



# healthwatch

## Blackburn with Darwen

# Accessibility of NHS Dentists in Blackburn with Darwen 2020





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## About Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen

Healthwatch England is an independent national champion for people who use health and social care services, and we are here to find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need.

At the local level, Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen helps residents get the best out of their local health and social care services. Whether it is improving them today, or helping to shape them for tomorrow, Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen is all about local voices being able to influence the delivery and design of local services. People's views come first - especially those who find it hardest to be heard.

Healthwatch was created under Health and Social Care Act, 2012. We are part of a network of local Healthwatch organisations which encourage health and social care services to involve people in decisions that affect them and how this could be improved, and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen.

Find out more at: [www.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk](http://www.healthwatchblackburnwithdarwen.co.uk)





## 1. Rationale

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen have experienced a high number of calls since March 2020 from residents unable to either register with an NHS dentist or book an appointment.

From discussions with other local Healthwatch organisations and online discussions on the Healthwatch England intranet, we are very much aware that this is a nationwide issue.

However, this is of particular concern to us as Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen, given the fact that the borough has the highest proportion of its five-year olds experiencing decay in the whole of England. We are very conscious of the importance that oral health in the general health and wellbeing of children. Poor oral health can affect the ability of children to sleep, eat, speak, play and socialise with other children. Other impacts include pain, infections, poor diet, and impaired nutrition and growth which affect the ability of the child to learn, thrive and develop.

For adults, the two main oral diseases, dental decay and periodontal disease, share the same risk factors as other chronic diseases and conditions, such as heart disease, cancer, strokes, diabetes and obesity.

We therefore wanted to investigate the reason for the high number of enquiries we are experiencing about access to NHS dentists in the borough and learn more about what local dental practices are providing.

## 2. Methodology

The team at Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen carried out a 'mystery shopping exercise', calling every dental practice registered on NHS Choices website to understand the overall picture of accessibility to NHS dentists in the borough.

We also gathered case study feedback from residents who called our information and signposting service to find out whether they had managed to access the support they needed.

### Disclaimer

Please note this report relates to the findings from our mystery shopping exercise and from calls made to Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen by residents across March-November 2020.

Our report is therefore not a representative portrayal of the experience and views of all adults' experience of accessing NHS dentists in Blackburn with Darwen, only an account of what was represented at the time.





### 3. Mystery Shopping Exercise Survey Questions

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen partnered with Healthwatch Blackpool to develop a standard set of questions for the mystery shopping exercise which were used when calling each practice in the borough. These were: -

***Are you accepting new NHS patients?***

***Are you taking on children, if you are not taking on adults?***

***If no, where will I go to find out who is?***

***Do you know how I can see a dentist in an emergency?***

***Do you have any idea of when things will be going back to 'normal'?***





## 4. Our Findings

Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen contacted all 21 dental practices registered in the borough on NHS Choices website. Our key findings from the survey were: -

- 100% of Dentist's said they would not be taking on any new NHS patients for the foreseeable future.



95% (20 out of 21) of practices confirmed that they are not taking on children as well as adults

- 2 practices stated that they are still currently taking on private patients

- When asked how a resident might find out which practices are taking on new NHS patients, most referred the caller to the Lancashire emergency dental team phonenumber number **0300 1234 010 or 111** or to 'ring around'. However, five answers received to this question were "I don't know"
- When asked "how I can see a dentist in an emergency?", the majority referred the caller to the Lancashire emergency dentist phonenumber or 111



- When asked when things would be back to 'normal', all 21 practices were unable to comment.

Some suggesting that it would be sometime in the New Year and that they are struggling with their current backlog at present.





*“it's really different way of working here at the moment and we really are just focusing on emergency appointments.”*

*“You'll have to wait till the pandemic is over to be honest for routine unless you want to go private. We're currently operating at 20% capacity”*

## 5. Feedback from residents

Below are examples of calls taken by the Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen team between March and October 2020, highlighting the fact that residents are contacting numerous practices to no avail and are struggling to access the support they need.

*“Do you know if I can get emergency dental treatment because I’m in a lot of pain with my tooth – I’m taking paracetamol but the pain is so bad that I’ve not been able to go into work this week.”*

*“My son needs four fillings – he’s got large black holes in his mouth at the moment and I’ve been told that even if we go private, he can only have one filling at a time.”*

*“I am having trouble locating a dentist that is taking on NHS patients. I have called 111 and saw an emergency dentist who said that I would need to get my other teeth seen to. As I am having trouble locating a dentist which is taking on NHS patients, I am not sure what to do. Can you advise/help?”*

*“Hi I have been looking on the site every day for an NHS dentist taking on new adults patients in the Blackburn area had no luck am desperate for a dentist could you help please”*

*“Hi I am looking for a dentist because I have issues with my teeth due to intestinal failure. I have tried contacting all dentists to find out if they are taking on new NHS patients. I know there is a crisis at the moment, and I don’t expect to be seen quickly. I just want to be registered with a dentist so that I can get the treatment so badly needed. It’s really getting to me, on top of everything else, and I already have serious health issues and spend a lot of time in and out of hospitals and hospices.”*





## 6. Case Studies



Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen followed up on three contacts made to the team about lack of access to an NHS dentist to find out what support these individuals had managed to access following advice provided by us.

Please find these case studies below.

### Case Study 1

#### **Initial enquiry: -**

*"Hi, I need to register my 3 year old son with an NHS dentist - but there is literally none available?? What do I do? We live in Darwen and we've tried Ewood Dental, Blue Sky Dental, Bank View (in Blackburn) and been on various other websites but they all say they aren't taking on any new patients. Please help?"*

#### **HW BwD response to enquiry:-**

Provided list of Darwen surgeries and contact for Darwen Children's Centre

#### **Follow up response to HW query to find out how she had got on: -**

*"Hi*

*We've managed to get him on a waiting list at Bateman and Best; but he hasn't actually seen anyone yet. Apparently, that's the best they could offer 🙄🙄"*

### Case Study 2

#### **Initial enquiry:-**

*"I recently moved to Darwen having been living in ROI for the past few years, and I am struggling to find a dentist within the area. I have had to ring 111 on a few occasions to get temporary fixes for an ongoing issue that was supposed to tide me over until I found a permanent practice, however that is proving to be very difficult and the problem is escalating. If you could help in any way that would be brilliant."*

#### **HW BwD response:-**

Provided list of surgeries in Darwen and Barbara Castle surgery as emergency support

#### **Follow up response to HW query to find out how she had got on:**

*Hi, Unfortunately not. I had to ring the emergency dental line once again and they have referred me to the hospital as my infection is quite serious. I myself had contacted most dentists and none would even take me when I offered to pay private either."*







### Case Study 3

#### **Initial enquiry:-**

*Hi I'd like some information from you if you don't mind... I am a NHS patient at My Dentist in Blackburn, Some years ago a health problem caused the enamel on my front teeth to wear away, it wasn't as much a problem then but now with my age 61 I'm really noticing how bad they look and this is bothering me so much, my elderly mother who I care for offered to pay for me to have the front teeth replaced by crowns, I emailed My dentist and asked if I could pay NHS prices for crowns would they replace the worn teeth, they emailed back to say Yes they would and I should speak to the Dentist next time I'm there, A crown I already had come out and I made an appointment, and asked the dentist about the crowns and I would pay NHS price for each, He refused saying it was considered cosmetic so he wouldn't be able to help.. The dentist offered me dentures and a palette I explained the health problem I had caused me to be sick, and the thought of anything getting food underneath makes me wretch I've never eaten Gum or anything that stays in the mouth for longer than it takes to swallow I wouldn't cope with dentures, I left the dentist last week with a gap in my mouth because he wouldn't even replace the crown that had fallen out. I wanted to know if possibly anywhere I could have the work done? I'm thinking it's lucky were in lockdown and I don't need to go anywhere and if I do I put on a face mask on, no one will see how bad my teeth are...Thankyou I'll be grateful for any advice, if any you can give..... Yours sincerely*

#### **HW BwD response:-**

Provided emergency Lancashire dentists number and that for Barbara Castle Way and also suggested that she might query whether this is cosmetic because crowns are covered in NHS dental charges.

#### **Follow up response to HW query on how she had got on: -**

*"They did give me another number to contact but that too said i would need to find a NHS dentist that would replace the damaged teeth with crowns at NHS cost.. I've tried half a doz dentist all said they were full to capacity. .I have no idea what I can do.. But grateful for you trying to help...It wouldn't be such of a concern if two of the top teeth weren't already crowns that the previous dentist put in of his own accord, the more my teeth have worn away next to 2 crowns they all look so uneven and unsightly.. I just think, Well some people have worse things to contend with than merely teeth, so I try not to worry as much.. And I can wear a face mask if I go out I suppose.. Thanks again .... 😊"*





## 7. Conclusion

This report highlights the impact locally of a national issue. The British Dental Association recently reported that practices are operating at a fraction of their capacity during the Covid-19 pandemic and have provided around 19 million fewer treatments in England since March this year compare to the same period last year.

Although the government has stated that the NHS is working hard to restore dental care, this significant lack of access to support could have a dramatic impact on residents' oral health.

It is clear from our findings and the volume of calls being made to Healthwatch Blackburn with Darwen that residents are clearly not aware of what support is available to them at this time.

People would benefit from clear information about provision in the borough and emergency options so that they can make informed choices. Partners in health and social care and the voluntary sector would benefit from this up to date information to manage residents' expectations and signpost them appropriately as well as work together more closely at this time to promote good oral health.

In summary, our report highlights: -

- People are being denied a right to NHS dentistry
- Children are not able to see a dentist at key points of their development – exacerbating the issue of poor children's dental health in the borough
- A lack of awareness of where people can get emergency support

We look forward to working with NHS England, Public Health England and Blackburn with Darwen Council Public Health team to address these local issues and provide appropriate feedback to our residents.

