

AUT

A FUTURE IN
ORAL HEALTH





WHAT IS ORAL HEALTH?

Oral health is an important component of our general health and wellbeing. This is not only because a bright white smile looks healthy, but because an individual's dental and periodontal (disease of the gums) conditions can impact on many aspects of their overall health. Dental decay and periodontal disease remain among the most prevalent diseases in New Zealand and globally.

Oral diseases are problematic because they often have a relationship with other conditions or circumstances (risk factors) of the body. For example, diseases in the oral cavity might indicate the presence of systemic diseases elsewhere in the body, for example medications may have side effects that affect the oral cavity or periodontal infection may cause problems with stabilising diabetes.

Oral health therapists are health professionals who provide clinical care as well as oral health education to individuals or groups. Oral health therapists provide restorative oral health care for children and adolescents up to the age of 18 as well as periodontal care for all ages.

AUT oral health graduates can register with the Dental Council of New Zealand and practice as an oral health therapist. This title covers the roles previously known as dental health therapist and dental hygienist.

Are you keen to help people maintain good oral health? Are you interested in making a difference to the health of people and communities? Do you enjoy working in a team setting? Are you interested in human biology? Are you empathetic and caring? Do you have excellent communication skills?

If so, oral health may offer an interesting career path for you.

OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

The **biggest challenge** in oral health for New Zealanders is finding ways to make a significant impact on periodontal disease and dental decay.

Shortage of dental professionals

According to the New Zealand Dental Association, there is a shortage of oral health professionals in New Zealand (previously commonly known as dental health therapist or dental health hygienist).

Needs of aging and young

There is opportunity to further develop clinical practice to utilise the full potential of oral health therapists for two population groups in New Zealand –aged and young:

- Our aging population has complex medical histories and high treatment needs, both restorative and periodontal, as well as need for preventive care.
- Young people need improved oral health care services beyond the current 18 year old cut off. There is currently a push to remove this age limit.

Multicultural population needs

It is increasingly important that oral health professionals recognise how ethnic beliefs and language barriers impact on oral health literacy and communication of our increasingly diversified populations.



WORK SETTINGS

Oral health therapists work in teams alongside dentists, specialists, singly qualified dental hygienists and/or dental therapists, oral health educators, and other health care professionals.

Experienced oral health therapists can move into team leader roles, clinical education, academic and management roles. Some also move into non-clinical roles, choosing to work in health promotion.

Public health service – Oral health therapists are employed by District Health Boards (DHBs) in hospital or community clinics, alongside dentists. These services are free of charge to patients. Working for the DHBs involves travelling to hub clinics to provide child and adolescent dental care, or working in mobile clinics for screening and preventive treatment for children and adolescents.

Private practice – Oral health therapists may be employed in private practice, working with dentists, prosthodontists, maxillo-facial surgeons and orthodontic specialists. They may also be engaged by retirement villages and hospitals to provide preventive services to residents.

Once they have experience, dental hygienists can set up their own practice or work on contract to dental providers.

CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

Oral health therapists – Provide oral health assessment, diagnosis, management and preventive care for patients as documented in the Dental Council of New Zealand's scope of practice for oral health therapy. They can :

- Diagnose and restore treatment of dental caries for patients up to the age of 18
- Treat periodontal disease and work alongside orthodontists
- Collaborate with other oral health practitioners for the benefit of the patient's overall health
- Provide education, prevention and oral health promotion

Other roles for oral health therapists – Experienced oral health therapists can move into team leader roles, clinical education, academic and management roles. Some also move into non-clinical roles, choosing to work in health promotion.

Team leader – Provides guidance, instruction, direction and leadership for either a team of oral therapists or a multidisciplinary team of health professionals within a large organisation, eg DHB. Focus is on overall achievement of health targets. Need ability to encourage the team to collaborate and deliver to health targets.

Health promoter – Sets up and coordinates health promotion programmes. Advocates and works alongside schools, communities and organisations to help identify health issues and solutions. May also develop and manage health promotion programmes, writing submissions, researching, evaluating reports etc.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Critical thinking skills

- High level of oral disease knowledge and risk factor interaction
- Ability to analyse, research and apply theoretical knowledge to individual patient care and the promotion of oral health
- Ability to set goals with perceived outcomes and reassess success of oral health intervention

Communication and people skills

- Ability to work collaboratively in a team environment and with community groups
- Ability to act in an empathetic way with people who are concerned about their health and support their behaviour change

Physical skills

- Excellent finger dexterity and hand-eye co-ordination
- Ability to visualise 3D dental anatomical environment

PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

- Strong interest in oral health and general health
- Empathetic and good at relating at an appropriate level to people of all ages
- Organised, with attention to detail and an ability to work in a disciplined and systematic way

PROFESSIONAL REGISTRATION

Graduates register with the Dental Council of New Zealand, then apply yearly for an annual practising certificate (APC) that requires adhering to the Scope of Practice for oral health therapy.

More information on oral health professional registration requirements can be found at www.dcnz.org.nz

SALARY GUIDE

	Salary
Oral health therapist (public, eg DHB)	
Graduate	\$53,300
5 years experience:	\$69,900 (annual increments)
Advanced clinician:	\$77,900-\$100,000+
Oral health therapists (private)	
Oral therapist (private – hygiene therapy):	\$35-\$45 per hour
5 years plus:	\$60+ per hour

Sources: DHBs Allied/Public Health/ Technical MECA, Careers NZ and www.enz.org/salary-dental-occupations.html

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (mid 2019) and should only be used as a guideline.

THE AUT ADVANTAGE

Graduates of AUT's Bachelor of Health Science (Oral Health) degree may register as oral health therapists with the Dental Council of New Zealand to work in New Zealand and Australia. They are sought after in both countries.

As well as ongoing external clinical placements, AUT students get extensive clinical experience in AUT's campus based oral health service.

They also work on oral health promotion planning and participation in the wider community.

FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Further study is available in oral health at postgraduate, master's and PhD level.

Examples of current research include:

- Improving the survival of oral cancer patients in New Zealand
- Salivary hypofunction
- Effects during pregnancy and infancy of Vitamin D supplementation on dental health in early childhood
- Bond strengths of different fissure sealants



JAIMEE EDWARDS

Ngāti Kahungunu, Whakatōhea

Dual-qualified Dental Therapist and Dental Hygienist,
Hawke's Bay DHB

Bachelor of Health Science (Oral Health)

"I am in my third year working as a dental therapist at Flaxmere Community Dental Clinic where I work with the local community to prevent oral diseases, both caries (decay) and periodontal disease (gum disease).

I am currently working specifically with children, mostly using my therapist scope of practice. But I have a day set aside each week for hygiene patients. I also usually have a pre-schoolers day on Wednesday, but am open to any 'relief of pain' calls on that day. The rest of the week is booked up with a mixture of recalls and treatment.

I am also involved in an incubator programme led by the hospital involving students from Hawke's Bay high schools. The workshops aim to encourage teenagers to take on health-related careers by giving them information about what subjects to do at school and how university works.

I am also part of the Choose Water Hawke's Bay group. We are currently working on introducing policies to schools about having less or no sugar and sweetened beverages.

I enjoy my job because I am passionate about Māori oral health. I also like how I am still learning every day."

EMPLOYER COMMENT

"The dual roles of dental hygienist and dental therapist in AUT graduates is quite innovative and attractive to us when we look ahead at changes in our service at the DHB.

AUT graduates have solid clinical experience and experience of working with a range of different cultures so they understand cultural aspects, needs and perspective. They are well equipped to meet the needs of the profession."

Ruth O'Rourke

Clinical Team Leader of Oral Health Services,
Hawke's Bay District Health Board

USEFUL WEBSITES

The Dental Council of New Zealand (DCNZ) –
oral health profession registration body
www.dcnz.org.nz

New Zealand Dental and Oral Health Therapists
Association (NZDOHTA)
www.nzoral.org.nz

New Zealand Dental Hygiene Association
(NZDHA)
www.nzdha.co.nz/

New Zealand Dental Association
www.nzda.org.nz/pub/

New Zealand Health Survey
<http://bit.ly/2YbAjPa>

Auckland DHB Oral Health Service – Regional
Service
[www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/oral-maxillofacial-
surgery/auckland-dhb-oral-health-service-
regional/](http://www.healthpoint.co.nz/public/oral-maxillofacial-surgery/auckland-dhb-oral-health-service-regional/)

FURTHER INFORMATION

For the most up-to-date information on Oral
Health and the Bachelor of Health Science, visit
www.aut.ac.nz/oral-health

For other Future Career Sheets visit
www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets

For employability and career support, AUT
students can book an appointment through
<https://elab.aut.ac.nz>

Current AUT students can also contact the AUT
Student Hub team for help and advice:

0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)
email: studenthub@aut.ac.nz

Future students can email
futurestudents@aut.ac.nz

NORTH CAMPUS
90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland

Connect with us now:



www.aut.ac.nz/social

