



## A fact sheet for providers



# KNOW, LOOK, ACT

## Recognising and responding to oral health issues in aged care

### Why oral health matters

This fact sheet outlines the steps to recognise and respond to signs of poor oral health in residential aged care.

Poor oral health can impact an aged care resident's life by causing pain, interrupting sleep and affecting their ability to eat, drink and speak. It can also negatively impact how a resident feels about their appearance, general health and quality of life.

Poor oral health is linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke, aspiration pneumonia and dementia.

Poor oral health impacts a resident's ability to eat and drink. It can cause dehydration, malnutrition and weight loss.

### KNOW, LOOK, ACT

Aged care teams need to recognise and respond to signs of poor oral health.

- ✓ **KNOW** the signs to look out for that may indicate a resident is experiencing pain or discomfort from their teeth or mouth.
- ✓ **LOOK** inside their mouth to see if you can identify an issue.
- ✓ **ACT** by contacting a dental practitioner who can manage the resident's oral health.



## How it's done

### ✓ **KNOW the signs to look for**

If a resident is not able to tell you they have a painful mouth or tooth, some non-verbal indicators to look out for can include:

- signs of pain but no sign of disease elsewhere on the body
- a change in eating habits e.g. a decrease in consumption or refusal of certain types of foods or drinks such as tough, hard, hot, cold or sweet items
- weight loss
- behaviour changes such as a sudden refusal to brush their teeth or not wearing their dentures
- a sudden increase in saliva and drooling
- visibly swollen and/or bleeding gums
- growths, patches or lesions that have recently appeared in or around the mouth or on the lips, such as a non-healing ulcer.

#### **Watch for signs of oral pain during mealtime:**

- reduced appetite
- choking on food or drink
- refusing certain types of food.

### ✓ **LOOK and identify an issue**

Look out for inflamed and/or bleeding gums, tooth decay, loose teeth, a pimple or ulcer on the gum, bad breath and swelling involving the mouth or face.

Use the [Oral Health Assessment](#) from SA Dental to assist you in assessing the teeth and mouth to identify any issues.



Example of tooth decay



Example of poor oral hygiene and gum disease

### ✓ **ACT by contacting a dental practitioner**

If your service has a visiting dental practitioner, ensure the resident is examined by them if they consent.

If the resident has a private dental practitioner, contact them for an appointment.

If the resident holds a valid Health Care Card, Pensioner Concession Card or Commonwealth Seniors Card, they may be eligible for [government dental care](#). Information and contact details for your local public dental service can be found at [teeth.org.au](https://teeth.org.au).

Phone the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission's Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline on **1800 844 044** (free call), 9am – 5pm AEDT, Monday to Friday if you wish to speak with professionals about issues, ideas or concerns in relation to an enjoyable food, nutrition and dining experience in an aged care service. Alternatively, you can contact the Commission's general enquiries line on **1800 951 822** (free call).

 **1800 844 044**

**Food, Nutrition and Dining Hotline**  
Monday to Friday, 9am – 5pm AEDT



#### **Phone**

1800 951 822



#### **Web**

[agedcarequality.gov.au](https://agedcarequality.gov.au)



#### **Write**

Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission  
GPO Box 9819, in your capital city