

## Dental recovery plan

In February 2024, the Department of Health and Social Care published a recovery plan to improve the provision of NHS dental care across England. Backed by £200 million in government funding, the plan aims to provide up to 2.5 million additional NHS dental appointments over the next 12 months.

Under the plan, NHS dentists will be offered a payment of between £15 and £50 (depending on treatment need) for around 1 million new patients who have not seen a dentist for two years or more. The minimum payment that dentists receive for carrying out NHS work will also increase, from £23 to £28. The recovery plan aims to attract new NHS dentists and improve access to care in areas of England where demand is highest. Around 240 dentists will be offered one-off payments of £20,000 to work in under-served areas of England for at least three years. Dental vans will also be introduced to provide

treatment in isolated rural and coastal communities.

In addition, the plan sets out how the NHS will increase focus on prevention and good oral health in young children. A new 'Smile for Life' programme will be provided in nurseries and other early years settings, which will teach children aged one to three how to brush their teeth, and offer advice to parents and parents-to-be on caring for baby gums and milk teeth. Primary schools in under-served areas will receive visits from dental teams who will offer advice and provide preventative fluoride varnish treatments to more than 165,000 children.

The Government will also consult on rolling out a water fluoridation programme in the most deprived areas of the UK, initially in the north-east of England. Water fluoridation can reduce the number of tooth extractions caused by decay and

could benefit an additional 1.6 million people.

The recovery plan also sets out measures to expand the dental workforce. These include a 40% increase in dental training places by 2032 and a simplified process for recruiting dentists from overseas. There will also be a consultation on proposals that will require dentists to work within the NHS for a specified period of time following the completion of their undergraduate training.

Although industry bodies have welcomed the recovery plan, Healthwatch England believes that more radical solutions will be required to get NHS dentistry back on track.

Read more about the recovery plan at:

<https://bit.ly/43e1fAW>

and

<https://bit.ly/31xPpZ2>



### NHS DENTAL CARE

# GP 'super-practices' among suggested NHS reforms

Community health centres and GP 'super-practices' are among a number of reforms suggested in a new report by The Times Health Commission. The report proposes ten key reforms aimed at creating a healthier Britain, as well as highlighting examples of best practice. The Commission was set up in January 2023 and was supported by 18 commissioners across a range of backgrounds including science, business, medicine, sport and policy.

One key reform is to establish a network of purpose-built community health centres. The centres would include GP surgeries, along with outpatient clinics, diagnostic centres, obesity or frailty support, dentists and pharmacists as well as non-medical services such as housing

and employment advice. The first centres should be built in disadvantaged areas, with services tailored to local need.

The report also suggested that GP 'super-practices' should be encouraged. Such practices reduce administrative burdens and back-office costs by bringing together several GP surgeries in one location. GPs should also be more proactive, working with other professionals such as pharmacists, nurses, social prescribers and physiotherapists.

Other suggested reforms include expanding the role that pharmacists play in medicines optimisation to save the NHS money, cut waste and reduce pressure on hospitals. Speeding up the process that allows

the NHS to switch to generic medicines could also deliver significant savings, while increasing the use of technology such as eConsult could streamline services.

The report also highlighted workforce issues, including unfilled vacancies and reports of an unhealthy work culture, with issues of bullying, discrimination and harassment and a lack of work / life balance. However, one criticism of the report was that the language used was GP-centric and could exclude other healthcare professionals, and that the focus should instead be on changing the wider primary care contract.

Read more about the report here: <https://bit.ly/3TurwHL>

# Pharmacy First to unlock full potential of community pharmacy

Around nine in ten community pharmacies in England are offering the new Pharmacy First service, which gives patients more choice over where to access healthcare and will free up 10 million GP appointments a year. Pharmacy First will replace the Community Pharmacist Consultation Service (CPCS).

Pharmacy First went live in 10,265 community pharmacies in January 2024. The service allows community pharmacies to supply prescription-only medicines, including antibiotics where clinically appropriate, without the patient needing a GP appointment or prescription. The service covers seven conditions: sinusitis, sore throat, earache, infected insect bites, impetigo, shingles and uncomplicated urinary tract infections in women.

Pharmacy First builds on the expansion of the NHS Pharmacy Contraception Service. More than 5,300 pharmacies have now signed up to provide women with oral contraception without needing to first see their GP.

Concerns have been raised about the capacity and readiness of community pharmacies to provide the new and expanded schemes and services. However, the National Pharmacy Association expects pharmacy teams to successfully deliver the additional services despite increasing pressure on the sector. As negotiated by Community Pharmacy England, pharmacies are

paid per consultation under the Pharmacy First service and receive a monthly fixed payment if they provide a minimum number of monthly clinical pathway consultations. By 2025 at the latest, to qualify for the monthly payment, pharmacies must also deliver the contraception service and blood pressure check service.

Community pharmacies have urged the Government to allow them to take an active role in managing conditions such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease. However, the Government has confirmed that there are no plans to expand the scope of Pharmacy First.

Read more about Pharmacy First at: <https://bit.ly/3PevuBU> and <https://bit.ly/3wLOCrS>



# In brief...

## GP practices told to proceed with automatic patient record access

NHS England has told GP practices to proceed with offering automatic record access to patients following advice from the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Practices were required to offer automatic access via the NHS App by 31 October 2023. However, the BMA's GP Committee advised practices to submit data protection impact assessments to the ICO before proceeding due to concerns about implications for the safety of vulnerable patients. In response, the ICO has advised that, as long as GP practices remain in control of deciding which records to make available, it considers them able to mitigate any risks to patients' rights and freedoms.

Read more about the ICO's advice at: <https://bit.ly/4cd8FZ9>

## NHS App could resolve 20% of calls to GP practices

Since 30 January 2024, the NHS App shows patients the average estimated waiting time for their hospital treatment at NHS acute trusts. According to NHS England, this will help alleviate queries that would normally be directed towards GP practices and potentially reduce call volumes from patients requesting an update on treatment timescales. Overall, NHS England estimates that up to 20% of calls to GP practices could be resolved through hospital appointment features within the NHS App.

Read more about the app features at: <https://bit.ly/4a224Po>

## One in four delaying dental care due to cost

Statistics from the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities have revealed that a quarter of adults have delayed dental treatment due to the cost. Overall, a third of adults said that cost had affected the type of treatment they received.

According to the statistics, 63% of adults have regular dental check-ups, while 18% only visit a dentist when they are experiencing problems. No need to visit the dentist (50%), unable to afford the cost (34%), bad experiences (16%) and unable to find a dentist (12%) are some of the main reasons for not seeking treatment.

Read more about the statistics at: <https://bit.ly/48NNp9u>

## GP practices must register with new CQC portal

The Care Quality Commission (CQC) is inviting GP practices to register with a new portal as part of changes to inspections. Accounts on the current portal will not be automatically transferred, so GP practices must register with the new portal when invited. Practices can use the existing portal to view data until 31 March 2024, but will not be able to make any changes or submissions. Historic data will also not be transferred to the new portal, so the CQC has advised practices to download any data they need for record-keeping purposes.

Read more about the new portal at: <https://bit.ly/3wMwas3>

## Patients declining prescription medication due to cost

More patients are declining prescription medication due to the cost. This is according to a survey of 1,357 pharmacists in England, which found that 97% had patients who had foregone some of the medications on a prescription due to the cost and 35% had seen an increase in the number of patients declining prescriptions over the last 12 months. In response to the findings, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society (RPS) has called for a government review of prescription charges and the charge exemption list.

Read more about the survey at: <https://bit.ly/4c6xsy7>

## Accreditation scheme extended to PCN managers

The Institute of General Practice Management has extended its accreditation scheme to Primary Care Network (PCN) managers. The scheme, which was launched in 2022 and initially covered GP practices, allows managers to obtain professional status and be formally accredited. The accreditation framework has been adapted for PCN managers and covers ten separate areas/domains in which an applicant must demonstrate proficiency: these include qualifications, workforce, leadership, and financial proficiency. PCN managers who have held the role for at least two years can apply for accreditation.

Read more about the accreditation scheme at: <https://bit.ly/3uWM3eX>



# Findings of Dentistry Census published

Between 2021 and 2023, the average turnover of dental practices increased by almost 4%, but profit margins fell by 5.5%. This is according to findings from the 2024 Dentistry Census, which was a survey of almost 3,000 dental practices carried out between April and August 2023.

The Census has revealed that higher energy bills and a 26% increase in consumables costs were key reasons for the fall in profits. Almost three-quarters of practices reported that energy costs were directly

impacting the financial stability of their business and a third of practices were impacted by interest rates.

The Census also found that 44% of practices were facing recruitment difficulties that are severe enough to impact their ability to provide safe, effective patient care.

In 2023, spend on capital equipment increased, with 16% more practices spending over £50,000 in the last three years, compared to 2021. Investment and adoption of digital technologies also increased, with around 85% of practices now owning an intraoral scanner, while investment in 3D printing grew by 15%.

The increase in capital investment

has been largely driven by the growth in private dentistry, with the number of practices carrying out NHS work falling from 61% in 2021 to 44% in 2023. Among practices that carry out both private and NHS work, 71% of revenue came from private treatment.

The majority of practices reported an increase in patient interest for elective or complex treatment such as aesthetic orthodontics, dental implants and bleaching. The number of patients using a payment plan has also increased sharply, with 51% of patients using a plan in 2023 compared with 28% in 2021.

Read more about the Census findings at:

<https://bit.ly/3Isxp26>



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## Financial support for practices switching to cloud-based tech



NHS England has launched an Early Adopter programme to support healthcare practices that want to utilise new technology. GP practices, federations and Primary Care Networks (PCNs) could qualify for tens of thousands of pounds in funding to help them explore, assess and implement the next generation of IT systems.

Under the programme, practices will be offered specialist advice and support, including toolkits and guidance to guide them through the process of migrating to a new system. The programme is broken into four stages: discover, plan the change (pre-deployment), implement the change (deployment) and post go-live support.

The systems will be offered via suppliers included on the Tech Innovation Framework, which was established in 2022 and set up to develop internet-first and cloud-

based clinical systems for general practice. Under the programme, participants can choose the supplier that best suits their needs.

While practices will need the support of their Integrated Care Board to become an early adopter in order to qualify for the funding, there is no commitment for those that begin the discovery phase to move forward with the changes.

Funding is likely to amount to up to £20,000 per discovery and £100,000 per pre-deployment, depending on the scale and complexity of the planned changes.

There is no stated deadline for signing up, with funding currently available for this financial year and all applications assessed independently.

Read more about the programme here: <https://bit.ly/3IxTtbA>