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Dental Shortage Forces Thousands to Seek Emergency Care in Wiltshire and Swindon

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A growing shortage of accessible dental services in Wiltshire and Swindon has forced over 4,000 people to seek urgent care at local emergency departments, highlighting a deepening crisis in routine dental provision.

Between January 2021 and May 2025, Great Western Hospital in Swindon handled 4,138 emergency visits related to dental problems, according to data obtained through a Freedom

of Information (FOI) request and compiled by the House of Commons Library. Of these, 3,940 cases involved facial pain, such as severe toothache, and 198 were linked to dental injuries.

Swindon was hit hardest, with 2,688 instances of facial pain and 124 cases of dental injury, while Wiltshire saw 740 facial pain patients and 55 with injuries. These figures point to a severe shortage of routine dental services, where many patients find themselves removed from local practice lists, face extensive wait times, or are left with no option but to turn to expensive private care. Some individuals have even resorted to dangerous self-treatment.

Chippenham MP Sarah Gibson expressed concern about the unfolding situation. In a recent interview, she remarked: “These numbers reveal the real consequences of years of underinvestment and delay. Wiltshire and Swindon have effectively become dental deserts. No one should have to end up in an emergency room just to get help with a toothache.”

Gibson also warned of the growing burden placed on hospital staff who are being drawn away from core responsibilities to handle avoidable cases stemming from poor dental access. “This is a situation that cannot be allowed to continue,” she said.

The failure to implement promised contract reforms for dental professionals has been a major sticking point. “Practitioners in my area, along with professional associations, have been clear about what changes are needed,” Gibson noted. “But progress has been consistently slow.”

Her party has outlined a number of practical proposals to help restore services and rebuild trust in public dental provision. These include:

Overhauling existing dental contracts to encourage professionals to return to community-based work

With no clear timeline for lasting change, the crisis continues to put pressure on communities already grappling with limited access to essential services. “It’s outrageous that in 2025, families are turning to emergency departments because they can’t find a dentist,” Gibson said. “This is a failure of planning, and ordinary people are left to pay the price.”

Unless meaningful reforms are introduced soon, families across the country may be left with no safe or affordable options for basic dental care.