

Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP  
Chancellor of the Exchequer  
*Sent by email*

Dear Mr Sunak,

## **The 2021 Spending Review and the future of NHS Dentistry**

We are writing on behalf of the dental profession, current dental patients and the broader public across England.

NHS dentistry faces an unprecedented backlog. The initial suspension of face to face care, and ongoing restrictions mean over 30 million appointments have been lost since lockdown, and patients and the NHS will be feeling the impact for years to come.

Dentistry has risen to be the number one issue raised with Healthwatch over the last 18 months, and the volume of feedback continues to grow. From April to June 2021 feedback was up 55% on the previous three months, and 794% higher when compared with the same period in 2020. Nearly 4 in 5 people (79%) of those sharing their stories said they had found it difficult to access timely care.

### **The coming Spending Review is an opportunity to determine the shape of *any* recovery plan.**

Even before COVID, England lacked an NHS dental service capable of meeting patients' needs. Now the pressures of the pandemic mean ongoing access problems, widening health inequalities, and many dental team members reconsidering their futures in the NHS. The service is now at risk of a double whammy of increased demand and reduced supply.

It is our shared view that the approach taken in past spending reviews cannot be revisited. In 2015 commitments to annual inflation-busting increases in patient charges served as real barrier to patients on modest incomes. With flatlining budgets, what has been dubbed 'contributions' has morphed into a substitute for meaningful state investment. Even cash for the fundamentals - the epidemiological surveys on which any coherent oral health strategy should rest - have remained in doubt.

On core funding for high street services, no attempt has been made to keep pace with either inflation or population growth. The gulf is such that the BDA has estimated it would take an additional £879m to restore resourcing to 2010 levels.

The Government has acknowledged that the system NHS dentistry works to is unfit for purpose and has pledged reform. This Spending Review will determine whether necessary resources are in place to underpin the promised rebuild. Patients deserve an adequately funded system that delivers dental care for all those who need it. It is crucial that further increases in patient charges are not used to help balance the books, and that funds are in place to guarantee the research required to measure and meet patient demand.

Ultimately, dentistry is a cradle to grave service the NHS offers which primarily focuses on maintaining good health. If the Government and the NHS are committed to the prevention agenda, then we need meaningful reform. 'Do more with less' cannot be the mantra underpinning any new model for NHS dentistry.



Sir Robert Francis QC  
Chair, Healthwatch England



Eddie Crouch  
Chair, British Dental Association

cc. Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP, DHSC, Maria Caulfield MP, DHSC, Sara Hurley, NHSE, Ed Waller, NHSE, Sharon Egan, DHSC