

Torbay Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board

Oral Health and Dental Access Update NHS Devon ICB and Torbay Public Health November 2026

Introduction

This report provides an overview of current oral health and dental access initiatives across Devon and Torbay, including progress against national dental reform objectives, service developments, prevention programmes, workforce initiatives, and performance against key national measures.

Torbay Statistics

- **Hospital admissions & extractions under general anaesthetic (0-19s)**

Torbay has a significantly higher rate of extractions than the England and Southwest values at **729.3 per 100K population** (England 251, Southwest 230). Hospital admissions for tooth decay (0-19) are defined as finished consultant episodes with tooth extractions. Source – Hospital Episode Statistics (HES). Latest data (2-24-25) shows an **18%** increase from 23-24. This is a greater % increase than England (8%). The Southwest has seen a reduction of 11%. Torbay has the highest rate in the Southwest and is the fifth worst in England. Numbers likely to be an under reporting based on variability in HES data.

- Numbers 24-25: **200 in total**. 0-4: 15 / 5-9: 125 / 10-14: 45 / 15-19: 10.
- Most extractions are in the 5-9 age group, highlighting the need for programmes (for example First Dental Steps and Supervised Toothbrushing) to focus on early years

- **Prevalence of tooth decay in five-year old children.** This profile describes the oral health of five-year-olds living in Torbay. It uses data from the 2024 Biennial National Dental Epidemiology Survey, published in Feb 25.

- **217 five-year-olds** were examined via a sample of primary schools. Prevalence of experience of dentinal decay: **Torbay: 26.4% (21.3% increase)**, England 22.4%. Devon: 19.3%. Next survey us due for release early 2027

- **Oral cancers in adults - mortality rate.** Latest data set **2020-22**. Torbay prevalence based is **6.3** per 100,000 (34 cases). This is worse than England (5.2) and an increase on last measurement period (2017-19). Oral cancer is more common in men and deprived groups. Source: ONS. Southwest prevalence is 4.7, Plymouth 6.5 (highest in SW) and Devon 3.9.

- The first **National Dental Epidemiology Programme Survey of Adults aged 65+ in care homes** was completed in 2025, results are due in early December. The survey will provide a first national, comparable picture of

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clinical oral health, including tooth decay, plaque, dentures, treatment needs and urgency. It will also cover residents' experiences of dental access, barriers to appointments and how oral health affects daily life, such as eating and socialising. The survey will provide a good baseline for future planning

National Dental Contract Reform

NHS dental contract reforms were introduced nationally from April 2026 with the aim of improving patient access, increasing urgent care capacity and supporting prevention-focused care. Key changes include:

- Mandatory delivery of 8.2% of contract value through urgent and unscheduled care.
- Introduction of new complex care pathways for patients with severe periodontal disease and extensive dental decay.
- Greater use of prevention through fluoride varnish application and changes to fissure sealant payments.
- Additional workforce support measures, including annual clinician appraisal funding and quality improvement incentives.
- Reinforcement of NICE recall guidance to support more appropriate patient recall intervals and release capacity for patients with greater need.

Improving Access to NHS Dentistry

NHS Devon continues to increase dental capacity through investment and procurement activity.

A new dental contract covering Torquay and Paignton has been awarded for up to nine years, valued at approximately £1.3 million per annum. The service will provide:

- 33,000 additional Units of Dental Activity (UDAs) each year.
- 30% of capacity dedicated to urgent and unscheduled care.
- A specific focus on addressing health inequalities and supporting vulnerable populations.

NHS Devon is also undertaking procurement of a new dental helpline service to improve patient experience and maximise utilisation of available appointments.

Supporting Vulnerable Groups

Targeted work continues to improve access for populations with the greatest oral health needs, including:

- Commissioning initiatives focused on vulnerable groups through newly procured dental contracts.
- Development of dental services for people experiencing homelessness in Torbay and North Devon.
- Dental checks for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

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- Continued support for Children Looked After and care leavers.
- Development of a Devon-wide oral health workforce training programme.
- Review of domiciliary dental services for people unable to attend traditional dental settings.

Dental Workforce

NHS Devon continues to invest in recruitment, retention and workforce development through:

- The national Dental Recruitment Incentive ("Golden Hello") Scheme.
- Postgraduate bursaries and specialist dental trainee support.
- Funding for the Educational Supervisor Incentive Scheme through to 2028/29 to encourage more training practices and support recruitment and retention of Foundation Dentists.

Oral Health Improvement and Prevention

NHS Devon and local authority partners continue to deliver a range of prevention programmes aimed at improving oral health outcomes and reducing inequalities.

- **First Dental Steps (1-2 yrs).** This programme trains health visitors and midwives to give oral health care advice to families with children under two and supply free oral health care packs (toothbrushes and toothpaste). Children at high risk of decay are identified and referred directly to Community Dental teams for further help if required.
- **Big Brush Club Supervised Toothbrushing programme (3-11yrs).** This important programme trains school and nursery staff to increase daily brushing via supervised activity - making brushing part of children's everyday routine and helping to protect their teeth from decay. The Big Brush Club has been extended to provide an offer to 100% of primary schools and nurseries in Torbay. At present, the programme is achieving a 90% uptake in schools and 75% in nurseries. National funding has also been drawn down to extend the offer to all primary year groups in schools that have the highest residency of children from the areas of greatest inequality. Take up is much lower in these older year groups – reason include space, teaching capacity and restrictions on pupil time (curriculum).
- **Open Wide Step Inside (6-7 yrs).** Year 2 children in primary schools across Torbay have been part of this programme where the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise (PDSE) Outreach Team deliver 45-minute oral health education lessons. The lesson includes a 15-minute animated film and an interactive session. The programme is offered to all primary schools in Torbay and is currently achieving a 75% take-up.

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- **Devon Oral Health Workforce Training.** A new service will deliver a workforce training offer for non-dental professionals working with both children and adults, including priority populations at higher risk of poor oral health (care-dependent adults, children in care and care experienced). It is anticipated that this new service will be live by July 2027.

Torbay specific outputs

- **Resources for Food Banks, Night Shelters and Warm Spaces.** Work is now underway to make oral health packs available to these settings (adult/child oral health advice and guidance, brushes and paste) in late 2026.

Progress Against National Performance Priorities

1) Dental Activity (UDA Delivery)

As of August 2026:

- Devon had delivered 66% of contracted UDAs.
- Providers delivered 363,488 UDAs between April and August 2026 compared with 353,288 during the same period in 2025/26.
- This represents an increase of 10,200 UDAs year on year, providing additional NHS dental capacity for patients.

2) Patient Access

Whilst children's access has continued to improve, adult access remains below pre-pandemic levels. Improvements in capacity and activity are expected to take time to be reflected in the national access metrics because these are measured over a rolling 24-month period.

3) Clinically Appropriate Recall

- 31% of low-risk patients are currently on a recall interval of 12 months or longer.
- This is the second-highest performance of all Integrated Care Boards nationally.

4) New Care Pathways

New care pathways were introduced in June 2026. Providers have begun using the pathways and activity is being recorded, although it is currently too early to fully assess impact. Uptake is expected to increase as providers become more familiar with the new arrangements.

5) Urgent and Unscheduled Care

- Devon's annual target is 53,736 unscheduled courses of treatment (COTs).
- By the mid-year point of 2026/27:
 - 25,438 unscheduled COTs had been delivered.

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- This equates to 47.3% of the annual target.
 - Activity was 6% higher than the same period in 2025/26.
- Devon exceeded the national 8.2% urgent care requirement in June, July and September.

6) Contract Rebasing

Devon has actively addressed underperforming contracts to maximise available NHS capacity.

- 44 contracts were identified through the national rebasing process.
- 67% have been rebased.
- 4% have been terminated.
- Only 6% had no agreed management action in place.

Summary

Since the introduction of national dental contract reform, NHS Devon has continued to increase NHS dental capacity, improve urgent care provision and invest in workforce development and prevention programmes. Progress is being made against national performance measures.

Alongside these improvements, NHS Devon and Torbay Public Health continue to work together to improve oral health outcomes through targeted prevention programmes and services focused on vulnerable populations.

Future priorities remain improving access to NHS dentistry, embedding national contract reforms, supporting workforce sustainability and reducing oral health inequalities across Devon and Torbay.