

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

6 July 2022

Dear Mr Barclay,

NHS dentistry

On behalf of the country's 42,000 dentists, please accept our congratulations on your appointment as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care.

Let us cut to the chase. As we have repeatedly stressed to your predecessor, Ministers and the Health and Social Care Committee, without meaningful action and a fair funding settlement from this Government NHS dentistry in England faces a slow death.

Access problems are now the rule for millions. Every single day dentists are moving away from the NHS, unable to see a light at the end of the tunnel, leaving more and more patients unable to get the help they need. Concerns about this growing crisis are the number one reason people contact Healthwatch, are filling up MPs' postbags, making headlines, and have now become an issue on the doorstep at election time.

Over a decade after the Conservative Party committed to reforming the discredited contract underpinning NHS dental services in England, we have recently finally entered negotiations on new contractual arrangements. We remain, however, seriously concerned about this Government's lack of urgency and ambition to deliver genuine change.

Ministers have indicated that an announcement was set to be made this side of summer on what we would characterise as modest, marginal changes to the current failed NHS contract. We sincerely hope the reshuffle does not delay this, as we urgently need to move on to the next stage – meaningful long-term reform that can improve access for patients, and make sure dentists can see a future working in the NHS.

COVID has accelerated a process that has been in motion for over a decade. For 16 years perverse government targets have come before patient care, while dental budgets were subject to savage cuts unparalleled elsewhere in our health service. A system that funds care for barely half the population has creaked on, and the drift of talent out of the NHS continued. Now – as we move out of the pandemic – we face a historic backlog, an exodus from the workforce, and widening oral health inequality. NHS dentistry is at a tipping point, and it is clear that without urgent action, we will soon pass a point of no return.

Yesterday we marked the 74th birthday of the NHS, unsure if this service actually has a future. For the sake of our patients, we hope you will move this agenda forward without any further delay, and ensure officials have the latitude and the resources needed to finally end this crisis and start a new chapter in the history of NHS dentistry.

The Department has spoken of its intentions to 'level up' dentistry. We trust you will meet words with action.



Eddie Crouch
Chair, British Dental Association



Shawn Charlwood
Chair, BDA General Dental Practice Committee