

**“It's not just about teeth”: supporting AOD recovery and improving client wellbeing through access to oral healthcare.**

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**Background:** Teeth are not just about how we chew or smile. Missing teeth or poor oral health can negatively impact on confidence, resilience and self-worth. For people in alcohol and other drugs (AOD) recovery, chronic dental issues are common, often caused or exacerbated by AOD use. In early 2022, Palmerston Association led a partnership to pilot a free oral health program to improve access to dental treatment for clients in our residential AOD treatment program, evaluated by Notre Dame University.

**Description of Model of Care/Intervention:** In a pre-dental treatment survey, four out of five clients reported feeling self-conscious and avoiding smiling due to the appearance of their teeth. Lack of confidence, pain, and difficulties eating were also experienced by many clients.

**Effectiveness/Acceptability/Implementation:** A total of forty-five people have accessed dental treatment through this project since June 2022. The response to the program has been exceedingly positive, with many clients referring to physical, practical and psychological benefits of having 'their teeth fixed'. Many have reflected on how it complements their AOD recovery goals, their broader wellbeing and bolsters their sense of it being a 'fresh start'.

**Conclusion and Next Steps:** The integration of this trauma informed oral healthcare program within an AOD therapeutic community has already yielded individual and therapeutic benefits beyond expectation. Findings are highly relevant to other populations that face barriers to accessing oral healthcare, and more broadly, to individuals or communities embarking on recovery. As noted by one client, 'it is not just about teeth', it's about mental health, confidence, self-esteem, and hope.... it's a massive part of recovery".