

What do the Welsh public understand about NHS dental services, what do they think they could look like, and what are their priorities? A qualitative study

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Executive Summary

Background

NHS General Dental Services in Wales are undergoing reform. To ensure dental services meet the needs of those who use them, we explored what the public think these services could look like and what their priorities for are.

“Having that public perspective on what is an acceptable service is absolutely vital when deciding on policy...any reform to services needs to reflect that public need and their preferences”

Andrew Dickenson, Chief Dental Officer for Wales

The **aim of this study** was to consult with the Welsh public to understand their views on NHS dental services to help inform dental reform plans in Wales. Specific objectives were to explore:

- What do the public think Welsh NHS dental services could look like?
- What do the public understand about dental services and the dental team?
- What are their views on skill mix in dentistry?
- What are their attitudes towards and needs for oral health self-management?
- What are their priorities for dental care services in Wales?

Methods

We used qualitative methods (interviews and focus group style workshops) across two phases between November 2023 and May 2024 to explore the study objectives. Thematic analyses were performed on the data to identify key themes.

Key Findings

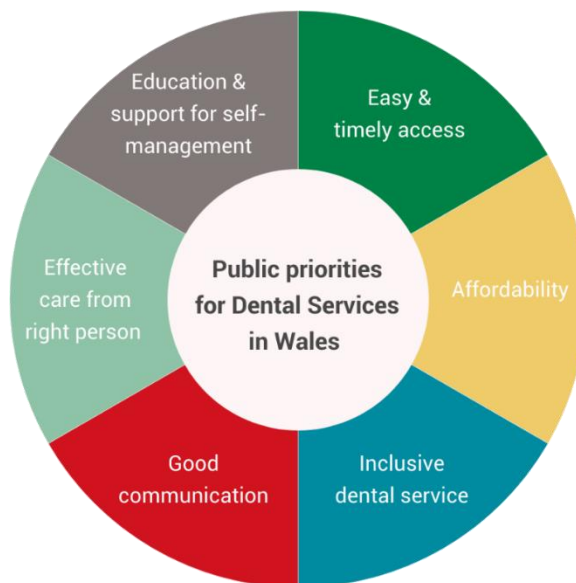
Forty four participants with diverse backgrounds from all seven local health boards took part. **In summary, we found that the public participants:**

- Had *limited understanding* of the dental team and their roles
- *Lack clarity* on how and when to access *emergency dental services*
- Are *supportive of increased skill-mix* and multi-disciplinary approaches to their general dental care, *but awareness and education are needed*
- Are *receptive* to solutions offered by ‘*teledentistry*’, if this is delivered in an *optional and inclusive way*
- Would like *more education and support* to be more engaged in oral health *self-management*

Key Priorities

Six key priorities for dental services in Wales were identified by participants:

1. Easy and timely access
2. Affordability
3. Inclusive dental service
4. Good communication
5. Effective care from the right person
6. Education and support for self-management



Recommended priority areas	What the public think this could help with	Public Priority addressed
Improve understanding of the dental team and their roles via a public awareness raising campaign and easily available inclusive education resources	Increased awareness of skill mix approaches and the choice of dental team members available to patients, increased patients’ confidence in skills of the wider dental team, improved buy-in/uptake of skill-mix (e.g. making/accepting an appointment with a dental therapist), freeing up resources and time in the service for those with more complex needs	1. Easy and timely access 4. Good communication 5. Effective care from the right person
Consider the role of ‘teledentistry’ and alternative delivery models	Offering a more inclusive, accessible, and convenient service, and improved two-way communication with dental team	1. Easy and timely access 3. Inclusive dental service 4. Good communication
Improve understanding of emergency dental situations and how to access these services	Increased awareness of what constitutes usual, urgent, or emergency dental care, and making sure that more patients access the right service for them (whilst reducing burden on other services)	1. Easy and timely access 4. Good communication 5. Effective care from the right person
Improve education and support for better self-management	Increased awareness of the importance of oral health prevention, improved understanding of the things that people can do to self-manage, improved uptake of preventative behaviours	3. Inclusive dental service 4. Good communication 6. Education and support for self-management

