

Supplementary written evidence submitted by Healthwatch England (DTY0105)

Initial reflections on dental recovery plan

If we were to adopt a traffic light rating system for this plan to date, we'd give it:

- **Green for at least acknowledging the access crisis.** We continue to hear desperate stories from patients, so we welcome the fact it's finally on the political agenda after years of inaction from successive governments.
- However, we'd rate it **Amber for the level of detail.** It leaves many questions unanswered on implementation and delivery and lacks clear milestones and metrics for success. There's also missing detail on how to address cost barriers to dental care.
- Finally, we'd rate the plan **Red for Ambition.** Most of the proposals are small-scale and short-term and the plan is not going to deliver the government's stated ambition of ensuring that everyone who needs to see a dentist will be able to do so.

The other two panellists were asked about contract reform. If asked, we would have stated that from the public perspective:

- People have a mistaken belief that they have a right to be with a dental practice permanently in the same way as a GP. That's why there can be confusion or ill feeling if a practice removes them from their informal list.
- People want a closer and ongoing relationship with a local trusted dentist.
- Poor oral health has clinical implications in relation to health disease, diabetes, cancer care and in pregnancy and needs more frequent attention in children. That's before you factor in any of the social and mental health impacts.
- That's why we have called for restatement of patient registration. We were disappointed in the government's rejection of this recommendation from the committee. We don't agree that it's convenient for patients to be made to travel hundreds of miles just to find what should be a 'must-have' service, rather than a 'nice-to-have' care.

Qualifying our initial welcome for the plan

- We had cautiously welcomed the plan partly due to being pre-brief by NHSE that it was backed by new funding and have since been disappointed to discover that's not the case.

Our one question for the minister

The other two panellists were asked for their 'one question for the minister'. If we had been asked the same, we would have asked:

- Will the government commit to a mid-point review, in six months' time, to check if the plan is delivering extra NHS access for patients? Along with publication of data showing that this is over and above previous delivery. The last initiative of £50m in 2022 only delivered 64K extra appointments out of 350k heralded by ministers.

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