

Retirement Policy and Research Centre
University of Auckland Business School
Private Bag 92 019
Auckland 1142
New Zealand
<http://www.rprc.auckland.ac.nz>

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To: Ministry of Health
c/o <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/life-stages/health-older-people/health-older-people-strategy-update>

Submission: Ministry's Health of Older People Strategy

The Retirement Policy and Research Centre thanks the Ministry of Health for this opportunity to make a submission on the Ministry's Health of Older People Strategy.

Submission issue: access to oral care for the aged population.

Background:

The Ministry of Health's survey published in 2010, *Our Oral Health: Key findings of the 2009 New Zealand Oral Health Survey*, pp. xx - 1 (available at: <https://www.health.govt.nz/system/files/documents/publications/our-oral-health-2010.pdf>) states in precis:

Oral health, the health of teeth and mouth, is critical to good health and wellbeing. Oral diseases are among the most prevalent chronic diseases in New Zealand and represent a considerable burden on the public. New Zealanders have poorer oral health than Australians across a range of clinical oral health indicators. Cost was found to be a key barrier to accessing oral health services: 44.1% of adults surveyed had avoided dental care due to cost in the previous year. In 2009, key population groups who experienced disparities in oral health outcomes and access to services included Māori, Pacific people, and people living in high deprivation areas. These population groups generally had higher levels of untreated decay and missing teeth, poorer self-reported oral health, and higher prevalences of having experienced one or more oral-health-related quality-of-life impacts.

The Overview of key findings of the *Annual Update of Key Results 2014/15: New Zealand Health Survey* (at: <http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2014-15-new-zealand-health-survey>) reports that in 2014/15 the Government spent \$199 million on oral health care, including oral health services provided or funded by district health boards. Children and adolescents up to their 18th birthday have access to free basic oral health services. For adults, some publicly funded oral health services are available when treatment is required for accident or injury, for people with medical conditions or disabilities whose conditions prevent them from accessing community-based dental care, and low-income adults who need emergency dental treatment.

The issue:

The primary issue in this submission is oral health of the aged population, particularly those in long-term residential care. We are gravely concerned that the *Age Related Residential Care Services Agreement* between DHBs and Providers of age-related residential care (at <http://www.centrautas.co.nz/assets/Health-of-Older-People/ARRC-Agreement-effective-1-July-2015-v-20May2015.pdf>) specifically excludes dental care:

D14.1 The Services do not include: d. Services such as those provided by **dentists**, opticians, audiologists, chaplains, hairdressers, dry cleaners, and solicitors.

In the RPRC *PensionBriefing* 2013-3, *Oral health, general health, and residential aged-care*, March 2013 (available at: <https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/business/about/our-research/research-institutes-and-centres/RPRC/PensionBriefing/2013-3%20Oral%20health,%20general%20health,%20and%20residential%20aged-care.pdf>),

we note that:

oral ill-health or discomfort causes loss of appetite, and loss of well-being. There is also growing international evidence about links between periodontal disease and cardiovascular disease, diabetes and other chronic illnesses.

Given New Zealand's ageing population, investing in the oral health of the elderly would improve the general health and well-being of those currently deprived of this care; and would also be a likely source of future saving from reduced incidence of chronic illnesses.

We submit that, as a core aspect of the Ministry's Health of Older People Strategy, all aged care facilities are required to have oral care policies, provide oral care plans for their residents, and ensure access as required to oral health professionals including dentists.