

#SP2021 SNP aim to make dentistry free

SNP leader, Nicola Sturgeon, will once again confirm the SNP's commitment to an NHS which is free at the point of need. This time she will set out plans to cancel NHS dentistry charges – and she will pledge to work with dentists to make long-term funding arrangement for the profession.

The SNP manifesto – published on [Thursday](#) – contained a plan to remobilise the NHS after the pandemic with a 20% increase in frontline NHS spending.

The SNP abolished prescription charges, and charges for hospital parking at NHS sites during the pandemic, so the party say the last remaining service for which people are routinely charged is dentistry.

Ms Sturgeon will confirm that, if the SNP is re-elected to government, all NHS dentistry charges will be scrapped over the next Parliament – starting with care experienced young people.

Removing the charges will cost around £75 million, estimated to increase to £100 million based on the additional uptake which the party expects – and hopes – will occur as the result of the cost being removed.

Speaking on a visit to Glasgow today, Nicola Sturgeon is expected to say: "NHS services should be free at the point of need, and when I was Health Secretary I was proud to abolish prescription charges, which were little more than a tax on ill health.

"Although we have made huge progress in improving access to dental treatment in Scotland in recent years, charges remain a barrier for too many people.

"That's why, if re-elected, an SNP Government will abolish all NHS dentistry charges in Scotland.

"We will start the roll-out with care experienced people between the ages of 18 and 26 – and complete the roll-out over the course of the parliament.

"As we do this, we will engage with the British Dental Association and others to help shape a reformed funding arrangement to make their services sustainable for the long-term.

"By giving both votes to the SNP on May 6th, people can elect a government and a first minister absolutely committed to ensuring that vital services such as dentistry are available to all. That is testament to the fairer society that we want to build."

The dentist's union has warned of [widening inequality following the COVID pandemic](#), with high street services operating at a fraction of their former capacity, with an estimated 2,500 children now facing up to year-long waits for dental extractions in hospitals.

The British Dental Association Scotland (BDA) says that Public Health Scotland data has shown a dramatic reduction in NHS dentistry due to Covid, and it is hitting those in most deprived communities the hardest. Between April and November 2020, the number of courses of treatment delivered was 83%

lower than during the same period in 2019. Practices are operating at significantly reduced capacity to meet infection control protocols, and the BDA is seeking capital investment in areas such as ventilation that can help restore patient volumes.

David McColl, chair of the BDA's Scottish Dental Practice Committee, said: "Dentistry in Scotland risks becoming a casualty of this pandemic. We have called for wholesale change to the way care is delivered, and we will work with the next Scottish Government to achieve that.

"These are big plans to bring down barriers to care and improve access, but they must go hand in hand with needed investment if services millions depend on are going to remain sustainable.

"Practices are now operating at a fraction of their former capacity. Dentists will need real and ongoing support if we're ever going to meet historic levels of demand."