

Research and Innovation at PDSE Community Oral Health: Research in Action

Integrating dental services for people with complex needs (University of Plymouth collaboration)

This research explores how dental services can be better integrated into wider health and social care for people experiencing homelessness, addiction and other forms of severe and multiple disadvantage.

Working with the University of Plymouth, the team involves stakeholders including people with lived experience, healthcare professionals, third-sector organisations and service planners.

Methods include qualitative and mixed-methods evaluations of outreach and inclusion health dental services, as well as studies on peer-led oral health promotion.

Findings are used to inform service development and support discussions with funders and commissioners on models of care.

Related publications and outputs:

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41688708/>

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/hex.70243>

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41415-024-8166-1>

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/froh.2024.1283861/full>

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/32761764/>

Impact of the PDSE social enterprise model on workforce and communities

This PDSE-funded programme explores the social, economic and clinical impact of the Peninsula Dental Social Enterprise model over the past decade.

The research examines how PDSE services have evolved in response to changing population oral health needs, and who has been reached through our clinical and educational provision.

Working with students, patients, clinical teams and external stakeholders, the study gathers perspectives on training, service delivery and organisational impact. It also explores opportunities for future development through an oral health inequalities lens.

Findings will be used to highlight areas of impact, inform strategic development, and support wider understanding of social enterprise models in dentistry.



Research and Innovation at PDSE


Community Oral Health: Research in Action

Improving the oral health of people in prison and on release

This project, funded by the Royal College of Surgeons of England, aims to develop tools to understand the oral health needs of people in prison and after they are released. It works with people with experience of the criminal justice system and community partners to develop questionnaires about oral health, access to dental care, and untreated dental problems.


The findings will help shape future research and support better oral health services in prison and after release.

Related publications and outputs:



Peers with Purpose:

Using a Peer Research Approach to Measure Dental Health in Prison and Beyond



Why Dental Health Matters

For people in prison and on release, dental pain, broken teeth, or missing teeth are more than just health issues. They can affect confidence, relationships, behaviour, job opportunities, and employment. Poor dental health can also lead to isolation, drug or alcohol use to cope with pain, and barriers to starting over.

The Evidence Gap

We know dental health is a serious problem, but data is scarce. Existing surveys don't reflect prison life or the challenges of release, making service improvements harder.

Our Approach


We worked with dentists, prison health staff, support workers, and people with lived experience of prison. Across four online workshops, we:

- Adapted surveys and added new questions to reflect real experiences.
- Created a peer-researcher model, where people with prison experience lead the research.


We then tested the approach in person, role-playing and refining each step.

References:
Booth J, McMullen H, Rodriguez A, Muirhead V. Co-designing a film showcasing the dental experiences of community returners (ex-offenders). *Front Oral Health*. 2025 Jan 6;5:1391438.
Booth J, O'Malley L, Meek R, Goldrick NM, Maycock M, Clarkson J, Wanyonyi-Kay K. A scoping review of interventions to improve oral health in prison settings. *Community Dent Oral Epidemiol*. 2023 Jun;51(3):373-379


Key Findings



Tailored surveys capture key impacts
- such as low self-esteem, work barriers, and coping with pain.



Peer-researchers improve trust, engagement, and response rates. The role also offers employment for people with lived experience.



Peer-led conversations go beyond surveys - opening discussions on dental care, access, and wider support.

What now?

Dental health must be a clear priority in prisons and after release. Our peer-led model and questionnaire collects the evidence needed to advocate for better services. Peer-researchers don't just gather data - they build trust, start conversations, and bring community benefit.

Take Action

Do you work in prisons or with people after release? Use our peer-led survey to gather evidence and drive change.

Contact joelle.booth@plymouth.ac.uk to get started.

