

ANNUAL REPORT

DHF
Dental Health
Foundation
Ireland





**OPTIMUM
ORAL HEALTH
FOR ALL**

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CEO's Foreword

Oral health is a fundamental part of overall health and wellbeing, yet for many people in Ireland it remains an overlooked and unequal aspect of care. Dental decay is largely preventable, and continues to affect children, families, and vulnerable communities at unacceptable levels. Addressing this challenge requires sustained commitment, collaboration, and a clear focus on prevention — values that have guided the Dental Health Foundation for nearly five decades.

In 2025, the Dental Health Foundation continued to advance its mission of improving oral health and wellbeing for all. Throughout the year, we focused on delivering practical, evidence-based educational information strengthening partnerships, and reaching communities most at risk of oral health inequalities. From children and families to people experiencing addiction, disability, or social disadvantage, our work remained firmly rooted in inclusion, respect, and community engagement.

I am particularly proud of the breadth and depth of our impact in 2025. We distributed over 70,000 oral health resources nationwide, supported schools and Gaelscoileanna, delivered targeted community workshops, and developed new educational materials addressing the needs of autistic children, children with complex medical conditions, and marginalised communities. Our first public research project on oral health behaviours provided valuable insights that will inform our work well into the future.

Advocacy and collaboration were also central to our efforts this year. We strengthened our engagement with policymakers, contributed to national policy submissions, and worked alongside public affairs partners to ensure oral health remains visible within wider public health discussions. These activities are essential if prevention is to be prioritised and oral health inequalities meaningfully reduced.

None of this work would be possible without the dedication and support of our partners, funders, trustees, advisory committee members, contributors, and volunteers. I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Health Service Executive, the National Oral Health Office, our community and professional partners, and everyone who contributed their expertise, time, and energy throughout the year.

As we look ahead to 2026, the Dental Health Foundation remains committed to championing prevention, education, and equitable access to oral health information and resources. While challenges remain, I am confident that by continuing to work collaboratively and guided by evidence, we can achieve lasting improvements in oral health outcomes across Ireland.

Orlaith Kennedy
CEO



About Us

The Dental Health Foundation (DHF) is Ireland's only independent charity dedicated exclusively to improving oral health and wellbeing. Established in 1977, the Foundation has spent nearly five decades at the forefront of oral health promotion, working to ensure that everyone in Ireland has the knowledge and resources needed to achieve and maintain good oral health.

Oral health is fundamental to overall wellbeing. It enables people to eat, speak, smile, and live with confidence. DHF's mission is to promote lifelong oral health through education, advocacy, and the provision of accessible, evidence-based resources. We work in close partnership with the Health Service Executive (HSE), the Department of Health, schools, community organisations, and professional bodies to champion better oral health outcomes nationwide.

How We Deliver Our Mission

We achieve our mission by:

- Developing and distributing free of charge, evidence-based oral health educational resources for the public and healthcare professionals
- Supporting schools to embed oral health education within their curricula
- Working with community and healthcare partners to deliver targeted oral health initiatives
- Contributing to national oral health policy through collaboration and advocacy
- Publishing professional resources, including Oral Health in Ireland: A Handbook for Health Professionals (3rd Edition)
- Supporting professional development through bursaries, awards, and conference engagement

Our Values

Our work is guided by five core values:

- **Care** – Responding thoughtfully to the needs of individuals and communities
- **Respect** – Valuing diversity in backgrounds, beliefs, and abilities
- **Trust** – Building strong relationships through collaboration and transparency
- **Quality** – Pursuing excellence through research, evidence, and evaluation
- **Innovation** – Adopting creative and cost-effective approaches to maximise impact



(L-R) Ms Anna Gunning, CEO Children in Hospital Ireland & Ms Orlaith Kennedy CEO DHF, IDHA President Sviatlana Anischuk & CEO Orlaith Kennedy, Dr Isabel Olegário, Senior Lecturer RCSI, Dr Sinead Nic Ghearailt, President ISDC, Ms Orlaith Kennedy, CEO DHF., Sandra Byrne DHF.

Our Impact in 2025

In 2025, the Dental Health Foundation delivered meaningful and measurable impact by advancing oral health education, strengthening partnerships, and reaching communities most affected by oral health inequalities.

By the Numbers

- 70,072 oral health resources distributed
- 334 orders fulfilled across health, education, and community sectors

Key Highlights

- Developing a culturally appropriate resource for the Traveller community - Caring for Your Child's Gums & Teeth (0–8 years) flipbook with Traveller Visibility Group Cork and Cork/Kerry Traveller Group
- Delivered tailored oral health sessions to service users at the National Drug Treatment Centre
- Developed and launched new evidence-based resources addressing specific health needs including autism, heart conditions, smoking, and vaping
- Supported oral health education in schools nationwide, including Gaelscoileanna through Irish-language resources
- Delivered community workshops to Men's Sheds across four counties
- Expanded public awareness through national media coverage and professional publications
- Completed DHF's first public oral health behaviour research project
- Shortlisted for the Irish Healthcare Awards - Patient Education Project of the Year — Non-Pharmaceutical
- Provided DHF t-shirts to volunteers who ran the Cork mini marathon on our behalf.

Our Resources

Dental Care for a Child with a Heart Problem



It is important for a child with a heart problem to keep their mouth healthy and free from bacteria (germs) on and around the teeth. Ask your cardiac team about what this means for your child.

TIPS FOR CLEAN TEETH & GUMS

Oral Health for Autistic Children

A GUIDE FOR ADULTS



Every Child is Unique

Oral Health Care for a Child with a Heart Problem 0-5 years of age

Looking after your child's teeth and gums helps protect their smile and their heart.

It is important for a child with a heart problem to keep their mouth healthy and free from bacteria (germs) on and around the teeth. Ask your cardiac team about what this means for your child.



Oral Health and Menopause

(Peri and post menopause)

Menopause hormonal changes can impact your oral health

- Research shows that low oestrogen levels can lead to an increased risk of gingivitis, gum issues, inflammation, jawbone density loss and tooth loss.
- Some medications used to reduce osteoporosis risk (e.g. bisphosphonates) may impact on future dental treatment, e.g. tooth extraction. Talk to your dentist and doctor about medications and any specific oral problems.
- Taking positive steps to prevent problems and maintain good oral hygiene is important during this time and can improve whole-body and oral health wellbeing.



Choosing the Right Toothbrush

There are many good toothbrushes available. Try different kinds, colours and designs. Your child can pick which one to use.

- Manual Toothbrushes**: Choose a small-headed, soft-bristled toothbrush. If your child finds it tricky to hold, ask your dental team how to make the handle easier to grip.
- Electric Toothbrushes**: Electric or battery-powered toothbrushes can be game-changers for those who struggle with manual brushes. Their rotating heads are very good at removing plaque. Some children might not love the feeling or noise, but others might find it fascinating particularly hyposensitive children. It can help them get used to different sensations for their dental visits.
- Specialised Toothbrushes**: Double and triple-sided toothbrushes are a great option and available online or in some pharmacies. They help to clean all tooth surfaces at once, making brushing find tooth brushing difficult, e.g. Collis Curve or Dr. Barman's Superbrush.



Smoking & Oral Health

Your gums, teeth and mouth feel it immediately

Smoking reduces blood flow, dries out your mouth, weakens gums, leads to bad breath, stained teeth, and even tooth loss.

Risks

- Smoking is the leading cause of severe gum disease (periodontitis).
- Smoking reduces oxygen to the gums, and may lead to early tooth loss.
- Stale smoke, infection, and rotting tissue lead to "smoker's breath".
- Slower healing of cuts/ulcers in your mouth.

No Safe Option

- Rollies: More tar, no filters and higher chemical load.
- Nicotine Pouches/Snus/Chewing Tobacco: Burns gums, increases oral cancer risk, and gum recession.

Benefits of Stopping

- Fresher breath, healthier gums, and whiter teeth.
- Improves healing of cuts/ulcers in your mouth.
- Helps prevent gum disease from getting worse.

Protect Your Smile

- Brush teeth and gums twice daily (at night and one other time) for 2-3 minutes with fluoride toothpaste (1450).
- Use a soft brush & change every 3 months or when bristles are worn.
- Floss and/or use interdental brushes to remove bacteria from hard-to-reach areas.
- Spit, don't rinse after brushing to keep fluoride on your teeth.
- Visit your dentist regularly for early signs of cancer or gum disease can be spotted.
- Choose healthy snacks between meals and limit sugary foods and drinks to reduce attack risk.

Need Help to Quit?

www.quit.ie - Free support to stop smoking / vaping
www.dentalhealth.ie - Learn how to care for your teeth.

www.dentalhealth.ie | info@dentalhealth.ie



Vaping, Nicotine Pouches & Your Oral Health

Pressure to vape can come from your own friends. Teens and young adults can take up vaping to fit in. Spot the pressure. Choose what's right for you.

Vapes and nicotine pouches are addictive. The chemicals in them will damage your teeth and gums. This can lead to bad breath, gum disease and increase your risk of mouth cancer.

You have one mouth. Take care of it.

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Programmes & Community Engagement

Children and Families

Supporting children and families remains central to DHF's work. In 2025, we developed new resources addressing specific health needs, including:

- Dental Care for a Child with a Heart Problem poster and information postcard
- Oral Health for Autistic Children: A Guide for Adults, which was shortlisted for Best Patient Educational Project at the Irish Healthcare Awards

In collaboration with Traveller organisations, we developed a culturally appropriate oral health resource to support Traveller families, reflecting our commitment to inclusive, community-led health promotion. Additionally, we developed an audio visual to accompany the resource "*Caring for your Child's Gums & Teeth 0-8 years*" an educational flipbook for Traveller Community Healthcare Workers. This resource will be launched in 2026.

Community and Inclusion

We continued to prioritise communities facing increased oral health challenges.

- Delivered oral health workshops to Men's Sheds in Westmeath, Laois, Meath, and Longford
- Hosted an oral health information morning at the National Drug Treatment Centre, providing tailored advice and resources to service users
- Contributed oral health items to Children in Hospital Ireland Parent Care Packs, supporting families during unexpected hospital admissions

Schools and Education

DHF distributed over 5,000 oral health resources to schools nationwide and supported oral health education in Gaelscoileanna by providing materials in Irish. These initiatives help embed positive oral health habits from an early age.

Advocacy, Policy, & Research

Research

In 2025, DHF commissioned Empathy Research to undertake our first public research project examining dental and oral health behaviours in Ireland. The findings provided valuable insight into public attitudes and behaviours, helping inform future education and advocacy efforts.

Fundraising & Advocacy

We also developed a capital campaign focusing on three important initiatives:

- Mighty Mouth
- Ireland Love your Smile
- Your Mouth Matters Roadshow

In April 2025, DHF engaged Pinnacle Public Affairs to strengthen our advocacy work, increase awareness of the Foundation within the political landscape, and support efforts to secure sustainable government funding.

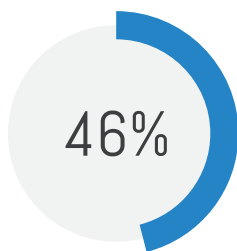


Through Pinnacle Public Affairs, we commissioned a report by economist, David W. Higgins, '**Cost Benefit Analysis – Dental Health foundation Ireland's 3-Year Plan**'. The DHF's three oral health promotional campaigns listed above are projected to yield significant lifetime savings in dental treatment costs – exceeding their combined investment. Prevention ultimately champions long-term cost savings and health outcomes for the population.

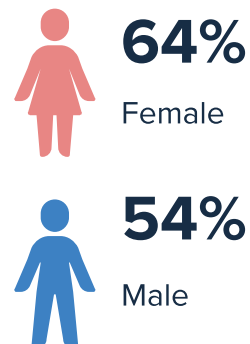
Empathy Research

A Snapshot of Ireland's Oral Health

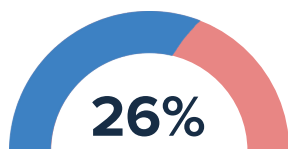
Percentage of Adults who report brushing before bedtime



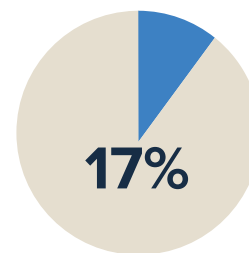
Percentage of Adults who report brushing twice a day



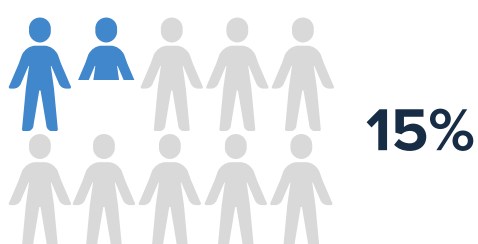
Percentage of Adults who report flossing daily



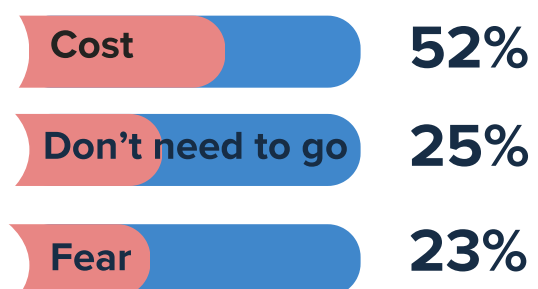
Percentage of Adults who report spitting out toothpaste after brushing and not rinsing



Percentage of Adults who report visiting the dentist every 4 years or less



Reasons for not visiting the dentist regularly



Advocacy, Policy, & Research Cont.

Policy

We contributed to key policy submissions, including:

- Alcohol Action Ireland's Time to Close the L0.0phole
- Alcohol Action Ireland's call for action on alcohol health warning labels



(L-R) Dr Anne Twomey (DHF Trustee), Deputy Minister Colm Burke T.D. and Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO).



(L-R) Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO), Deputy Minister Martin Daly T.D. and Dr Anne Twomey (DHF Trustee).

In July 2025, DHF CEO Orlaith Kennedy and Trustee Dr Anne Twomey met with Deputy Minister Colm Burke T.D. Fine Gael and Deputy Minister Martin Daly T.D. Fianna Fail to discuss three oral health promotion initiatives focused on prevention, education, and early intervention.

Communications & Public Engagement

Effective communication is central to DHF’s mission, enabling us to raise awareness, influence behaviour, and ensure reliable oral health information reaches a wide audience.

Media and Publications

During 2025, DHF contributed articles to national publications, including:

- Irish Independent Children’s Health & Wellbeing supplement: A Parent’s Guide to Oral Health for Autistic Children and Those with Sensory Processing Differences
- Irish Pharmacy News (September): Oral Health and the Pharmacist – Making Every Contact Count
- Irish Pharmacy News (October): When Strong Bones Come at a Cost: Bisphosphonates and the Hidden Risks to Dental Health

Digital and Social Media

We maintained an active presence across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and X, sharing oral health guidance, news, and updates on our work. Our Facebook page alone receives an average of 8,000 visits each month, reflecting strong ongoing engagement with our audience. Our website continues to be updated with new resources and professional literature, while our online shop expanded to include additional patient motivators and oral care products.



Fundraising

In September, our trustees — Prof. Mairead Harding, Dr Evelyn Crowley and Dr Anne Twomey — joined dental students from UCC to take part in the Cork City Mini Marathon on behalf of the Foundation. Proudly wearing specially designed DHF “Smiles for Miles” t-shirts, the team helped raise awareness and show their support for our work.



DHF Volunteers (UCC Students and supporters) at The Cork City Mini Marathon.



1st Meath Dunboyne
Celebrating
40 years of Scouting
in the Community
1973 - 2013



**PROMOTING
WELLBEING
THROUGH ORAL
HEALTH**

Collaborations & Alliances

Partnerships in Action

DHF values collaboration as a key driver of impact. In 2025, we worked closely with:

- **Children in Hospital Ireland**, contributing oral health items to Parent Care Packs
- **Irish Men's Sheds Association**, delivering community-based oral health workshops
- **National Drug Treatment Centre**, providing tailored oral health education and resources
- **Traveller Visibility Group Cork and Cork/Kerry Traveller Group**, co-developing inclusive oral health materials



Coosan Men's Sheds.



Kerry Traveller Group.

National Alliances

We continued our support for several national alliances, including:

- Alcohol Health Alliance Ireland
- Children's Rights Alliance
- Mouth Cancer Awareness Day

Stakeholder Groups

DHF was honoured to join the following stakeholder groups:

- Epidermolysis Bullosa – Children Hospital Ireland
- Tobacco Free Ireland - HSE
- Keep My Teeth – Trinity College Dublin
- National Roma Network – Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre

Education, Conferences, & Professional Development



Conferences Attended

Throughout 2025, DHF participated in national and international conferences, including:

- Irish Dental Hygienist Association Annual Scientific Conference - Strong & Rising
- Irish Society of Dentistry & Children Annual Scientific Meeting - Dentistry for Children through the ages
- Irish Society of Disability & Oral Health Annual Conference - Look after your patients
- RCSI Annual Scientific Conference Annual Scientific Meeting - Dentistry through the ages
- The Orthodontic Society of Ireland Autumn Meeting - Modern Orthodontics in 3D
- IDA/Paediatric EU Academy Conference - Children's Dentistry in a Day
- Irish Academy of American Graduates Dental Specialists Annual Scientific Meeting
- The Oral Health Promotion Research Group Annual Conference - Where to now?
- Trident Dental Student Conference



Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO) & Minister for Health Ms Jennifer Carroll MacNeill at the IDHA Conference.



Dr Maghnus O'Donnell & Dr Paddy Crotty, Dr Evelyn Crowley & Dr Catherine Waldron, Dr Margaret Tuite, Dr Emily Crossan & Dr Eamonn Murphy, Dr Padraig Creedon DHF Trustee, Sandra Byrne DHF, Orlaith Kennedy DHF CEO & Dr Evelyn Crowley DHF Trustee at the RCSI Annual Conference.



Sinéad Jones, Hillview Family Resource Centre with DHF CEO Orlaith Kennedy at the Children's Rights Alliance meeting: Breaking the Cycle.



Ms Orlaith Kennedy (CEO) & Dr Grace Kelly.



**WORKING
TOGETHER
FOR BETTER
ORAL HEALTH**

Awards and Bursaries

DHF supported education and research through the following awards:

Oral Health Promotion Research Group Bursary

Awarded to Ms Katrina Byrne, Prof Blánaid Daly, Prof Philip McCallion, Prof Mary McCarron and Dr Caoimhin Mac Giolla Phadraig for their project "From Surveillance to Promotion: Inclusive Oral Health Monitoring for People with Disabilities in Ireland".



The Moloney Award

Presented to Dr Isabel Olegario for her lecture exploring the integration of Caries Care International with the principles of Minimal Intervention Dentistry.

Dr William Rymer, IDA President, Dr Isabel Olegario, Moloney Award Winner, Dr Patrick Crotty, DHF former Trustee and Ms Orlaith Kennedy, DHF CEO.

Irish Society for Disability and Oral Health Annual Special Care Dental Care Professional (DCP) Award

Awarded to Karen Hennessy and Emer Crowley for "A retrospective audit of the outcomes of a community-based midazolam sedation service for complex special care patients".



Best Hygienist Oral Health Project – Trinity College Dublin

Awarded to Laura Dunne for her final-year community project.

Orlaith Kennedy (CEO), Emer Crowley, Dr Neil Martin, and Karen Hennessy (ISDH Award Winners).



**Patient Education Project of the
Year — Non-Pharmaceutical**

FINALIST

**Oral Health for Autistic Children.
A Guide for Adults**

Dental Health Foundation

Education and Student Engagement

In 2025, DHF supported the next generation of oral health professionals through a range of educational and outreach activities. We delivered presentations to Dental Science students at Trinity College Dublin, Dental Surgery students at the Dental School of University College Cork, and Dental Nursing students at Atlantic Technological University in Athlone. We also attended the Trident Student Conference in Cork, provided resource packs for the Healthy Heroes event at the University of Galway, and hosted a pre-dental student from Indiana University for an eight-week placement.



Orlaith Kennedy (CEO) with the Dental Nursing Students, Atlantic Technological University.



Prof. Mairead Harding (DHF Trustee) is introducing the CEO of DHF to the Dental Surgery Students in UCC before an oral health promotion workshop.



CELEBRATING INNOVATION IN ORAL HEALTH PROMOTION



Governance & Leadership

Governance

The Dental Health Foundation is governed by a Board of Trustees in accordance with the Charities Act 2009 and the Charities Governance Code. The Board provides strategic oversight and ensures the Foundation operates with transparency, accountability, and integrity.

Board of Trustees

Our Board offers professional leadership and guidance on evidence-based oral and dental health initiatives.

- Dr Mary Coleman, BDS, M.D.P.H. – Chairperson
- Professor Máiréad Harding – B.D.S., M.D.P.H., Ph.D. M.F.G.D.P. (U.K.), F.D.S. R.C.P.S.(Glasg.), P.G.Dip.T.L.H.E.
- Dr Pádraig Creedon, BDS, MPH (NUI)
- Dr Paul O’Dwyer, BDS MSc
- Dr Anne Twomey, BDS MSc
- Mr Niall Downey, FAIA, BSc (Mgt)
- Dr Evelyn Crowley, BDS (NUI) MSc(ULond) DDPHRCSEng MSc(TCD)

Our Team

- Ms Orlaith Kennedy – Chief Executive
- Ms Sandra Byrne – Administration and Accounts Manager

Scientific Advisory Committee

The Scientific Advisory Committee provides expert guidance on DHF projects and resources. Members in 2025 included:

- Ms Fiona McKeown
- Dr Darshini Ramasubbu
- Yvonne Howell
- Dr Niamh Coffey
- Professor Denis O'Mullane
- Dr Isabel Olegario



Acknowledgements

DHF's achievements in 2025 would not have been possible without the support of the National Oral Health Office and the Health Service Executive (HSE). We also thank our auditors, legal advisors, consultants, contributors, partners, and volunteers for their continued commitment.

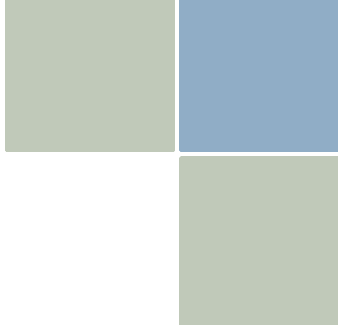
We extend our sincere thanks to our Board of Trustees for their leadership and strategic oversight, and to our Scientific Advisory Committee for their invaluable expertise.

Collaboration is central to our mission, and we are deeply appreciative of the insights and dedication of those who share our commitment to improving public health.

Contributors and Supporters in 2025 included:

- Ms Dorothy Halpin– Dental Hygienist
- Dr Niamh Coffey – Senior Lecturer, RCSI
- Ms Siobhan O’Shea – Dental Hygienist
- Dr. Pooja Agarwal - Dentist
- Dr Caoimhin Mac Giolla Phadraig – Assistant Professor in Public Dental Health, TCD
- Dr Kirsten Fitzgerald – Consultant in Dentistry, CHI
- Ms Clare Furler – Graphic Designer, Clare Furler Design
- Ms Fiona Considine – Colgate
- Ms Aine Lenihan – Haleon
- Ms Edel Quinn – Ocean Healthcare
- Ms Eilís Ní Chearnaigh – HSE
- Ms Sharon McAllister – HSE
- Ms Una Woods – Una Woods Illustrations
- Ms Tehmina Kazi – Traveller’s Visibility Group, Cork
- Ms Eileen Burke - Traveller's Visibility Group, Cork
- Mr. Andy Walker, Kerry Traveller Group
- Ms Taylor Hodge – DHF Intern and pre-dental student, Indiana University.
- Mr Ger Carey – Video and Audio production
- Ms Jessie Newman - DHF T-Shirt Design
- Mercy Ministry Fund
- Farrelly Dave White Limited – Auditors
- Barry O’Donnell Solicitors – Legal Advisors
- Doggett Printing – Printers
- Printcomp - Printers
- Pinnacle Public Affairs – Consultancy and Public Affairs Advice

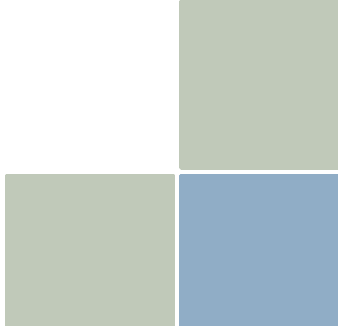
THANK
YOU



Looking Ahead to 2026



As we move into 2026, the Dental Health Foundation will continue to champion prevention, education, and inclusion in oral health. We will deepen partnerships, strengthen advocacy, expand accessible resources, and focus on sustainable funding to support our mission. Guided by our values and supported by our partners and funders, we remain committed to achieving optimum oral health for all.





www.dentalhealth.ie

