

Scotland's deep oral health inequalities persist

With new data indicating that Scotland's oral health gap shows little sign of closing, the British Dental Association has warned that decades of progress on children's dental health risk going into reverse.

The latest report of the National Dental Inspection Programme shows stark and persistent inequalities are widening between Scotland's most deprived and most affluent communities. Just 68.1% of P7 children in the tenth most deprived areas were found to be decay free – compared to 89.7% in the tenth least deprived – a gap of 21.6% up from 20.1% in 2019.

Over four out of five Primary 7 children (81.9%) in 2023 had no obvious decay experience in their permanent teeth – up from barely half (52.9%) in 2005. The BDA celebrates the huge progress made in recent decades, but warn that gains may not be sustainable given ongoing access problems and disruption to preventive programmes.

Earlier this year the BDA warned the Scottish Parliament's COVID Recovery

Committee, that Scotland has lost more than a year's worth of NHS dentistry since lockdown, and levels of activity remain lightyears from pre-pandemic norms.

The BDA understands the pioneering *Childsmile* Programme is not universally accessible across all nurseries in Scotland and that some nurseries are expressing 'hesitancy' to implement it in the COVID recovery period.

David McColl, Chair of the British Dental Association's Scottish Dental Practice Committee, said: 'Our children are paying the price for the crisis in NHS dentistry; hard won gains are going into reverse.'

'Certainly, there is no room complacency at Holyrood, as the oral health gap between rich and poor shows little sign of closing. It remains to be seen if coming reforms will be enough to bring this service back from the brink. The Scottish Government cannot pretend it is 'Mission Accomplished' for NHS dentistry.'

BDJ Student's student editor scoops award

Yaqoub Imran, *BDJ Student's* student editor, has won the British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry's (BASCD) Keith Woods Essay prize.



His entry on the chosen topic of 'How should we measure the oral health of our populations to inform the planning of services and development of a workforce strategy in the UK?' was chosen from a field that was open to any undergraduate from dentistry, dental therapy, dental hygiene or dental nursing student registered at a dental school in the UK.

Yaqoub added: 'Being chosen as the winner of this essay competition is truly an honour. I would like to extend my gratitude to the members of the BASCD for their efforts in improving the standards of dental care and for providing opportunities like this essay competition for undergraduates. I thoroughly enjoyed writing this essay and it has given me a greater insight into the factors involved in assessing community oral health needs and a broader perspective on the field of dental public health.'

Oral Health Foundation backing new vaping consultation



The Oral Health Foundation welcomes a new consultation from the Government on new legislation surrounding the use of tobacco and vaping products.

The consultation will gather public views on legislation for selling vaping and other tobacco products, warning notices, and proxy sales. It will also address youth vaping by

regulating flavours, packaging, affordability, and enforcement of laws.

The most recent independent review of the evidence commissioned to inform the government's policies and regulations published in 2022, concluded that vaping poses only a small fraction of the risk of smoking on overall and oral health.

The review also highlighted that vaping is certainly not risk-free and advised against people who have never smoked from taking up vaping.

The Oral Health Foundation calls for more long-term research to be carried out to establish the potential long-term, ill-effects of vaping to overall health, especially to oral health. Including a possible link to an increase in dry mouth, dental decay and gum disease in those who have never smoked.

Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation said: 'There are over

70 years of evidence proving the harms of smoking, while vaping has only been around for 16 years since 2007. Therefore, we cannot yet be precise about the long-term risks of vaping.

'We support Cancer Research UK's recommendations to the UK Government on e-cigarettes and vaping.'

The Oral Health Foundation also agrees that there is no need for childish branding and there should be action to remove bright colours, sweet names, and cartoon characters.

Dr Carter added: 'We should prohibit the promotion and display of e-cigarettes in shops and put vapes out of sight and out of reach of children. There should be an introduction of funding for heavy weight anti-smoking public health campaigns which promote vaping to adult smokers as a quitting aid. By motivating these adults to quit smoking like this, it could potentially save many lives.'