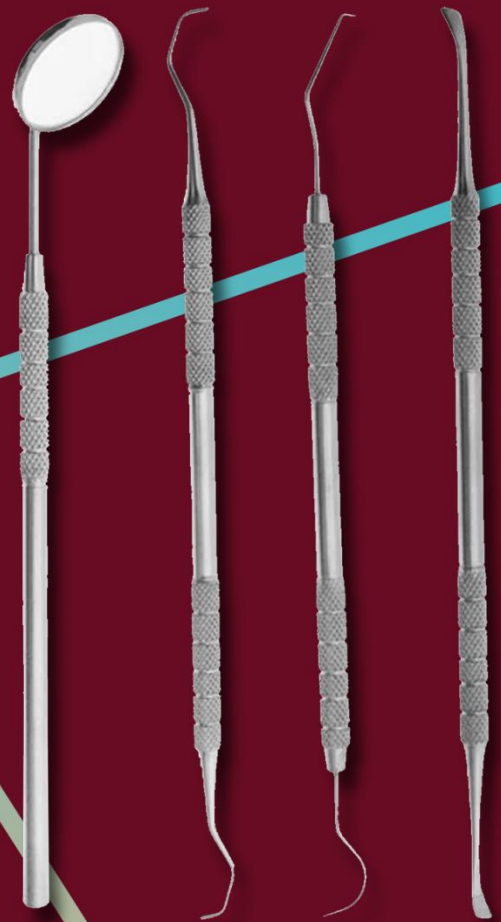


# Dental Manifesto for the 2026 Welsh Parliament Election



FACULTY OF  
**DENTAL  
SURGERY**

# **The Faculty of Dental Surgery's Manifesto for the 2026 Parliamentary Elections**

According to a November 2024 survey of NHS dental services in Wales conducted by Llais, a third of respondents didn't have a dentist or were stuck on a waiting list.<sup>1</sup> Further, there has been a 36.2% decrease in the average number of courses of treatment provided by each dentist or dental care practitioner in the ten years up to June 2025.<sup>2</sup> The number of dentists per population has also been on a downward trend over this ten year period.<sup>3</sup>

Untreated dental problems can lead to serious systemic health issues, emergency hospital admissions and, in extreme cases, life-threatening infections. More importantly, behind these statistics are individuals living in pain or discomfort with conditions that can worsen over time. This is particularly problematic for those in areas of under-provision and in low socio-economic areas who are unable to turn to private providers. Projected changes in the size and composition of Wales's population<sup>4</sup> are likely to increase the demand for dental services.

The Welsh Government is committed to reforming and improving NHS dentistry, with a new contract for NHS General Dental Services in Wales due to come into effect from April 2026, and initiatives like the Dental Access Portal designed to improve access to NHS dental services.

However a number of key problems remain, so we are asking national policy makers to consider the following as ways to improve the nation's oral health.

## 1. Bolster the NHS Workforce

### The current situation:

- Despite Wales having a Dental Strategic Workforce Plan aimed at addressing the 'significant challenges within primary dental care in Wales.' More than 10% of dentists have left the profession every year since 2010-11.<sup>5</sup>
- Recruiting dentists in rural and low-income communities is particularly challenging and is only reinforcing wider health inequalities and placing additional demand on primary care and hospitals.
- The Welsh Government has expanded the postgraduate dental training and initiatives such as the Dental Foundation Training Welsh Enhance Recruitment Offer (WERO) and 'run through' training programmes aimed at attracting and retaining skilled dental trainees.
- Wales has a number of dentists who qualified overseas, International Dental Graduates, (IDGs) who are unable to work as dentists as a result of a bureaucratic and lengthy application process. Instead, they take on roles, which limits the type of procedures that they can carry out.

### We therefore ask the next Welsh Government to:

- Retain the Dental foundation training (Welsh Enhanced Recruitment Offer) that offers enhanced financial, academic and wellbeing support for dental graduates choosing to train in rural areas.

- Continue the Academic DFT post offering trainees the chance to combine clinical practice with academic experience.
- Increase the number of dental examinations held in Wales to allow successful IDGs to enter the dental workforce.
- Work with the GDC to streamline the process for attaining a Performer Number, and inclusion on the NHS Dental List, ensuring that the process of registering with the GDC and being added to the list is done promptly and smoothly.

## 2. Improve Public Health

### The current situation:

- A lot of progress has been made to tackle smoking in Wales; however, data shows that 24% of children in Years 7-11 still live with someone who smokes, significantly increasing their chances of developing a lifelong addiction to nicotine.<sup>6</sup>
- More than 6 in 10 adults in Wales live with excess weight, increasing the risks of developing diet related ill health, including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and 13 types of cancer.<sup>7</sup>
- Although the proportion of young children in Wales experiencing tooth decay has continued to fall, the prevalence of decayed, missing or filled teeth is substantially higher in the areas of highest deprivation.<sup>8</sup>
- We acknowledge the important work of existing initiatives such as Designed to Smile, PIPYN and the Flying Start programme that are tackling obesity

and helping improve the nutrition and oral health of children and vulnerable patient groups.

### We therefore ask the next Welsh Government to:

- Establish a Minister for Public Health, with an allocated budget for primary prevention.
- Have a renewed, cross departmental focus on addressing health inequalities and improving public health.
- Continue to support and expand proven interventions such as community-based fluoride varnish schemes.
- Continue to invest in effective schemes like Designed to Smile.
- Continue to endorse ASH Wales's Charter for a Tobacco-free Generation and all campaigns that educate children and young people of the dangers and harms of vaping.

## 3. Increase Awareness around Head & Neck Cancers

### The current situation:

- Globally, incidences of head and neck cancers are rising significantly, with a predicted 30% increase annually by 2030.<sup>9</sup>
- Cases of Human Papillomavirus (HPV), a major cause of oropharyngeal head and neck cancers amongst high-risk

patients are also rising at an alarming rate.

- Dentists are fortunate in that they can detect these forms of cancer at an early stage. They can perform routine screenings and refer patients with suspicious symptoms. This, in turn, alleviates the pressure on General Practitioners and other parts of the NHS.

## Who We Are

The Faculty of Dental Surgery of the Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh was established in 1982 to promote excellence in oral health through education, examination, and engagement. Today, we have over 8,000 Members and Fellows in over 100 countries, helping improve dental care throughout the world.

### **We therefore ask the next Welsh Government to:**

- Encourage adults over the age of 40 to see a doctor or dentist about persistent and unusual symptoms that could be head and neck cancers.
- To increase awareness of HPV as a major cause of oropharyngeal head and neck cancers.
- To ensure parents are provided with the necessary information about the HPV vaccine and make it clear that it is not only for female students but for boys as well.
- To reduce the disparity in vaccine uptake among pupils in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas.

## Sources

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<sup>1</sup> Welsh Government, *NHS dental services: April to June 2025: Number of patients receiving NHS dental treatment, the type of treatments provided and the numbers of NHS dentists for April to June 2025*, 20 November 2025. Available online at <https://www.gov.wales/nhs-dental-services-april-june-2025-html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/nhs-dental-services-april-june-2025-html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.wales/nhs-dental-services-april-june-2025-html>

<sup>4</sup> The population of Wales is projected to increase by 5.9% to 3.32 million by mid-2032, and by 10.3% to 3.46 million by 2047. In comparison, Wales's population growth over the previous decade to mid-2022 was 2.0%. Welsh Government, *National population projections: 2022-*, 28 January 2025. Available online at <https://www.gov.wales/national-population-projections-2022-based-html>.

<sup>5</sup> BBC News, *There could be no NHS dentists in two years*, 17 February 2025. Available online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c5y25dzg2x5o>

<sup>6</sup> ASH Wales, *One in Four Welsh Children Still Growing Up Around Smoking*, March 11, 2025. Available online at <https://ash.wales/one-in-four-welsh-children-still-grow-up-around-smoking/>

<sup>7</sup> Public Health Wales, 2025. *Overweight and Obesity*. Available from: <https://phw.nhs.wales/topics/overweight-and-obesity/>

<sup>8</sup> The prevalence rate in the most deprived areas is 43.4 per cent (down from 57.6 per cent in 2007/08) compared to 20.7 per cent (down from 34.5 per cent in 2007/08) in the least deprived

areas, Public Health Network Cymru, *Tooth decay rates in children in Wales fall, but issues remain*, 6 February 2024. Available online at <https://publichealthnetwork.cymru/tooth-decay-rates-in-children-in-wales-fall-but-issues-remain/>

<sup>9</sup> *Reviewing the Epidemiology of Head and Neck Cancer: Definitions, Trends and Risk Factors*, p.781. Available online at <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41415-022-5166-x.pdf> (Accessed 1 December 2025).