

# BSPD supports publication of Looked After Children Oral Health Toolkit

A new practical guide for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) offering recommendations on oral health for Looked After Children (LAC) has been published by the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry (BSPD) in the Resources section of their website.

This Oral Health Toolkit supports ICBs, Integrated Care Systems (ICs) and key stakeholders in children's oral health to identify the oral health needs, as well as plan and deliver dental services for LAC.

The toolkit has been written by a working group who have come together to share practical examples of activities and programmes that have been implemented in different regions of the UK. It contains personal reflections and case studies embedded in the document which provide practical and real examples of activities and programmes that have been implemented in different regions of the UK.

Whilst BSPD has not initiated this document, the Society supports the publication of this toolkit as part of the drive to ensure that the oral health needs of LAC are prioritised.

LAC are defined under the Children's Act 1989 as children and young people (CYP) who have been under the continuous care of a local authority for more than 24 hours. LAC are placed in care under a court or

through voluntary arrangements with their parents or carers. They can remain in care until their eighteenth birthday or older if they are in full-time education.

LAC also includes Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), a person under 18-years-old or who, in the absence of documentary evidence establishing age, appears to be under that age and is applying for asylum on their own right, is separated from both parents, and is not being cared for by an adult who in law or by custom has responsibility to do so. Importantly, current government policy does not support using dental records or x-rays to assist with age estimations for UASC.

The LAC Oral Health Toolkit's four main authors are Laura Johnston, Vanessa Muirhead, Claire Stevens CBE and Katharine Julia Hurry, supported by 24 other experts with personal reflections on case studies; six individuals have provided feedback and comments prior to publication.

Dr Vanessa Muirhead, author and Clinical Reader, and Honorary Consultant in Dental Public Health, Queen Mary University of London said: 'Looked after Children are an overlooked and vulnerable group. Our research with LAC, care leavers and foster carers shows that they often have unmet dental needs despite the conscientious care



British Society of  
Paediatric Dentistry

## Looked After Children Oral Health Toolkit

A practical guide for Integrated Care Boards (ICBs)

Credit: Courtesy of BSPD

often provided in foster families. We created this practical toolkit to draw on evidence, to share examples of different programmes and to provide links to further resources. Tackling inequalities in LAC is essential and a key objective of NHS England national policies such as Core20PLUS5 for Children and Young People. We hope that this toolkit will be widely used to improve dental services for LAC and care leavers at a crucial time in their lives.'

<https://www.bspd.co.uk/Professionals/Resources>

# Grant applications open for patient safety and wellbeing projects

The MPS Foundation – a global not-for-profit research initiative that aims to shape the future of patient safety – has opened for applications for its 2024 grant programme.

Medical Protection Society (MPS) – of which Dental Protection is part – launched the Foundation in 2022. Now in its third year, it has already supported over 30 research projects from across the world.

UK projects awarded funding in 2023 include a study aimed at understanding students' experiences in oral surgery

departments across two UK dental schools, and another study exploring dental professionals' perceptions of resilience.

The Foundation is now inviting new research grant applications from both MPS members and non-members. It will invest in research and analysis with a key focus on patient safety and the wellbeing of healthcare professionals and teams, both medical and dental. Applications will be considered from the jurisdictions where MPS has members.

Research projects supported by The MPS Foundation need to be academically robust

and evidence based. Available funding will range from £5,000 to £200,000, or equivalent in local currency, depending on the scale, focus and duration of the proposal.

The funding focusses on five main areas:

- The impact of human factors on patient safety, outcomes, and risk
- The impact of processes and delivery modes on patient safety, outcomes, and risk
- The personal and professional wellbeing of healthcare professionals and teams ►►

- The impact of digital integration and technology on patient safety, outcomes, and risk
- The impact of the effectiveness of teaching and learning innovations upon patient safety, outcomes and risk.

Dr Graham Stokes, dentist and MPS Foundation Chair, said: 'We are delighted to launch our third grant programme to support research projects on patient safety and the wellbeing of dental professionals.'

Funding for research in this area has been limited but our grant programmes have been changing that. Projects that we have supported in previous years have shown great success in promoting best practise and wellbeing across several countries.

'Our aim is simple: to fund research that improves safety for patients and the wellbeing of healthcare teams.'

'If you have a research project that you think is suitable, register your interest and join our growing community of grant

recipients. I strongly encourage healthcare professionals to consider applying for support whatever the scale of the proposal and to make the most of the additional resources available to support applicants this year.'

Applicants can register their interest and apply by visiting [www.thempsfoundation.org](http://www.thempsfoundation.org) and entering their details via the online grant portal. Calls for expressions of interest close on 3 May 2024 at 17:00 BST.

## Dental professionals must advocate for water fluoridation

As government launch a new consultation into water fluoridation in the North East, the Oral Health Foundation is encouraging dental professionals to seize this opportunity by liaising with local MPs for further expansion of the scheme across the UK.

The consultation opened on 25 March with plans to extend the region's water fluoridation scheme to an additional 1.6 million people, targeting vulnerable populations, particularly children and young adults.

Although the benefits of water fluoridation to oral health are well established and accepted, as few as six million people in England live in areas with fluoridated water.

The Oral Health Foundation believes water fluoridation should be more widely implemented in the UK and wants dental professionals to play a key role in promoting the benefits to policymakers.

Dr Nigel Carter, Chief Executive of the Oral Health Foundation, said: 'By participating in the North East consultation, you have the power to improve oral health outcomes for millions of people for generations to come. As dental professionals, we witness the devastating effects of tooth decay daily, placing us in a unique position to provide invaluable insights into its true impact on patients' oral, general, and mental health.'

'This consultation also presents a critical opportunity to build relationships with our local MPs and advocate for water fluoridation plans in all our respective areas. The success of the North East consultation



will only strengthen our cause to expand water fluoridation across the UK.'

Although oral health is improving in England, the oral health survey of five-year-olds in 2019 showed that just under a quarter have tooth decay.

Each child with tooth decay will have on average three-to-four teeth affected. For those children at risk, it can happen early in life. The oral health survey of three-year-olds in 2020 found that 11% had visible tooth decay, with on average three teeth affected.

A 2022 health monitoring report showed five-year-olds in areas with fluoridated

water in England were less likely to experience tooth decay compared to areas without fluoride and are less likely to be admitted to hospital to have teeth removed.

Claire Stevens CBE, Spokesperson for the British Society of Paediatric Dentistry (BSPD), said: 'BSPD supports the fluoridation of public water supplies in communities where the burden of dental decay is severe enough to warrant this public health measure and fluoridation is technically feasible. [The announcement of this consultation] is monumental. It will be the first one conducted in an area of the UK for several decades. So, we welcome and will support this consultation – and look forward to seeing the outcomes. Dentistry is in crisis at the moment and now children's oral health is everyone's business – where creative approaches using proven interventions that deliver return on investment are more important than ever.'

Under the Health and Care Act 2022, the Secretary of State was given the authority by Parliament to implement new water fluoridation programmes. These initiatives have the backing of local authorities in the area, and the water company involved has prior experience in managing such schemes.

The government's consultation, titled 'Community water fluoridation expansion in the north east of England' can be found at [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) and will last 12 weeks. Following this, it will collect and review the feedback before making a decision on whether to extend the scheme.

You can find the contact details of your local MP by visiting [www.members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP](http://www.members.parliament.uk/FindYourMP).