

Access to NHS Dental Care in Powys

July 2022



CYNGOR IECHYD CYMUNED
COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCIL

Accessible formats

This report is also available in Welsh.

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About the Community Health Councils (CHCs)

CHCs are the independent watchdog of the National Health Service (NHS) within Wales. CHCs encourage and support people to have a voice in the design and delivery of NHS services.

CHCs work with the NHS, inspection and regulatory bodies. CHCs provide an important link between those who plan and deliver NHS services, those who inspect and regulate it and those who use it.

CHCs hear from the public in many different ways. Before the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs regularly visited NHS services to hear from people while they were receiving care and treatment. CHCs also heard from people at local community events, and through community representatives and groups.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, CHCs have focused on engaging with people in different ways.

This includes surveys, apps, videoconferencing and social media to hear from people directly about their views and experiences of NHS services as well as through community groups.

There are 7 CHCs in Wales. Each one represents the “patient and public” voice in a different part of Wales.

Powys CHC represents the views of people living in Powys whether the NHS services they use are within or outside of Powys.

Background & Introduction

In 2021, we sent a report to Powys Teaching Health Board which outlined the results of a survey about access to dental services in Powys during COVID-19.¹ At that time, more than half of the people who responded to our survey told us that they were unable to access an NHS dentist in Powys.

The Health Board told us about the changes and developments which were happening with dental services in Powys. The Health Board developed an improvement plan and we have been monitoring actions against the plan.

On 20 June 2022, we picked up on social media concerns about dentists, particularly in Crickhowell and Newtown. The concerns in Crickhowell were about appointments being cancelled and the concerns in Newtown were about the closure of a dental practice.

We wanted to find out more about people's current experience of NHS dental care in Powys.

Our report reflects the views and experiences we've heard from people. It does not reflect everyone's experience. We know that people's individual views and experiences are all different.

¹ <https://powyschc.nhs.wales/what-we-have-to-say/news/access-to-dentists-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

What We Did

We decided to set up a short, quick survey to gather Powys residents' experience of obtaining an appointment or getting the treatment they needed with an NHS dentist.

We ran the survey through our social media channels. It was available online from 24 June until 3 July 2022.

We received **199** responses.



Who We Heard From

Here is a snapshot of the people who shared their views and experiences of obtaining dental care.

People do not always tell us everything about themselves when they come to share their experiences and views with us.

199 people completed the survey online

73% were women

80% identified as heterosexual, **1%** identified as gay or lesbian, **2%** identified as asexual, **1.5%** identified as bisexual

The average age of people sharing their views with us was **56**

Just over **90%** were White (Welsh, English, Scottish, Northern Irish, British)

Almost **50%** of people stated that they have No Religion and almost **34%** had Christianity as their religion

24% were carers

13.5% of people had a disability or long-term health condition

You can find out in our Equality Plan what we are doing to hear from different groups of people so that we can better represent the diversity of the communities we serve. You can find our Equality Plan on our website:

<https://powyschc.nhs.wales/about-us/our-governance/>

We asked people to provide their postcode area for where they live. The postcodes with the highest number of respondents were:

Postcode Area	No. of Respondents
LD3	40
NP8	23
SY21	21
LD8	19
LD7	16
LD1	12
LD5	12

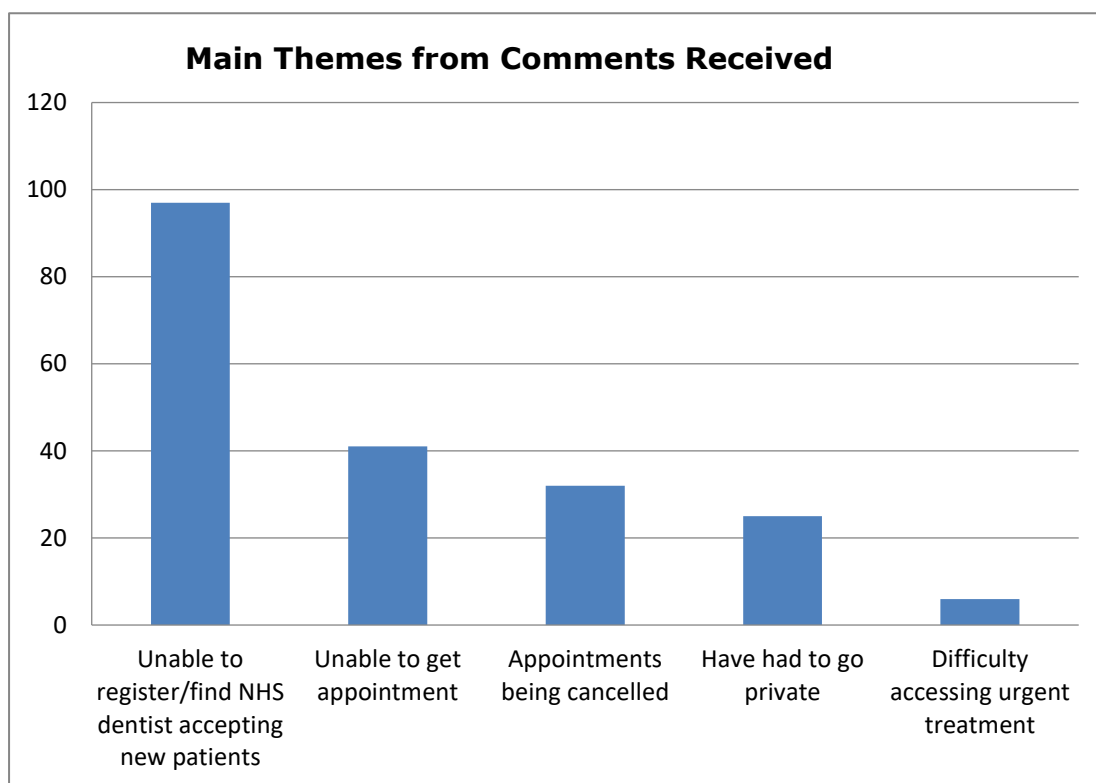
We also received responses from the following postcode areas:

HR3	8
SY16	8
SY18	8
SA9	6
LD2	5
SY15	4
SY17	3
NP7	2
SA10	2

SY22	2
LD4	1
LD6	1
SY19	1
SY20	1
SY24	1
SY7	1

What We Heard From The Survey

The main themes from comments received are shown in the graph below:



The overwhelming response from people was the inability to access an NHS dentist, with almost half of respondents commenting that they had been unable to get registered with or find an NHS dentist who was able to take new patients.

Some people had difficulty finding a private practice that would accept them.

Some people commented that their usual dental practice had gone private or had closed and they were then unable to find an alternative NHS dentist.

Some people felt that their only option was to go private and some told us about the high costs that they had to pay for treatment. Other people commented that they could not afford private dental treatment.

We heard from women who had been pregnant and who were unable to access NHS treatment during their pregnancy.

Some people explained that they had been unable to obtain routine appointments, with some people being told that the dentist was only seeing urgent cases. Some people were told about the backlog of patients that the dentist was working through because of the pandemic.

Several people who had been given routine appointments commented that they were subsequently cancelled, sometimes at very short notice. It was then difficult to re-book an appointment; if it was possible to make an alternative appointment, it was several months away. Some people had a number of appointments cancelled, meaning that it was many months or even years since their last appointment.

We heard from people who had received urgent treatment which was considered a temporary fix but then not had the follow-up care they expected. Some people mentioned that they were having to obtain kits to carry out temporary fillings themselves.

Some people shared their poor experience of obtaining urgent dental treatment.

Below are some quotes from the survey responses:

Having moved to the area a year ago, I have been unable to find an NHS dentist in the local area, and even finding a private one is proving a challenge. My children haven't seen a dentist since 2019.

I have not been able to register with a NHS dentist.

I have tried for 4 years to find an NHS dentist and am unable to get myself registered.

Moved here in 2015 and have never been able to get NHS treatment. I'm 71 and could do with a little help!!

We had to sign up with a private dentist because we couldn't find an NHS dentist when we moved to Newtown

No dentists are taking on new clients, haven't been able to get an appointment for two years even with having two babies in that time and midwives pushing for me to go.

I have periodontal problem and unless I pay for a hygienist I would of lost all my teeth by now.

I can't find anyone private or nhs to take me on

Can't afford Private treatment can't get an NHS dentist

I was with an NHS dentist but was swapped to private by the practice. Been private ever since as noone seems to take on adult NHS anymore.

6 years and still not on NHS Dentist books despite having put name on loads of waiting lists. Need to have regular checkups and attention as I suffer with severe gum disease.

I'm trying to get to see a dentist because I am pregnant but can't find a dental practice that will see me

As a family we were with an NHS dentist and then moved to private without prior information. On a recent visit my 13year old son was told he needed 2 fillings & 2 extractions as he needed a referral for a brace - I was then told the cost would be £400. Unbelievable for a 13year old.

I moved to Rhayader area over 3 years ago and have been trying to find an NHS dentist. I have been pregnant and just had my baby and me and my 3 children cannot find a dentist in powys to register at. I can't afford private treatment so haven't been for over 4 years. I really do need to see someone soon as have needed some treatment and my children need to see the dentist too.

I couldn't get one is the simple answer resulting in a tooth extraction at a later date. I'm furious as it now costing me £2,300 for an implant.

At Christmas, I cracked two teeth. Every dentist I contacted said they were not taking on any new NHS patients, but I could see them privately, which was out of the question. So I now have two broken teeth, which are sometimes painful, plus eating is very difficult.

I have tried for the past 12 months to get an appointment for my children and I to get a checkup with our dentist in Welshpool. Getting through to them on the phone was the main problem. The when we did get offered an appointment it was 6 months away. The appointment was then cancelled and another appointment was not available. So I have made the decision to go to England and go private! Dental services In Powys are not good at all.

Have had a dental problem since Feb 2020 and in the last year alone I have had four appointments cancelled

My appointment for a checkup was cancelled 5 times. I got in as an emergency as I said I was having toothache. The dentist only checked the problem one I had to make another appointment to have the rest of my teeth checked but that's not until September.

Unable to get appointments and when you do they are cancelled and usually at the last minute!

My appointments have been cancelled without any reason being given. When I try to make a new one, I am being told only emergencies appointments are being made and I'll hear from them in due course.

Awful always having appointments cancelled and then not being booked back in for weeks for that then to be cancelled last minute and treatment is not being completed once started

About a year ago we had a letter telling us that they no longer had an NHS service due to one of their dentists leaving. I tried in vain to get another dentist. A few months ago I had a problem and booked an appointment with [another] dentist. In short I am halfway through a £2,000 programme of work and my husband who also had raging toothache recently is in the middle of £1,000 worth of work. None of this is cosmetic but due to problems plus booking with a new dentist (X-rays etc), We have savings to be able to do this but I have no idea how people come anywhere close to affording a dentist.

My March 2020 app was cancelled, and haven't been able to get an app since! In Aug 2020 1/2 my tooth fell out, there's wasn't pain, but it was sharp. On ringing the dentist was told to file it with a nail file!! In Nov 2020 I had a very bad abscess, the roof of my mouth was swollen, my cheek hurt... the dentist rang me and advised gargling!! No apps available! Haven't seen 1 since! I know when I do go somewhere I will need at least half my teeth out as my gums are bad!

Unable to get appointment, offered me take away filling kit. Went to collect but not allowed over doorstep. Rang again and told they are no longer doing nhs and only option was to go private with them and they sent out a letter and direct debit form to me. So I'm guessing I won't get appointment before august when the private treatment starts.

Emergency appointment needed for child with tooth pain, absolutely shocking we were left with an hour to make a booking couldn't get through and we're told by 10 am on a Sat there is no appointments left, my child was left to suffer for 3 days with extreme pain and no access to any help

We did receive some positive comments about dental care received.

I rang the Powys dental helpline and they found me a dentist in Ystradgynlais- I was seen nothing after and the practice were very helpful patient and understanding

Yes have been able to get appointment with dentist in Knighton

No problem

I thought I needed a tooth out but didn't expect an appointment as it was during the Pandemic. It was a new Dentist, mine having retired, so I was apprehensive but I was seen and offered root canal treatment to save the tooth. I was very impressed, root canal work not pleasant but dentists were great.

With great issues, had to ring 111 and the dental helpline and they were fantastic. I had an appointment the same day. Lady on the dental helpline was so supportive

Easy. I've been with my dentist since 1976 they've never let me down.

Learning From What We Heard

From the information we received from this patient survey, it is clear that there are many people living in Powys who are not able to access NHS dental services. This does not seem to have changed since the last survey that we did in late 2020/early 2021.

Based on the postcode area information, the survey has highlighted that there are particular problems being experienced by people living in the mid-Powys area, but also in the Welshpool and Crickhowell areas. However, we should not assume that the problems in access are only in these areas.

People still expect to be registered with a particular dental practice in order to be able to access NHS dental care.

People reported that they are not receiving the routine checks they wish to have. Some people have not had a dental check for a number of years.

There are children and young people under 18 who are not having the recommended six-monthly check-ups with a dentist.

Some people need to have follow-up treatment or a course of treatment to be completed and this has not happened for them.

Although not highlighted by the public through this survey responses, the CHC has been made aware that there are at least two dental practices in Powys (Newtown) who have given notice to cease providing NHS dental care.

Recommendations

The CHC is aware that Welsh Government has a commitment to reform primary care dentistry and increase access to dental care.

The public needs to be given clear information about what the reform will mean for them and how they should expect to be able to access dental treatment in the future.

Powys Teaching Health Board has been working hard to try to improve access to dental care in Powys. The CHC understands that some of the improvements are likely to take some time.

The CHC would like to see the latest updated Improvement Plan, including an update on the 'Designed to Smile' programme for primary and nursery children and the 'Gwên am Byth' programme for people living in residential and nursing homes.

The CHC would like to be provided with a mitigation plan which explains what will be put in place where the NHS dental contracts are ceasing.

The CHC would like to understand what the Health Board plans are to recruit and/or train new dentists or other dental care professionals to work in Powys.

The CHC would like to understand how the Health Board will keep Powys residents informed and updated on the above plans. Also how it will let people know how they can access urgent and routine NHS dental care and what to do if they are struggling to access the dental care they require.

Response from Powys Teaching Health Board

The Health Board made the following response to the CHC recommendations:

The CHC would like to see the latest updated Improvement Plan, including an update on the 'Designed to Smile' programme for primary and nursery children and the 'Gwên am Byth' programme for people living in residential and nursing homes

The Designed to Smile programme has re-started including fluoride application to primary school children. The programme will continue to target primary schools in the most deprived quintiles. The pandemic has caused significant disruption to the programme, but it is anticipated that a full recovery of the programme is now on target for the beginning of the new school year in September 2022.

The restart of the Gwên am Byth (GaB) led by the PTHB Community Dental Service has commenced and essential GaB is being offered to all residential and nursing care homes across Powys. A combination of recruitment difficulties and the pandemic has caused significant disruption to the programme and understandably there has been a slower recovery to the programme, but it is now well underway.

The CHC would like to be provided with a mitigation plan which explains what will be put in place where the NHS dental contracts are ceasing

PTHB is committed to maintaining and where possible increasing patient access to NHS dental services. Two current examples of this is an additional/new tender contract opportunity in mid

Powys, and also the re-tendering of an existing contract (due to a retirement) in north Powys.

Multiple factors influence a mitigation plan when an NHS dental contract is terminated. In summary the mitigation usually involves the reprovision of the service via a tender process or via a salaried *General Dental Services* model delivered by the PTHB Community Dental Service. In addition to this and depending on the sustainability of the existing provision of NHS dental services in the area an existing provider may be approached to consider increasing an existing contract.

Whilst alternative arrangements are progressed to re-provide a service, mitigating interim arrangements are put in place with local practices and or the Community Dental Service to ensure that patients have access to urgent care. The terminating contract holder during the termination period of 3 months, works collaboratively with the Health Board to inform patients to contact the PTHB Dental Helpline for future access to NHS dental services.

In addition to this and to support urgent access provision, the health board has been proactively securing urgent access provision across the county with both independent contractors and via the Community Dental Service. Currently as part of Contract Reform, PTHB has negotiated 40 urgent slots per week from contractors under the new Contract Variation agreement, and also 15 urgent slots per week via the Community Dental Service. Urgent access is reviewed on a weekly basis from a demand and capacity perspective.

The CHC would like to understand what the Health Board plans are to recruit and/or train new dentists or other dental care professionals to work in Powys

PTHB is currently in dialogue with Cardiff Dental School to receive undergraduate students placements within the

Community Dental Services, this will expose students to opportunities to work in Powys within a rural setting which will help with long term recruitment.

PTHB currently has three dental foundation training practices, one based within an independent contractor and two within the Community Dental Service. This strategy has been successful in the past by retaining dentists upon completion of the programme and continues to show newly qualified dentists the benefits of working and living in Powys. The Community Dental Service offers a portfolio career pathway to enable dentists to have a varied case mix, develop additional skills and become an integrated member of the community team, working alongside specialists. Offering a salaried position in a supportive work environment can be attractive to some dentists compared to a self-employed associate position.

An important component of value based health care is through an expanded multi disciplinary dental team. The health board is currently scoping a 'grow your own approach' for Dental Nurse and Dental Therapist posts, by potentially offering a recruitment and training/development package.

Prior to the pandemic workshops have been put on for sixth form students in all areas of health care including dentistry to try and attract "home grown" students. A similar health career event is planned for the forthcoming autumn.

The community dental service is currently looking to offer dental core training places, these training posts are attractive to young dentists as they provide the opportunity for developing enhanced skills. It is anticipated that a post will be available in September 2023.

The CHC would like to understand how the Health Board will keep Powys residents informed and updated on the above plans. Also how it will let people know how they can access urgent and routine NHS dental care and what to do if they are struggling to access the dental care they require

PTHB works in collaboration with all dental practices to support the signposting of patients who do not have access to an NHS dentist. This can either be through the PTHB Dental Helpline or via 111.

In September 2021, PTHB established a dedicated dental helpline for Powys residents to support patients with dental queries and concerns. Members of the public can call the helpline number if they do not have access to a dentist and are either signposted to a dentist with slot capacity, urgent capacity or added onto a centralised waiting list. The waiting list informs future dental access provision requirements across Powys. The helpline is covered from 9am-5pm, Mon-Fri. This line also has the ability for the patients to leave their details if they call outside of these hours. Access to dental services information is via the PTHB website and social media. Dental helpline posters have been distributed to all dental practices and general practice.

Communications via dental access is reviewed on an ongoing basis. Any temporary change in service is flagged to the CHC.

Thanks

We thank everyone who took the time to share their views and experiences with us about dental services in Powys.

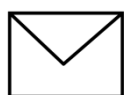
We hope the feedback people have taken time to share influences healthcare services to recognise and value what they do well – and take action where they need to as quickly as they can to make things better.

Feedback

We'd love to hear what you think about this publication, and any suggestions about how we could have improved it, so we can use this to make our future work better.



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