

Experiences of Dentistry in East Sussex since March 2020



Survey Findings: March 2022

Contents

1	Background	4
2	What we did.....	4
3	Who did we hear from?	5
4	Our report	5
5	Key Findings from the survey	6
6	What you told us	8
6.1	Accessing dental services in East Sussex before March 2020.....	8
6.2	Accessing dental services in East Sussex since March 2020	9
6.3	Satisfaction with dental services in East Sussex before March 2020	10
6.4	Obtaining access to dental services since March 2020	11
6.5	Ease of access to dental services since March 2020	12
6.6	Emergency support with dental issues since March 2020	13
6.7	Standard of care.....	14
6.8	Finding an East Sussex dentist accepting NHS patients	14
6.9	Joining a dental practice in East Sussex	15
6.10	Dental treatment plans.....	15
6.11	Eligibility for NHS dental treatment.....	16
6.12	Removal from patient lists.....	17
6.13	Information on COVID-19 precautions	18
6.14	Access to information on dental services	19
6.15	Impacts on dentistry services since March 2020	20
6.16	Satisfaction with dental services in East Sussex since March 2020.....	23
6.17	Comments on the dental experience since March 2020	24
7	Conclusions and recommendations	28
7.1	Conclusions.....	28
7.2	Recommendations.....	30

8	Appendix 1 - Summary of equalities information.....	33
8.1	What is your age?.....	33
8.2	To which gender do you most identify?	33
8.3	Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?.....	34
8.4	Please tell us which sexual orientation you identify with.....	34
8.5	How would you describe your ethnic background?	35
8.6	How would you describe your religion or beliefs?	35
8.7	Do you have a disability?	36
8.8	Do you consider yourself to be a carer, have a disability or a long-term health condition? <i>Please tick all that apply</i>	36
9	Appendix 2 - Survey questions.....	37

Contact Details:

Healthwatch East Sussex
Freepost RTTT-BYBX-KCEY
Greencoat House
32 St Leonards Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN21 3UT

Telephone: [0333 101 4007](tel:03331014007)

Email: enquiries@healthwatcheastsex.co.uk

1 Background

During 2020-21, dentistry was the third most common reason that people contacted us, with only GPs and COVID-19 vaccinations generating more enquiries.



Whilst we heard issues about dentistry provision in East Sussex before the COVID-19 pandemic, since it began these have become increasingly common.

Our [COVID-19 survey](#) in 2020 found that the service people had experienced the most challenges in obtaining clear information about was dentistry, and since the summer of 2021 it has become the most common reason get in touch with Healthwatch East Sussex.

Dentistry saw a very rapid reduction in capacity due to the restrictions on routine and emergency dentistry imposed due to the high COVID-19 infection risks. This, combined with the length of the lockdown and the limited availability of dentists (especially NHS dentists), has created challenges for many in accessing dentistry services in a timely way.

Whilst dental services have gradually re-opened, demand still exceeds capacity in many cases. We have heard from people struggling to access emergency treatment, find dental practices accepting new patients, experiencing delays and cancellations in routine appointments, additional costs for treatment and raised anxiety due to not being able to access check-ups and preventative services such as hygienists.

2 What we did...

Between October and November 2021, Healthwatch ran a survey to gather experiences of people in East Sussex who had or had tried to access dental services, both before and since the COVID-19 pandemic began. We wanted to hear about the good, the bad and the indifferent.

This survey was primarily distributed online through our newsletter, bulletins and partner networks, but people were invited to complete paper versions of the survey, with staff offering to complete the survey online or over the telephone.



Our goal was to understand how people were experiencing dental services, both private and NHS, and whether these met their needs.

We focused our questions (see Appendix 2) on capturing feedback on:

- Registration with dentists and access to NHS and private services
- Satisfaction with different aspects of dental services (e.g. waiting times, advice, treatment, referrals and costs) before and during the pandemic
- Whether people’s dental needs were met, including access to emergency support
- Awareness of dental costs - especially NHS charges and exemptions

➤ Information on changes to dental services

This report provides a brief summary of the key themes identified in the responses to the survey.

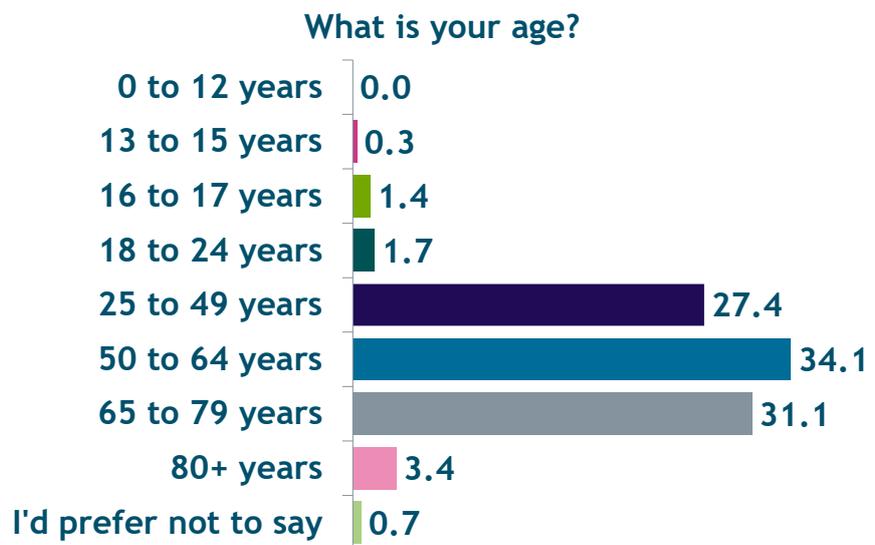
3 Who did we hear from?

296 people completed our survey.

282 respondents answered on their own behalf (95.3%), with 12 (4.1%) being made by people on behalf of those they care for, with 2 respondents not answering (0.7%).

Respondents were across all age groups, including:

- 5 people aged 18 or younger (1.7%)
- 187 people between 19 and 64 (63.2%) and
- 102 people aged 65 and older (34.5%)
- 2 people didn't want to disclose their age (0.7%)



A full breakdown of the demographic and equalities characteristics of respondents is provided in Appendix 1.

4 Our report

Please note that each respondent to the survey did not necessarily complete all of the questions asked. These are shown in graphs and tables as 'No response'.

Percentages shown in this report are as a proportion of the total number of respondents to the survey (296) unless otherwise stated.

Statements and quotes are subjective accounts submitted to the survey by respondents and do not represent the views of Healthwatch East Sussex.

5 Key Findings from the survey

We undertook a survey of people's experience of dentistry in East Sussex during October and November 2021 and received 296 responses. The summary below provides the key findings.

- Respondents identified an overall decline in their satisfaction with dental services since March 2020, when compared to their pre-pandemic experiences. The largest decline in satisfaction related to waiting times, but also in: advice received, treatment received, access to information, charges and costs, and speed of referrals.
- Most respondents found timely and appropriate access to dentistry services and treatment in their local area (both NHS and private) had got harder. This applied to both routine and emergency services. This was particularly problematic for anyone who had not regularly accessed dental services before the pandemic.
- Only one-in-three of the respondents who had tried to join a dental practice (NHS or private) since March 2020 were successful. Some of these had joined as private patients because they could not find practices accepting NHS patients. Some respondents expressed a perception that they could only access treatment in a realistic timescale if they went private.
- Some respondents had been removed from dental practice lists, but over half of these were not informed that this had happened. Where provided, reasons given by practices included a lack of regular attendance, missed appointments and departure of staff. These individuals then faced challenges in finding another practice accepting patients.
- The lack of a 'one-stop shop' location identifying the practices offering NHS dentistry and accepting patients was a major source of frustration. The NHS 'Find a dentist' website shows contracted NHS practices, but not which are accepting patients. It was often found to be out-of-date, as were individual practice websites. This left people to have to 'ring round' practices, impacting both their time and that of practice staff.
- Of those who responded, the most common rating provided by respondents on the standard of care they had received from dentists and practice staff was 'Poor', which was identified by one-in-five people.
- Some examples were provided of practices (both NHS and private) which had managed to continue to provide very prompt and responsive care, which suggests that there is some variation in the dentistry services available.
- Only a third of respondents indicated that they had discussed and agreed a dental treatment plan, despite this being recommended by General Dental Council and NHS guidance. Their comments demonstrate examples of confusion and concern over how

and when treatment and associated costs were explained to patients, especially differences between private and NHS options.

- Some respondents were unclear on their eligibility for ‘free’ NHS dental treatment, which suggests they may benefit from this being explained as part of the treatment plan process or further information provided in a form that they can access. Some may be paying for services unnecessarily.
- Clarity on charges and costs could be improved. Some people noted additional charges or changes to prices occurring during the pandemic, sometimes with limited explanation or limited opportunity for discussion. The significant gap between NHS and private fees for certain treatments was identified as a concern.
- Responses and comments indicated that dental practices in East Sussex were short of dentists and other staff, and there were often delays in finding replacements. A lack of staff greatly impacted on the appointment capacity available, and consequently on waiting times.
- People highlighted anxiety about the challenges in obtaining routine check-ups and hygienist appointments, citing concerns about the lack of preventative services and longer-term impacts on their oral and wider health. Repeated cancellations or delays due to limited practice capacity or the prioritisation of emergencies were also a source of frustration.
- The restricted capacity and high thresholds for accessing urgent and emergency treatment, both from practices and Emergency Dental Services (EDS), left some people experiencing significant discomfort and pain, as well as leading to infections, tooth loss and wider impacts on their day-to-day lives. As a result, people have been forced to seek support from other health services including NHS111, GPs and Accident and Emergency Departments.
- Information provided to patients on COVID-19 precautions in place at practices and on the steps that attendees needed to take were mostly regarded as very clear, often shared via practice staff, email and text. Only one-in-ten respondents identified this as being poorly communicated by their practice.
- The common response from respondents was that the information provided by dental staff about available dental services during the pandemic was poor, including on practice websites and via other forms of communication. Similarly, more people rated the information provided by the NHS and British Dental Association website as being poor compared to those who felt it was good.

6 What you told us

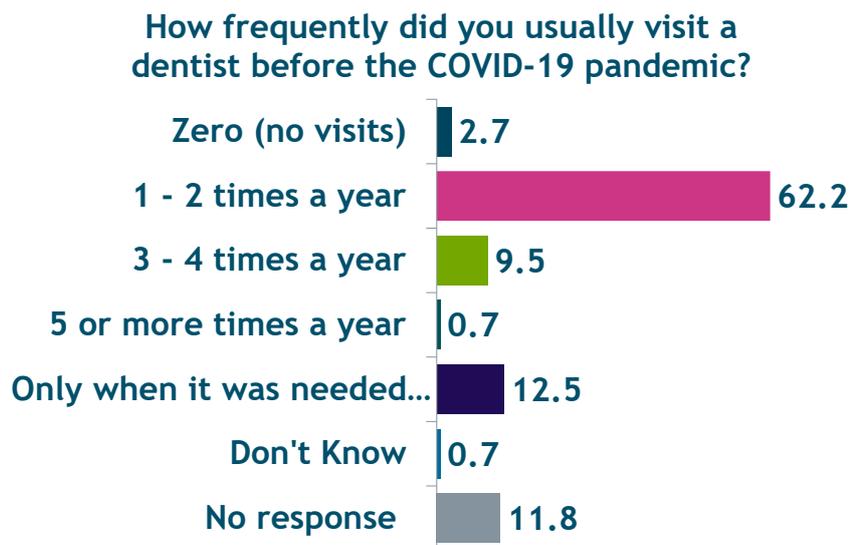
6.1 Accessing dental services in East Sussex before March 2020

Of the 296 respondents we heard from, approximately three quarters (73.6%) indicated they had received regular dental care before the COVID-19 pandemic, whilst 13.9% had not and 12.5% offered no response.

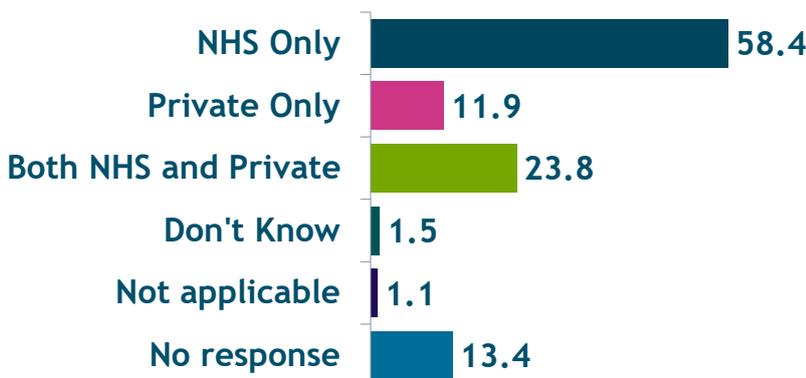
Nearly two-thirds of respondents (62.2%) visited their dentist one or two times a year, and 9.5% three to four times a year.

However, 12.5% (37 people) only attended their dentist when the need arose, such as when they had an urgent or emergency problem.

This suggests that the bulk of the people who participated in the survey were regular dental service users and able to assess differences between pre-COVID services and those during the pandemic.



Before the COVID-19 pandemic (March 2020), was your dental care or dental treatment covered by the NHS, privately or a combination of the two?



Over half of the respondents (58.4%) we heard from regularly used only NHS dental services, with a quarter (23.8%) combining NHS and private treatment and approximately one in ten (11.9%) only using private dental services.

6.2 Accessing dental services in East Sussex since March 2020

Have you used or tried to use a dental practice or service in East Sussex since March 2020?



Approximately three-quarters (77.0%) of the 296 respondents to the survey indicated they had tried to use a dental practice or service in East Sussex since the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020.

A majority of respondents said that they had experienced issues in obtaining access to dental treatment (both private and NHS) since March 2020, but particular issues occurred for people seeking to find dentists in their local area accepting NHS patients.

“Can’t get an NHS dentist that I can get to & can’t afford private.”

“Tried to book in for a routine check without success with all practices in Bexhill.”

“Phoned 7+ dentists most months, none of which can take NHS patients but will take private patients.”

“I attended Brighton Dental Clinic (private) because none of the dentists in my area are offering NHS (I tried over 10 ones).”

The most common reason given for seeking to access dental services was for routine dental check-ups (46.6%). However, the second most common was people seeking emergency or urgent dental treatment (26.4%). In part, the latter may have been driven by the challenges in accessing routine care throughout the pandemic.

Other common reasons provided were for hygienist appointments (14.5%), scheduled dental treatment or procedures (non-emergency) (12.8%) and continuation of ongoing treatment (10.5%). The comments also identified barriers and challenges in accessing these dental services.

6.3 Satisfaction with dental services in East Sussex before March 2020

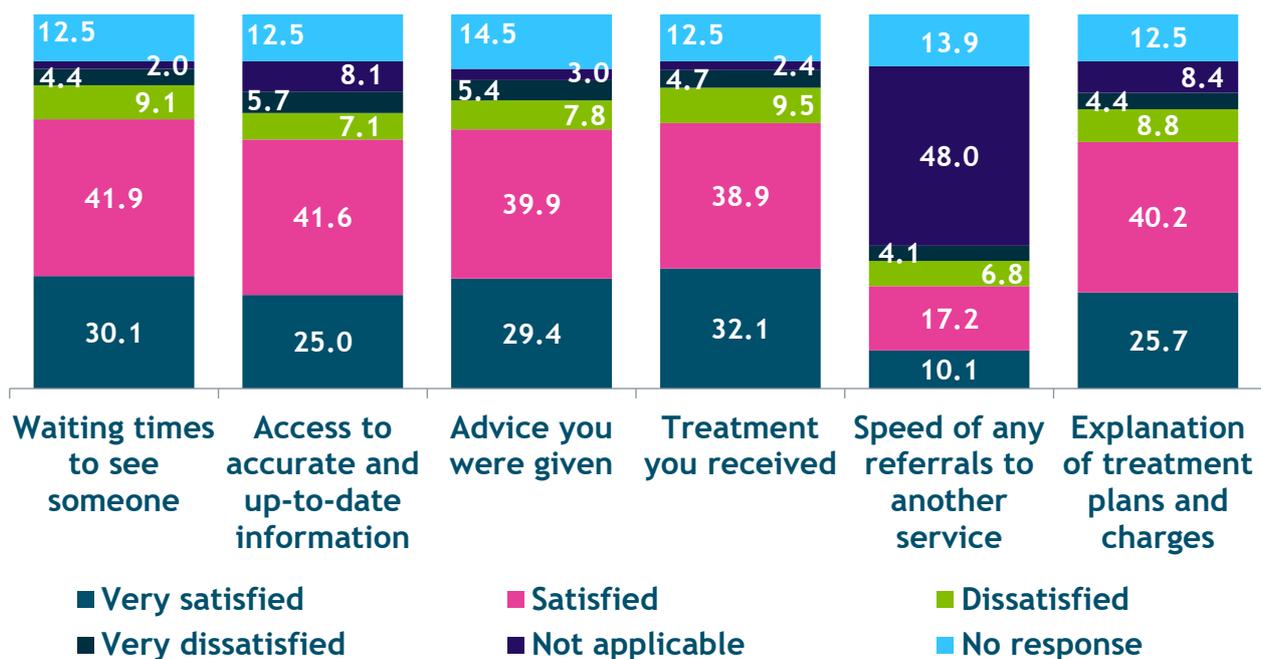
To set the scene for people’s experiences and perceptions of dental services during the pandemic, we asked people to provide their views on dentistry provision in East Sussex before March 2020.

Overall, the majority of respondents indicated satisfaction with dentistry services in the county before March 2020. We heard that:

- 72.0% respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with **waiting times**
- 71.0% respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with the **treatment they received**
- 69.3% respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with the **advice they were given**
- 66.6% respondents were satisfied/very satisfied that they had access to **accurate and up-to-date information**
- 65.9% respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with the **explanation of treatment plans and charges**
- 27.3% respondents were satisfied/very satisfied with the **speed or referrals to another service** (*However - this was not applicable for the bulk of respondents*)

The themes where respondents identified the highest levels of dissatisfaction (dissatisfied/very dissatisfied) were treatment received (14.2%), waiting times to see someone (13.5%) and advice given/access to accurate and up-to-date information (12.8%).

Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience of using dental services before COVID-19 (March 2020)?



6.4 Obtaining access to dental services since March 2020

Respondents were asked whether they had been able to book dental appointments or treatment that met their needs since March 2020.

The most common individual response was ‘No’ by more than a quarter (27.0%) of respondents. However, ‘Yes - Always’ (20.6%) and ‘Yes - Sometimes’ (19.3%) received a combined response of 39.9%.

Respondents who answered ‘No’ or ‘Yes - Sometimes’ were asked which services they had experienced problems in accessing and what impact this had on them, and 106 comments were received. Some examples are provided below.

“Had to go private as NHS were only offering to do emergency appointments.”

“No-one taking new NHS patients, no routines or hygienist appointments available - I have not had a regular check-up in 2 years. I have a non-urgent issue but still unable to access anywhere.”

“Couldn’t get emergency appointment and regular appointment cancelled. Had four trips to A&E (for two separate incidents) for antibiotics and an emergency extraction.”

“Was not able to have an appointment for a filling that was needed as dentists not able to do them at the time(?) ended up having an emergency appointment to have the tooth removed.”

Within these comments, the five most common themes were:

- **Lack of access to dental appointments** - 28 (26.4%). This reflected a combination of limited access to routine appts, combined with a high threshold for urgent and emergency cases, as well as changes in practice capacity, with a number of practices highlighting a loss of dentists as impacting on their services.
- **Delays to routine appointments**, such as check-ups, scale-and polish and hygienist appointments - 23 (21.7%). These comments often included concerns about ongoing repeated delays to these services, and the longer-term impact that the loss of these preventative checks and treatment may have.
- **Negative impacts of delays in accessing dental treatment** - 18 (17.0%). These ranged from minor ongoing discomfort, impacts on people’s ability to eat, through to severe pain, infections, and tooth loss. Examples were provided of people being forced to access non-dental services such as their GP, NHS111 and Accident and Emergency Departments due to challenges obtaining appointments at dental practices and the Emergency Dental Service (EDS).
- **Practices not accepting new patients** - 16 (15.1%). Comments focused on an inability to obtain access to any NHS dental treatment, with limited reference also to getting access to private treatment ‘locally’.

- **Delays in accessing emergency treatments** - 11 (10.4%). People identified delays in obtaining emergency treatment from their regular dentist, but also challenges in accessing the Emergency Dental Service.

6.5 Ease of access to dental services since March 2020

Most respondents indicated that across all dental services it has been difficult or very difficult to get an appointment since March 2020.

More than twice the number of respondents (113 - 38.2%) found it difficult or very difficult to obtain appointments at their regular dental practice compared to those who found it easy or very easy (47 - 15.9%). This gap was even more pronounced for those seeking appointments at practices other than their own (9 - 3.0% vs 61 - 20.6%).

Respondents provided comments which highlighted their experiences in seeking to obtain appointments with different dental services, and the impact it had on them.

“I wish this Practice took NHS Patients. They only take Private but in emergency you got no choice if other Practices cannot take you and you are in pain!”

“Arthur Blackman clinic was exceptionally well run for emergency treatment and the on call Dentist was very good.”

“Still can’t see a dentist unless for an emergency. My dentist also retired during the pandemic and the practice can’t find a replacement.”

“New to the area, tried two practices who had no space for new (private) patients, this one was very welcoming and offered appointments to suit me.”

Similar issues in obtaining timely access to appointments, although with a slightly lower frequencies, are also shown for the Urgent Dental Centres, Emergency Dental Service (EDS), Orthodontics, Special Care Dental Services and Hospital Dental Services.

	Very easy or Easy		Acceptable		Very difficult or difficult		Not applicable		No response	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
My regular dental practice	47	15.9	31	10.5	113	38.2	9	3.0	96	32.4
Other dental practices	9	3.0	4	1.4	61	20.6	105	35.5	117	39.5
Orthodontist or other specialist dentists	8	2.7	1	0.3	21	7.1	143	48.3	123	41.6
Emergency Dental Service (EDS)	10	3.4	8	2.7	41	13.9	121	40.9	116	39.2
Special Care Dental Services	5	1.7	1	0.3	20	6.8	151	51.0	119	40.2
Urgent Dental Centre	4	1.4	4	1.4	42	14.2	129	43.6	117	39.5
Hospital Dental Services	1	0.3	1.0	3	18	6.1	52.4	155	40.2	119

6.6 Emergency support with dental issues since March 2020

Nearly a quarter of respondents (24.3%) indicated they had sought emergency support with dental issues from their regular dentist since March 2020.

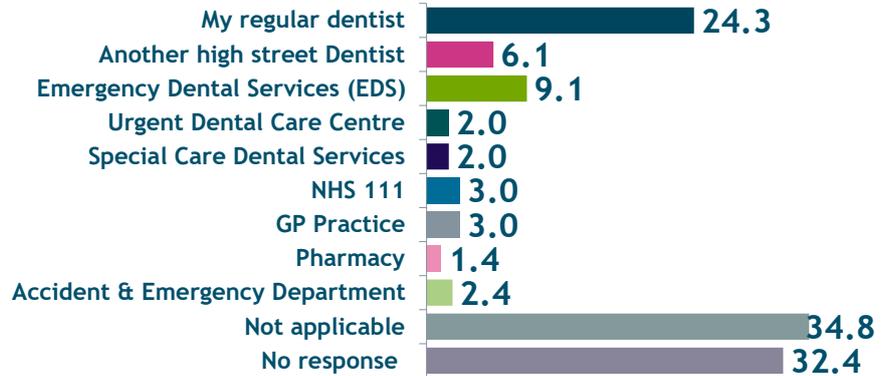
Other common sources included the Emergency Dental Service (9.1%) and other high street dentists (6.1%).

Comments illustrate that people’s experiences of accessing emergency support throughout the pandemic have been mixed.

Some patients have received excellent and responsive care, whilst other have received long waits, and some have had to resort to using other non-dental services such as NHS111, GPs and Accident and Emergency Departments to receive the support they require.

In some instances, people have been unable to obtain assistance and been left in pain or with issues unresolved.

Since March 2020, have you needed to seek emergency support with dental issues from any of the following services?
Please tick all that apply



“Fantastic - immediate appointment and my husband too on another occasion.”

“I still have a broken tooth and I've had 3 courses of antibiotics.”

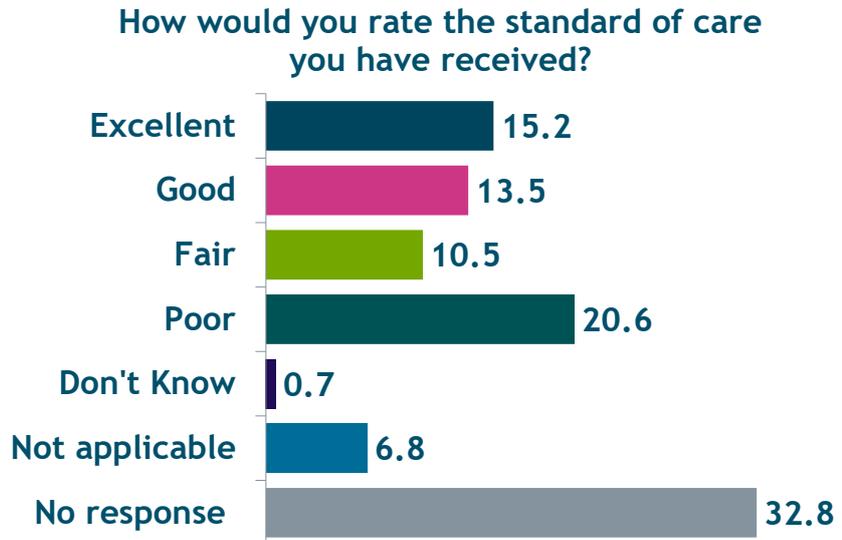
“EDS are brilliant, my normal dentist surgery is appalling, had an extraction done and ended up in A&E as it was done so badly. GP practice have helped out with getting alternative antibiotics to the ones the dentists prescribed.”

“The emergency dental services are excellent and have got me out of real pain. Their service is outstanding.”

6.7 Standard of care

Approximately one-in-five people (20.6%) rated the standard of care received from the dental services they had accessed as 'Poor'.

- 15.2% rated it as Excellent
- 13.5% rated it as Good
- 10.5% rated it as Fair



6.8 Finding an East Sussex dentist accepting NHS patients

Many NHS services, including dentists, signpost people to the 'Find a Dentist' website¹ as a means of identifying dental practices offering NHS treatment.

A majority of respondents indicated that this was not applicable as they already had a dentist, or they had not used the platform. However, of those that had used it (48), a majority rated it as 'poor' in terms of both usefulness (31 - 64.5%) and accuracy (33 - 68.8%).

"The dental practices listed were not accepting NHS patients."

"Gave me a list of dentists that were not accepting NHS patients."

Comments from users indicated several frustrations with the website:

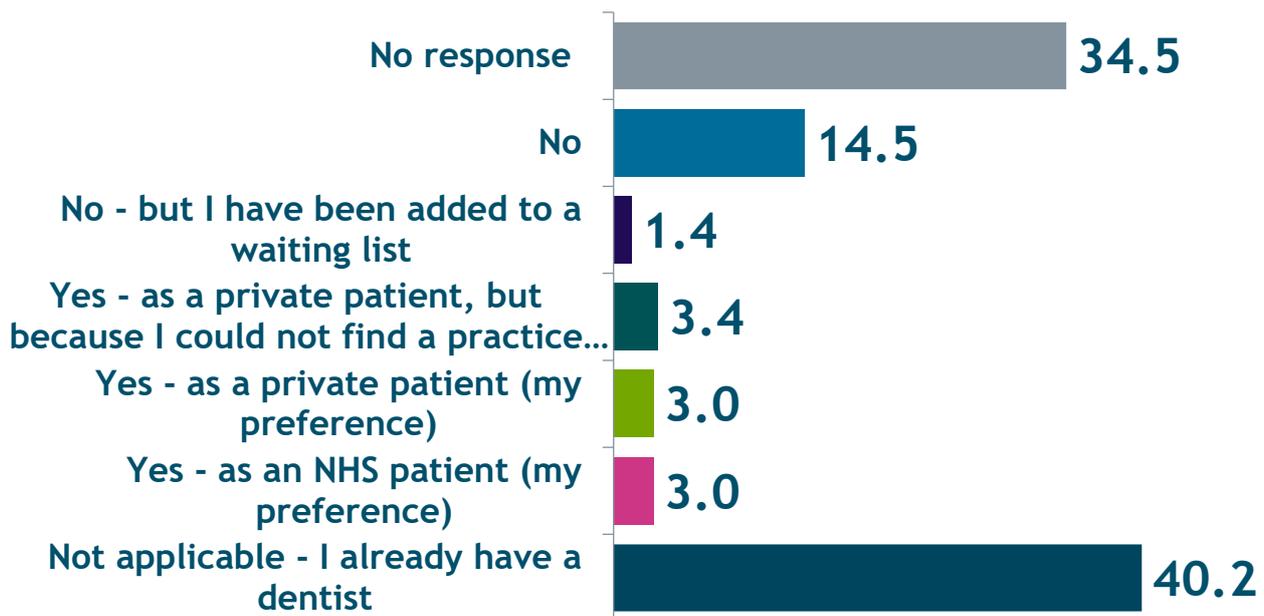
- Many struggled and often failed to find any of the listed dentists accepting NHS patients, but those contacted were often accepting private patients
- Information provided was often inaccurate or not up-to-date
- Listings did not offer clarity on which practices were currently accepting NHS patients, which necessitated the public contacting individual surgeries anyway

¹ <https://www.nhs.uk/service-search/find-a-dentist>

6.9 Joining a dental practice in East Sussex

Of the 75 respondents who have tried to join a dental practice in East Sussex since March 2020, 28 (37.3%) were successful and the remainder (62.6%) were not.

If applicable, have you managed to join the patient list of a dental practice in East Sussex since March 2020?



Of the 28 who were successful in joining a patient list, 10 (35.7%) indicated they had done so as a private patient because they could not find a practice accepting NHS patients.

6.10 Dental treatment plans

The General Dental Council's (GDC) *Standards for the Dental Team* states that patients expect: 'To receive full, clear and accurate information that they can understand, before, during and after treatment, so that they can make informed decisions in partnership with the people providing their care.'

This is reinforced by the NHS guidance² which highlights that patients accessing NHS services should receive a [written treatment plan](#) for Band 2, Band 3 or a mix of NHS and private treatments.

² <https://www.nhs.uk/nhs-services/dentists/what-dental-services-are-available-on-the-nhs/>

Treatments plans should include:

- A clear explanation of the treatment, possible outcomes and what they can expect.
- Clarity on how much treatment will cost before it starts, with patients informed of any changes.
- Communicated in a form that patients can understand via dialogue with the dental team, with a written record kept of any decisions.

Nearly a third of respondents (29.4%) identified they had discussed and agreed a dental treatment plan at their last appointment, but nearly a quarter (24.0%) indicated they had not and 3.4% did not know.

At your last appointment, did your dentist discuss and agree a dental treatment plan (including any charges) with you before treatment was provided?



Whilst some patients may have accessed emergency or one-off dental services where treatment plans

were not appropriate, it is concerning that such a high proportion of respondents had not had discussions with their dentist about the nature, timescale and cost of their dental treatment.

6.11 Eligibility for NHS dental treatment

Previous Healthwatch engagement activity about dental services has identified that public awareness of the eligibility criteria for accessing free NHS dental treatment is often quite mixed.

Whilst a majority of respondents (60.5%) were able to identify their NHS eligibility status, 7.1% (21 people) didn't know.

Are you entitled to free NHS dental treatment?



This is concerning as it means that some people may be paying for dental treatment unnecessarily, and this may particularly impact on those already facing financial hardship.

6.12 Removal from patient lists

We asked survey participants if they had been removed from patient lists at dental practices, and if so, whether they were informed of this.



25 respondents (8.4%) indicated that this had happened to them.

Of these, 9 (3.0%) were aware they had been removed, but 16 (5.4%) had not.

Various reasons were given for people's removal from lists, such as them moving house or opting to move to a different practice

Of people removed by practices, the majority were for failing to regularly attend appointments, but other reasons included a shortage of dentists reducing capacity and practices no longer offering NHS treatment.

“Hadn't attended since 2018. But wasn't aware - only when I rang to make appointment they told me.”

“My dentist left the practice - I was not made aware”

Removal from surgery lists by practices and without making them aware has obvious implications for people, especially as they may only find out at the point when they seek treatment. This is reinforced by the small numbers of dental practices in East Sussex that are currently accepting new NHS patients, which can leave people without access to services.

6.13 Information on COVID-19 precautions

The COVID-19 pandemic led to changes in the standard operating procedure for dental services, but also the precautions that needed to be applied at dental practices based on their individual circumstances. Examples include gaps between appointments, types of appointment (such as less capacity for aerosol generating procedures), restricted use of waiting areas and wearing of masks.

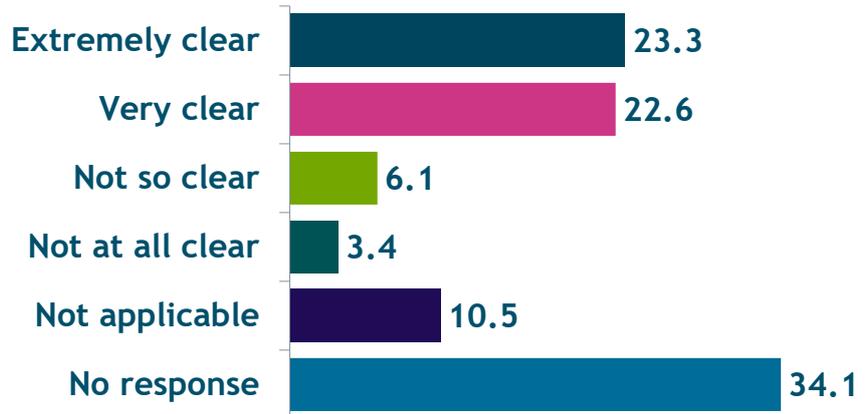
Most respondents (45.9%) identified that details of the precautions were extremely or very clear.

Approximately one-in-ten respondents (9.5%) identified that these were not particularly, or at all clear.

Some examples highlighted pro-active processes where the details on precautions were communicated to patients at the point of booking or via text or email confirmation.

However, in other examples, no information was provided, or it was provided verbally when booking, but was forgotten by the time of the appointment. Other respondents identified they would have preferred information about this to be provided via the practice’s social media or website which they could refer to as needed.

Before attending a dental service, how clear was the information on the COVID-19 precautions in place?



“Given by word of mouth, could be improved by being written.”

“A dentist having a website or even FB messaging!!!”

“No information was offered.”

“Give any info at point of booking, or text the day before.”

6.14 Access to information on dental services

Having access to up-to-date information about health and care services is always important, but even more so during periods when services are subject to change and less accessible or less frequently used, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

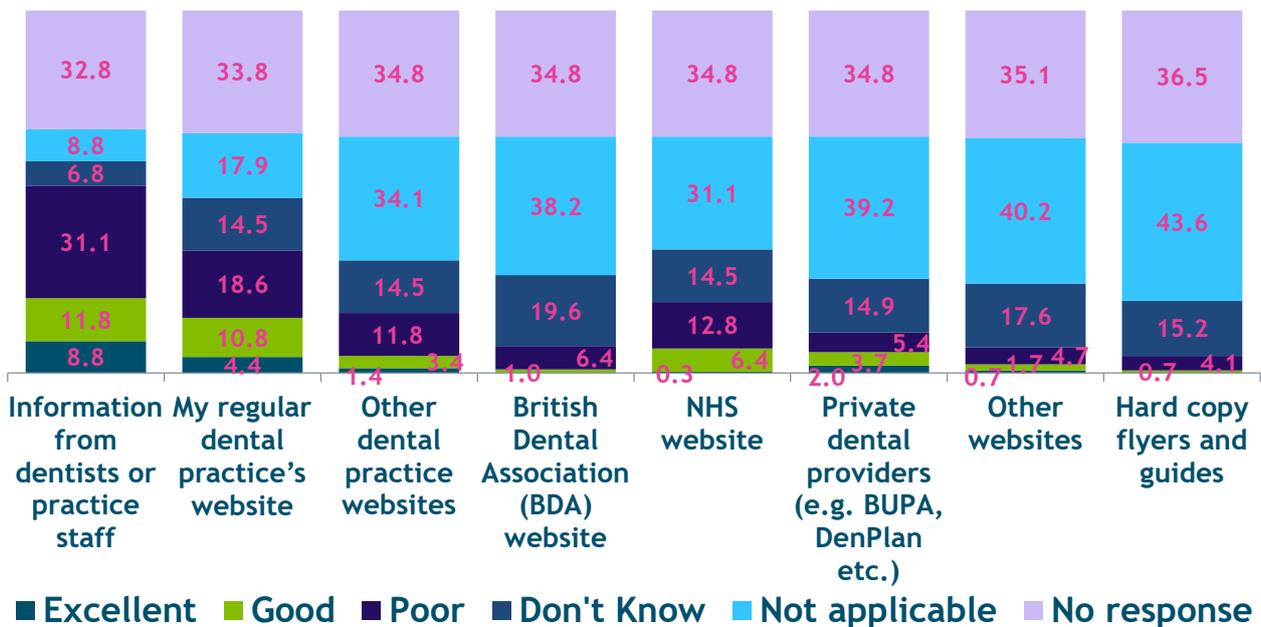
Of those respondents who sought to access dental service information since March 2020, nearly a third (31.1%) rated information provided by dentists or practice staff as Poor, with 20.6% rating it as Excellent or Good.

Similarly, more respondents (18.6%) rated their usual dentist’s website as Poor than Excellent or Good (15.2%), as did respondents accessing other dental practice websites (11.8% versus 4.8%), the NHS website (12.8% versus 6.7%) and British Dental Association (BDA) website (6.4% versus 1.0%).

“What websites say and what is actually available are two different things.”

“I did visit the CQC website to check its rating of my current practice but it seemed rather out of date.”

How would you rate the information available on dentistry services since March 2020?



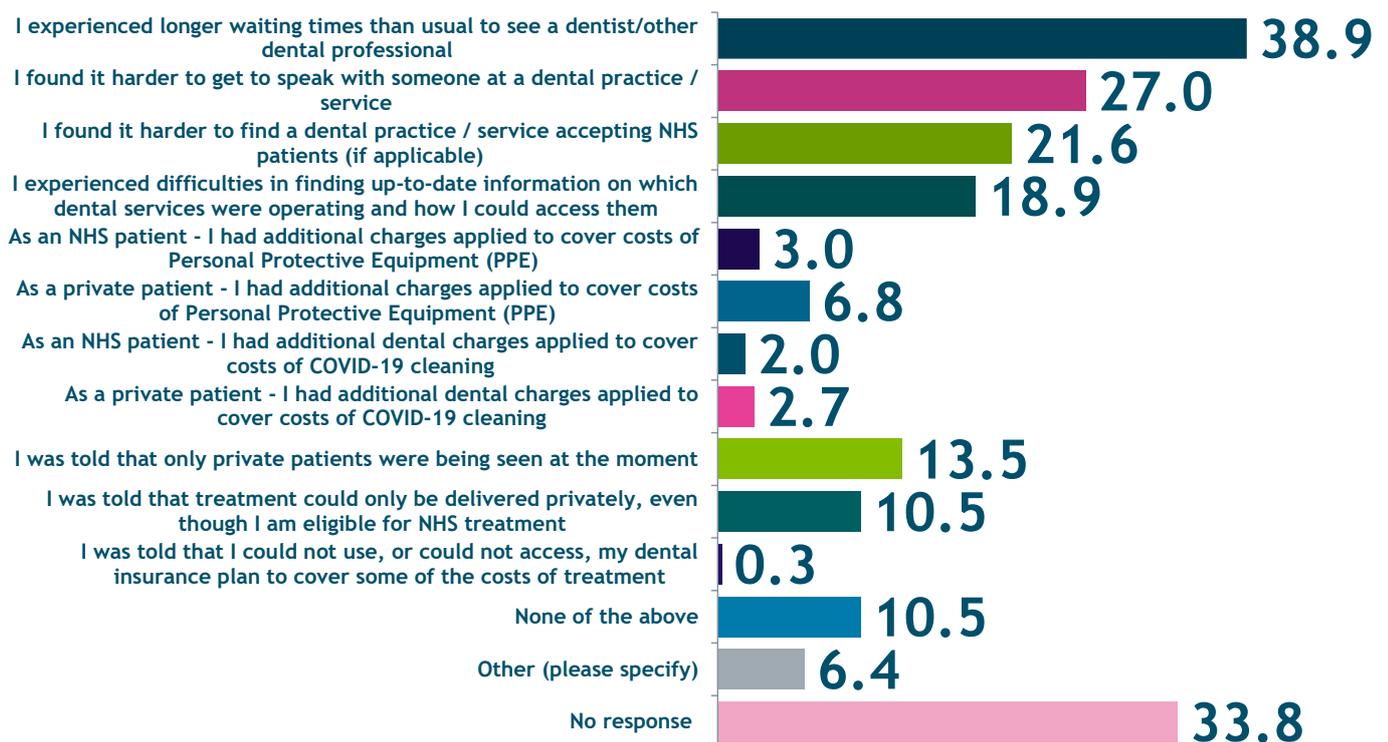
A previous Healthwatch East Sussex [report](#) into patient experiences of dental care in the High Weald and of the Emergency Dental Service (EDS) identified that the information made available by dental services to patients could be improved. Particular themes were websites being up-to-date, the provision of information on NHS charges for treatment and the location and contact details of out-of-hours services.

Findings from this survey suggest that the extent and quality of publicly accessible information available on the status of dentistry services remains variable, both at individual practice level, but also nationally from the NHS and British Dental Association.

6.15 Impacts on dentistry services since March 2020

Our survey asked people to tell us if they had experienced any changes or variations to dentistry services since March 2020. The options provided to them were developed using enquiries and feedback received by Healthwatch East Sussex, Healthwatch England and the wider Healthwatch network.

Please indicate if you have experienced any of the following since March 2020?



- Over a third of respondents (38.9%) had experienced longer wait times than usual to see a dentist, and this applied to both NHS and private dentistry.
 - The suspension of dentistry services at the start of the pandemic and reduction in capacity since has led to a backlog of people contacting practices seeking routine appointments, follow-up treatment or to register as new patients.

- More than a quarter (27.0%) of people found it **harder to contact dental practices and services**.
 - The latent demand for dental treatment built up during the pandemic has been released by the resumption of services, but still appears to exceed the available supply, with more people seeking appointments than are available.
- Approximately one-in-five people (21.6%) we heard from had found it **harder to find a dental practice accepting NHS patients**.
 - Mystery Shopping of dental practices by Healthwatch East Sussex in December 2021 identified that a number of dental practices had ceased delivering NHS dentistry services since the start of the pandemic. This has reduced capacity.
- Nearly a fifth (18.9%) of respondents identified **difficulties in finding up-to-date information on dentistry services**.
 - As previously identified in both this and other Healthwatch reports (both locally and nationally), the information provided publicly on dentistry services varies considerably, largely due to practices being independent private businesses.
 - However, many lay reviews of dental practice websites identify that the information could be made more accessible, detailed and kept up to date. The lack of suitable information via websites may encourage people to make contact with practices directly, increasing demand on receptionists, and in-turn generating challenges for other people in making contact.
- 13.5% of respondents were told that practices were **only seeing private patients** when making enquiries since March 2020.
 - Mystery Shopping of dental practices by Healthwatch East Sussex in December 2021 identified that the wait times for NHS and private patients could differ significantly, even at the same practice. Whilst lead in times for NHS patients were often several months, they could be only days or weeks for private patients.
- A limited number of respondents (both NHS and private) identified that they had **received additional charges for PPE and COVID-19 cleaning** as a result of visiting their dental practice
 - Some additional charges were levied by practices to cover the additional costs associated with PPE/COVID-19 cleaning.
 - Some examples were provided where no additional ‘itemised’ costs linked to the pandemic were levied, but there was an increase in the charges for treatments.
- Approximately one-in-ten respondents (10.5%) indicated that they had experienced none of the challenges or issues listed since the pandemic began in March 2020.
 - It is positive that some respondents have indicated that they have experienced no problems in accessing dental services as and when they have needed to.

“Emergencies and private patients only being seen”

“I had tooth extraction and was way too expensive and have to accept which I assumed was due to Pandemic.. I got no choice.”

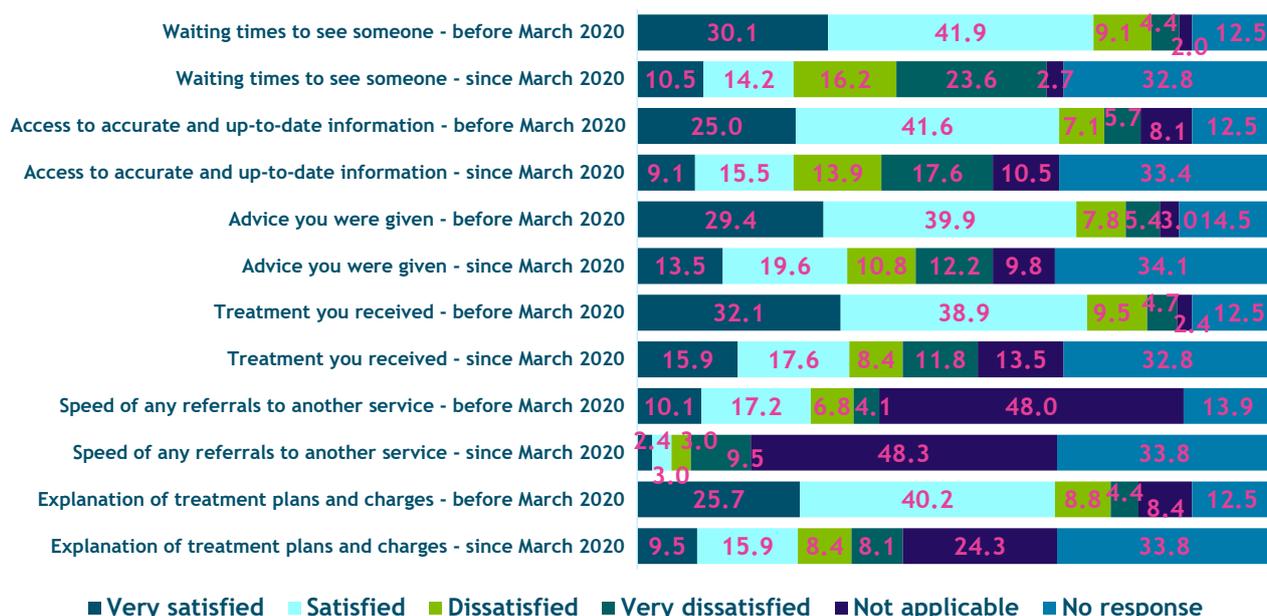
“I was told only emergency appointments were available or hygienists which had increased by £10.”

“As my dentist was now only private, they wouldn't see my children.”

6.16 Satisfaction with dental services in East Sussex since March 2020

Our survey asked people about their satisfaction with dental services since the pandemic began, and the graph below presents the responses to this and compares them to the satisfaction people indicated before March 2020.

Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience of using dental services: Before March 2020 vs Since March 2020



Data from our survey shows a decline in satisfaction with dental services since the pandemic began across all six of the key indicators that survey participants were asked about. *We acknowledge that the number of ‘no responses’ is higher for the post March 2020 experiences.*

The largest decline in satisfaction occurred in the Waiting Times, which saw a 47.3% decline.

- **Waiting times to see someone** - Satisfaction (Very Satisfied/Satisfied) fell from 72.0% pre-pandemic to 24.7% since March 2020.
- **Access to information** - Satisfaction (Very Satisfied/Satisfied) fell from 66.6% pre-pandemic to 24.6% since March 2020.
- **Advice you were given** - Satisfaction (Very Satisfied/Satisfied) fell from 69.3% pre-pandemic to 33.1% since March 2020.
- **Treatment you received** - Satisfaction (Very Satisfied/Satisfied) fell from 71.0% pre-pandemic to 33.5% since March 2020.
- **Speed of referrals** - Satisfaction (Very Satisfied/Satisfied) fell from 27.3% pre-pandemic to 5.4% since March 2020.
- **Explanation of treatment and charges** - Satisfaction (Very Satisfied/Satisfied) fell from 65.9% pre-pandemic to 25.4% since March 2020.

6.17 Comments on the dental experience since March 2020

Respondents to the survey were provided with an open-ended opportunity to provide comments on their dental experiences since March 2020, and 112 were received. These were reviewed and categorised based on the themes they identified.

Theme	Number of comments
Delays to Routine Appointments	26
Poor experiences of dental services	19
Other	18
Lack of dentists or staff continuity	15
Positive experiences of dental services	14
Inability to access dental appointments <i>(no clarity on whether these were NHS/Private)</i>	14
Negative impacts of delays in accessing dental services <i>(routine and emergency)</i>	13
Delays to Emergency Appointments	9
Patients who felt forced to go private due to an inability to access a suitable NHS alternative	8
People who couldn't find practices accepting new patients	8
Cost and charges	4

Please note that comments may have contained information categorised under more than one theme, and the number of comments may exceed the number of people that completed the question (112).

The most common issue was delays in obtaining **access to routine appointments** (26 comments). Concerns related to the delays generated by the pandemic and the impacts these had, but also the ongoing challenges in obtaining access as services have resumed, especially the knock-on effects on dental health.

“Having spoken to friends, I realise that I am not alone in being denied dental care since March 2020, I fear that my overall dental health has deteriorated, and additional costs will be incurred when I finally am able to get treatment that I need due to inability to access care at the time.”

“No routine appointment available to me for 2 years. I have phoned every month only to be told nothing available to me.”

“The system seems to be in chaos. I do not want to continuously attend A&E for treatment, that had it been carried out in a timely manner by a dentist, would not have been necessary. It's passing the work and cost onto other parts of the NHS.”

“My son needs to get an appointment to access treatment as the emergency services only did a temporary fix but he cannot get an appointment for 2 months.”

19 comments referred to **poor experiences of dental services** and these related to the various examples of engaging with dentists and practice staff, as well as treatment where this has been accessed.

“Once seen by the dentist they appear not to be listening anymore to any additional problems you may have that could be impacting on your dental health. Also appear to have gone back to the days were dentists extracted teeth as a quick fix method without providing extra care and support to help preserve teeth and discuss oral hygiene.”

“They keep cancelling appointments, advising appointments haven't been made, taking half the hygienist charge 6 months in advance then not refunding the cost when transferring to another private practice due to the dental treatment and disgraceful administration.”

The general **availability of dentists** and the ability to see the same dentist on a regular basis was mentioned in 15 comments. Respondents highlighted practices losing dentists and being short-staffed, particularly in certain geographical areas, which in turn impacted on appointment and treatment times. Dental provision keeping pace with population expansion was also raised.

“The 2 lovely dentists have just left leaving them without dentists yet again. The reception staff don't answer the phone. There are no dentists in the Heathfield area currently taking on new NHS patients yet they are building lots of new houses in the area. This needs fixing urgently.”

“I and many others have not been able to see a dentist due to one of the dentists in the practice leaving and a replacement has not been found. Other dentists in the practice are full.”

There were 14 comments highlighting **positive experiences of dental services** since March 2020. A majority indicated long-term satisfaction with dentists and their practices, with several also highlighting that patients had changed from NHS to private dentistry and had found this to be beneficial for them, but at a cost.

“I'm fortunate to have had the same dentist for around 20 years. He has had to relocate but still see him. I was able to make contact and see him throughout the CV 19 period. I used to have an insurance but now my dentist has private patients only.”

“Pleased with the dental service received, the surgery was not to blame for the delays in getting appointments because of all the additional precautions needed due to Covid.”

An **inability to access dental appointments** was raised in 14 comments. These indicated that people had struggled to obtain NHS, private and emergency appointments. Some highlighted frustration that whilst NHS appointments were not accessible or had long wait times, they could be seen faster if they were prepared to pay, including at the same practice.

“There is a terrible lack of dental practices accepting NHS patients. If I could afford to pay I would be seen quickly, it's so unfair. I called all practices in my area and none would accept NHS patients.”

“It's impossible to access NHS dental care at present!”

The **negative impact of delays** or not being able to access dental services was mentioned in 13 comments. Examples highlighted people being forced to endure severe pain, often on an ongoing basis for weeks or months. Some highlighted turning to self-treatment and accident and emergency departments as a last resort.

“Very disappointed- quality of life affected by being in constant pain. Seems like you are second class citizen if wanting NHS treatment. Still in pain. Made written complaint a month ago which has been acknowledged but not replied to.”

“Having spoken to friends, I realise that I am not alone in being denied dental care since March 2020, I fear that my overall dental health has deteriorated, and additional costs will be incurred when I finally am able to get treatment that I need due to inability to access care at the time.”

Obtaining timely access to **emergency dental support services** was flagged in nine comments. People highlighted the extreme delays they experienced in seeking to obtain dental support, often with negative knock-on effects, such as severe pain and the need to resort to mainstream emergency services such as NHS111, GPs and Accident and Emergency. Examples included priority groups such as children, those with dementia and those living in care homes.

“my daughter has had two issues both resolved with antibiotics from A&E as not easy to get emergency dental treatment and my daughter refuses to use EDS as treatment was poor.”

“My father has Dementia and is living in a Nursing Home in Eastbourne, he is clearly in pain with toothache and the manager there says they have tried their usual dentist, the NHS number and private dentists but have still been unable to secure an appointment for him.”

Eight comments were made by patients who felt **forced to go private** due to an inability to access a suitable NHS alternative. People indicated they felt it was unfair that whilst their preference was for NHS dentistry, the challenges in finding an NHS dentist and getting an appointment effectively pushed them (implicitly and explicitly) towards private dental services where access was far easier and quicker. Some indicated that the cost of private dentistry was prohibitive.

“I would much prefer to be able to have a NHS dentist, the cost of private dentistry is sometimes eye watering expensive, I haven’t had a NHS dentist for probably 10 / 12 years.”

“I was paying into Denplan yet no dentist services were available. I want to be NHS cos my work pays poorly & I’ve had no job security during Covid - but it’s impossible to get dental treatment as an NHS patient. That’s appalling.”

“I understand why practices are not taking on new nhs patients, however no practices have offered to put me on a waiting list or given an indication of timescale.”

“I have been trying to help my brother find an NHS dentist as his dentist became purely private. It has been hopeless. No one is taking on NHS patients. People are in pain and can only get care if they have money. That is not the ethos of the NHS. I work for the NHS and I’m ashamed.”

A key challenge for some respondents was finding a dental practice that was **accepting new patients**, either because they had moved to the area, their circumstances had changed, or they had not been a regular attendee. People contacted many practices, but with limited success, and often long waiting lists. A further frustration was a lack of signposting to alternative services and information about waiting lists and waiting times.

The final theme which appeared regularly in comments related to **costs and charges**. People commented on the lack of clarity on the way in which costs and charges were communicated to them, often at the point when they feel they have limited option but to accept. There is a lack of clarity for some on the criteria for and pricing of NHS treatment options when compared to private alternatives, and the differences between the two.

“There is a complete lack of information on charges and what treatment is private and NHS. How people on low incomes afford visit to dentist I do not know! Hygienist £60! A days earnings for some people!”

“I would like to receive advance information about potential treatments and prices. My Dentist quotes some figures whilst I’m sat in the chair and I’m asked to make an instant decision to be NHS or private and feel I’d benefit from more information and time to reflect before deciding.”

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Conclusions

Regular access to high quality routine dental care is essential for maintaining the oral health of the population. We acknowledge that all dentists face real challenges in delivering services during a pandemic, but we also believe that the variation in services provided by individual practices shows that improvements could be made across the sector despite these challenges.

This survey has identified that the COVID-19 pandemic has created significant challenges for many people in obtaining regular and/or timely access to dental services and treatment in East Sussex, including urgent or emergency support. It has affected people of all ages and backgrounds, including children, older people, those on lower incomes and people receiving care or with medical conditions.

It is important to acknowledge that access to dental provision, especially NHS dentistry, was problematic for many before the pandemic, but this has been exacerbated by the cessation, reduction and re-introduction of dentistry services since March 2020. People are reporting waiting many months for routine dentistry appointments, with often long waits for emergency or follow-up treatment.

Many respondents expressed frustration at the challenges and delays in obtaining timely access to both routine and emergency dental services since the pandemic began. Experiences shared with us suggest there is a significant gap in the demand for NHS dental services in East Sussex and the capacity available, with respondents identifying long wait times and practices being short of dentists or ceasing to deliver NHS contracts at all.

Some areas of the county appear to have very limited NHS dental provision, and whilst those able to travel can access services elsewhere, this may potentially impact most on those who are unable or cannot afford to travel. However, finding a dentist accepting NHS patients anywhere in East Sussex is currently extremely challenging.

The responses received to this survey indicate a potential difference of understanding between patients and practices regarding 'registration' and patient lists. It appears that patients may regard their use of dentists on a similar basis to GPs, considering themselves to be registered with a practice. Whilst patients are free to choose any surgery, switching is not easy in the current climate, which also creates issues if practices remove patients from their patient 'list'.

Whilst people already registered with or attending dental practices have been affected, the pandemic has been particularly problematic for people seeking NHS treatment but not currently on a practice list. Finding practices accepting new patients at a time when their capacity has been operating on a reduced basis has proved challenging. In part, this is also due to the lack of clear information available from NHS England and practices on which are delivering NHS services and accepting 'new' patients.

Patient feedback suggests that information on dentistry provision is fragmented and often out-of-date, which creates challenges for the public in identifying how, where and when to access services appropriately. Improvements in the information made available by NHS England and individual practices may assist in clarifying people's understanding and expectations about how to access dentistry appropriately. However, this is unlikely to resolve the underlying issue of a lack of NHS capacity.

Many examples were shared where people's lives have been severely affected by their inability to obtain timely NHS treatment for dental issues and faced with the dilemma of waiting or paying for private treatment. However, this risks excluding those least able to afford private alternatives. It also affects other services that people are forced to access for support such as Accident and Emergency departments which are themselves under pressure.

People also expressed concern that in some instances they can access prompt private treatment at the same practices where wait times for NHS services were very long. It appears unclear to many members of the public why practices offer private and NHS services so differently, and why private capacity appears less affected by the pandemic than NHS capacity.

Our findings highlighted that there is some inconsistency in people's understanding of what dental services the NHS can and does provide, and what is available privately. Similarly, issues were also raised around treatment plans and discussions related to charges and costs. It is clear that greater clarity and consistency could be provided to patients about the nature of NHS provision, the treatment options available and associated costs.

Survey responses also indicated respondents ongoing concerns about the longer-term impacts on people's oral health of being unable to access or facing long delays for preventative and routine services, such as check-ups and hygienists, due to capacity prioritising urgent and emergency treatment. It is currently challenging to predict the ongoing effects of the reduced levels of routine dentistry undertaken since March 2020.

7.2 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the experiences and feedback of people who completed this survey. We are committed to ensuring that the voice of East Sussex residents and patients reach those who commission, design and deliver local services.

The findings and recommendations of this report will be shared with Healthwatch England, NHS England and local commissioners and providers, including the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS) which will take over responsibility for the commissioning of dental services in East Sussex from July 2022.

NHS England and NHS Dentistry Commissioners

1. The findings of this survey align with the findings of other local Healthwatch and Healthwatch England initiatives which indicate the significant impact of a lack of access to NHS dentistry on the population. NHS England (and the Sussex ICS moving forwards) should do more to acknowledge the issues identified, and as a matter of priority seek to address the significant gap between NHS dental capacity and the levels of demand.
2. NHS England and the Sussex ICS should closely monitor the experiences of users of NHS dental services, including the Emergency Dental Service, in order to determine the effectiveness of service delivery both locally and nationally. They should regularly commission independent research to gather and analyse patient feedback.
3. NHS England should ensure that the information provided on the 'Find a Dentist' website (or any other public source identifying NHS dental providers) is updated regularly, and where possible identifies which practices have capacity for additional NHS patients. The Sussex ICS should seek to provide similar signposting resources.
4. The General Dental Council and NHS England should re-iterate to all dental practices the importance of providing treatment plans to all patients in a timely, accessible and user-friendly form. Clarity on all charges should be provided before any treatment commences.

Dental Practices

5. All dental practices in receipt of NHS dental contracts should provide regular updates to the NHS 'Find a Dentist' website (or equivalents) so that a one-stop-shop location is available for people to identify practices offering NHS dental services.
6. Dental practices should make clear and transparent on their websites (and in other communications) if they are accepting new patients, and if so, whether they can be private, NHS or either. Where practices are operating waiting lists for patients, and joining these is an option, this should also be made clear in their communications.
7. All dental practices should adhere to the General Dental Council and NHS guidance and ensure dental treatment plans are provided to patients in a way that allows

them to make informed decisions about their treatment, including any costs and any differences between NHS and private treatment options.

8. All dental practices providing NHS dental services should ensure that new patients are made aware of the NHS eligibility criteria for free treatment when joining the patient list and at regular intervals afterwards (or at any point when the eligibility criteria change).
9. All dental practices should provide clear, accessible and transparent feedback and complaints processes/policies for patients. These should be regularly drawn to the attention of patients, both existing and new.
10. All dental practices should provide clear and accessible information to all patients on their policies and procedures for removing patients from their lists, and the factors which may lead them to do so, such as regularly missing appointments.
 - a. Any patients being removed from dental practice lists should be made aware by the practice that this will be taking place in advance of it occurring and with clear reasons provided for the course of action.
 - b. Dental practices should provide patients they remove from their lists with information on other dental practices in their local area.
11. All dental practices should seek to provide clear information to patients on any COVID-19 precautions or change to operating procedures at their practices via websites, social media, emails, texts or other communication mechanisms.
 - a. Dental practices should re-iterate COVID-19 precautions at the point of booking appointments, and in any confirmation or reminder messages such as text, email or verbally.
12. All dental practices should seek to provide accessible websites and other forms of communication that deliver clear and up-to-date information on the key features of the practice, including: the status of their services, details of delays or wait times, Care Quality Commission ratings/reports, contact details and signposting for out-of-hours or alternative support.

Healthwatch East Sussex

13. Healthwatch should communicate the findings, conclusions and recommendations in this report with NHS England, Healthwatch England, the Sussex Integrated Care System (ICS) the Local Dental Committee, local dental practices and other health and care service commissioners and providers.
14. Healthwatch should share these findings with NHS England, Healthwatch England and local services to highlight the impact that a lack of timely access to routine and emergency dental services may have on the wider health and care system.
15. Healthwatch East Sussex should encourage dental practices to undertake independent or lay reviews (Mystery Shopping) of their websites or communications

on a regular basis (at least annually) to maximise their effectiveness.

16. Healthwatch in Sussex should continue to promote their '[A Healthwatch guide to your rights and accessing the treatment you need](#)' document to the public and via practices, partners and stakeholder networks to raise awareness of how, when and where people can access NHS dentistry, and of the eligibility/charging regimes.



Healthwatch East Sussex

Freepost RTTT-BYBX-KCEY
Greencoat House
32 St Leonards Road
Eastbourne
East Sussex
BN21 3UT

Contact Us



www.healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

0333 101 4007

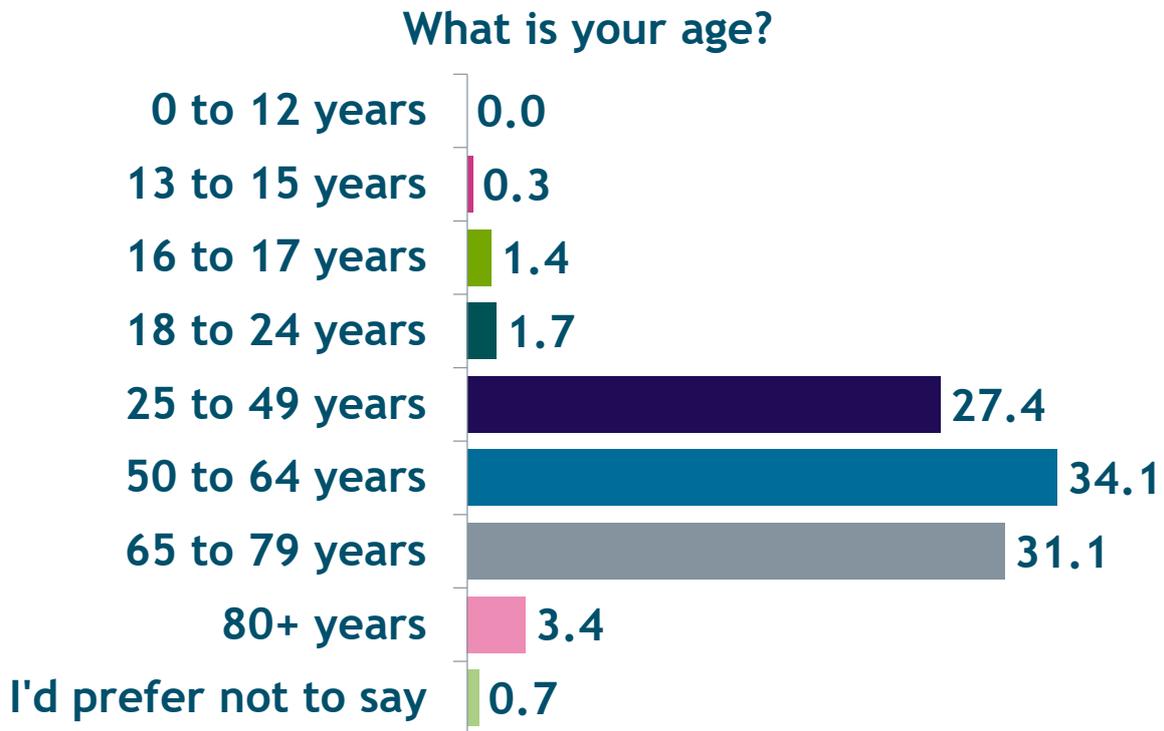
enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

Twitter: @HealthwatchES

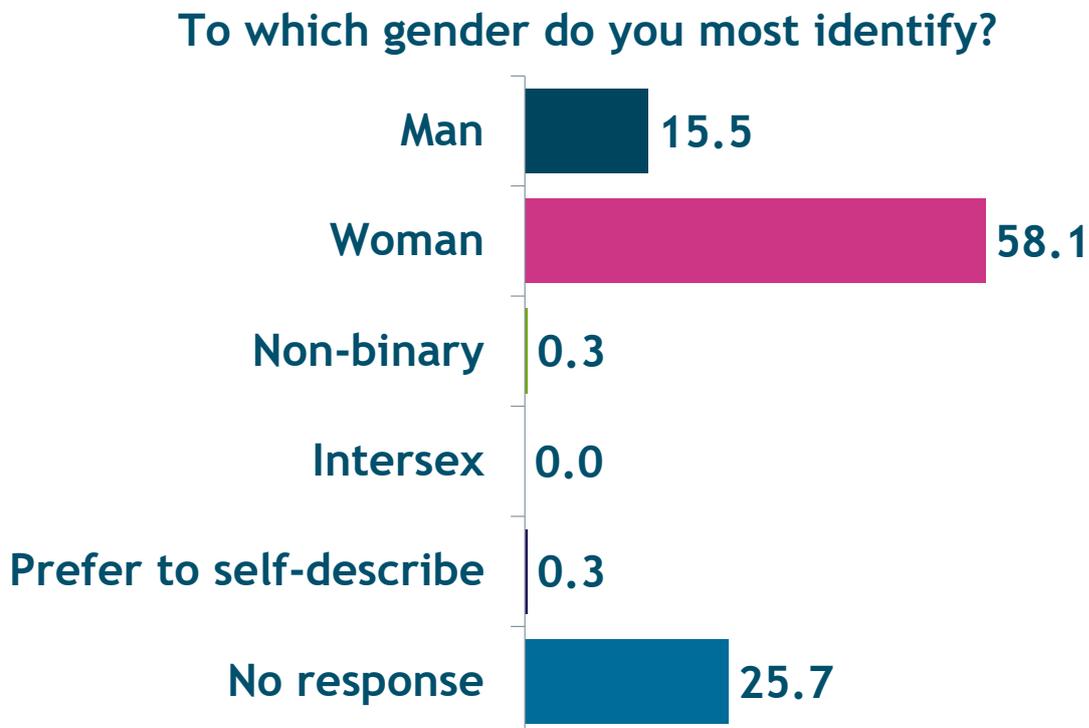
Facebook: [Facebook.com/HealthwatchESussex](https://www.facebook.com/HealthwatchESussex)

8 Appendix 1 - Summary of equalities information

8.1 What is your age?

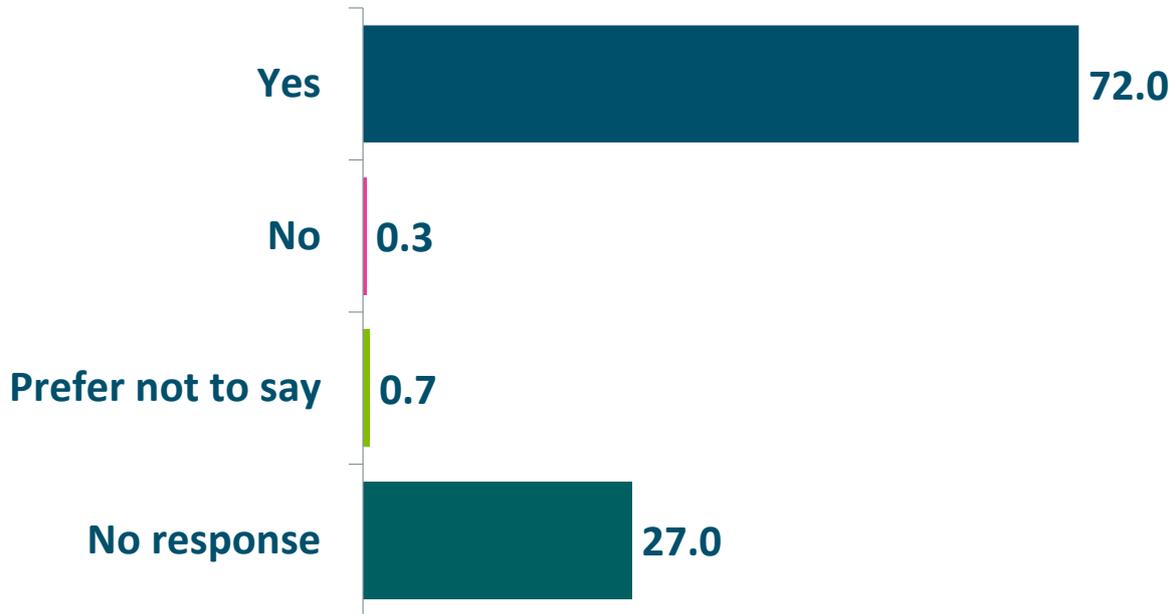


8.2 To which gender do you most identify?



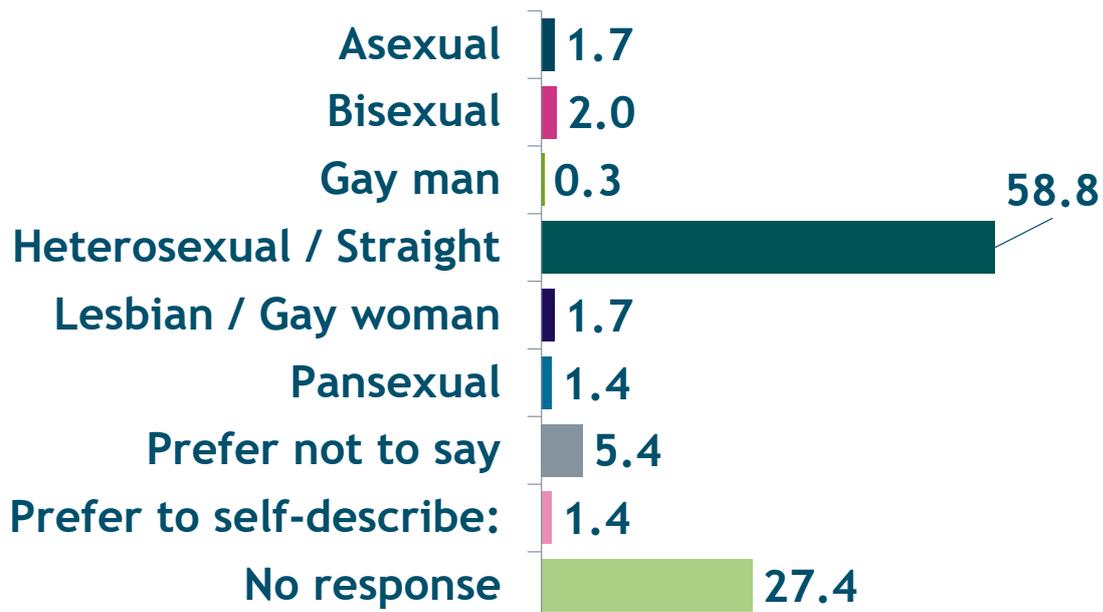
8.3 Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?



8.4 Please tell us which sexual orientation you identify with

Please tell us which sexual orientation you identify with:



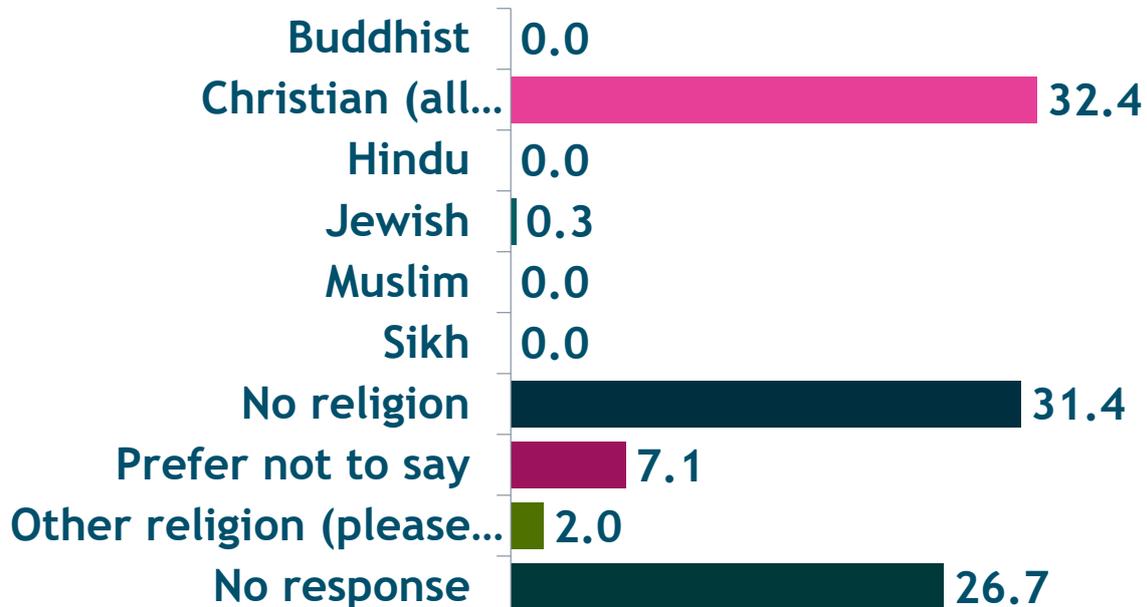
8.5 How would you describe your ethnic background?

How would you describe your ethnic background?

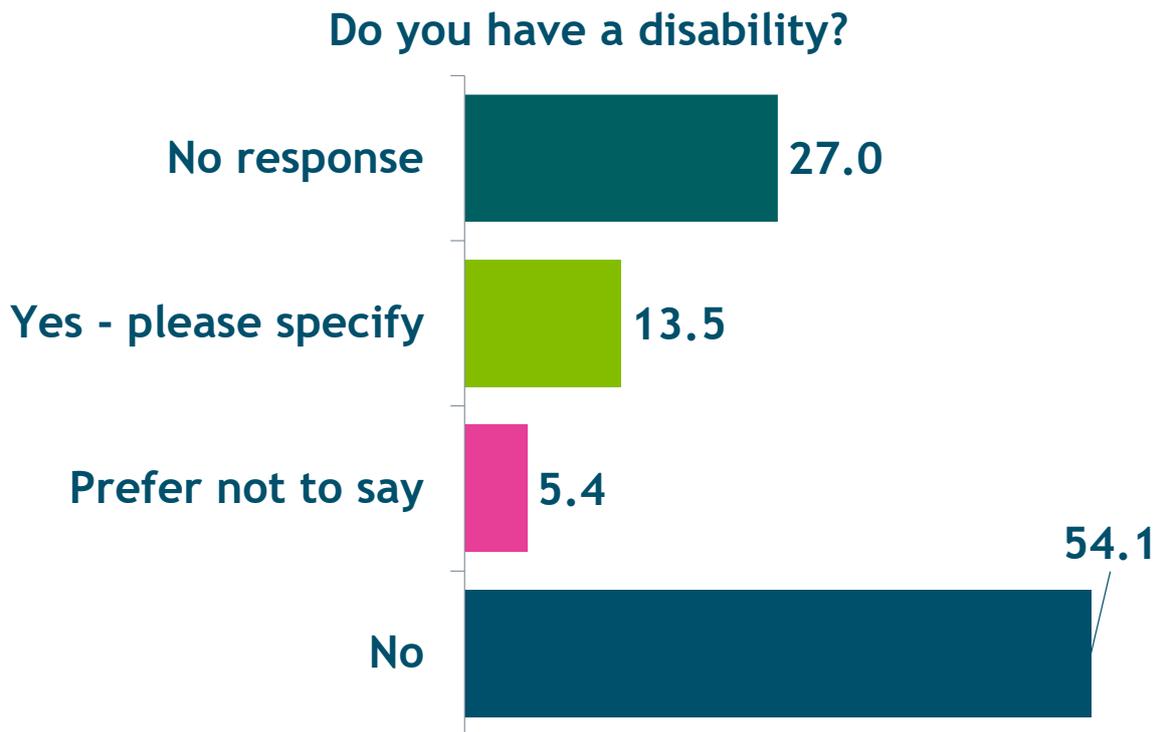


8.6 How would you describe your religion or beliefs?

How would you describe your religion or beliefs?



8.7 Do you have a disability?



8.8 Do you consider yourself to be a carer, have a disability or a long-term health condition? *Please tick all that apply*



9 Appendix 2 - Survey questions

Your experiences of dentistry in East Sussex

Healthwatch are the public watchdog for those using health and social care services in East Sussex.

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic we have been monitoring people's experiences of dental services to understand whether your needs and expectations are being met. Dentistry was the third most common service that you contacted us about during 2020-21 and we continue to hear a wide variety of experiences.

Please spend 10 minutes completing the following questions and tell us how dental services in East Sussex are for you.

We want to hear about your experiences before and since the COVID-19 pandemic started in March 2020.

Completing our survey

Our survey can be accessed online via this link or QR code:
<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DentistryinEastSussex2021>



The closing date for the survey is midnight on **30th November 2021**.

Your answers will help us understand public and patient opinion, which we will share with health and care providers and decision-makers.

We will then report on our website what changes have been made by services in response to the feedback you provide.

Support in completing the survey

If you would like assistance in completing this survey, require it in a different format or wish to complete it with a member of our staff over the phone, please contact us via

enquiries@healthwatcheastSussex.co.uk or call 0333 101 4007

You can return this survey to us free at: Freepost RTTT-BYBX-KCEY, Healthwatch East Sussex, Greencoat House, 32 St Leonards Road, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN21 3UT.

Your information

Any responses you provide will be anonymous unless you choose to provide us with your details. We will collate individual responses during the analysis, but this will not include identifiable personal information.

Healthwatch East Sussex is committed to protecting and respecting your privacy and security. We process any personal data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations [GDPR] and the 2018 Data Protection Act.

Section 1 - About you:

1. Are you completing this survey on behalf of yourself or someone else?

Please tick one option only

Myself	A dependent or someone I care for aged 18 or older	A dependent or someone I care for aged 17 or younger

If you are completing the survey on behalf of someone else, please complete all of the following questions using their information.

2. What is your age?

0 to 12 years		50 to 64 years	
13 to 15 years		65 to 79 years	
16 to 17 years		80+ years	
18 to 24 years		Prefer not to say	
25 to 49 years		Not known	

Section 2 - In this section, please tell us about your experiences before COVID-19 (before March 2020).

3. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, did you receive regular dental care?

Yes	No

4. How frequently did you usually visit a dentist before the COVID-19 pandemic?

Please tick one option only

Zero (no visits)		5 or more times a year	
1 to 2 times a year		Only when the need arose (no regular attendance)	
3 to 4 times a year		Don't Know	

5. What was the name of the dental practice that you usually attended? (if applicable)

--

6. Before COVID-19, was your dental care or dental treatment covered by the NHS, privately or a combination of both?

Please tick one option only

NHS Only	Private Only	Both NHS and Private	Don't Know	Not applicable

7. Overall, how satisfied were you with your experience of using dental services before COVID-19 (March 2020)?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
Waiting times to see someone					
Access to accurate and up-to-date information					
Advice you were given					
Treatment you received					
Speed of any referrals to another service					
Explanation of treatment plans and charges					

Section 3 - COVID-19: In this section, please tell us about your experiences since March 2020 (Since COVID-19 began).

8. Have you used or tried to use a dental practice or service in East Sussex since March 2020?

Yes	No

If you answered Yes, which dental practice or service did you attend or try to attend:

--

If No, please go straight to Q27.

9. How frequently have you visited a dentist since March 2020?

Please tick one option only

Zero (no visits)		5 or more times a year	
1 to 2 times a year		Only when the need arose (no regular attendance)	
3 to 4 times a year		Don't Know	
Other (please specify):			

10. What type of dental appointments have you made or tried to make since March 2020?

Please tick all that apply

Routine dental check-up (including scale and polish)		Emergency or urgent dental treatment	
Continuation of dental treatment		Orthodontics	
Hygienist appointment		Appointment for child or dependent	
Scheduled dental treatment or procedure (non-emergency)		Not applicable	

11. Were you able to book dental appointments or treatment that met your needs?

Please tick one option only

Yes - Always	Yes - Sometimes	No	Not applicable

If No or Yes - Sometimes, what impact did this have on you?

12. Overall, how easy have you found it to get an appointment with a dental service since March 2020?

Please rate all the services that you have used or tried to use

	Very easy	Easy	Acceptable	Difficult	Very difficult	Not applicable
My regular dental practice						
Other dental practices						
Orthodontist or other specialist dentists						
Emergency Dental Service (EDS)						
Special Care Dental Services						
Urgent Dental Centre						
Hospital Dental Services						

Please tell us about your experience(s):

13. How would you rate the standard of care you have received?

Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Don't know	Not applicable

14. Since March 2020, have you needed to seek emergency support with dental issues from any of the following services?

Please tick all that apply

My regular dentist	
Another high Street Dentist	
Emergency Dental Services (EDS)	
Urgent Dental Care Centre	
Special Care Dental Services	
NHS 111	
GP Practice	
Pharmacy	
Accident & Emergency Department	
Not applicable	
Other - please specify:	

What was your experience of using these services?

15. If applicable, have you managed to join the patient list of a dental practice in East Sussex since March 2020?

Please tick one option only

Not applicable - I already have a dentist	
Yes - as an NHS patient (my preference)	
Yes - as a private patient (my preference)	
Yes - as a private patient, but because I could not find a practice accepting NHS patients	
No - but I have been added to a waiting list	
No	

16. If you have used the NHS 'Find a Dentist' website since March 2020, how useful and accurate have you found this?

Please tick one option only in each row

	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Not applicable
Usefulness					
Accuracy					

Please tell us about your experience of using the NHS 'Find a Dentist' website:

--

17. Are you entitled to free NHS dental treatment?

Yes	No	Don't Know	Not applicable

18. At your last appointment, was your dental care or treatment on the NHS, Privately or a mixture of both?

NHS only	Private only	Both NHS and Private	Don't Know	Not applicable

19. Were you offered private treatment, if it could not be provided on the NHS?

Yes, and I accepted	Yes, and I declined	No	Not applicable

If Yes, please tell us why you chose to accept or decline:

--

20. At your last appointment, did your dentist discuss and agree a dental treatment plan (including any charges) with you before treatment was provided?

Yes	No	Don't Know	Not applicable

21. Has a dental practice removed you from their patient list since March 2020?

Yes - and they made me aware	Yes - but I wasn't made aware	No	Don't Know

If Yes, what reason was given by the practice for your removal?

--

22. How would you rate the information available on dentistry services since March 2020?

Please rate all the sources of information that you have used or tried to use

	Excellent	Good	Poor	Don't Know	Not applicable
Information from dentists or practice staff					
My regular dental practice's website					
Other dental practice websites					
British Dental Association (BDA) website					
NHS website					
Private dental providers (e.g. BUPA, DenPlan etc.)					
Other websites					
Hard copy flyers and guides					
Other (please specify):					

23. Please indicate if you have experienced any of the following since March 2020?

Please tick all that apply

I experienced longer waiting times than usual to see a dentist/other dental professional	
I found it harder to get to speak with someone at a dental practice / service	
I found it harder to find a dental practice/service accepting NHS patients (if applicable)	
I experienced difficulties in finding up-to-date information on which dental services were operating and how I could access them	
As an NHS patient - I had additional charges applied to cover costs of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	
As a private patient - I had additional charges applied to cover costs of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)	
As an NHS patient - I had additional dental charges applied to cover costs of COVID-19 cleaning	
As a private patient - I had additional dental charges applied to cover costs of COVID-19 cleaning	
I was told that that only private patients were being seen at the moment	
I was told that treatment could only be delivered privately, even though I am eligible for NHS treatment	
I was told that I could not use, or could not access, my dental insurance plan to cover some of the costs of treatment	
Other (please specify):	

24. Before attending a dental service, how clear was the information provided on the COVID-19 precautions in place?

Extremely clear	Very clear	Not so clear	Not at all clear	Not applicable

How could the way this information was provided be improved?

25. Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience of using dental services since March 2020?

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	Very dissatisfied	Not applicable
Waiting times to see someone					
Access to accurate and up-to-date information					
Advice you were given					
Treatment you received					
Speed of any referrals to another service					
Explanation of treatment plans and charges					

26. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about your experiences of dental services in East Sussex since March 2020?

About You

By telling us more information about yourself, you can help us better understand how people's experiences may differ depending on their personal characteristics.

If you are completing this on behalf of someone else, please complete it using their details (where known), leaving any questions where you do not know the answer blank.

However, if you do not wish to answer these questions you do not have to.

27. To which gender identity do you most identify?

Man	Woman	Non-binary	Other	Prefer not to answer

28. Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth?

Yes	No	Prefer not to answer

29. Please tell us which sexual orientation you identify with:

Please tick one box only

Asexual		Lesbian/Gay woman	
Bisexual		Pansexual	
Gay man		I'd prefer not to say	
Heterosexual/Straight		Prefer to self-describe:	

30. Do you consider yourself disabled, as set out in the Equality Act 2010?

Yes	No	Prefer not to say

31. How would you describe your ethnic background?

Please tick one box only

Arab	
Asian / Asian British: Bangladeshi	
Asian / Asian British: Chinese	
Asian / Asian British: Indian	
Asian / Asian British: Pakistani	
Asian / Asian British: Any other Asian /Asian British background	
Black / Black British: African	
Black / Black British: Caribbean	
Black / Black British: Any other Black / Black British background	
Gypsy, Roma or Traveller	
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Asian and White	
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Black African and White	
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Black Caribbean and White	
Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups: Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	

White: British / English / Northern Irish / Scottish / Welsh	
White: Irish	
White: Any other White background	
Another ethnic background	
I'd prefer not to say	

32. How would you describe your religion or beliefs?

Please tick one box only

Buddhist		Muslim	
Christian (all denominations)		Sikh	
Hindu		No religion	
Jewish		I'd prefer not to say	
Other (please specify):			

33. Do you consider yourself to be a carer, have a disability or a long-term health condition?

Please tick all that apply

Yes, I consider myself to be a carer	
Yes, I consider myself to have a disability	
Yes, I consider myself to have a long-term condition	
None of the above	
I'd prefer not to say	

Thank you for completing our survey - you can tell us more here:

If you have used a Dentist, please tell us about your experience by leaving a review on our Feedback Centre: <https://healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk/services/>

If you need support in accessing health and care services, please contact our Information & Signposting service via: enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk or 0333 101 4007

All reports are be published via the Healthwatch East Sussex website:
<https://healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk/>

 0333 101 4007

 Healthwatchesussex

 enquiries@healthwatcheastsussex.co.uk

 @HealthwatchES