



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Stephen Kinnock MP
Minister of State for Care

39 Victoria Street
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Mr Lachlan Bruce
Policy and Campaigns Manager
Cleft Lip and Palate Action (CLAPA)
By email to: lachlan.bruce@clapa.com

23 April 2026

Dear Mr Bruce,

I am writing to you with regard to the petition presented to the Prime Minister calling for improved access to NHS dentistry for people born with a cleft. The petition has been passed to this department.

I was sorry to read of the survey results shared, and I appreciate the concerns that CLAPA shares with the petition's signatories.

The management of a cleft lip and/or cleft palate requires involvement from a wide variety of specialties throughout the growth and development of the patient. Treatment, monitoring and maintenance of the condition is often required into adulthood, as the patient's facial bones and teeth grow and develop.

NHS England offers clear guidance for specialist restorative dentistry for patients with a cleft lip and/or cleft palate in its *Clinical standard for restorative dentistry*, which should be routinely available as part of NHS trust services. The guidance can be found at www.england.nhs.uk/publication/commissioning-standard-for-restorative-dentistry.

Such specialist restorative dentistry involves replacing missing teeth and repairing damaged teeth, and it extends to the rehabilitation of the entire mouth. It relies on expert skills and knowledge from relevant 'monospecialities', which are predominantly NHS consultant-led and usually in a hospital setting. Once treated and rehabilitated, routine ongoing care for these patients can be provided within primary dental care services.

Since the Clinical Standards Advisory Group's Cleft Lip and Palate Study was published in 1998, cleft services are delivered by centralised cleft centres using standardised treatment pathways. These centres routinely follow-up with patients until they are at least 20 years old.

Integrated care boards (ICBs) are responsible for commissioning primary care services, including NHS dentistry, to meet the needs of their local populations and for determining the priorities for investment in their area. Community dental services are also commissioned by ICBs and provide specialised dental services to adults and children with additional needs. They are available in a variety of settings to ensure everyone can access dental care – these include hospitals, health centres providing specialist services, mobile clinics, home visits, and visits to nursing and care homes.

We acknowledge that people of all ages are currently facing considerable challenges in accessing NHS services, and the Government is determined to work across the health and social care sector to build an NHS that is fit for the future, including NHS dentistry. Patients who are struggling to find a local dentist should contact NHS 111 if seeking urgent care.

We are taking significant steps to improve access for dental patients of all ages across the country. Since February, following advice from the Chief Dental Officer for England, the Government has broadened the scope of the previously pledged extra urgent dental care appointments, to include all dental appointments. Through doing so, ICBs will be able to offer more dental care for more patients, including children and those with serious issues.

We also recently undertook a public consultation on a package of changes to improve access to, and improve the quality of, NHS dentistry, to deliver better care for the diverse oral health needs of people across England, including children. The consultation demonstrated broad support. The Government's response to the consultation, published in December, confirms its intention to implement the proposals set out in the consultation, with changes to the current dental contract implemented this month. Details of the consultation can be found at www.gov.uk/government/consultations/nhs-dentistry-contract-quality-and-payment-reforms/outcome/government-response-to-consultation-on-nhs-dentistry-contract-quality-and-payment-reforms. Further information about dental contract reform can be found at www.england.nhs.uk/primary-care/dentistry/dental-commissioning/dental-contract-reform.

More broadly, *Fit for the Future: The 10 Year Health Plan for England* confirms our commitment to transform NHS dentistry, with a shift to focus on prevention and on the retention of NHS dentists. The ten-year health plan also sets out that our Neighbourhood Health Service will provide opportunities for dental care professionals to work as part of neighbourhood teams to provide integrated and proactive care that meets individual needs while maximising the capacity and capability of the workforce. The plan can be found at www.gov.uk/government/publications/10-year-health-plan-for-england-fit-for-the-future.

I would be grateful if you would share this reply with the petition's signatories.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Kinnock', written over a light grey rectangular background.

STEPHEN KINNOCK