

## **Interprofessional Collaboration on Oral Health for Frail Home-dwelling Older People**

### **Objective**

After the age of 65, dental attendance decreases in Europe, resulting in a high burden of untreated oral disease. Furthermore, oral health (OH) of frail home-dwelling older people is often not considered a priority among primary care professionals (PCP's). In contrast, literature indicates that once frailty is detected, interprofessional collaboration is needed to avoid the drop-out of this group from the oral healthcare system. This study aims to gain insights into the experienced needs and barriers of PCP's for interprofessional collaboration on OH for frail home-dwelling older people.

### **Methods**

Focus groups (n=20) were organized in 2023 in Belgium, engaging thirteen professional groups: dentists, dental hygienists, general practitioners, pharmacists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, dietitians, home nurses, home care workers, social workers and cleaning aids.

The following topics were discussed: (1) importance of OH within their profession, (2) current practices regarding interprofessional collaboration, (3) perceived needs and barriers for interprofessional collaboration, (4) ideal organization of OH for frail home-dwelling older people.

All focus groups were transcribed followed by thematic analysis in Nvivo.

### **Results**

**Micro:** Participants (other than OH professionals) admitted to pay little attention to OH. Often mentioned reasons were lack of knowledge and the assumption that OH is no priority for frail older people.

**Meso:** Interprofessional collaboration is complicated due to unclear responsibilities regarding oral healthcare (e.g. who is responsible for the daily oral hygiene of frail older people) and the lack of a communication platform for PCP's.

**Macro:** The shortage of dentists is perceived as a major problem. Furthermore, participants stressed the need for OH campaigns and financial incentives for interprofessional collaboration (e.g. compensation for multidisciplinary consultations).

### **Conclusion**

Efforts are required at all levels of care to improve interprofessional collaboration on OH for frail home-dwelling older people. Raising awareness and knowledge about OH among PCP's is a crucial initial step.