

Mouth Care Matters

Oral health: a pivotal clinical area for older adults

Good oral health is important for healthy ageing.

The picture of oral health in older adults has greatly changed over the last decades. Older people now often have natural teeth with complex dental restorations and partial dentures, requiring support to maintain their oral hygiene. Older adults are more likely to have poor oral health and be affected by its consequences.

6 key reasons why oral health for older adults should be a priority

1) General Health

There is a substantial body of evidence to show that poor oral health affects general health. Oral disease is linked to cardiovascular disease, stroke, diabetes, respiratory disease, rheumatoid arthritis and dementia.

2) Aspiration Pneumonia

There is a clear link between poor oral health and an increased risk of aspiration pneumonia, a leading cause of hospitalisation & death in older adults.

3) Nutrition

Poor oral health impacts older adults' ability to eat and drink, leading to dehydration, malnutrition and unexpected weight loss.

4) Quality of life

Poor oral health, including oral pain, dry mouth and bad breath, affects an older person's quality of life, impacting their physical and mental wellbeing and ability to socialize.

5) Aged Care Quality Standard 3

Delivering safe and effective oral health care is an essential requirement of meeting Aged Care Quality Standard 3 – personal and clinical care, to optimize an older adult's health and wellbeing.

6) Cost saving

Good oral health care minimizes emergency dental care and improves general health outcomes for older adults. Decreasing costs on your service and the health system.

How do we optimise oral health for older Australians?

Many oral health problems can be avoided with routine preventive care. While most services have oral health care policies, there is a lack of training, skills development and product resources to support the policies.

6 key ways to make oral health a priority for older adults

- Policy & protocols
- Education & training
- Tele-dentistry
- Specialised oral hygiene products
- Denture care & storage
- Oral health champions

6 key online policy, education & training resources

1. Better Oral Health in Residential Care (2009)

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, includes an Oral Health Assessment Tool. 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>

2. Oral and dental hygiene standardised care process for public sector residential aged care services (2023)

A Victorian Government document, developed by the Australian Centre for Evidence Based Care (ACEBAC) at La Trobe University, through the Department of Health and Human Services 'Strengthening Care Outcomes for Residents with Evidence' (SCORE) initiative.

<https://www.health.vic.gov.au/residential-aged-care/standardised-care-processes>

3. Senior Smiles (Newcastle University) www.seniorsmiles.org.au A preventive oral health care program for older people living in residential aged care facilities, with online training components.

4. Mouth Care Matters Guide for hospital healthcare professionals, 2nd Edition Version 13, UK National Health Service (2019)

<https://mouthcarematters.hee.nhs.uk/links-resources/mouth-care-matters>

<resources-2/index.html>

5. Knowledge Oral Health Care (UK) www.kohc.co.uk

Training in oral healthcare suitable for all care settings

6. Learn effective techniques to handle challenging situations and provide the best dental care for a person living with dementia with Teepa Snow

<https://shop.teepasnow.com/product/dental-care-for-people-with-dementia-streaming/>

Key online product resources

Tele-Dentistry Holland Healthcare TelScope

<https://hollandhealthcareinc.com/health-professionals/dental-and-teledentistry>

Specialized oral hygiene products (including Surround Toothbrush) One

Dental www.onedental.com.au

Denture Care Dr Mark's HyGenie, SureGrip and DentalFresh

www.drmarkshygenie.com

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SmileCARE International award-winning program, providing hands-on, practical oral health in aged care workshops across Australia.

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