

A Summary of ‘Taking Care of Your Smile’ report



Introduction

YouthWatch Leeds is a group of 13 to 25-year-old Healthwatch Leeds volunteers. They make sure that children and young people’s voices are heard in health and social care services.



‘Taking care of your smile’ is a volunteer led project, focusing on the oral health of children and young people in Leeds. We spoke to children, young people, parents and carers about their experiences with dental care and what could be better. We gathered feedback through focus groups and surveys, completed in person and online..

We gave feedback to the Children and Young People’s Health Board, West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) and Local Authority Public Health Department regularly throughout this project. This influenced investment in services and improved oral health information for families.

In May 2023, local Healthwatch across West Yorkshire shared [people’s experiences of NHS dentistry](#) at a West Yorkshire ICB meeting. This project adds to the general experiences, giving the ICB and dental services more detail about the experiences of children and young people in Leeds.

Key findings

The things we heard the most are:

1. **Struggling to find a dentist –**

Many dental practices are not taking new NHS patients. Those that are, have long waiting lists.

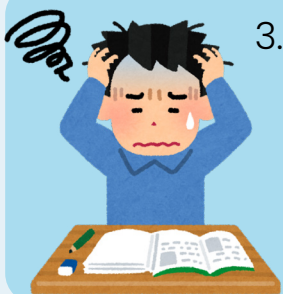


2. **Money worries –**

The cost of dental care impacts how those with financial difficulties look after their teeth.



7. **Language barriers –** Not all families are given access to translators when visiting the dentist. Written information is also not always available in other languages.



3. **Anxiety and distress –**

Some children and young people are experiencing anxiety, distress and poor school outcomes because of poor oral health.

8. **Complicated system –**

For those newly arrived in the UK, access to dental care is not a clear process. Many struggle to know where they can access support.



4. **Poor communication –**

Some dentists do not explain things well, increasing young people’s fear of visiting the dentist, and leads them to avoiding visiting the dentist.



5. **Adapting care –**

Some dentists support people as an individual, for example, using story boards to support autistic children.



9. **Schools stepping in –** School staff have supported families to access dental services.



What needs to change?

Key recommendations



1

Simple search

Make it easier to find an NHS dentist.

2

Knowledge

Provide help and education in schools.

3

Access

Improve children and young people access to NHS dentists, targeting families in low-income neighbourhoods.

4

Promote

Increase oral health promotion, particularly for those from low-income neighbourhoods.

5

Adapt

Improve children and young people's experience of appointments to reduce anxiety and meet specific needs.

6

Translate

Provide translators and information in other languages.

7

Act

Listen to children and young people to make decisions about dental services and future planning.

