



British Society of
Paediatric Dentistry

Looked After Children Oral Health Toolkit

A practical guide for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

Courtesy of BSPD

BSPD SUPPORTS PUBLICATION OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN ORAL HEALTH TOOLKIT

A new practical guide for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) offering recommendations on oral health for Looked After Children (LAC) has been published by the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry (BSPD) in the Resources section of their website.

This Oral Health Toolkit supports ICBs, Integrated Care Systems (ICSs) and key stakeholders in children's oral health to identify the oral health needs, as well as plan and deliver dental services for LAC.

The toolkit has been written by a working group who have come together to share practical examples of activities and programmes that have been implemented in different regions of the UK. It contains personal reflections and case studies embedded in the document which provide practical and real examples of activities and programmes that have been implemented in different regions of the UK. Whilst BSPD has not initiated this document, the Society supports the publication of this toolkit as part of the drive to ensure that the oral health needs of LAC are prioritised.

LAC are defined under the Children's Act 1989 as children and young people (CYP)

who have been under the continuous care of a local authority for more than 24 hours. LAC are placed in care under a court or through voluntary arrangements with their parents or carers. They can remain in care until their eighteenth birthday or older if they are in full-time education.

LAC also includes Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), a person under 18-years-old or who, in the absence of documentary evidence establishing age, appears to be under that age and is applying for asylum on their own right, is separated from both parents, and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so. Importantly, current government policy does not support using dental records or x-rays to assist with age estimations for UASC.

The LAC Oral Health Toolkit's four main authors are Laura Johnston, Vanessa Muirhead, Claire Stevens CBE and Katharine Julia Hurry, supported by 24 other experts with personal reflections on case studies; six individuals have provided feedback and comments prior to publication.

Dr Vanessa Muirhead, author and Clinical Reader, and Honorary Consultant in Dental Public Health, Queen

Mary University of London said: 'Looked after Children are an overlooked and vulnerable group. Our research with LAC, care leavers and foster carers shows that they often have unmet dental needs despite the conscientious care often provided in foster families. We created this practical toolkit to draw on evidence, to share examples of different programmes and to provide links to further resources. Tackling inequalities in LAC is essential and a key objective of NHS England national policies such as Core20PLUS5 for Children and Young People. We hope that this toolkit will be widely used to improve dental services for LAC and care leavers at a crucial time in their lives.'

<https://www.bspd.co.uk/Professionals/Resources>

NHS DENTAL CRISIS CAUSING ANXIETY ABOUT NATION'S ORAL HEALTH

The Oral Health Index, published by the Wrigley Oral Healthcare Programme to coincide with World Oral Health Day on 20 March, shows broad public disenchantment with dental services across the country.

While 68% of people say they feel more confident with a healthy smile, nearly a third of people (32%) report being stressed or anxious about the state of their own oral health.

Furthermore, one in ten people (10%) in England have missed more than two weeks of work in the past three years due to dental problems, a national survey has found. The younger workforce has been hit twice as hard, with one-in-five 16- to 34-year-olds reported to have missed at least a fortnight of work over oral health problems.

Two-thirds of respondents (64%) believe the country is experiencing a crisis in dental service provision – a broadly similar proportion to 2022's Index (67%).

An overwhelming majority (72%) of people want to see more investment from Government in dental services, with over three in five (62%) wanting dental

professionals to be paid more for NHS work, three-quarters (76%) thinking more dental professionals should be recruited, and nearly half (46%) supporting fluoridation as a measure for supporting good oral health.

Economic research commissioned by the Wrigley Oral Healthcare Programme last year showed that rolling out supervised toothbrushing programmes for children in targeted areas, expanding the coverage of water fluoridation schemes, and encouraging the public to chew sugar-free gum could together save the NHS over £50 million per year.¹ NHS patients could collectively save £95.9 million a year.¹

Speaking on publication of the Oral Health Index on behalf of the Wrigley Oral Healthcare Programme, Dr Ben Atkins said: 'Without regular dental check-ups, smaller and preventable oral health issues can easily turn into much larger problems that require urgent and lengthy treatments. This is leaving people in pain and resulting in them taking extended periods of time off work, too.'

'The Oral Health Index's findings have underscored the importance of addressing the crisis in NHS dentistry.

'A mix of investment in services and preventative programmes is needed, and we want to see the contribution that sugar-free chewing gum can make to good oral health reflected in national guidance.'

British Dental Association Chair Eddie Crouch said: 'The collapse of NHS dentistry isn't just hurting millions of patients, but the wider economy. Every time Ministers take a miserly approach to funding it hits other parts of their balance sheet. Not just the costs hitting our hospitals and GP surgeries, but the millions of lost hours in our workplaces.'

References

1. Woolley N, Camplejohn A. The economic value of good oral health. *Frontier economics*, 25 May 2023. Available at: <https://www.frontier-economics.com/uk/en/news-and-insights/news/news-article/?nodeId=10334#> (accessed March 2024).