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ACU Research to Improve Oral Health in Residential Aged Care



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ACU health researchers will develop a new app-based protocol to improve the oral health and wellbeing of residential aged care residents, thanks to a \$210,000 grant from Aged Care Research

& Industry Innovation Australia (ARIIA).

Poor oral health in older Australians can cause serious health complications leading to increased risk of pneumonia, more emergency hospital visits, food avoidance, pain, weight loss and social withdrawal.

Lead researcher Dr Kieran Flanagan, a speech pathologist and aged care researcher at ACU Brisbane, said key barriers to quality oral health care include cost, staff knowledge, training, and access to the correct oral hygiene products.

“Oral care in residential aged care can be challenging and can have a really big impact on overall health and wellbeing,” Dr Flanagan said.

“It is a very serious medical issue which can greatly impact quality of life, the ability to eat and interact with others. By improving access and knowledge about oral health care in aged care, we can dramatically reduce these risks of poor health.”

In the joint project with Amelo Dental, ACU researchers will initially work with staff and residents at five Southern Cross Care QLD (SCCQ) aged care services to pilot and review the new protocol but hope to roll it out nationally next year.

The new protocol’s impact on health and wellbeing and staff confidence in oral health management will be compared to standard practices by measuring changes in oral health behaviours, social interaction, and diet before and after its introduction.

Dr Flanagan said the project will address important gaps in the aged care workforce’s capability and knowledge.

“Most certificate III courses for aged care workers don’t include oral health training, so the purpose is to trial an app-based oral health protocol to help educate aged care staff and provide the right oral products for residents in aged care,” he said.

“The app is designed by dentists and oral health care experts to deliver the right information, but it’s also designed to be used by family to find out the needs for oral health care for the residents.

“Our ultimate goal is to provide a protocol for better oral health care that leads to better health and quality of life, and for this protocol to be used broadly across the nation in residential health and that’s something we can all smile about.”