

Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
*Sent by email*

21 May 2022

Dear Mr Javid,

## Charges and the funding of NHS dentistry

The Department has frozen NHS prescription charges. On behalf of the dental profession in England we ask that you now apply the same principles to charges for NHS dentistry.

With inflation at a 40-year high, families now face real and growing pressures with the cost of living. Your stated belief that where government can help, it absolutely will, must be applied here.

NHS dental charges were designed to discourage patients from seeking treatment. And, in the last decade - as inflation-busting increases became the norm – these charges have ceased to be a ‘contribution’ towards the cost of care and have become a substitute for meaningful state investment.

Yes, children and a proportion of adult patients are exempt. However, evidence shows the mounting cost of NHS dentistry impacts even on those who don’t have to pay. The number of treatments delivered to exempt adults crashed by almost a quarter in the five years ahead of the pandemic, with many unclear on their exemption status, worried about facing fines for ‘misclaiming’ free treatment or losing eligibility entirely because of changes across the benefits system. This translates into 1.7m fewer exempt adults accessing NHS dentistry in 2020 than in 2015.

Over a year’s worth of dentistry has been lost since the first lockdown, and patients are now presenting with higher levels of need. When official data shows one in five patients delay treatment for reasons of cost, and with oral health inequality set to widen, the government must not give those on modest incomes a reason to think twice about seeing their dentist.

No patient should have to choose between heating, eating or seeking NHS dental care. A charge freeze is a vital first step, and the logic of recent hikes – that patients should pay more so government can pay less – must end.

The Department has a stated commitment to ‘level up’ dentistry, including reform the discredited NHS contract. We want these pledges to have meaning, and a fair funding settlement is required to underpin the rebuild and reform of the service.

As we stressed to the Treasury ahead of the last Spending Review, it would take £880 million a year simply to restore levels of resource to those seen in 2010. It does not seem plausible to tackle the pandemic backlog, improve access and recruit and retain talent in the workforce on an inadequate, standstill budget.

Given the depth of access problems - and with the exodus of dentists from the NHS accelerating - there is real urgency here. Dentists want to ensure the public can access the care they need, delivered through a genuinely sustainable service. So, we trust you can offer assurances that further financial burdens will not fall on our patients and needed support will be put in place.



Eddie Crouch  
Chair, British Dental Association

cc. Rt Hon Rishi Sunak MP, HMT, Maria Caulfield MP, DHSC, Sara Hurley, Chief Dental Officer for England, NHSE