



Consultant in Dental Public Health Update

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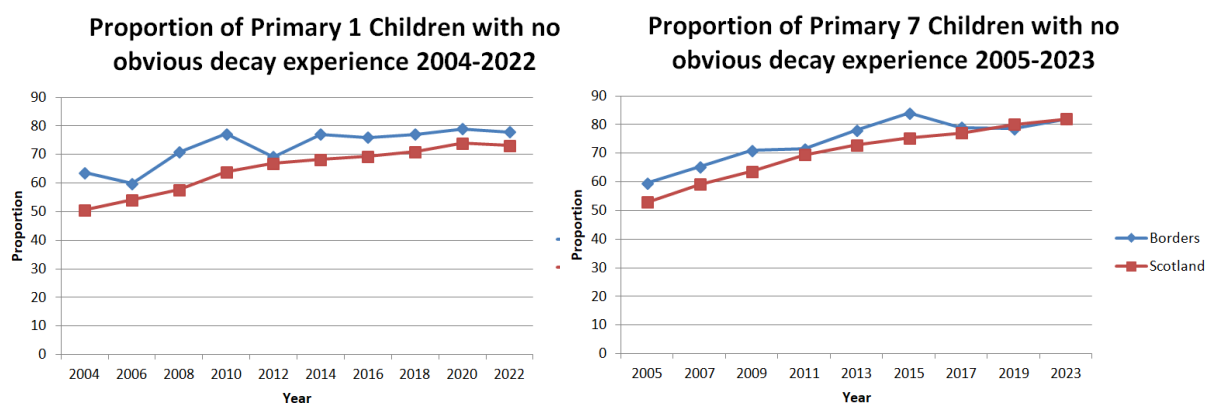
Introduction

Dental Public Health is a specialty concerned with securing and maintaining population oral health, working across the pillars of Public Health and in partnership across the wider system. Dental Public Health in the Borders is delivered through the South East and Tayside Dental Public Health Network. This update describes the oral health status in the Borders, ongoing work to promote and improve oral health and future plans.

Oral Health in the Borders

Our most robust data on oral health are gathered annually through the National Dental Inspection Programme (NDIP) of children in Primaries 1 and 7. In general the oral health of children in The Borders is good with the proportion of children with no obvious decay experience regularly higher than the national average as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1 – Trends in proportion of P1 and P7 children with no obvious decay experience

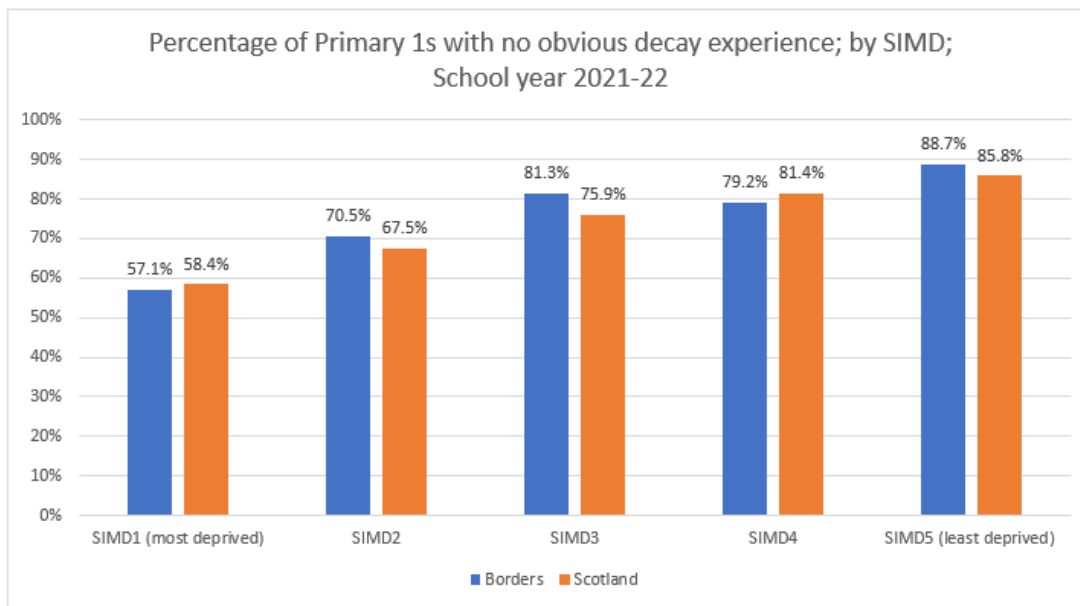


Public Health Scotland

The most recent NDIP report (school year 2022-23) shows that in the Borders 82% of Primary 7 children had no obvious decay experience, which is comparable to Scotland as a whole. This is encouraging and is a marked improvement on 2005 when these figures were only 59.5% in The Borders and 52.9% in Scotland, however almost 20% of children do still experience dental decay and action is required to bring this down further.

We know that children living in areas of deprivation are at increased risk of dental decay and analysis of the P1 NDIP data from 2021-22 at Health Board level (Figure 2) demonstrates the gradient between oral health of children living in the most and least deprived areas in The Borders. Any action to reduce decay experience must therefore focus on supporting those at greatest risk.

Figure 2 – Primary 1 “no obvious decay experience” by SIMD, Borders and Scotland



Public Health Scotland

Adult oral health has also improved over time though data are less readily available. We know that these improvements mean that many more adults are retaining their own teeth into older age. While this is hugely positive, it does generate an increased need for dental care, including for teeth which have undergone complex restorative treatment and require ongoing maintenance. Additional complexities arise as this ageing dentate population develop co-morbidities, frailty or dependencies which can impact on provision of dental care and ability to maintain oral health on a day-to day basis. A proactive, preventative approach is essential to ensure early identification of older people who require support with daily oral care to prevent dental problems developing and impacting on overall health and wellbeing.

Dental Services

Dental services in The Borders continue to operate under significant pressure. A national shortage of dental professionals has compounded longstanding recruitment challenges in the area, impacting on the availability of dental services. Emergency dental care remains available to anyone with an urgent dental problem, either through their usual dentist or, if unregistered, through the Borders Emergency Dental Service.

As at 30th September 2022 (most recent data available), 83.4% of children and 84.4% of adults in the Borders were registered with an NHS dentist, slightly lower than the national average of 87.2% of children and below the national rate of 97.3% of adults. Recent access challenges have seen a reduction in the numbers of young children registered with an NHS

dentist, most likely because very few practices have been accepting new patients since many of these children were born.

The majority of NHS dental care is delivered by independent dental contractors in the General Dental Service (GDS) (“high street” dental practices). The Public Dental Service (PDS) has a remit to provide dental care for vulnerable populations who cannot be treated in routine general dental services. In the Borders the PDS have played a valuable role in delivering access to dental care for members of the general population where availability of GDS has not been able to meet the level of demand. As access challenges have increased, it is important that PDS capacity is managed to ensure that those most in need of this service are prioritised.

Over the past 18 months two new NHS general dental practices have opened in The Borders which has helped to increase capacity, though levels of demand remain high. Access to dental care, while still challenging, is beginning to show some signs of improvement.

A new system for NHS dental care was introduced in Scotland on 1st November 2023. This has facilitated a move to a more patient centred approach with recall intervals (time between check ups), tailored to the individual patients’ oral health status and a simplification of the fee structure. It remains early days for this new system but it is hoped that this will bring increased stability to the sector and over time support increased access to NHS dental care.

Prevention

As with many other aspects of health, the most important factors for maintaining good oral health sit outwith healthcare or dental services. On a day to day basis brushing teeth at least twice a day with fluoride toothpaste, eating a diet low in sugar, avoiding smoking and limiting alcohol intake will help prevent dental problems. These factors become even more important in times when dental services are under extreme pressure.

Recognising that for some people their life circumstances can place them at increased risk of poor oral health, NHS Borders have an active Oral Health Improvement Team who work closely with various partners and agencies to help create environments which support oral health. The main body of work for the team is delivery of the five national oral health improvement programmes:



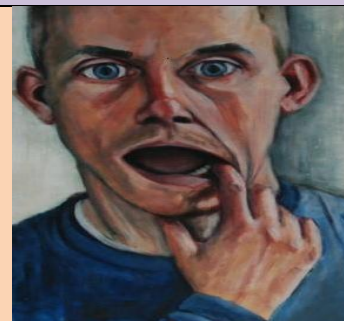
Childsmile – for children, takes a proportionate universalism approach to improve the oral health of all children, with a particular focus and enhanced input for those at greatest need. Childsmile work closely with dental services, health visitors, education establishments and other children’s services supporting toothbrushing in the home and through supervised toothbrushing programmes as well as offering advice and support to families and encouraging dental attendance. The supervised toothbrushing programme in particular has been estimated to save almost £3 in reduced treatment costs for each £1 spent.



Open Wide – for adults with additional care needs. Since the national programme was launched in 2019 the team in NHS Borders have developed strong networks with support agencies as the programme becomes established. Oral health support and advice, including toothbrushing are supported



Caring for Smiles – for dependent older people. Focussed initially on care homes, the programme provides training to care staff to enable them to deliver daily oral care to maintain healthy mouths for those who require support with this important task. The NHS Borders team actively seek to expand the reach of the programme working with care homes but also across other health and care settings



Mouth Matters – for people in prison and .



Smile4Life for people experiencing homelessness are delivered in parallel with a focus on the most vulnerable communities through working with partner agencies such as the Dept of Work and Pensions, addictions services and other local groups.

Despite a pause in these programmes when staff were redeployed to other areas during the COVID pandemic, remobilisation of the programmes has been very successful and the team constantly seek to expand and develop to deliver the best possible support and prevention of dental disease.

Strategic Direction

In response to an oral health needs assessment undertaken in 2018, a Strategic Plan for Oral Health and Dental Services is in advanced stages of development and will be implemented from April 2024. The overarching twelve year plan will be divided into three yearly action plans. The plan will deliver on four key themes based on the ten priorities identified by the needs assessment as outlined in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3 – Vision, Themes and Priorities for NHS Borders Strategic Plan for Oral Health and Dental Services 2024-36

OUR VISION:				
Everyone in the Borders will enjoy excellent oral health as a key part of their overall health and wellbeing.				
<u>THEMES</u>	Maximising oral health	Access to dental care	Developing pathways	Partnership working
<u>PRIORITY ACTIONS</u>	Raising the profile of oral health	Maintaining and improving access	Meeting the needs of ageing patients	Raising the profile of oral health
	Maintaining and improving oral health	Encouraging recruitment and retention	Meeting the needs of dental priority groups	Maintaining and improving oral health
	Meeting the needs of ageing patients	Developing the role of the Public Dental Service	Developing the Public Dental Service workforce	Meeting the needs of ageing patients
	Meeting the needs of dental priority groups		Developing patient pathways to dental services	Meeting the needs of dental priority groups
	Networking and engagement with dental teams and wider partners			Networking and engagement with dental teams and wider partners

