Brighter smiles for Greater Manchester
5-point plan for better oral health across Greater Manchester

Greater Manchester is at the bottom of the UK league table for oral health.

In fact, of the ten local authorities with the poorest children’s oral health outcomes in England, three are in Greater Manchester. Today 5-year-olds in areas like Salford and Oldham are more than six times more likely to have decay than their peers in Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt’s constituency.

We think all children deserve the best start in life. Sadly, oral health is often treated as general health’s ‘poor relation’, but its importance to people’s lives cannot be overstated.

Tooth decay – an almost completely preventable disease – can have a significant impact on children’s general health, development, school readiness, confidence, ability to sleep, eat and socialise. A recent NHS survey revealed that more than a fifth of 12-year-olds (22%) experienced difficulty eating as a result of poor dental health in the past three months, and more than a third (35%) reported being embarrassed to smile or laugh due to the condition of their teeth. In adulthood, poor oral health may increase the risk of serious diseases such as stroke, diabetes and heart attack, and can significantly impair people’s ability to find a job.

Manchester has led the way in recent years in tackling levels of dental disease, through innovative schemes like Manchester Smiles and Baby Teeth Do Matter, which helped decrease the rate of children’s decay in the city by over a third (36%) in just eight years. But not all parts of Greater Manchester have seen improvements, with outcomes in some councils deteriorating significantly over the same period. This needs to change.

The British Dental Association urges the mayoral candidates to support our 5-point plan for better oral health across Greater Manchester:

1. **Plan for the future.** It’s time for an ambitious long-term strategy to turn around oral health across Greater Manchester.
2. **Invest in children’s oral health** Build on tried and tested programmes from across the UK to give kids the best start in life, starting from birth.
3. **End the scandal of child tooth extractions** Prevent children facing costly and avoidable extractions under general anaesthesia in our hospitals.
4. **Extend “Healthy Living Dentistry” scheme** Expand local initiatives delivering real results on healthy lifestyle and dental attendance.
5. **Make Manchester a low-sugar city** Reduce the sugar driving decay in schools and workplaces.
1. **Plan for the future**

Almost half (44%) of adults in Greater Manchester have not seen an NHS dentist for more than 2 years, with more than a third of children (37.5%) in the area not having seen a dentist for over a year, even though check-ups for under 18s are free and in some cases should take place as often as every three months.

Greater Manchester needs a coherent and ambitious long-term strategy, to raise awareness of the importance of oral health and improve dental attendance and outcomes. It is crucial that NHS dental services continue to be commissioned across the entire Greater Manchester area to ensure that no areas are left behind in the fight against tooth decay.

2. **Invest in children’s oral health**

Greater Manchester should build on the successes of Manchester Smiles and Baby Teeth Do Matter schemes by promoting buddy-up partnerships of dental care professionals with nurseries and schools. These could provide timely preventive intervention such as application of fluoride varnish, dental check-ups and advice for parents.

Greater Manchester should also learn from tried and tested schemes like ChildSmile in Scotland, and consider introducing supervised tooth-brushing and twice yearly fluoride varnish application in all nurseries, and for under 5-year-olds in selected schools in areas of greatest need.

3. **End the scandal of child tooth extractions**

A child in Greater Manchester is 60% more likely to end up having to be admitted to hospital to have multiple decayed teeth extracted under general anaesthesia than an average child in England. Over the past 4 years the area saw more than 15,000 of these painful and completely preventable procedures, costing the local NHS over £13 million. Such extractions are in fact the number one reason young children are now admitted to hospital.

While our ambition should be to put an end to these procedures completely, it is also important that children who do currently need them receive them as soon as possible. Currently, many children face a long and painful wait – in some areas of Greater Manchester up to a year – during which they require painkillers and antibiotics. This must end.

Greater Manchester should aspire to a 20% reduction in tooth extractions under general anaesthesia due to decay over the course of the next 5 years, and to bring the waits for such procedures down to a maximum of 3 months if such extraction can’t be avoided.
4. Extend “Healthy Living Dentistry” scheme across Greater Manchester

Healthy Living Dentistry, a partnership between Wigan Council and the Local Dental Committee, has offered training and support to members of the dental team and enabled them to make an even greater impact on oral and overall health of their communities. Staff in participating practices offer patients advice on lifestyle issues such as smoking, alcohol and diet, and help promote health campaigns like Stoptober, Mouth Cancer Action Month and Dry January. Healthy Living Dentistry practices also nominate an ‘Early Years Champion’ who can facilitate relationships with the local early years services and Children’s Centres to improve dental attendance in young children.

This cost effective scheme will bring real savings down the line by improving the health of the population, and Greater Manchester should follow Wigan’s lead and roll it out to benefit communities across the area.

5. Make Manchester a low-sugar city

The average five-year-old eats their own body weight in sugar in just one year, with devastating effects for their teeth, as well as their weight.

Greater Manchester should aspire to become a 'low-sugar' city, encouraging all schools to ban the sales of sugary drinks, promoting low-sugar options in Breakfast Clubs, and drawing attention to the harm of too much sugar to both dental health and healthy weight by displaying information about sugar content in various drinks and snacks on posters near vending machines in workplaces and public spaces.