

# ANNUAL REPORT

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**Prepared by**

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# OPTIMUM ORAL HEALTH FOR ALL

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# CEO's Foreword

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## **Dental Health Foundation Ireland**

2024 was a busy and challenging year. It showed just how resilient and adaptable the Dental Health Foundation (DHF) team truly is. Our figures (successes and impacts) tell one story, behind them lies the energy, passion, and commitment of our staff, Trustees, volunteers, and partners, all of whom worked together to ensure our mission stayed strong.

## **Our Mission: Optimum Oral Health for All**

At the core of everything we do is a simple but powerful idea — that every interaction is an opportunity to support someone in making better oral health choices. We're here to empower people and families to consider meaningful oral health behaviour change that supports lifelong wellbeing, with practical, evidence-based information.

## **Navigating a Tough Economic Landscape**

Following the loss of a long-standing government funding source in 2023, we shifted gear, reassessed priorities, continued strategic practice, and stayed focused on our key goals.

Despite this, demand for our resources continued to grow — a testament to the relevance and quality of our work. We also launched our new online shop, giving people an opportunity to support the Foundation while accessing practical items like toothbrushes, tooth timers, and non-sugar-based rewards for patients in practices and children in primary schools. Sometimes, a treat does not have to be sweet!

## **Fundraising Scope**

We engaged 2 into 3 fundraising consultants to work with us on our Capital Campaign and Feasibility Study. In response to the Government funding cut and increasing need to promote oral health in Ireland, we developed three key initiatives to directly advance oral health. To run these campaigns, the DHF will need to raise 700k over a three-year period.

## **New Faces and Fresh Ideas**

A highlight of the year was welcoming our first group of interns, from Ireland and abroad. They contributed to resource development and brought new perspectives into our work. Our workshops, too, evolved to be more engaging and participative, encouraging attendees to think critically about their oral health in creative ways.

## **Steady Progress and Strong Results**

Major achievements included the release of the 3rd edition of Oral Health in Ireland: A Handbook for Health Professionals, developed in collaboration with the Oral Health Research Centre at University College Cork. We were also thrilled to have our Caring for Your Child's Teeth (0–5 years) brochure shortlisted at the Irish Healthcare Awards. We continued our work on a new parent resource, Oral Health for Autistic Children, set to launch in 2025, and kicked off a capital campaign with a feasibility study — laying the groundwork for long-term growth.

## **Meaningful Community Connections**

From oral health information days at the National Drug Treatment Centre to hands-on workshops in communities across Ireland, 2024 was filled with moments that reminded us of the power of small steps. Whether it's someone picking up a toothbrush after years of dental anxiety or a child learning how to brush properly for the first time, these moments matter.

Our outreach is growing — and so is engagement. Participants at our events often share stories, build connections, and reflect together on how oral health fits into their overall wellbeing.

## Turning Challenges into Opportunities

Each challenge enabled an opportunity to pause, reflect, and innovate. How do we better serve? What can we improve? How do we keep our mission front and centre in a changing world?

The answers often came through collaboration, creativity, and a willingness to try something new.

Our highly productive Board Away Day at the end of the year, anchored our new strategy for 2025-2027 with new ideas to broaden our scope and begin our fundraising journey.

We were sorry to lose our long time Trustee and stalwart supporter, Dr Paddy Crotty, who retired after more than 20 years with the organisation. His energy and enthusiasm, and wonderful sense of humour will be greatly missed. We all wish him the very best in his retirement.

## Looking to 2025 and Beyond

We enter 2025 with renewed energy and focus. Our top priorities? Strengthening our fundraising efforts, expanding our partnerships, and continuing to innovate in how we deliver resources and education.

The Irish oral health landscape will keep evolving — and so will we. But no matter what changes come, our mission remains the same: promoting oral health and wellbeing for everyone, at every stage of life.

To our incredible team, our volunteers, our partners, and everyone who supported us in 2024 — thank you. Together, we're making a difference.

Orlaith Kennedy  
CEO



# About Us

The Dental Health Foundation (DHF) is Ireland's only independent charity solely dedicated to improving oral health and wellbeing. Since our establishment in 1977, we have led the way in oral health promotion, working closely with the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Department of Health, schools, and community organisations to advocate for better oral health outcomes nationwide.

Oral health is a vital part of overall wellbeing—it enables us to speak, smile, eat, and live with confidence. Our mission is to promote oral health across the life course through education, advocacy, and the provision of accessible, evidence-based resources.

To achieve this, we:

- Develop and distribute free oral health resources for the public and professionals.
- Collaborate with community and healthcare organisations to support local initiatives.
- Support schools in integrating oral health into their curricula.
- Contribute to national policy development through strategic partnerships.
- Publish professional resources, such as Oral Health in Ireland: 3rd Edition.
- Support professional development through bursaries and awards.
- 

Our work is guided by five core values:

- **Care** – We are mindful of people's needs and concerns.
- **Respect** – We honour diverse backgrounds, beliefs, and abilities.
- **Trust** – We build trust through collaboration and transparency.
- **Quality** – We strive for excellence through research and evaluation.
- **Innovation** – We embrace creative, cost-effective approaches to achieve impact.

# Our Impact in 2024

In 2024, the Dental Health Foundation remained steadfast in its commitment to reducing oral health inequalities and improving access to reliable, evidence-based information across all communities in Ireland.

## By the Numbers

- 80,973 resources distributed
- 388 orders fulfilled across health, education, and community sectors

## Key Highlights

### Collaborative Outreach

Partnered with the Traveler's Visibility Group Cork and the Kerry Traveller's Health and Community Development Project to co-develop culturally appropriate oral health resources (ongoing).

### Targeted Support

Delivered oral health information stands at the National Drug Treatment Centre, offering tailored advice and resources to service users.



### Major Publications

Launched the 3rd edition of Oral Health in Ireland: A Handbook for Health Professionals, in collaboration with the Oral Health Services Research Centre at UCC.

*(L-R) Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO), Prof. Denis O'Mullane & Prof. Mairead Harding at the launch of Oral Health in Ireland. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition*

## **New Educational Materials**

- Redesigned our Mouthguard Poster with updated visuals
- Created an A4 poster with oral health tips for 8–12-year-olds
- Translated key oral health resources into Polish, Romanian, Ukrainian, and Arabic
- Developed a Menopause and Oral Health postcard
- Updated our DHF leaflet and event roller banners
- Completed edits to our upcoming Oral Health for Autistic Children. A Guide for Adults

## **School Engagement**

Distributed 4,000 Irish-language resources to Gaelscoil's and supported oral health education in preschools and primary schools.

## **Community Workshops**

Delivered oral health sessions to Men's Sheds groups in counties Kerry, Clare, Tipperary, and Wexford.

## **Professional Engagement**

Supplied materials to public health nurses, midwives, and pharmacists, and supported professional development through conference participation and bursaries. Our CEO gave a presentation at the Oral Health Promotion Training Day, Dental Staff of HSE Dublin South West, Kildare, and West Wicklow.

## **Public Awareness**

- Featured in the Irish Independent's Children's Health & Wellbeing supplement (1.8M+ readers)
- Ran a national radio campaign on RTÉ Radio 1, 2FM, and Lyric FM
- Expanded our online shop with patient motivators and oral care products

## **Internship Programme**

Piloted a successful six-week summer internship with four 4th-year dental students from Trinity College Dublin and hosted a Global Health Masters student from Uppsala University.

## **Fundraising & Donations**

Continued to grow our online shop and donation platform, enabling supporters to contribute directly to our mission.



# Collaborations & Alliances

## Partnerships in Action

### Irish Men's Sheds Association

The DHF is a member of the stakeholder group participating in the Sheds for Life Programme., and initiative for the Men's Sheds Association. We work towards a common goal with other organisations in this group to effect positive change for men's oral health and general wellbeing. In 2024, our partnership with the Irish Men's Sheds Association brought oral health workshops to communities in Kerry, Clare, Tipperary, and Wexford. Sessions in Doonbeg, Killarney, Enniscorthy, and Knockanrawley were enriched by the participation of dental hygienists, who provided expert insights during interactive Q&A segments.



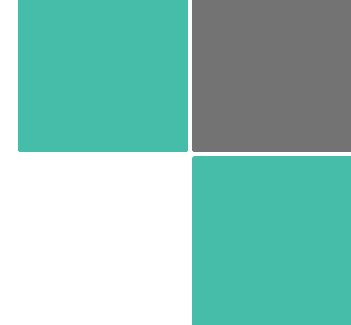
*Shamrock Men's Sheds*



*Killarney Men's Sheds*

### National Drug Treatment Centre

We were proud to collaborate with the National Drug Treatment Centre, hosting several oral health information stands at their Pearse Street location. These events offered tailored advice and resources to service users, helping address specific oral health needs.



### **Traveller Visibility Group Cork & Kerry Traveller's Health and Community Development Project**

In collaboration with the Traveller Visibility Group Cork and the Kerry Traveller's Health and Community Development Project we began developing a new culturally appropriate oral health resources to support the Traveller community. This ongoing work reflects our commitment to inclusive, community-led health promotion.

### **National Dairy Council**

The DHF continues its collaboration with the National Dairy Council, having created Moo Crew Dental Health Programme for Junior and Senior infants (linked to the SPHE Curriculum), and updated annually. This resource has also moved online.



### **Alliances for Broader Impact**

We are proud to support the missions of the following national alliances:

#### **Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland (AHA)**

Led by the Royal College of Physicians of Ireland and Alcohol Action Ireland, AHA works to reduce alcohol-related harm. The alliance operates independently of the alcohol industry and aligns with WHO recommendations to protect public health policy from commercial influence.

#### **Children's Rights Alliance**

Representing nearly 100 NGOs, this alliance advocates for the full implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland, aiming to improve laws, policies, and services for children.

#### **Mouth Cancer Awareness Day (MCAD)**

As a former member of the stakeholder founder group we supported MCAD in September 2024 through our website and social media platforms, helping raise awareness of early detection and prevention.





**HARNESSING  
SUCCESS  
THROUGH  
PARTNERSHIP**

# Communications & Public Engagement

## Website & Digital Resources

Our website continues to evolve, offering improved navigation, updated publications, oral health tips, and a dedicated section for health professionals. In 2024, we added a literature section to provide access to the latest research and reports. Our online shop also expanded, offering oral health products and motivational tools to support education and fundraising.



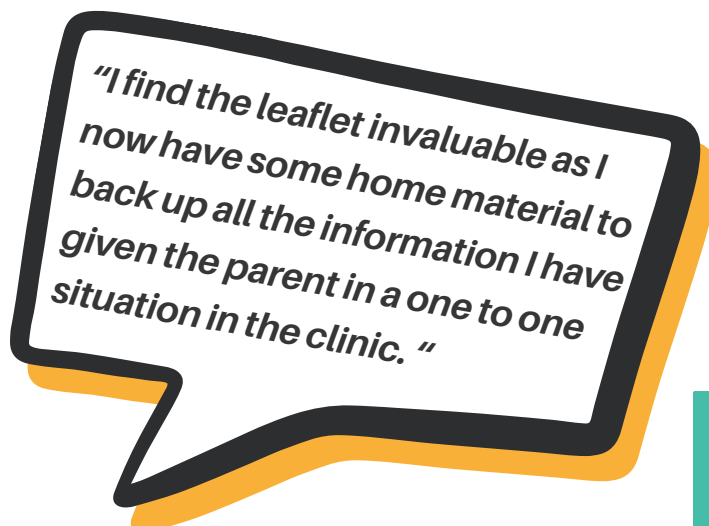
## Social Media

We actively shared evidence-based content across Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Topics included:

- Sustainability in dentistry
- Breastfeeding and oral health
- Alzheimer's and oral health
- Sugar tax
- Dental workforce shortages
- Oral microbiome
- Dry mouth
- Mouthguard use
- Bad breath
- "Teeth as tools" awareness

## Radio Campaign

Our national radio ad aired on RTÉ Radio 1, 2FM, and Lyric FM from August 23 to September 1, 2024, reaching an estimated 981,312 listeners.



## Policy Submissions

We contributed to:

- The call for a Health Impact Assessment of the Sale of Alcohol Bill
- The national workforce census survey

## Media Coverage

Our article, “Top oral health recommendations for your children’s mouth, teeth and gums,” featured in the Children’s Health & Wellbeing supplement of the Irish Independent, reaching over 1.8 million readers. We also contributed the article “From Bump to Toddler” to Pregnancy and Parenting magazine, highlighting the importance of oral health from pregnancy through early childhood.



## Top oral health recommendations

for your children's mouth, teeth and gums

Good oral health is a human right and vital to children's wellbeing. Prevention is essential for healthy teeth, gums and to avoid injury to front teeth.

**C**urrent views on oral health for children align with general health principles. They emphasise prevention, rather than addressing problems once they occur. This involves a common risk factor approach to prevention.

### Common childhood oral conditions

Tooth decay is the most common chronic disease of childhood, affecting around 60%–90% of school-aged children globally. It's a common reason for young children attending hospital and receiving treatment under general anaesthesia.

Other common conditions include inflamed gums, dental erosion and injury to front teeth. All these conditions are preventable by the following advice, using a common risk factor approach and ensuring early dental visits to detect potential problems.

### Recommendations for a healthy mouth

Eat/drink as little sugars as possible. Particularly avoid foods/drinks sweetened with sugars between meals and at bedtime. Avoid fizzy drinks, whether identified as sugar-free or not. Plain milk and tap water are the best drinks for healthy teeth.

Brush teeth twice a day using fluoride toothpaste from age two. Spit, don't rinse, after brushing. Supervise brushing at least until age seven. For older children, ask your dentist or dental professional about use of floss and interdental brushes. Don't smoke/vape, or discontinue if already started. Wear a mouthguard when playing contact sports, during both competitive and training games.

These recommendations not only support a healthy mouth, teeth and gums but also contribute to overall health. This common risk factor approach is recommended by the national oral health policy 'Smile agus Sláinte' and by the World Health Organization.

### Medication and toothpaste advice

Some medications can contain sugars. Always choose sugar-free options when available. Inform your dentist about all medicines your child is taking. Some children enjoy the taste of toothpaste. Always supervise brushing, using only a pea-sized amount. Avoid letting your child eat, lick or swallow toothpaste. For children under seven years, use toothpaste with 1,000ppm fluoride. Those over seven may use a toothpaste with 1,450ppm. Follow the guidance unless your dental professional says otherwise.



**Mairead Harding,**  
Trustee, Dental Health  
Foundation

Sponsored by **Dental Health Foundation**

Find out more at  
[dentalhealth.ie/children-oral-health](https://dentalhealth.ie/children-oral-health)

**DHF** Dental Health  
Foundation  
Ireland



**EMPOWERING  
COMMUNITIES  
THROUGH  
DENTAL HEALTH  
EDUCATION**

# Conferences Attended

In 2024, we participated in key national and international conferences, sharing our work, learning from peers, and supporting professional development:

- Irish Society of Dentistry and Children Annual Scientific Meeting – May
- Irish Society for Disability and Oral Health Summer Conference – June
- Irish Dentistry Show – September. We were sponsored by the Irish Dentistry Show to attend this conference.
- Oral Health Promotion Research Group Annual Conference – September
- IDA/HSE Dental Surgeon's Conference – October
- Irish Dental Hygienist Association Annual Conference – October
- International Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research (Irish Division) – October
- Oral Health Promotion Training Day (HSE Dublin South West, Kildare, West Wicklow) – October. Our CEO gave a presentation "From theory to practice; developing a highly effective oral health promotional resource".
- Royal College of Surgeons Faculty of Dentistry Annual Scientific Meeting – October
- Orthodontic Society of Ireland Autumn Meeting – November



*Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO) & Ms Sandra Byrne Orthodontic Society Conference*



*Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO) & Ms Sviatlana Anishchuk I.D.H.A Conference*

# Awards & Bursaries

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We proudly supported education and research in oral health through the following awards in 2024:

- **Oral Health Promotion Research Group Bursary**  
Awarded to Emma Ryan for her project “Keep Smiling – Working Together.”
- **The Moloney Award**  
Presented to Dr Donal Blackwell for his lecture “Resin bonded bridgework: mainstream and off-label application.”
- **Irish Society for Disability and Oral Health Award**  
Awarded to Fargol Nowghani for “Keep My Teeth: A peer-led evaluation of dental professionals’ training in mouth care for people with intellectual developmental disorder.”
- **DHF Biennial Travel Bursary**  
Awarded to Dr Kim Panupol for “Behavioural Support, Sedation, or General Anaesthesia? A prediction model for better clinical decision making.”
- **Best Hygienist Oral Health Project – Trinity College Dublin**  
Awarded to Jowita Pala for her final-year project on the physical and mental wellbeing of dental hygienists.
- **International Association for Dental Research (Irish Division) Poster Award**  
Awarded to Dr Harriet Byrne for her research on oral health needs of oncology patients receiving bone-modifying agents.
- **Irish Healthcare Awards**  
Our Caring for Your Child’s Teeth: 0–5 Years brochure was shortlisted for Best Patient Educational Project of the Year. Judges praised it as “a clear and informative guide for parents and caregivers... an excellent early life intervention.”



*Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO) with  
OHPRG Bursary Winner Ms Emma  
Ryan*



*(L-R) Dr Rory Boyd, Moloney Award Winner Dr  
Donal Blackwell, Dr Paddy Crotty and Ms Orlaith  
Kennedy (CEO)*



**RECOGNISING  
EXCELLENCE IN  
ORAL HEALTH  
INITIATIVES**



# Education & Student Engagement

In 2024, we continued to support the next generation of oral health professionals:

- Delivered a presentation to dental and dental hygiene students at Trinity College Dublin, highlighting DHF's work and current challenges in oral health.
- Provided resource packs for the Healthy Heroes event hosted by the Paediatric Society at the University of Galway.
- Piloted a six-week summer internship programme with four 4th-year dental students from Trinity College.
- Hosted a Global Health Masters student from Uppsala University, Sweden, for a one-month placement focused on public health and oral care.



*Global Masters student Ms Simla Oksüz at The National Drug Treatment Centre with Ms Sandra Byrne*



*Winner of Best Project, Trinity College, Ms Jowita Pala with Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO)*

# Our year in numbers



**115,522** people reached through our website and social media platforms



**918,312** people heard our Radio Ad



**80,963** resources distributed in 2024



**51.8%** increase in Facebook likes



**3,968** resources as gaeilge

# Governance & Leadership

## Governance

The Dental Health Foundation is governed by a Board of Trustees in accordance with the Charities Act 2009, ensuring transparency, accountability, and the protection of our charitable status. By adhering to the Charities Governance Code, the Board provides legal and operational oversight, reinforcing public trust and ensuring that the Foundation operates with integrity, efficiency, and effectiveness. Regular meetings are held to review systems, processes, and strategic direction.

## Board of Trustees

Our Board offers professional leadership and guidance on evidence-based oral and dental health initiatives.

We were pleased to welcome two new Trustees:

- Dr Anne Twomey, BDS MSc
- Mr Niall Downey, FAIA, BSc (Mgt)

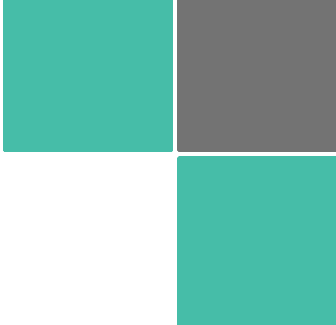
They join our existing Board members:

- 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, BDS, F.D.S., R.C.S. (Edin)
- Dr Paul O'Dwyer, BDS MSc
- Professor Brian O'Connell BDS, PhD, FACP, FTCD

## Our Team

- Ms Orlaith Kennedy – Chief Executive
- Ms Sandra Byrne – Administration and Accounts Manager





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## Scientific Advisory Committee

The Scientific Advisory Committee provides expert input on the development of DHF projects and resources. Members in 2024 included:

- Dr Evelyn Crowley
- Ms Fiona McKeown
- Dr Darshini Ramasubbu
- Ms Yvonne Howell
- Dr Niamh Coffey
- Professor Denis O'Mullane

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## Contributors and Supporters in 2024 included:

- Mercy Ministry Fund
- Ms Sarah Burke – Dental Hygienist
- Dr Niamh Coffey – Senior Lecturer, RCSI
- Ms Siobhan O'Shea – Dental Hygienist
- Dr Caoimhin Mac Giolla Phadraig – Assistant Professor in Public Dental Health, TCD
- Dr Grace Kelly – Specialist in Special Care Dentistry
- Dr Kirsten Fitzgerald – Consultant in Dentistry, CHI
- Ms Caitlin Cruise – Trainer, As I Am
- Ms Clare Furler – Graphic Designer, Clare Furler Design
- Ms Úna Woods - Illustrator
- Ms Eilís Ní Chearnaigh – HSE
- Ms Leena Albayati, Summer Intern, Trinity College Dental School
- Ms Afnan Al Maini, Summer Intern, Trinity College Dental School
- Mr Michael McGrath, Summer Intern, Trinity College Dental School
- Ms Rachel Chen, Summer Intern, Trinity College Dental School
- Ms Simla Oksüz, Intern, Global Health Masters student from Uppsala University, Sweden

THANK YOU

## Acknowledgements

The Dental Health Foundation's achievements in 2024 would not have been possible without the generous support of our funders, including the National Oral Health Office and the Health Service Executive (HSE).

We are also grateful to:

- Farrelly Dave White Limited – Auditors
- Barry O'Donnell Solicitors – Legal Advisors
- Doggett Printing - Printers
- Printcomp - Printers

We extend our sincere thanks to our Board of Trustees for their leadership and strategic oversight, and to our Scientific Advisory Committee for their invaluable expertise.

A special thank you to our colleagues and partners who contributed to the development and review of our resources. Collaboration is central to our mission, and we are deeply appreciative of the insights and dedication of those who share our commitment to improving public health.



# Looking Ahead to 2025

As we look to 2025, the Dental Health Foundation remains committed to promoting oral health and wellbeing across Ireland. Building on the progress of 2024, we will continue to:

- Strengthen collaborations with key stakeholders
- Advocate for evidence-based oral health initiatives
- Expand our public education and resource development
- Grow our fundraising efforts to support long-term sustainability
- Expand our public education and resource development, including the ongoing creation of our ***Dental Care for Children with a Heart Problem*** poster and ***Oral Health for Autistic Children. A Guide for Adults*** brochure, which we hope to release in early 2025.

As the oral health landscape continues to evolve, we are ready to adapt to new challenges while staying true to our mission: optimum oral health for all. With the continued support of our partners, funders, and dedicated team, we look forward to another impactful year ahead.



