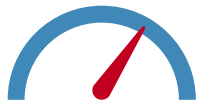


ORAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Understanding lived-living experience perspectives

Lived Experience Australia commenced this research in late 2024 to better understand oral health and mental health, the interconnections and the experiences of consumers, families, carers and kin. 198 consumers and 36 carers completed the survey.

Barriers to dental care



Cost is the main reason for delaying dental treatment (67%)

- 57% of consumers said anxiety prevented them from visiting the dentist
- 47% avoided dentists due to past trauma
- 30% avoided dentists due to self-stigma and shame

Stigma & discrimination



- Half of consumers felt their oral health concerns were not taken seriously by dental staff
- 30% of consumers reported experiencing stigma or discrimination from dental staff

Lawn, S., Kaine, C., Earle-Bandaralage, L., Hill, R., Justice, P., Milford, J., Nanson, C., Reed, S., Tudehope, A., Turner, R. (2025) Understanding the Links between Oral Health and Mental Health: Lived and Living Experience Perspectives, Lived Experience Australia.

Access & affordability challenges



- When specialist dental treatment was unaffordable:
 - 40% put up with the pain
 - 34% had a tooth pulled instead
 - 42% did nothing



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Recommendations

Consumers and carers overwhelmingly support including dental care under Medicare to support affordability, emphasising that oral health is critical to overall well-being.

There is also a need for trauma-informed care from dental staff, improved communication between oral health and mental health professionals, and better education for both practitioners and consumers about the connection between oral and mental health.

<https://www.livedexperienceaustralia.com.au/oral-health>

This report highlights the strong bidirectional relationship between oral health and mental health.

Poor mental health can lead to neglect of oral hygiene due to lack of motivation, self-care difficulties, and side effects from medications, while poor oral health exacerbates mental health issues through stigma, low self-esteem, and social anxiety.

Key barriers to accessing dental care include financial constraints, long public dental wait times, trauma from past experiences, stigma from dental staff, and lack of support for individuals with mental health experiences. Many reported experiencing discrimination from dental staff, particularly when disclosing mental health conditions or a history of alcohol or other drug use.

“When I’m struggling mentally, I find it hard to maintain my oral health routine, often not brushing or flossing my teeth for days at a time. I have a lot of shame over that and therefore don’t want to see the dentist because I’m afraid of what they will think/say”

