

GENERAL DENTAL SERVICES: COVID-19 FINANCIAL SUPPORT SCHEME

(V1.1 – 9 APRIL 2020)

Introduction

1. This document sets out the Financial Support Scheme (FSS) arrangements in respect of the provision of support payments to General Dental Practitioners (GDPs) undertaking General Dental Services (GDS) affected by the downturn in Health & Social Care (HSC) activity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Background

2. The background to the support arrangements have previously been set out in the letters from the Department of Health (DoH) to all GDPs on 20 March 2020 and 3 April 2020.^{1 2}
3. The GDS FSS has been designed to:
 - (a) protect the availability of staff to provide essential dental services during the response period to COVID-19;
 - (b) reduce the risk to ongoing GDS stability to allow a return to pre-pandemic levels of service; and
 - (c) fairly compensate practices for costs incurred.

Details of Scheme

Eligibility

4. All GDPs who would have undertaken GDS activity in the absence of the COVID-19 pandemic are eligible for the scheme.

Payments

5. The majority of GDPs with stable activity levels who have applied for support, will receive an additional Item of Service (IoS) payment based on 1/12th of their total IoS payments from April 2019 to March 2020, less any IoS claims already submitted each month. This includes GDP income from patient contributions.
6. The additional support payment will be abated by 20% to reflect variable costs that will not be incurred such as materials and laboratory costs. GDPs will continue to receive payment in respect of IoS claims for activity undertaken- this will not be subject to abatement.
7. Some GDPs may not have a stable, 12 month, reliable activity level upon which to base the additional support payments. This would include those that may have had a period of sickness or maternity leave, have recently commenced a different working pattern, are new contractors, or have worked across different practices over the year. For eligible GDPs that have less than

¹ http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/COVID-19_GDS-Financial-Support-Scheme.pdf

² <http://www.hscbusiness.hscni.net/pdf/COVID-19%20GDS%20Financial%20Support%20-%20Notice%20to%20Dental%20Practices%20Mar%202020.pdf>

12 months data, a monthly average will be used, from the available data, but with the lowest month's data excluded. This is to address concerns that an initial month may not reflect the anticipated income in future months.

Allowances

8. The following allowances will continue to be paid in line with the approach in 2019-20:
 - Practice Allowance;
 - Continuing Care;
 - Capitation;
 - Seniority;
 - Vocational Training;
 - Trainers Grant;
 - Trainee Salary & NINO Contributions;
 - Maternity Benefit;
 - Rates Reimbursement; and
 - Quality Assurance.
9. The patient registration period for patients will be extended by 3 months which will address the issue of patients unintentionally dropping off the register.
10. The normal payment arrangements should continue for GDPs claiming maternity leave, paternity leave, adoptive leave or sickness payments during the support payment period. GDPs should continue their leave as planned.

Conditions

11. The conditions of the GDS FSS are outlined below:
 - GDPs, specialist practitioners and practices must continue to operate in line with the advice from the Health & Social Care Board (HSCB) in respect of the provision of minimum levels of service and make alternative arrangements where this is not possible.
 - GDPs, specialist practitioners and other staff must assist the wider HSC, when asked by the HSCB where possible.
 - GDPs and specialist practitioners must make the monitoring returns as directed by the HSCB.
 - Practices must retain and pay staff (associates, non-clinical and other) who normally provide GDS dental care, to ensure the continued provision of urgent dental care services and to provide support to other parts of the HSC sector as appropriate, unless in exceptional circumstances.
 - Associate dental surgeons are expected to discuss their contractual arrangements with practice principals to support practice sustainability during the COVID-19 period.

- Additional support payments will be calculated on the basis of the conditions set out in this document which may be subject to change.
- Conditional on there being a significant increase in the level of activity following the outbreak then it may be necessary to recover the support payments made in 2020, over the period 2021-22 to 2023-24.
- Applicants to the FSS should provide copies of applications and awards of grants / loans from other government sources over the past month including:
 - Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (HMT)
 - NI COVID Small Business Grant (Department of Finance)
 - Self-employment Income Support Scheme (HMT)
 - Statutory Sick Pay relief
 - Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (HMT)
 - Other sources
- If not already provided, applicants should submit a completed DA1 form for 2018/19 by 15 May 2020.
- Applicants should provide confirmation that they are currently operating as a GDP or specialist practitioner and would have been providing the same level of services as in 2019-20, in the absence of COVID-19 outbreak.
- The appeals process under GDS Regulation 21 will not be available to applicants.
- Applicants should submit a completed electronic application form by the 9th April at 5pm 2020 in order to receive first payment and submit claims on 7th of each month thereafter. PAPER SUBMISSIONS ARE NOT PERMITTED.

Application Process

12. The nature of the scheme means that it will be necessary for GDPs to apply for the support payment rather than being automatically enrolled. In addition, there is expected to be a need to refine and amend the approach as more information becomes available which means that this approach should be repeated each month.
13. GDPs should submit their first application by the 9th April 2020 in order to receive a first payment and submit claims by 7th of each month thereafter. PAPER SUBMISSIONS ARE NOT PERMITTED.
14. Once it has been decided that the additional support payments are no longer required the monthly email will indicate that this is the final time that applications will be invited from GDPs.

Other Government Schemes

15. The GDS FSS is to support HSC Service activity only and no further government support should be applied for in respect of a GDPs HSC activity. Duplication of support is not permitted.
16. The eligibility criteria and conditions for wider business support schemes are not the responsibility of the Department of Health in Northern Ireland. However, GDPs also wishing to claim for support from such schemes should ensure that this is in relation to private activity only.
17. To ensure that this is the case, each monthly application must include details of all applications and awards in respect of other sources government funding. Failure to do so may lead to a loss of eligibility to the GDS FSS and recovery of funding already provided.
18. If it is evident that payment has been received from wider business support schemes in respect of both private and HSC activity then it may be necessary to make an adjustment to the FSS payments. The adjustment would be based on the amount of support received from the wider support scheme and the private/HSC split in income from a GDPs most recent DA1 submission.

Appeals

19. In light of the short period of time available it is not possible to design a scheme which covers the particular circumstances of all individual GDPs. In the context that the scheme is voluntary with a need to have the minimum amount of administration possible, it is intended that there will no appeal process available in respect of the level of monthly support payments.

Statement of Dental Remuneration (SDR)

20. The development of the COVID-19 GDP financial support arrangement has delayed the implementation of the Minister of Health's decision to apply the DDRB recommendations through a 2.7% increase in the rate of payment for items under the Statement of Dental Remuneration.
21. However, the 2.7% increase will be applied to the 2019-20 monthly average payment levels when calculated the level of additional support payment, to reflect the Minister's decision.
22. Action to implement the SDR will take place as soon as possible.

Monitoring and Review

23. It should be noted that the applications for additional funding support are voluntary.
24. In light of the ongoing uncertainty in respect of the financial impact of the COVID-19 outbreak, the scope of all the provisions set out above will be kept under close review and are subject to change each month. GDPs will be informed of any changes as part of the application process.

Recovery

25. There is the potential for a spike in activity following the outbreak which would result in a boost in IoS payments for 2020-21 compared to what they would have been in the absence of the pandemic. If this is found to be the case there may be a need for some of the support to be recovered if there is a significant increase in activity compared with previous years.
26. This remains uncertain, will be monitored and further details will be developed by the DoH in due course.

**General Healthcare Policy Directorate
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DOCUMENT CONTROL

Version	Date	Author	Changes
1.0	7 April 2020	Michael O'Neill	
1.1	9 April 2020	Michael O'Neill	Removed 20% capitation abatement.