

Progress on recommendation 4

The dental profession needs improved guidance on how to treat people in care homes

Guidance for dental care professionals

In our Smiling matters report in 2019, we made recommendations about dental providers making their charges clearer and improvements to guidance for dental professionals on how to treat people in care homes.

Our review for this progress report has shown that there is still a lack of up-to-date guidance for dental care professionals on how to manage the needs of people living in care homes, resulting in a lack of confidence in supporting their oral health.

"Dentists sometimes struggle with the change in treatment planning style... as people age, it can be quite hard to choose between different levels of intervention."

(Representative of professional body)

As a result of this lack of confidence, we heard that dentists would refer cases to an already stretched community dental service.

"We often receive referrals from general dental practitioners who are understandably scared about how to treat this group."

(Representative of professional body)

"[Dental care should] depend on your local arrangement. For a fairly fit and well care home patient, a close relationship with a general dental practitioner seems to work well... as there is no way community dental services would be able to see the whole aging population."

(Representative of professional body)

Although some evidence-based guidance exists on how to care for older dental patients, it was clear from our engagement that the dental profession needs more up-to-date and current guidance that applies to everyone living in care homes.

In terms of addressing the gap in confidence, we've heard about initiatives and schemes that have tried to improve the connection between dentists and people living in care home settings – see [Dental access – challenges and solutions](#).