



STARTING WELL CORE: Update Report - progress to January 2019

PURPOSE

The NHS Long Term Plan has recently identified that the Starting Well Core dental access initiative supports broader health development and contributes to a strong start in life for children:

“The Starting Well Core initiative is supporting 24,000 dentists across England to see more children from a young age to form good oral health habits, preventing tooth decay experienced by a quarter of England's five year olds.” (Chapter 3: Further progress on care quality and outcomes)

This briefing note provides an update of project progress and should demonstrate to stakeholders the opportunities to take forward Starting Well Core with the NHS Long Term Plan.

BACKGROUND

Starting Well Core, developed by the Office of Chief Dental Officer, England, is a commissioning initiative which aims to improve oral health and reduce health inequalities¹ in young children. This is part of wider efforts to reduce the number of children being admitted to hospital for dental extractions. The evidence-based initiative supports the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry's (BSPD) campaign for a first Dental Check by One (DCby1) and is complementary to NHS England's targeted Starting Well programme in 13 high-priority Local Authorities.

The objectives of the pan-England Starting Well Core initiative are to:

- Optimise and/or increase NHS England commissioned local dental practice capacity; target available capacity towards increasing access opportunities for children aged 0-2 years and subsequent recall/preventive interventions.
- Increase number of children attending for “Dental Check By One” and receiving preventive interventions, (e.g. topical fluoride varnish, dietary advice) shaping habits for a smile for life.
- Raise public and professional awareness of early ongoing dental attendance and preventive care, including support and resources for wider Health & Social Care and Early Years.
- Contribute to Making Every Contact Count – focus on common risk factors shared by dental decay and obesity/diabetes.

Starting Well Core is endorsed by the NHS England Prevention Board and is an integral element of the Child Oral Health Improvement Programme. Supported by PHE, BSPD, LGA, RCS, FGDP(UK), and with professional / clinical leadership of Local Dental Network Chairs at the local-level, it is an exemplar of place-based, locally delivered programme within a national framework for quality.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation is designed to be national, i.e. pan-England. The “place-based” commissioning model was made available to all NHS England local dental commissioning teams in April 2018. The implementation package includes a recommended commissioning approach, tools to support implementation (e.g. needs assessments), training materials for the dental profession and central communication activities.

With effect from December 2018, Starting Well Core is now underpinned with a Statement of Financial Entitlements (SFE) which enables local commissioners to respond to local needs/demand with provision for remuneration of dental practices that deliver on the locally agreed activity. Specifically, the SFE enables

¹ The project is based on the principle of *proportionate universalism*, i.e. resourcing and delivering of universal services at a scale and intensity proportionate to the degree of need. Services are therefore universally available, not only for the most disadvantaged, and are able to respond to the level of presenting need.

local increases in NHS England dental contractual capacity in order that dental practices can readily accept additional child patients aged 0-2 years.

NHS ENGLAND UPTAKE

Application of the commissioning model, activation of SFE options, and implementation timelines are determined by the local NHS Directors of Commissioning Operations. NHS England dental commissioning teams in London and West Midlands have been at the forefront of delivery of this initiative. Implementation in the South West and South East has yet to commence. NHS Regional Directors will be urged to commence/maintain the roll out of Starting Well Core through 2019 with the ambition that it becomes business as usual.

DELIVERABLES & IMPACT

As at 31 January 2019, approximately 2000 NHS England dental practices are involved in the delivery of Starting Well Core, in the following local commissioning areas: London, West Midlands, Shropshire & Staffordshire, Cheshire & Merseyside, Greater Manchester.

Since original concept, the initiative has contributed to a rise in the NHS dental access rate of children aged 0-2 years. For this age group, in the period from November 2016 to November 2018, an additional 56,238 children have been seen per year by a NHS dentist.²

In the 12 month period ending 30 September 2018, 6.9 million children (<18 years) were seen by a NHS dentist, an increase of 1.2% compared to the previous year. In 2017/18 there were 5.5 million fluoride varnish applications for children, an increase of 17.4% compared to the previous year.

UNDERPINNING COMMISSIONING CAPACITY

To support delivery and the promotion of early-years dental care, a set of online resources has been available (nationally) since June 2018. This includes profession- and public-facing resources from a variety of sources (e.g. e-learning, guidance, posters, Apps, video links), aligned with the national drive for DCby1 and PHE's Change4Life campaign. This has enabled consistent, coherent messaging to be promulgated to all NHS dental teams, as well as to wider child social, educational and health promotion teams via LGA networks. Further work with UNICEF, the third sector and commercial partners is broadening the scope and opportunity for "bespoke" integration of oral health promotion to better tailor format and messaging for marginalised groups.

EVALUATION

The evaluation of Starting Well Core is ongoing. However, there is evidence of early positive impacts since work started with multiple stakeholders 18 months ago. Feedback to date indicates success in advancing access opportunities for 0-2s and a raising of public and professional awareness of Dental Check by One. A small reduction (7.8% c.f. 2017) in the number of 0-4 year olds admitted to hospital for dental extractions during 2018 offers an indication of further tangible improvements that may be achieved with continued investment and roll out of Starting Well Core.

NEXT STEPS

In addition to continued roll out of Starting Well Core, a complementary national child oral health promotion campaign is planned to coincide with National Smile Month (May/June) 2019. This will use the network of NHS England community pharmacies (supported by NHS England Local Dental Networks, Local Pharmacy Networks and PHE) to synchronise messaging and offer support on better brushing, choosing healthier lower sugar diets as well as local advice on how to access regular dental checks for infants and children.

² 396,815 children aged 0-2 years seen by a NHS dentist in 12-month period to November 2016, c.f. 453,053 in 12-month period to November 2018.