

# Mouth Cancer Action Charter launched to Parliament

The Oral Health Foundation and Denplan launched their Mouth Cancer Action Charter at a face-to-face event in the Houses of Parliament in November. Members of Parliament, ministers, and dental and health professionals were invited along to sign the Charter and demonstrate their support for its policy recommendations.

The Mouth Cancer Charter was created to coincide with November's Mouth Cancer Action Month – the UK's biggest charity campaign for mouth cancer awareness. The campaign calls for more people to be mouth-aware by being able to recognise and act on any unusual changes to the mouth.

The Oral Health Foundation and Denplan are concerned that mouth cancer referrals have significantly fallen over the pandemic period, while awareness of the major signs and symptoms of mouth cancer is very low. According to results from a recent MP survey, only 27% of 103 MPs felt they were as well informed of the causes and symptoms of mouth cancer as they are of other leading cancers.

Recent research conducted by the Oral Health Foundation and Denplan shows that four in five UK adults have never been exposed to public health messaging around mouth cancer, leading to poor awareness of the early warning signs and risk factors.

The Charter proposes that GPs, pharmacists, care home and nursing staff should all be given enhanced training or further information about how to look out for signs and symptoms of mouth cancer to further improve early detection. Spotting signs early can increase someone's chances of survival from 50% to 90%.

Commenting on the policy recommendations proposed in the Charter, Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation, said: 'If these mouth cancer policy changes were put into action we could drive down case numbers and save the government a significant amount of money in oral cancer treatment costs. In England, the cost of head and neck cancer treatment was £309 million in 2010–2011<sup>1</sup> and since then case numbers of mouth cancer have grown by around 67%<sup>2</sup>.

The Mouth Cancer Action Charter<sup>2</sup> highlights the following policy areas for change:

1. Conduct a government-funded public health awareness campaign of the signs and symptoms of mouth cancer
2. Improve access to routine dentistry to detect mouth cancers earlier and save lives
3. Enable enhanced training of GPs to identify suspected mouth cancers and change the NICE guidelines so that more cases can be referred to secondary care
4. Improve training programmes for healthcare staff to look for signs of mouth cancer
5. Introduce free dental check-ups and treatment for mouth cancer patients to end the unfair financial burden placed on them
6. Support the development of better technology to diagnose mouth cancers.

One of the key points in the Mouth Cancer Charter is about the development of better technology to diagnose mouth cancers. During the pandemic, it has become more evident that innovation, data and technology are helping to make dentistry safer, faster and more accessible.



Baroness Liz Redfern at the Mouth Cancer Action Charter launch event

The use of technology in diagnostics is also becoming more important. Denplan and the Oral Health Foundation are proposing that with the support from NHSX, a mobile app could be developed that would enable patients to share photographs of their mouth lesions which would then be reviewed within a short space of time by a consultant.

In addition to politicians and ministers, the Oral Health Foundation and Denplan are also asking dental professionals and other healthcare professionals to show their support and sign the Charter at [www.dentalhealth.org/mouth-cancer-action-charter](http://www.dentalhealth.org/mouth-cancer-action-charter).

## References

1. Keeping S T, Tempest M J, Stephens S J *et al*. The cost of oropharyngeal cancer in England: A retrospective hospital data analysis. *Clin Otolaryngol* 2018; **43**: 223–229.
2. Oral Health Foundation. Mouth Cancer Action Charter. November 2021. Available at: <https://bit.ly/3y0lphd> (accessed December 2021). ✦