch-up vaccination programme to extend protections against HPV to over a million school-aged boys.

- Make sugar the new tobacco

Protect children from junk food marketing everywhere. Extend the Soft Drinks Industry Levy to include sweetened milk-based, sports, and energy drinks, and also to sweets and other foodstuffs. Set mandatory targets for sugar reduction: voluntary targets are not delivering results.
About us

The British Dental Association is the voice of dentists and dental students in the UK. Dentists are critical to the health of the nation and we want to see better oral health for all. We stand up for dentists, so they can deliver the very best care for their patients.

We work to:

- Promote the interests of our members
- Advance the art, science and ethics of dentistry
- Improve the nation’s oral health.

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It’s time for a joined-up approach to prioritise the nation’s oral health

Tooth decay and gum disease are the most prevalent – but preventable – diseases in Britain. Oral health is key to overall health, yet somehow dentistry remains in a silo.

Our message to politicians of all parties is that oral health can no longer be the missing piece in health planning and budgets.

This ‘Cinderella Service’ continues to operate with less funding than it received in 2010 and thus, by default, private dentistry is growing to fill the void.

The oral health gap between rich and poor isn’t closing, patients are struggling to secure access, and the service faces a mounting recruitment and retention crisis.

Real progress will require the next government to look at the workforce, funding and public health together.

Mick Armstrong, BDA Chair