

Oral Health in Aged Care

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Why is oral health important in aged care?

The picture of oral health in aged care has greatly changed over the last decades. People now living in residential aged care often have natural teeth with complex dental restorations and partial dentures, requiring support to maintain their oral hygiene.

Older people are more likely to have poor oral health and be affected by its consequences; including social isolation, functional impairment, poor nutritional status, pain and discomfort. There is a substantial body of evidence to show that poor oral health affects general health, with oral diseases being linked to cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, dementia and aspiration pneumonia.

What are the main oral health findings from the Royal Commission into Aged Care?

It has been 2 years since the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety was tabled in the Australian Parliament in March 2021. The Royal Commission consistently heard that oral and dental healthcare needs of people living in residential aged care are not treated as priorities. Daily oral healthcare is often not undertaken and access to oral and dental health practitioners is limited. Lack of staff time and inadequate training were cited as the main contributing factors.

What are the oral health recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care?

6 oral health recommendations were made to address the shortcomings documented by the Royal Commission. Advocacy is required to see these oral health recommendations become a reality.

- **Recommendation 19** Amend the Aged Care Quality Standards to include best practice in oral care.
- **Recommendation 38** Require approved providers to employ (or otherwise retain) at least one oral health practitioner.
- **Recommendation 60** Establish a new Senior Dental Benefits Scheme.
- **Recommendation 79** Review certificate-based aged care courses and consider whether oral health should be included as a core competency.
- **Recommendation 114** Fund continuing education and training to improve the quality of the current aged care workforce, with courses relevant to direct care skills, including oral health.

How do we optimise oral health for older Australians?

'Better Oral Health in Residential Care', is a national evidenced-based education and training program, endorsed by the Australian Government. It promotes a multi-disciplinary approach with doctors, nurses, aged care workers and oral health practitioners sharing 4 key responsibilities for optimising oral health including: oral health screening, oral healthcare planning, daily oral hygiene and access to dental referrals and treatment.

This resource, including an Oral Health Assessment Tool (OHAT), was developed under the Encouraging Better Practice in Aged Care Initiative. The resource package is free to access from the following link:

<https://www.dental.sa.gov.au/professionals/oral-health-resources/care-for-older-people-toolkit/residential-care>

To arrange a face-to-face 'oral health in aged care' hands-on workshop with a qualified educator, contact registered dental hygienist, Cathryn Carboon via email: cathcarboon@bigpond.com

Let's change the culture of mouth care in Australian aged care for the better!