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### Introduction

2023 was a challenging year for the foundation and oral health in general. The foundation lost 60% of its operational funding from a year-on-year grant for Secretariat Agency services to the Department of Health in January 2023. This resulted in a staff member redundancy which has had a significant impact on the organisation. Targets originally projected were scaled back. Despite the loss of human and financial resources, the foundation achieved the highest request for oral health promotional materials since its inception. The foundation later engaged the services of a professional fundraising company to assist in developing a case for support for active corporate fundraising. It is envisioned that professional assistance will help bridge some of the loss of income in 2024-26.

We continued to produce new materials and our resource outreach increased by 160% from 2022.

Although oral health in Ireland has greatly improved over the last fifty years, there is much still to be done. This is for several reasons. Many people still do not recognise the importance of oral health and its connection to lifestyle choices, diet, and overall well-being. Oral health practice can be a challenge for many families, especially for families on limited incomes. Access to oral health education is further reduced in the schools' systems, and those who are most vulnerable suffer the most.

The dental sector in Ireland has experienced many changes in the past decade, with an accumulation of issues ranging from; a general lack of government investment in public health dentistry whereby routine dental care for the schools and medical card holders was scaled back during the economic downturn (2008-2014); COVID 19 backlog; limited places available for dental graduates in universities (dental and hygienist) with 50% of overseas students returning home after achieving their degree; the population of Ireland increased by 8% from 2016-2022 (387,376); and a cohort of dentists are retiring in the coming years without adequate replacements.

The WHO's Oral Health Country Profile- Ireland, outlined that Ireland continues to have oral health risk factors associated with tobacco use and sugar and alcohol consumption, with an economic impact related to oral diseases, treatment, and prevention. While there is a national health system response including Smile agus Slainte, the National Oral Health Policy, and the implementation of tax on sugarsweetened beverages (SSB), there is no definitive research suggesting that through both these initiatives oral health in Ireland has improved. A recent report outlined that Ireland has fewer dentists per head of population out of 24 European countries - circa 1 dentist per 1,770 of the population.

The DHF goal is optimum oral health for all in Ireland and is informed by both the NOHP and the WHO's Global Oral Health Strategy (2023-2030):

#### **Smile agus Slainte**

An overarching goal of Smile agus Sláinte is to provide To provide the necessary information to enable every individual to achieve their personal best oral health.

To reduce oral health inequalities across the population by enabling vulnerable groups to access oral healthcare and improve their oral health.

### **WHO global Strategy**

The WHO's core global health challenge is the extent and unequal burden of preventable oral diseases. Untreated oral disease affects more than half the world's population. The strategy aims to guide member states like Ireland to develop ambitious national responses to promote oral health; reduce oral diseases; other oral conditions and oral health inequalities; strengthen efforts to address oral diseases and conditions as part of Universal Health Care and consider the development of national and subnational targets and indicators to prioritise efforts.

https://www.dentist.ie/\_fileupload/Policy%20Advocacy/ Workforce%20Plan%20Final.pdf

<sup>&</sup>quot; (Data source: WHO Global Health Observatory; 2019)

https://www.independent.ie/irish-news/ireland-has-fewest-dentists-out-of-24-countries-in-europe/a1332496108.html

About Us & Values



### **About Us**

The Dental Health Foundation (DHF) is Ireland's only independent charity dedicated to improving oral health and wellbeing. Founded by dentists in 1977, DHF has been at the forefront of oral health promotion in Ireland working closely with the Department of Health, the Health Service Executive, schools, the dental sector, and stakeholder groups.

Oral health is the gateway to all body health and is essential for overall wellbeing. It allows us to speak, smile, touch, chew, laugh, taste, swallow and increases our self-esteem and confidence. Our vision is to advocate for optimum oral health for all in Ireland while our mission is to promote oral health across the life course through advocacy and education. We aim to empower the public to make positive choices through evidence-based advice.

Oral health is essential to overall health. This is not always understood. The DHF actively engages in oral health promotion and outreach to increase awareness of the important role that oral health plays in wellbeing and healthy outcomes and has long recognised that concrete and sustainable interventions can help improve oral health in Ireland, and this is why:

#### We do this through:

- Developing evidence and issue-based oral health resources through the life-course which are free to the public.
- Actively collaborate with community, educational, and health organisations to promote oral health in Ireland and to draw attention to early intervention.
- Providing ongoing support and information in oral health promotion to the educational sector.
- Participating in all relevant fora, policy, and advisory bodies and support agencies to the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive.

- Producing and publish Oral Health in Ireland, a handbook for Health professionals in association with University College Cork, Ireland.
- Providing bursaries and awards to assist professional development and expertise in oral health.

### **Values**

The Dental Health Foundation's core values of care, respect, trust, quality information and innovation shape the culture and define the character of the Foundation. These values guide decision-making within the Foundation and its work programme.

- **Care**: We are mindful of people's needs and concerns.
- Respect: We respect people's backgrounds, beliefs, and abilities.
- Trust: We foster trust through listening, collaborating, and working in partnership with all stakeholders.
- **Quality**: We strive for quality in all our work through research, analysis, and evaluation.
- Innovation: We have an innovative approach to all aspects of our work and practice efficient costeffective management to achieve our goals.





Our impact in 2023 - what we did



# Our impact in 2023 – what we did



**124,772** resources distributed to



262

**health, community, education** institutions and groups

#### **Our Work & Achievements**

The Dental Health Foundation's overarching objective is to help everyone achieve their best oral health and empower them with oral health life skills. We achieved this through four strands: promotion, advocacy, publications, and education. In 2023, we aimed to reduce the number of people affected by oral health diseases and increase access to oral health related information.

The demand for our oral health information and educational resources increased by 160% from 2022 to 2023. The foundation adopted a proactive strategy in developing and designing promotion and new issuebased materials for distributing nationwide. All our resources are freely available from the Dental Health Foundation website. www.dentalhealth.ie

In 2023 we invited two new trustees to the board, Professor Brian O' Connell, and Dr Paul O' Dwyer. We also initiated an Advisory Group of skilled and experienced professionals to assist in informing the work of the foundation.

From January to April 2023, the DHF was engaged by the Department of Health to conclude the Secretariat agency of the former Expert Body on Fluorides and Health, whose tenure ended in December 2022. The scope of work included gathering, collating and archiving 19 years of paper and electronic files.

### **Projects and Programmes**

We focused on addressing the oral health gaps in vulnerable groups and high-risk groups by being responsive to their oral health needs and habits. Several highlights through the year included:

- Project development, information gathering, and collaboration with Pavee Point / Roma Traveller Community Healthcare Workers, Pavee Mothers. (ongoing).
- Collaboration with the Travellers Visibility Group Cork to develop cultural-specific information to help reduce the number of Travellers affected by oral health disease (ongoing).
- Collaboration with the National Children's Network to develop digital oral health information for their members (ongoing).
- Reviewed and updated Caring for your Child's
   Teeth 0-5 years brochure with active distribution to
   public health nurses nationwide.
- Translation and distribution of the 2–7-year oral health resource card into Polish and Arabic.
- Provided primary schools and preschools with resources to help them deliver oral health modules within their curricula. We increased our reach to schools through translating and disseminating education resources into Gaelic for Gaelscoils nationwide.
- Presented oral health workshops to community and educational groups nationwide, specifically Men's Sheds in Counties Donegal, Sligo and Cork.
- Supported health professionals by providing oral health promotion resources for both the oral health sector and their public, including public health nurses, midwives, and pharmacists.
- Attended oral health conferences nationwide and supported the profession through bursaries and awards.
- Increased our social media presence by 30%.
- Contributed issue-based media content to newspapers, and trade magazines.
- Developed an online shop with student and patient rewards and motivator products to increase income.



### **New in 2023**

#### Caring for Your Child's Teeth 0-5 years of age

was kick-started in January 2023. The resource was developed in collaboration with the Assistant director of Public Health Nursing Waterford and a Senior Administrative Dental Surgeon, Cork. We recognise that public health nurses, and the public dental services play a vital role in helping to prevent early childhood caries and reduce the number of dental extractions in young children. The brochure was designed to assist parents in the critical steps of oral hygiene and of early intervention in practice, nutrition and prevention and outlines the importance of keeping baby gums and teeth health, and the role diet and practice play in supporting overall health. More than 20,000 were distributed throughout the year.

We continued our **Gaeilge resources initiative**, sending out 4,000 resources to Gaelscoils including **Clog an tslúcra** and **Mo Chairt Scuabtha** posters, **2-7 mbliana d'aois** and **8-12 bhliain d'aois Cárta Poist**.

We are aware of the importance of making oral health information accessible to more vulnerable groups and translated our 2–7-year-old oral health card into **Arabic** and **Polish** this year.

A new **Preventing Tooth Decay in your Baby** poster was produced, with pictures of healthy teeth and advanced stage decay and information on sugar risk, wiping gum, best drinks and Sippy cup use. More than 800 were given out at conferences throughout the year.

In late December, we began the process of redesigning our **Mouthguard poster** including a fresh design. Our aim is to unveil the finalised poster in January 2024.

We introduced an **online shop** in late autumn as a pilot project. The items available are patient and student rewards and motivators. Our unique reward stickers, which are Irish designed specifically around oral health, are now available on rolls of 100 stickers.

We added a "Donate Now" button to our website, enabling our supporters to contribute funds toward our educational initiatives.

# "They are ideal to give to parents at our developmental checks."

We began extending invitations to oral health professionals to join our Scientific Advisory Committee. The main objective of the Committee is to act in an advisory capacity providing scientific input on projects being developed by the DHF.

Current membership includes:

- Dr Anne O' Connell
- Dr Evelyn Crowley
- Ms Fiona McKeown Dir. PHN
- Dr Darshini Ramasubbu
- Ms Yvonne Howell
- Dr Niamh Coffey
- Prof Denis O' Mullane









### **Collaborations**

#### Irish Men's Sheds Association

Our collaboration with Men's sheds took the DHF to Donegal, Sligo and Cork this year. We delivered workshops and general information sessions in Ballybofey, Clifford, Clifoney, Enniscrone, Headway, and Carrigaline. It was wonderful to have the help and advice of dental hygienists, nurse, students, and oral health promoters along the way to offer expert advice in Q and A sessions and to assist in conducting the effective use of disclosure tablets in showing the more difficult areas to reach when brushing teeth effectively.

### Pavee/Roma Association

We began actively working with the Traveller/
Roma group of Traveller Primary Health Community
Healthcare Workers (TPHCHW). The focus of the
early meetings was identifying the gaps in the oral
health knowledge of the TPHCWs for pregnancy and
early years - what information was needed and
the number of information sessions required. The
outcome will be to develop culturally appropriate
resources for Pavee Mothers - pregnancy, 0-2 years,
followed by 2-5 years. This project is ongoing, and it
is envisioned that there will be an explanation video
and/or audio component to accompany visual printed
materials.



Ballybofey Men's Sheds

Collaborations



### **Traveller Visibility Group Cork**

We conducted a number of information sessions, both remote and in person with the Traveller Primary Health Care Workers at TVGC. The early sessions identified the gaps in knowledge across the life course for oral health and the travelling community. The outcome is to develop a suite of oral health resources for this group to deliver to their community. This project is on-going.

#### **National Childrens Network**

Our work earlier this year with the National Children's Network (NCN) was to collaborate on developing visual resources for the NCN, CPD online members course on healthy teeth and gums. Our aim is to develop several animations / publications on promoting a range of key messages in oral health for early childhood care for providers/children and families. It is envisioned that the information developed will be distributed through the NCN networks including, their 3,800 members, Better Start, County Childcare Committees and through their cross-border networks.



TVG Traveller Visibility Group Cork



### **Alliances**

The DHF is actively engaged in supporting the missions of both the Children's Rights Alliance and the Alcohol Health Alliance.

The Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland (AHAI), initiated by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland (RCPI) and Alcohol Action Ireland, is dedicated to reducing the health damage caused by alcohol misuse. Comprising medical professionals, NGOs, and charities, AHAI operates independently from the alcohol industry, aligning with the World Health Organization's recommendation to shield alcohol policies from commercial or vested interests.



**The Children's Rights Alliance**, comprised of nearly 100 non-governmental organizations (NGOs), is dedicated to advocating for children's rights in Ireland. Their focus is on achieving full implementation of the

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) by campaigning for changes in laws, policies, and services. Their ultimate goal is to enhance the well-being of all children under 18 years old in Ireland.



The Mouth Cancer Awareness Group, of which the DHF was a founding member, moved to the office of the Irish Dentist Association. The DHF continues to support awareness around this topic for Mouth Cancer Awareness Day each September.









## **Communications**

#### **DHF** Website

We continue to review and update our website to enhance visitor retention, streamline navigation, and boost search engine visibility. Our site offers access to a wide array of resources, publications, a news section, oral health tips for both adults and children, links to our social media profiles, and a dedicated section for health professionals. In 2023, we introduced a new online shop and a donation button making it easier than ever to support our work. Our overarching message is that a treat dose not have to be a sweet, and that fun message-driven alternatives are available.





#### Social Media

Through our Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn profiles, we disseminate evidence-based content and social media messages on oral health and general well-being. These platforms serve as gateways, directing users to valuable information and resources available on our website.

Some of the topics covered on social media this year.

- Oral and kidney health
- Importance of handwashing
- Healthy school lunches
- · Vaping and oral health
- Child's first dental visit
- Non-food rewards for children
- Fissure sealants
- Mouthguards
- Oral and heart health
- Importance of drinking water
- · Fear of the dentist
- Reducing sugary drinks
- Halloween



Communications



#### **Articles**

We successfully reached various target groups, such as pregnant women, oral health professionals, parents and the general public through the publication of articles and letters. These included the following:

- Letter to the Editor "Risks of alcohol must be spread"
- Letter to the Editor "Halloween sugar monsters beware"
- Article in Pregnancy and parenting magazine "Feeding practices".
- Article in the IDA Journal "Oral Health Information
   more resources from the DHF"
- Article in The Irish Independent 's Children's Health Supplement - Taking steps to promote proper oral health in children

#### **Submissions**

The Dental Health Foundation made the following submissions:

- Department of Health Public Consultation on the draft patient voice partner policy January 2023
- Safefood START Campaign Evaluation Research March 2023
- European Commission DG SANTE Unit on Disease prevention and health promotion "A comprehensive approach to mental health" Q.2, 2023
- European Commission DG SANTE Unit for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion "Cancer prevention – action to promote vaccination against cancer-causing viruses" Q.3 2023





### **Conferences Attended**

The Dental Health Foundation actively participates in numerous conferences organised by the oral health community. These events serve as valuable platforms to showcase resources, exchange knowledge, foster collaborations with peers, and stay updated on emerging issues within the field.

In 2023, we attended the following conferences:

- Irish Society of Dentistry and Children Annual Scientific Meeting - May
- Royal College of Surgeons Ireland Children and Dentistry Seminar - May
- Irish Dental Association Annual Anniversary Conference - May
- Irish Society for Disability and Oral Health Summer Conference – June



Sandra Byrne at the ISDC Conference 2023



IDHA Conference Ms Yvonne Howell, IDHA Presidemt, Ms Orlaith Kennedy, DHF CEO

- British Association for the Study of Community Dentistry Summer Scientific Meeting – June
- Oral Health Promotion Research Group Annual Conference September
- IDA/ HSE Dental Surgeon's Conference October
- Royal College of Surgeons Faculty of Dentistry Annual Scientific Meeting – October
- Orthodontic Society of Ireland Autumn meeting November
- Principal Dental Surgeons Seminar November
- Irish Dental Hygienist Association Annual Conference November



Orlaith Kennedy with Claire McComish and Seáneen Shields from Zen Orthodontics



DHF Trustee and BASCD President Prof Mairead Harding awarding Honorary membership to Prof Denis O'Mullane





### **Awards and Bursaries**

The foundation considers awards and bursaries an important support towards education and research for the oral health profession and new and emerging graduates. We were delighted to continue to support these groups in 2023 for the following awards:

Oral Health Promotion Research Group: The DHF provides a bursary to promote the communication of current oral health promotion projects and work that is going on across Ireland. In 2023 the award was presented to Ailish Nolan for her submissio "The translation of Dental leaflets to enable brief interventions in Oral Health across the language barrier".

The Moloney Award is awarded to an outstanding Irish presenter/lecturer at the IDA's annual scientific conference, as chosen by the delegates. This year's winner was Dr Hal Duncan for his lecture "Managing deep caries and the exposed pulp".

**Irish Society for Disability and Oral Health:** The Annual Special Care Dental Care Professional

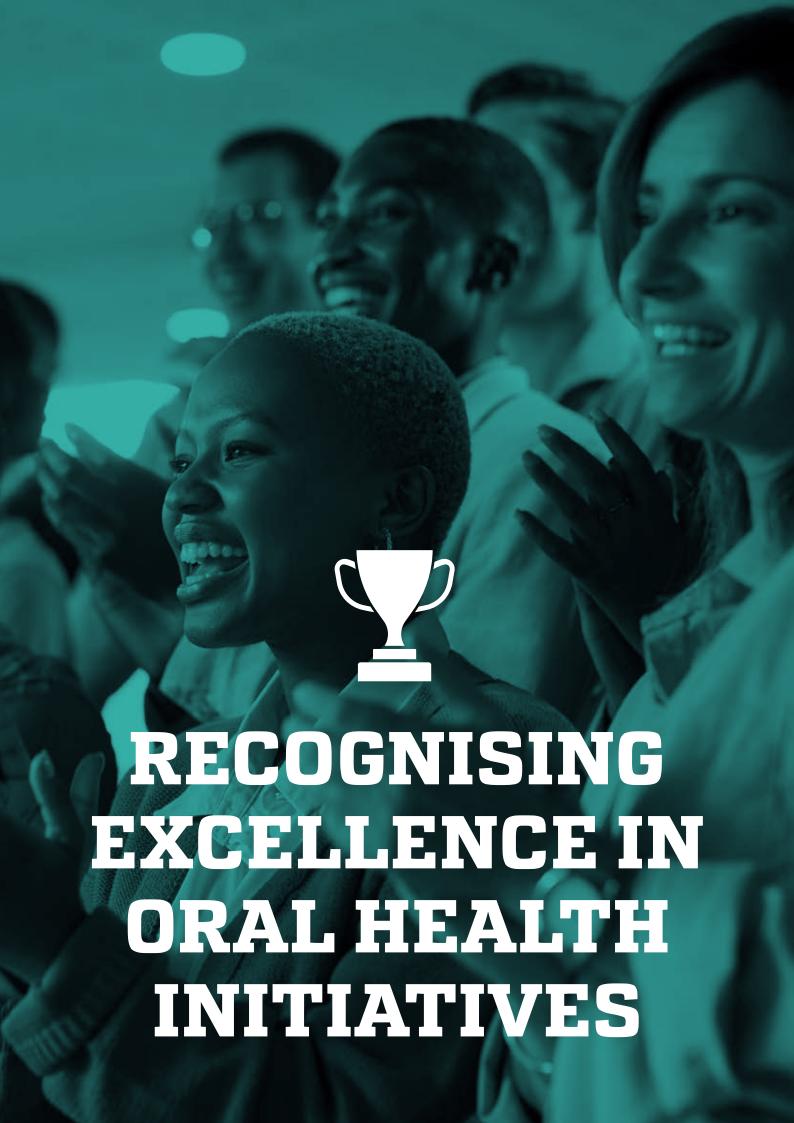
(DCP) Award is given to the best essay, case-report or completed project on any aspect of Special Care Dentistry by a dental nurse, hygienist, oral health promoter or other non-dental health care professional. Elizabeth Ellard was the winner in 2023 for her project "And the beat goes on; Innovative and collaborative practice to support the dental care of children with complex and integrated care needs".

Best Hygienist Oral Health Project, Trinity College Dublin, is awarded to the best student project and was won by Sarah Burke in 2023 for her project "Assessing the challenges people with Autism Spectrum Disorder face accessing Oral Health services".

International Association of Dental Research, Irish Division, poster award supports research by investigators whose current main position is in a primary care setting such as within the Health Service Executive or general dental practice. The 2023 award was won by Dr Claire Curtin for her "Study on oral health and patients with dysphasia".



Moloney Award winner 2023 Dr Hal Duncan, Ms Orlaith Kennedy, Dr Paddy Crotty and Dr Eamonn Croke





### **Education**

In March, dental students and dental hygiene students, Trinity College Dublin, attended a presentation on the work of the DHF and the current issues facing oral health. Samples of our resources were distributed to all attendees.

The DHF provided a pre-recorded presentation and resources for goodie bags to the **Healthy Heroes** event run by the **Paediatric Society, University of Galway**.

The DHF commissioned the **Oral Health Services Research Centre, UCC**, to review and update
'Oral Health in Ireland: A Handbook for Health **Professionals'** 3rd Edition. This publication provides updated evidence-based guidance on oral health promotion for both health and oral health professionals. It will be available in 2024.

We supported the UCC Dental Society by providing resources to students for their annual Dental Society Day.

"I find the cards really good to give patients as it has extra information that you might not get to cover in a 30 minute appointments"

### Training undertaken

We continuously seek opportunities to enhance the skills of our staff and trustees, empowering them to better achieve our mission. Below are the courses we attended in 2023:

- The Wheel Finding your online voice webinar
   Managing media relationships webinar
   Driving meaningful traffic to your site webinar
- Boardmatch Chairperson training





# The Year in Numbers



124,772

resources distributed in 2023



42,679

Caring for your children's teeth brochures



20,284

**Maternity** postcards



14,664

**Posters** 



7,447

Other language resources



113%

**increase** in content interaction on Facebook



100,000

**people** reached through our website, Facebook and X pages.



### Governance and Staff

# **Acknowledgements**

The Board of Trustees oversees the governance of the Dental Health Foundation, operating under the regulations of the Charities Act 2009. This legislation promotes accountability, transparency, and prevents misuse of the DHF's charitable status, fostering public trust in the charity sector. The Board exercises control and legal responsibility for DHF management, ensuring compliance with the Charities Governance Code. Regular board meetings are held to confirm the implementation of systems and processes, ensuring the DHF operates with integrity, effectiveness, efficiency, and transparency while striving to achieve its charitable objectives.

### **Our Leadership**

Our Board of Trustees provides professional leadership on evidence-based oral and dental information

In 2023 we were delighted to welcome two new Trustees to our Board:

- **Dr Paul O'Dwyer,** Dentist, Lecturer, BDS MSc
- Professor Brian O'Connell, Trinty College Dublin Dental School

They join our current Trustees:

- **Dr Mary Coleman,** BDS., M.D.P.H. (chairperson)
- Professor Máiréad Harding, University College Cork Dental School
- Dr Pádraig Creedon, BDS, MPH (NUI).
- **Dr Patrick Crotty,** Dental surgeon, BDS., F.D.S., R.C.S. (Edin)

The DHF acknowledges that the achievements of 2023 would not have been feasible without the support and commitment from our funders, including the National Oral Health Office, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and the Department of Health. We also extend our gratitude to our auditors, Farrelly Dave White Limited, and legal advisors, Barry O'Donnell Solicitors.

We extend our sincere appreciation to our dedicated Board of Trustees, whose tireless efforts and leadership provide essential strategic guidance and oversight to the DHF as a charitable trust.

We would also like to thank former member of staff Ms Etain Kett for her dedication and invaluable contributions throughout her many years of service. We are truly grateful for her outstanding work and wish her continued success in all her future endeavours.

We understand that achieving our oral health goals requires the effort of more than one organisation or individual, therefore we would like to express our thanks to the following for their contributions to the development/review of our resources this year:

Karen Bulger. Dental Hygienist

Maria O'Donnell, Dental Hygienist

Tracey Costello, Dental Nurse

Julia Banasiak, Research Assistant, UCC

Dr Evelyn Crowley, Senior Administrative Dental

**Ms Fiona McKeown,** Assistant Director of Public Health Nursing, HSE

Surgeon, HSE

### **Our Staff**

Ms Orlaith Kennedy, Chief Executive.

 $\begin{tabular}{ll} \textbf{Ms Etain Kett,} & Public Affairs \& Communications Manager. \\ (Jan to Apr) \end{tabular}$ 

Ms Sandra Byrne, Administration Officer.

Looking ahead to 2024



# **Looking Ahead to 2024**

We look forward to maintaining strong relationships with our stakeholders, collaborators and partners throughout 2024.

The DHF will digitally publish Oral Health in Ireland 3rd edition in 2024. This publication will benefit those in the health, oral health, dental health and well-being sectors in Ireland.

We will launch our newly designed Mouthguard poster in January 2024.

Translation of particular resources into other languages is planned, as are new resources in maternity and oral health, autism/sensory processing disorder and oral health, and women and oral health.

The DHF work with the foundation to secure funding for the progression of three key initiatives aimed at enhancing oral health in Ireland. Follow our web-based news items, and social media for further information on these forthcoming exciting programmes.







www.dentalhealth.ie