

**GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY
DIRECTORATE**



To: All NI GDPs
BY EMAIL

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COVID-19: FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO GENERAL DENTAL SERVICES

Further to my letter of 20 March 2020, I am writing to provide an update in respect of the financial support arrangements for General Dental Practitioners (GDPs) operating in Northern Ireland (NI) in response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. In particular, the Department has been working intensively with colleagues in the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) and Business Services Organisation (BSO) to resolve the practicalities in respect of how GDPs will apply for the additional support and how the amount of payment will be calculated.

In respect of the former, individual GDPs will be invited to apply for funding support each month that will be in addition to their normal Item of Service (IoS) payments. This reflects the need to adapt and amend the approach as circumstances change and more information becomes available in respect of the impact of the pandemic on GDP finances as well as the interface with other support measures, such as those recently announced by HM Treasury. It is expected that the first invitations to apply for support will be issued to GDPs next week with the associated support payments made on 20 April 2020. Please ensure that you check your emails on a regular basis to ensure that you undertake any required actions as soon as possible.

The amount of additional monthly support payment to each GDP will be calculated as the average level of their monthly IoS payment in 2019-20 minus the amount claimed for any IoS activity each month in 2020. For those GDPs who have only recently started work or who have significantly increased or decreased activity in recent months, then the average monthly payment in 2019-20 may be calculated over a shorter period of time. Only those GDPs who would be expected to have undertaken IoS activity in the absence of the pandemic will be eligible for support.

One issue that had been raised by GDPs was that the financial support arrangements related to IoS income paid by government. This was in line with the initial approach in Scotland which has now been expanded to also cover patient contributions, offset by an increased rate of abatement. In light of the concerns raised by GDPs, the funding support arrangements in Northern Ireland will now be extended to also include patient contributions. The same 20% rate of abatement will apply as with IoS payments.

In addition, the working principle is that the other elements of General Dental Service (GDS) payments in 2019-20, including allowances and capitation payments, will continue to be made on the same basis during the COVID-19 outbreak as last year, with the only adjustment being for costs that are not expected to be incurred.

In return for receiving the additional financial support, it is expected that the staff costs associated with the normal delivery of HSC dental care will continue to be paid by GDPs where possible. If this is found to not be the case, then it may be necessary to amend the support arrangements. Furthermore, it is expected that support payments will be distributed fairly within each practice.

The additional support payments are intended to offset the costs of providing HSC dental care that cannot be avoided. Therefore, it is expected that GDPs will not also apply for wider business support in respect of these costs. However, it is recognised that GDPs may wish to apply for support from wider support schemes where it is not possible to separate out the HSC costs from the costs of private activity. In such cases, consideration is being given to a mechanism for this to be reflected in the level of HSC additional funding support. However, the situation remains very fluid and the approach may need to be revised.

While the Department and HSCB will endeavour to email all updates to practitioners as soon as possible, it is incumbent upon you to frequently check the COVID-19 webpage on the dental section of the BSO (<http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/services/3111.htm>).

Yours Sincerely

Paul Montgomery

**PAUL MONTGOMERY
DIRECTOR OF GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY**