



Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
Sent by email,

24 April 2023

Dear Mr Barclay,

NHS Dental Charges in England

On behalf of the British Dental Association, I am writing following today's 8.5% increase in NHS patient charge levels in England.

This increase will hit millions of patients on modest incomes. This is borne out in polling by YouGov, that 1 in 4 adults in England have already delayed or avoided needed care for reasons of cost.

Minister Neil O'Brien has told Parliament that the increase "will raise important revenue for pressurised NHS budgets."

The reality is this hike won't put an extra penny into NHS dentistry, it will just force millions to think twice about needed care. In the decade leading up to the pandemic charge increases have not provided any new funds for NHS dentistry, they have merely permitted government to reduce its direct contributions to the budget.

The result is that NHS bridges, crowns or dentures now cost £306.80 in England compared to £203.00 in Wales. You have a duty to explain to the public why patients in England must pay over £100 more for exactly the same NHS care.

Polling strongly suggests the public do not support this approach. The supporters of all major parties overwhelmingly reject the idea that patients should have to pay more, simply so your Department can pay less.

Yasmin Qureshi MP recently tabled written questions (150438) on whether your Department plans to produce an updated Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) on oral healthcare. On 28 February Minister O'Brien responded to confirm that Equality Impact Assessment is an "integral part of developing policy within the Department" and it "will undertake additional assessments in due course as we introduce further reforms for National Health Service dental care."

We see no evidence any consideration has gone into the impact of this latest record-breaking increase. It's not merely those avoiding or delaying needed care. It profoundly disturbs us that polling shows costs now come ahead of a dentist's clinical recommendations in defining what NHS treatments patients take forward.

At any time, such vast patient charge increases would be unacceptable. During a cost-of-living crisis we consider them utterly outrageous. It is well beyond the increases set for optics or pharmacy, and we must ask why our patients are being singled out.

Millions are currently unable to access NHS care, and deep oral health inequality looks set to widen. We must insist that an updated EqIA is put in place urgently to ensure the choices made by your Department are measured against their impact on the patients who need us most. A 4% increase that Whitehall sources indicate is set for next year must be dropped. And fundamentally we require assurances that a sustainable funding model will be in place to underpin meaningful reform of this service.

It reflects the gravity of these issues that I am also directing this letter to your opposite numbers in the opposition, and to the Chairs of the Health and Social Care and Public Accounts Committees.

Yours sincerely,



Eddie Crouch
Chair, British Dental Association

cc. Wes Streeting MP, Daisy Cooper MP, Steve Brine MP, Health and Social Care Committee, Meg Hillier MP, Public Accounts Committee, Neil O'Brien, DHSC, Sara Hurley, NHSE