

Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
*sent by email*

17 August 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

**Public Health England**

We are writing to seek urgent clarification on the status of public health - and the place of dental public health - following your commitment to abolish Public Health England.

It is now anticipated that COVID-19 will see already unacceptable oral health inequalities widen. Most existing public health programmes have been suspended, and access to primary care services remains limited.

**Any successor body must play a lead role in tackling these inequalities, identifying effective evidenced-based measures to improve outcomes. The following work is now, in our view, under threat:**

- Generating tools and guidance for local authorities, commissioners and practitioners, covering key areas ranging from updated COVID risk-mitigation to tackling antimicrobial resistance.
- Bridging the gap between local and national level, supporting local commissioning services and service delivery. Planning the future scope and scale of provision is now fundamental, given low levels of capacity across the service.
- Gathering evidence via collection and review of epidemiological data, and evaluation of public health programmes. Regular oral health surveys already faced an uncertain future.
- Providing leadership and co-ordination, bringing together dental and wider stakeholders to collaborate and provide mutual support, on key groups from young children to vulnerable older people.
- Supporting workforce development with Health Education England, generating innovation and business case development that underpin new services and programmes.
- Overseeing ongoing work on sugar reduction, built upon in the government's recent anti-obesity strategy.

Any loss or disruption will have a material impact on communities across this country. We now risk leaving policy makers without evidence on which to base plans, and practitioners without guidance to operate in unprecedented times, all while losing vital expertise from a committed and highly skilled dental public health workforce.

Effective management of the pandemic response is a clear a national priority. But meaningfully protecting the public long-term hinges on an effective approach to public health, in which oral health is not an optional extra. We have welcomed signals from the Department of Health and Social Care on prevention. As you have noted, scaling up these approaches has the power both to transform lives and save money.

A pandemic is not the time to cast aside that logic, but to double down. This vital agenda demands both proper resourcing and organizational commitment.

Yours sincerely,



Mick Armstrong  
Chair, BDA

cc: Jo Churchill MP, DH, Sara Hurley, NHSE, Sandra White, PHE, Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP.