

## Access to dental services: Middlesex University students

Poor oral health is mostly preventable and starting early is key. Research conducted by Healthwatch England in 2016 found that close to half of 18 – 24 year olds do not think it is necessary to go to the dentist, indicating a potential lack of interest and engagement in this age group. Eligibility for free NHS dental care stops at 18 years old (or up to 19 and in qualifying full-time education).

Healthwatch Barnet was invited to take part in a **Student Success Festival** at Middlesex University in March 2018. The festival covered a wide range of health and wellbeing topics, with university stalls and other local charities and organisations present. We asked students about their access to dental services since starting university and received responses from 43 students.

### Our findings revealed:

- 26 students (60%) **had been to the dentist** since starting university, however this had been back 'at home'. 15 students (35%) said they had not been to the dentist since starting university and only 2 students (5%) said they had been to the dentist in the local area. One student asked about where they could access a dentist, and if the university provided dental services.
- 24 students (59%) had been to the dentist less than 6 months ago, while 14 students (34%) had been over 6 months ago (7 of these had been more than 2 years ago). 3 students (7%) could not remember when they last went to the dentist.
- 38 students answered the question **what barriers they faced in accessing the dentist**:
  - The main barrier cited was the price of dental services and 17 students (45%) cited cost as a barrier. One student mentioned they needed to get their wisdom teeth removed as they were bothering them, but had put this off because of the cost. Another student commented that they did not actually know the costs, but assumed it was too expensive for them.
  - 11 students (29%), said they felt they did not need to go to the dentist.
  - Six students (16%) said the main barrier was 'fear of the dentist'.
  - Only 4 students (10%) said they did not know how to book an appointment.
  - Finally, one student added that their dentist was overseas. This was also mentioned verbally by a few other students, in conjunction with differing health insurance schemes in their home countries.
- Views on oral hygiene were positive and the university students strongly agreed or agreed that **having healthy teeth was important** (98%).

### Our conclusions from this engagement:

We found that students valued their oral health. The majority of students who had been to the dentist since starting university, had been while back at home. Worryingly, 15 students had not been to the dentist and some comments from students showed they may not know where or how to access a dentist. With many international students studying at Middlesex University, home is often abroad and students wait to travel for their care. Even for UK national students, travelling home for care could mean they are not going as often as they should. Cost and feeling that it was not a priority were the main barriers to access. From anecdotal feedback, it seems that students are waiting to go home for treatment, because they may receive help at home to pay for it.



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