



Mr Humza Yousaf MSP
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care
Scottish Government
St Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

By email

5 September 2022

Dear Cabinet Secretary

I am writing on behalf of BDA Scotland to urge the Scottish Government to take a strong lead in finally tackling the long-standing problem of lengthy waiting lists for paediatric extractions under general anaesthetic (GA). At the 2022 Conference of Scottish Local Dental Committees in April (the opening session of which you attended), the following motion was passed by delegates and later adopted as BDA policy:

This conference demands that Scottish Government urgently allocates targeted services and resources to address the lengthy waiting times experienced by an unacceptable high number of paediatric and additional or complex patients who can only be treated under GA.

The BDA has urged the Scottish Government to address this issue for many years but with little progress as the Government has repeatedly advised that this is a matter for NHS Boards. While Boards undoubtedly have a responsibility for tackling issues at a local level, the severe and enduring nature of this problem requires the Government to provide a national lead and to work with Boards to address the problem as a matter of urgency.

Before the pandemic, an estimated 8,000 GAs were carried out on children in Scotland each year for the removal of decayed teeth, and in BDA Scotland's 2021 Scottish Parliament election manifesto, we estimated that around 2,500 children were on waiting lists for paediatric extractions under GA. These figures were likely to be significant underestimates, and the problem is likely to have worsened significantly during the pandemic, with the associated pain and distress this causes for children and their families. While waiting for assessment and treatment, many children will be on antibiotics for extended periods, thereby risking an increase in antimicrobial resistance.

It has proved impossible for us to obtain accurate information from Health Boards on waiting lists for child dental general anaesthesia as they are neither routinely reported nor collected in a systematic manner, in sharp contrast to other NHS waiting lists. BDA Scotland issued a Freedom of Information request to all territorial NHS Boards in November 2019 to establish the current extent of the waiting times for paediatric extractions under GA and Boards' plans to address the problem. The information returned by Boards made it difficult to establish a clear figure for the number of children on waiting lists, and the length of these waits. However, we

understand that Boards are required to submit regular figures to the Scottish Government. We would therefore be grateful if you could provide the latest national figures for:

- the number of children waiting for **assessment**, and the average length of wait
- the number of children waiting for **treatment**, and the average length of wait.

Previous Cabinet Secretaries for Health have taken an interest in the issue but unfortunately have made no progress in tackling the problem. In April 2018, the then Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, Shona Robison, committed to intervene personally if there was no progress in resolving this issue but resigned from the Scottish Government shortly after. Your predecessor, Jeane Freeman, attended a theatre session for paediatric extractions under general anaesthetic during her tenure as Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport, and **we would like to invite you to attend a session in the near future** so you can see at first hand the traumatic nature of this procedure. We would be interested to know how long the Scottish Government considers an acceptable time for a child to wait to receive necessary surgery for the relief of pain.

Finally, we would like to request a meeting between yourself and/or the Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport and representatives of the BDA to help resolve the issue.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robt - Donald', written in a cursive style.

Robert Donald
Chair, BDA Scottish Council

CC. Mr Tom Ferris, Chief Dental Officer

CC. Ms Maree Todd MSP, Minister for Public Health, Women's Health and Sport

CC. Mr Tim McDonnell, Director, Primary Care, Scottish Government