

GENERAL HEALTHCARE POLICY DIRECTORATE



To: All NI General Dental Practitioners
BY EMAIL

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Date: 7 March 2022

GENERAL DENTAL SERVICES REBUILDING SUPPORT SCHEME

I write following my letter of 23 February 2022 to confirm details of the General Dental Services Rebuilding Support Scheme (GDS RSS), which will commence on 8 April 2022. In that letter, I advised of Minister's intention that any future investment should be based on current activity, rather than the historical activity of 2019/20 that has been a feature of the Financial Support Scheme (FSS) to date.

The FSS was introduced to sustain General Dental Services whilst the reduction in income due to pandemic restrictions put the viability of practices at risk. FSS payments of approximately £47m were invested in GDS in 2020/21, mainly to compensate for significantly reduced patient contributions and increased PPE, with approximately £27m made in 2021/22 to date. A further £5m has been made available in the 2021/22 Revenue Grant Scheme. This investment alongside your continued commitment has ensured that the urgent dental needs of the population have been met during a uniquely challenging period. **The FSS will come to an end on 7 April 2022 and be replaced by the RSS from 8 April 2022.**

At present, with a largely vaccinated population and workforce, continued investment in PPE and infection prevention and control measures, and, with wider society largely re-opened with limited restrictions, that risk to practice *viability* has significantly diminished. However while some restrictions and additional requirements remain, a

return to pre-pandemic levels of dental activity may not be possible and a new mechanism for supporting GDS is required.

As previously outlined the objectives of RSS are to;

- Incentivise activity to make full use of available capacity within General Dental Services (GDS) to see and treat patients and support practices in doing so;
- Support the sustainability of the service whilst allowing for a transition away from additional pandemic specific support; and
- Ease entry for dentists into the GDS, changes to working patterns and movement within the profession, that has been stymied over the last 20 months.

It is important to note that additional financial support, to deal with the ongoing impacts of the pandemic and to address these objectives, is taking place against a backdrop of a significantly challenging financial position across the wider Health Service going into 2022/23.

The RSS will enhance eligible General Dental Practitioner's (GDP's) gross Item of Service (IoS) claims by 25% each month for Q1 2022/23 (not including PPE codes or Orthodontic codes). The enhancement is irrespective of individual activity levels of GDPs; there are no activity thresholds to meet in order to receive the enhancement. A GDP undertaking 50% or 120% of their pre-pandemic activity, would receive the same percentage enhancement to the relevant codes. Capitation and continuing care payments will continue to be paid at the rates detailed in the SDR.

Each month, upon successful application for RSS, the Business Service Organisation will calculate the total gross IoS claims (excluding orthodontic & PPE codes) for a GDP and add a 25% enhancement prior to completing payment.

Orthodontic treatment codes have not been included in the enhancement as these treatments have been less impacted by the pandemic restrictions and the intention is to focus the investment, at this time, on oral disease. A full list of the excluded items will be provided as part of a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document currently being finalised.

The 25% enhancement has been determined based on a projected Covid 19 inefficiency impact of 20%, in terms of patient throughput. With 80% activity and a 25% enhancement, a GDP can expect to receive 100% of their 2019/20 IoS earnings. It is anticipated that the level of additional funding in Q1 22/23 will be on a similar level to recent quarterly additional investment via the FSS.

The date of submission of the claim will determine under which support scheme the claim will be paid. **GDPs should continue to make claims as normal.** As we transition from the FSS to the RSS, the HSCB and BSO will seek to identify irregular patterns in terms of claim submissions, with enhancements deferred if necessary, if there is such evidence.

Activity will also continue to be monitored on a weekly basis, with a decision on any additional investment in Q2 to be taken mid-way through Q1. However, should overall activity following implementation be considerably higher or lower than the anticipated,

adjustments may be made sooner. The Department will continue to work closely with the British Dental Association regarding any changes.

GDPs availing of the scheme will be subject to **a requirement to see unregistered patients with urgent and emergency dental needs** until such times as the Out of Hours (OOH) arrangements are reinstated. The HSCB and the Department are actively examining restoring OOH as soon as practically possible, noting the significance of GDP concerns regarding this issue. Further communication on OOH will be provided as soon as possible.

To further guard against the impacts of the pandemic, **Practice Allowance** payments will continue to be calculated based on IoS claims as well as support payments (RSS or FSS as applicable).

The **patient registration** period for patients will be extended until the end of September 2022 which will address the issue of patients unintentionally dropping off the register. Arrangements for the management of patient registration from September 2022 onwards are under consideration.

I appreciate fully that changes to the financial support arrangements may cause uncertainty for practices, at a time when your focus will be on treating the significant backlog of patients who need your time and expertise. After consultation with the BDA, the Department will publish a list of FAQs at the end this week to address any arising issues of concern not covered in this letter.

Whilst the Department and the BDA have worked very closely throughout the pandemic, it was not possible to come to an agreement on the plans for Q1 2022/23. The BDA have made it very clear to us that they feel that these proposals do not sufficiently compensate dental practices for the services being provided. The Chief Dental Officer and I are very keen that we remain in close contact with the BDA in the weeks and months ahead as the new arrangements are implemented.

The impact of the pandemic is likely to be with us for many months, even years to come. The Department remains committed to working with the BDA to review the current GDS contract to ensure that we have the framework for the best possible care for patients in Northern Ireland.

Thank you again for your commitment and continued support.

Yours sincerely



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