

CMA launches review of private dentistry

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The CMA has launched a market study into the £8 billion private dentistry sector to make sure it is working well for UK consumers.

- CMA is seeking views from consumers and dental professionals to inform its review
- New CMA advice published to help people when choosing and paying for dental treatment
- CEO: “For some, turning to private dentistry is a choice – but for many, it’s a necessity. People need clear, accessible information at the right time so they can make the right decisions for themselves and their families.”

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has launched a review of private dentistry, looking at both essential care and cosmetic treatments. It is seeking feedback from consumers and dental professionals as it explores how well the market is working – from finding a dentist and understanding prices to knowing where to go if something goes wrong.

Dentistry plays a critical role in people’s health and wellbeing, and demand for private dentistry has risen sharply in recent years – 1 in 5 people in Great Britain used private dental care in 2024. Independent sources suggest average prices in the UK have increased significantly – between 2022 and 2024, initial consultations rose by over 23% to £80, and routine check-ups for existing patients by over 14% to £55. Private dental services accounted for over two-thirds (69%) of the market in 2025, with the UK private dentistry market valued at £8.4 billion in 2023/2024. Research suggests this shift is partly driven by difficulties accessing NHS treatment.

It is crucial that consumers understand the dental care options available to them and have access to clear information before they spend money, but many may find choosing a dentist, and choosing between different treatments, complex and confusing.

The CMA has published the proposed scope of the study and is inviting views. Areas under consideration include:

- Access to private dentistry: The availability of private dental services in different areas, and how easily people can switch between providers.
- Consumer choice and experience: How people search for dental care, compare providers, and understand the information they receive from dental professionals – including how experiences may vary for different consumer groups, such as vulnerable individuals.
- Treatment prices: How prices for private dental services have changed compared with inflation.
- Business tactics and behaviour: Whether dentists engage in any practices that may be unfair, misleading or anti-competitive that could harm consumers or limit their choice.
- Competition between private dentists: How dental practices compete to attract and retain patients, and whether competition is leading to good results for consumers on pricing, and experience.
- Complaint and redress mechanisms: Whether people can easily raise concerns or seek redress when things go wrong.
- Sector regulation: Whether the regulatory frameworks – and how they are enforced – support good outcomes for consumers, including access to clear information.

Sarah Cardell, Chief Executive of the CMA, said:

Going to the dentist is an important part of health and wellbeing, yet we're concerned many may be uncertain about costs, availability, treatment options and what they're entitled to.

For some, turning to private dentistry is a choice - but for many, it's a necessity. People need clear, accessible information at the right time so they can make the right decisions for themselves and their families.

We want to hear directly from people across the UK about their experiences - good or bad - to help us build a clear picture of how this market is working in practice.

The CMA recognises the dedication and professionalism of dental professionals across the UK, and this study is not a criticism of clinicians or the care they provide, but an examination of how the market is working for consumers.

Dentistry is devolved to national governments, which means people's experiences and the options available to them can vary depending on where they live. The CMA will take these differences into account and work closely with all 4 governments as its study progresses.

This work aligns with the CMA's 2026-2029 strategy to protect consumers in their day-to-day lives and prioritises action in essential areas of household spend.

In taking forward this work, the CMA will apply its 4Ps approach - pace, predictability, proportionality and process.

The CMA will not wait to act if it can make a difference, so to support people now, the CMA has published advice - including 3 top tips - to help people understand private dental costs, explore available options and know what to expect before starting treatment.

The CMA's Top Tips for private dental patients

1 . Compare what's available to find a dentist that works for your needs

If you're looking for a dentist, search online and ask your friends and family where they go. Research can help you make the right decision for you. There's lots to think about: Does the practice offer NHS and private treatments? What about the costs? And do the practice facilities and opening hours work for you?

2 . Make sure you know and understand the cost before you agree to treatment

Private dental fees can vary, so it's important to ask for clear pricing upfront. Knowing the cost in advance helps you avoid nasty surprises and makes it easier to plan ahead. Ask for a written plan explaining any treatments and costs, so you can see what you're paying for. It's one of the simplest ways to understand your options, compare approaches and feel confident you're getting good value for money.

3 . Ask if there are other treatment options that might suit you

Your dentist should explain all treatment options available to you - including those that may be

cheaper. If you're not sure why they are recommending a treatment, or you're worried about the cost, ask them to talk you through the alternatives.

The CMA has published online forms for consumers and dental professionals to share their experiences, as well as a separate call for views on the proposed scope of the study. This feedback will help shape the areas to be examined. While the study will not examine NHS dentistry on its own, it will consider how NHS systems influence the private market, including the impact on people's choices and treatment availability.

Possible outcomes

Depending on what the evidence shows, the CMA's market study could lead to a range of outcomes – ultimately aiming to ensure people have access to detailed, clear and timely information, enabling them to make the best possible choices for them.

This could include recommendations to governments to change regulation of the sector, direct action from the CMA, or new guidance to help ensure businesses are clear on their obligations. The review may also help inform or shape future policy in the different nations of the UK.

For more information, visit the market study case page.

Statistic sources

- In England, 29% of adults used private care exclusively in 2023/2024. [Source: Adult oral health survey 2023 - GOV.UK].
- 1 in 5 people in Great Britain used private dental care in 2024 [Source: Denplan, 2024 survey of GB adults].
- Between 2022 and 2024, initial consultations rose by over 23% to £80, and routine check-ups for existing patients by over 14% to £55. [Source: MyTribeInsurance]
- In 2024, people across the UK reported turning to private dental care because: they couldn't get NHS treatment at all (36%), they couldn't get NHS treatment quickly enough (31%), their dental practice/professional stopped offering NHS treatment (25%) or they preferred it (18%). [Source: General Dental Council – Views and experiences of dentistry].
- Research suggests this shift is partly driven by difficulties accessing NHS treatment [Source: General Dental Council – Views and experiences of dentistry].
- Six in 10 (61%) NHS dental patients would consider paying for private dental care, with the top reason being to access faster treatment (39%) [Source: Denplan, 2024 survey of GB adults].
- Private dental services accounted for over two-thirds (69%) of the market in 2025, with the UK private dentistry market valued at £8.4 billion in 2023/2024 [Source: LaingBuisson].

Notes to editors

1. All media enquiries should be directed to the CMA press office by email on press@cma.gov.uk, or by phone on 020 3738 6460.
2. The launch of the market study follows a request from Chancellor Rachel Reeves to look into the provision of private dentistry. The Chancellor asked the CMA to consider consumers' ability to make effective choices and obtain good value for money in the market.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/cma-launches-review-of-private-dentistry>