

NZDC Adult Scope 2019
Kendall Stewart- Oral Health Therapist

To whom it may concern,

I am a new graduate who is working for the [REDACTED] District Health Board as an Oral Health Therapist. This experience has broadened my overall knowledge regarding public health and the dental services available to New Zealanders. I am writing to the New Zealand Dental Council in response to the proposal to remove the 18-year age limit for restorative activities from the OHT scope of practice. I have read and analysed the discussion document and will give an outline below of the reasons why I feel changes should be made.

Currently, there is an age restriction on the Oral Health Therapy Scope in relation to restorative procedures. Therefore, when our patients turn 18 they are no longer entitled to the free dental care. This means their only option is to access dental care through private practice. However, for many New Zealanders going through private practice is not an option due to the cost. I understand that not all services can be free or subsidised however; I feel that with additional training, Oral Health Therapists can provide adequate restorative treatment to patients over 18 years of age.

Furthermore, if this change is made it would give family members of the children we can treat an opportunity to improve their oral health. From my experience, many family members of the children we treat ask where they can access affordable dental care. To qualify for free dental care, they have to meet criteria, which can include having a community services card, experiencing dental pain and paying a fee. Those who do not have dental pain or are not eligible for a community services card have limited options, which mean paying a fee that they cannot afford.

I feel this unintentionally associates dental care with discomfort and a place where you only go if you're in pain. My personal goal is to remove the fear of visiting the dentist in the children I treat. When treating adolescent patients, I emphasise the importance of regular dental check-ups once they turn 18 to prevent further issues. This links back to the cost factor and what patients can access. If this change was made, New Zealanders 18 years and over could access treatment earlier, leading to a more positive outlook towards dental health.

The patients I treat vary in ages ranging from young children to the older adolescents. Therefore, I feel with additional training myself and many other Oral Health Therapists can be confident and equipt to provide restorative dental care to patients 18 years and older. When New Zealander's over 18 years of age are able to access free dental care, without being in pain, there could be improved oral health outcomes.

I have examined the new proposed scope of practice for Oral Health Therapists outlined on the NZDC website and if these changes were made, I feel dental health for all New Zealanders will improve.

Thank you for your time

Kendall Stewart