

An Open Letter on the Cleft Dental Care Crisis

We cannot ignore the cleft dental care crisis.

Cleft is for life – and so are the complex dental issues that often come with it. Yet people born with a cleft lip and/or palate are disproportionately unable to access the vital care they need. In some cases, they are explicitly denied treatment.

Evidence from CLAPA – the UK charity for people affected by cleft – shows:

- People born with a cleft are twice as likely to struggle with dental access.
- Over 7% have been denied treatment outright because of their cleft.
- 42% have experienced inadequate care due to a lack of training among dentists.
- 38% have been unable to afford cleft-related treatment.

Research also shows that people born with a cleft are more likely to need treatment than the general population. Children are one-third more likely to have missing teeth, decay or fillings, and adults one-quarter more likely. Despite this greater need, access to care is worse.

We therefore add our voices to CLAPA's call on all UK governments to act now by:

1. **Improving Access:** Guaranteeing lifelong NHS dental care for people born with a cleft.
2. **Improving Training:** Embedding cleft training in undergraduate dental education and mandating ongoing professional development.
3. **Improving Care:** Strengthening multi-disciplinary working so dentistry and orthodontics are integrated within cleft pathways.
4. **Improving Transparency:** Committing to regular monitoring and reporting on dental access for priority groups, including cleft.

We urge immediate action so that no person born with a cleft is left behind in the dental system.

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