



# DELIVER

# NEWSLETTER

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Deliver Project EU



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the DELIVER Project  
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## No Health Without Oral Health: A Historic WHO Milestone

The World Health Organization (WHO) recently held its inaugural Global Oral Health Meeting in Bangkok, Thailand, from November 26 to 29, 2024. This landmark event underscored the critical importance of oral health as an integral component of overall health and well-being. The meeting culminated in the adoption of the Bangkok Declaration on Oral Health, a pivotal document aiming to integrate oral health into universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030.

Among the esteemed global health leaders present were Prof. Stefan Listl, Project Lead, and Dr. Paula Vassallo, Work package Lead of the Deliver Project and Director of Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate. Their presence at the meeting underscored the importance of proactive leadership in advancing oral health agendas. Through their work with the DELIVER Project, they have consistently advocated for integrated healthcare approaches, ensuring that oral health is recognised as a fundamental component of public health strategies.

Prof Listl said that "The enormous economic burden of oral conditions on individuals and society require the prioritisation of cost-efficient interventions, and evidence-informed policy-making."

The DELIVER Project was shown as an example to support the implementation

of the global oral health action plan

"This meeting was a turning point," said Dr. Vassallo. "It reinforced that oral health is not separate from overall health—it is a cornerstone of well-being. We must act now to integrate oral health into universal healthcare systems and reduce the disparities affecting vulnerable populations."

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Paula Vassallo, Ave Pold & Stefan Listl

# DELIVER Project Consortium meets in Göttingen

The aQua Institute in Göttingen, Germany, hosted the General Assembly of the DELIVER Project Consortium. Experts from fields such as quality improvement science, dental research, health economics, medical law, software development, data analytics, participatory research, and policy convened to discuss project outcomes and impacts.

The meeting focused on the ongoing development of a practical toolkit designed to enhance quality in oral healthcare. This toolkit will incorporate evidence-based approaches and advanced technology to assist healthcare providers and policymakers in improving access to quality oral care for all individuals, including underserved populations.

Participants emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and reaffirmed their

commitment to the project's objective of improving global oral healthcare access and quality.

Additionally, the assembly recognized **#worldmentalhealthday2024**, highlighting the significant link between mental health and oral health. Discussions underscored research showing individuals experiencing mental health challenges often face difficulties maintaining oral hygiene, leading to an increased risk of gum disease and tooth decay. Further, it was noted that declining oral health and oral health-related quality of life can negatively affect depressive symptoms, particularly among older adults. The assembly emphasized that tooth loss and poor oral health have substantial impacts on overall life satisfaction and quality of life.



Olenka van Ardenne, Matthew Byrne, Michael Lorenz, Emily Janssens, Kasper Rosing, Julian Eigendorf, Paula Vassallo, Stefan Listl, Nagihan Bostanci, Paulo Melo and Michiel van der Linden



# Advancing oral care quality through innovation

The **DELIVER (DELiborative ImproVemEnt of oral caRe quality) Project**, with significant contributions from the University of Manchester, continues to make remarkable progress in driving advancements in dental care quality through pioneering research and technology. Here is an overview of the latest developments across its three key workstreams:

## PROMs and PREMs dashboard goes live

In collaboration with aQua and University Hospital, Heidelberg, and under the leadership of the University of Manchester, DELIVER has developed a quality improvement dashboard and action implementation toolkit that leverage patient-reported outcomes and experience measures (PROMs and PREMs). This innovative dashboard enables real-time patient feedback on dental care across check-ups, elective treatments, and urgent care visits.

Extensive stakeholder consultations have refined the selection of 11 key measures, providing visual feedback on dental practice performance. Additionally, a toolkit featuring 24 evidence-based action strategies supports practices in transforming feedback into measurable improvements. Following successful user testing, the DELIVER Dashboard is set to launch shortly, and interested practices can soon register to participate.

## Leveraging AI for patient feedback analysis

A systematic scoping review on natural language processing (NLP) in healthcare has been completed and submitted to the *Journal of Medical Internet Research*. This review investigates how NLP is utilised to interpret unstructured patient feedback and drive clinical enhancements.

Building on this foundation, the team has crafted sentiment analysis, topic modeling, and classification modules specifically designed for dental patient feedback. These tools will contribute to a new patient experience dashboard, enabling dental teams to analyse and address concerns more effectively.

## Exploring mobile app utility for periodontitis & diabetes

Through successful stakeholder engagement, the DELIVER team has formulated initial programme theories to guide a realist review of mobile apps designed for patients with periodontitis and diabetes. These insights aim to assist policymakers and app designers in identifying the most effective features and target audiences for clinical application. Preliminary results from this research are anticipated within the next six months.

These developments underscore the commitment to enhance oral healthcare through innovation and research.

### Project Partners:

Radboud University  
Medical Centre  
(Radboudumc)

Universitätsklinikum  
Heidelberg  
(UKHD)

University of  
Manchester  
(UMIMAN)

Karolinska  
Institutet  
(KI)

Ministry for Health  
& Active Ageing  
(MFA)

Stichting Vrije  
Universiteit  
(VU-ACTA)

University of  
Copenhagen  
(UCPH)

University of  
Porto  
(ISPUP)

aQua-Institut  
GmbH  
(aQua)

Stichting  
Lygature  
(LYG)

# Improving community oral healthcare through co-creation

Dr Linnea Eisemann de Almeida, University of Copenhagen, presented her latest research on improving access to oral healthcare for underserved communities as part of the DELIVER Project at the Scandinavian Division IADR Baltic Meeting, 'Improving Community Oral Healthcare through Co-creation' and highlighted efforts to address unmet dental care needs among two key groups in Denmark:

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Asylum seekers and migrants, who face significant difficulties navigating an unfamiliar and often complex healthcare system.

By working in multistakeholder teams, the project brings together diverse perspectives - including those directly affected - to develop sustainable, community-driven solutions. Early insights reveal several key barriers to care, including:

- Navigating a complex healthcare system, which can be overwhelming for those unfamiliar with its structure.
- Experiencing stigmatisation, which discourages individuals from seeking the care they need.

2

Citizens with limited financial resources, for whom affordability and accessibility remain major challenges.

- Limited access to both preventive care and treatment, leading to worsening oral health conditions over time.

Through this co-creative approach, the DELIVER Project aims to uncover actionable solutions that can make oral healthcare more accessible, equitable, and sustainable for all. Linnea's presentation marks an important step toward raising awareness and driving systemic change in community dental care.



Linnea Eisemann de Almeida

# Complexities of EU Healthcare Policy: Lygature's deep dive into professional guidelines

Lygature is currently conducting research on the adherence to and creation of professional guidelines within the EU healthcare landscape. Building upon already gathered insight this research combines desk analysis with an in-depth review of previously conducted questionnaires.

A key finding emerging from this work is the evolving yet still limited role of the European Union in supporting healthcare promotion and prevention

policies. While Article 168 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides a foundation for EU involvement, healthcare governance remains largely within the jurisdiction of individual Member States. This analysis seeks to clarify how the EU can effectively support, coordinate, and supplement national efforts to improve healthcare quality-especially in the realm of oral care.

## Mapping standards and defining competences

A major component of this research involves mapping professional guidelines and standards across different EU Member States. This includes a careful examination of:



### Provenance

Where do these guidelines originate?



### Scope

What aspects of healthcare do they cover?



### Consequences

How do they impact practitioners and patients?

**The primary focus is on two key areas:**

#### **Healthcare professionals (HCPs):**

Their competences, qualifications, and continuous quality improvement.

**Treatment quality:** Ensuring that healthcare services meet high standards while recognising that **the tangible aspects of healthcare (such as practice infrastructure) remain under national legislation.**

Another dimension of this research examines the regulation of medical devices, which unlike treatment quality, is governed by multiple EU legislative instruments.

## Bridging competences for a unified approach

One of the most intriguing challenges in this study is determining the appropriate division of responsibilities between the EU and Member States. As healthcare increasingly crosses borders, through transborder care and the European Health Data Space (EHDS), there is a growing need for coordinated EU action. Our research aims to highlight the most effective ways for the EU to support and enhance national healthcare systems without

overstepping its competencies.

By shedding light on these complex dynamics, we hope to contribute to the development of more effective and harmonized professional guidelines that ensure optimal oral care quality across the EU.

Further insights will be shared as the research progresses!

# The challenges of prioritizing Oral Health Policy

Safeguarding accessible and effective oral health care remains a persistent challenge for governments worldwide. As part of the DELIVER project, a recent study examined key factors influencing the prioritization of oral health policy in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom. The findings reveal the complexities involved in resource allocation and policy-making in this critical area of public health.

## Understanding the research approach

To gain insight into oral health policy dynamics, researchers conducted a comprehensive literature review of 249 articles published between January 2000 and October 2023, sourced from PubMed and Google Scholar. Additionally, six key informant interviews with policymakers provided firsthand perspectives on decision-making processes. The study focused on identifying trends in oral health policy choices and the factors driving prioritisation and resource allocation.

## Key findings: accessibility and policy drivers

A major theme emerging from the study was the focus on improving accessibility to dental care, primarily through localised programs targeted at vulnerable populations. Governments have generally taken an incremental approach to reform, rather than implementing large-scale systemic changes.

On the supply side, policies have adapted to population needs through financial incentives for dental care providers and innovative service delivery models, such as task shifting—where certain dental responsibilities are transferred to non-dentist professionals to optimise efficiency. Quality management interventions were particularly prominent in Germany, strongly emphasising maintaining care standards.

To better illustrate the policy-making process, the study identified three core drivers influencing oral health policy decisions:

- 1 Political Accountability:** Public demand and outcry play a significant role in shaping policy decisions, as governments respond to concerns about access and affordability.
- 2 Stakeholder Influence:** Negotiations and lobbying efforts by key players, including private dental professionals and insurance companies, strongly impact policy directions.
- 3 Bureaucratic Justification:** Policymakers require data-driven evidence to justify policy innovations, yet limited availability of reliable data often presents a major bottleneck.

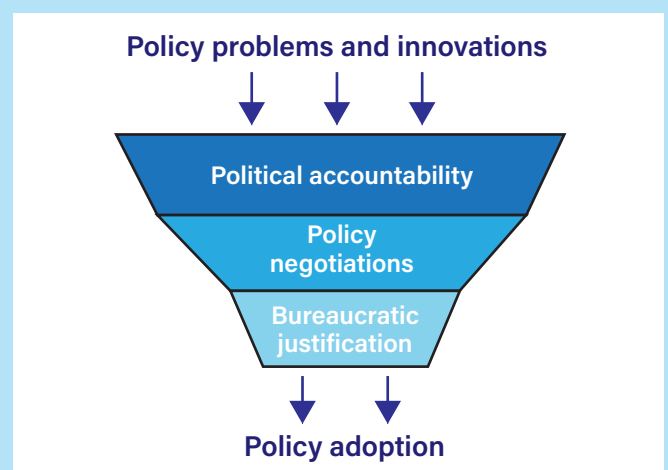
## The challenge of policy inertia

While some political traction exists for oral health policy reform, the study found that complex negotiations and competing interests often stall progress. The strong influence of private professionals, coupled with constrained public resources, has created a state of policy inertia - where the need for change is acknowledged, but systemic barriers prevent meaningful reform.

Most policy investments remain fragmented, favouring incremental improvements over comprehensive redesigns, such as integrated benefit packages that could ensure more sustainable and equitable access to oral health care. The challenge remains in balancing public spending constraints with the growing demand for quality and accessible dental services.

## Implications for policymakers and researchers

The study highlights the critical need for enhanced data acquisition and analysis to support evidence-based oral health policy-making. Understanding the roles of various stakeholders in maintaining the status quo can help policymakers navigate the complexities of reform and develop more effective strategies for advancing oral healthcare systems.



**You can access the full study online:**  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23800844241302052>

# The current state of quality improvement in general dental practice

Ensuring high standards in general dental practice is a crucial aspect of healthcare delivery. A recent study from the University of Heidelberg, published in JDR Clinical & Translational Research (JDR CTR), explores the current landscape of quality improvement (QI) in dental practices across the United Kingdom and Germany. The study examines key factors influencing QI efforts and the barriers that impact their implementation.

## Understanding the research approach

Researchers conducted a situational analysis using desk research and semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insight into QI practices. Participants included dentists, dental hygienists, therapists, nurses, and practice managers, offering a comprehensive perspective on the real-world application of QI measures. The study identified key themes affecting QI implementation in dental care settings.

## Key Findings: Challenges and perspectives on QI

The study highlighted several challenges and diverging opinions among dental professionals regarding QI initiatives:

### 1. Time Constraints and Resource Allocation –

Many practitioners found it challenging to balance patient care with the time-intensive nature of QI activities.

### 2. Regulatory Pressures vs. Meaningful Change –

While some saw QI as a tool for improving standards, others viewed it as a regulatory requirement rather than a driver of real improvement.

**3. Team Involvement in QI** – Successful QI requires full-team engagement, but in many cases, responsibility was placed solely on practice managers or senior staff.

**4. The Role of Patients in QI** – There was debate over the extent to which patients should be involved in assessing quality, with some professionals emphasizing clinical expertise over patient feedback.

## Overcoming barriers and future directions

While challenges exist, the study underscores the importance of integrating effective and sustainable QI strategies within general dental practice. Addressing time constraints, fostering a collaborative approach, and redefining QI beyond compliance-driven processes are critical steps toward achieving meaningful improvements.

By examining the perceptions and realities of QI implementation, this research provides valuable insights that can shape policies and support dental professionals in refining their approaches to quality improvement.



The full article is available online:  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/23800844241306734>

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*It's time to* **DELIVER**





# Why has oral health policy in Europe been so resistant to change?

Oral health policy in European countries continues to lag behind necessary reforms, despite the significant disease burden and financial strain it places on healthcare systems. Why? As part of the DELIVER Project, Ziade Sarroukh, Radboud University, conducted a comprehensive literature review and key informant interviews in Denmark, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands to better understand the political and economic barriers to progress.

**Our findings point to three key determinants shaping the priority setting and resource allocation in oral health care systems:**

- **Political accountability** – Policymakers often opt for quick, visible wins that align with public concerns rather than investing in long-term, systemic change.
- **Policy negotiation** – Negotiations with influential professional stakeholders, including dental associations and private sector interests, make comprehensive reform difficult.
- **Bureaucratic justification** – The lack of comprehensive data hinders the ability to justify substantial investments in oral health policy interventions.

As a result, governments rely on small-scale programs - such as safety net policies for vulnerable

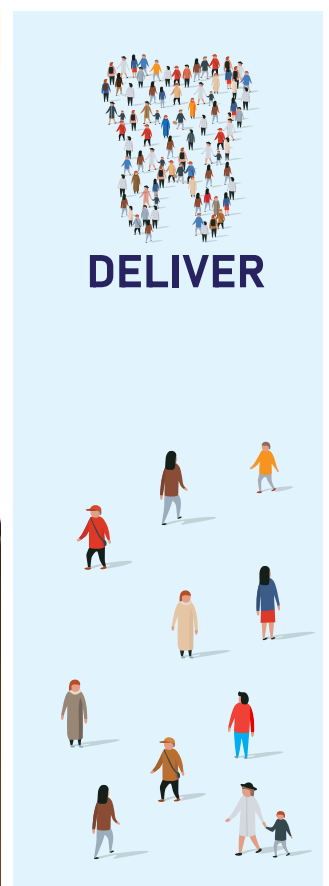
populations - rather than addressing systemic issues. While these programs provide some relief, they also reflect a preference for maintaining the status quo in a largely privatised sector.

However, experiences from other regions, including North America, highlight that limited government interventions alone cannot bridge the persistent gaps in oral health care. More ambitious policy reforms are needed to ensure universal access and equitable oral health outcomes.



**Read more about Ziade Sarroukh's findings:**

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23800844241302052>





# Advancing Oral Healthcare Quality Improvement at EADPH Conference

At the recent European Association of Dental Public Health (EADPH) conference held in Crete, Shaila Akter from the University of Heidelberg presented an insightful poster highlighting critical findings on European and global policymaking efforts aimed at enhancing oral healthcare quality.

The study, which involved comprehensive stakeholder interviews, revealed diverse perspectives on policymaking practices and challenges related to oral healthcare (OH). Through thematic analysis, Akter identified four significant areas of focus:

**1. Perception and Understanding of Quality Improvement (QI):** Stakeholders demonstrated varied levels of comprehension and acknowledgment regarding the significance of quality improvement in oral healthcare policy.

**2. Prioritisation of QI:** Despite acknowledging its importance, stakeholders pointed to competing health priorities and resource limitations as significant barriers impacting the emphasis placed on oral healthcare QI.

**3. Efforts and Actions for QI:** The interviews documented a variety of existing actions and initiatives dedicated to improving oral healthcare quality, though stakeholders noted the need for stronger, more consistent efforts.

**4. Stakeholder Engagement:** Effective engagement and collaboration among stakeholders were highlighted as crucial components for driving meaningful quality improvement initiatives in oral healthcare.

Akter's presentation underscored the necessity of international collaboration, emphasizing that strategic synergies could significantly boost global efforts in oral healthcare quality improvement.



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*It's time to* **DELIVER**



# Collaborative efforts for global Oral Health: EUPHA Workshop Highlights

The Oral Health section, in collaboration with the Global Health section of EUPHA (European Public Health Association), recently hosted a workshop entitled The Global Oral Health Action Plan: Integrating Oral Health into the Global Health Agenda. It focused on the lessons learnt from the global health action plans.

The session reinforced the importance of deliberative dialogue between all relative stakeholders to achieve oral health care for all. Dr Paula Vassallo highlighted the valuable role that the DELIVER Project has in supporting the implementation of the global oral health action plan.

## The Global Oral Health Action Plan: Integrating Oral Health into the Global Health Agenda



Paula Vassallo



Workshop by the Oral Health section and Global Health Sections of EUPHA

Neville Calleja, Elena Petelos, Alison Ekberg, Paula Vassallo, Maria Tsantidou, Dymrna Kavanagh of EUPHA





# DELIVER aligned with the Bangkok Declaration: Towards a Healthier Future

The Bangkok Declaration emphasizes the urgent need for equitable access to affordable and effective oral healthcare, recognizing the profound impact of oral diseases on overall health, social well-being, and economic stability. It advocates for the integration of oral health into primary healthcare systems and a concerted effort to address key risk factors such as high sugar consumption, tobacco use, and harmful alcohol consumption.

The historic WHO Global Oral Health Meeting represents more than just a policy milestone - it is a global call to action. With the 4<sup>th</sup> UN High-Level Meeting on Noncommunicable Diseases (NCDs) approaching in 2025, world leaders have a unique opportunity to enshrine oral health as a public health priority.

The DELIVER project, funded through Horizon Europe, aims to produce a quality improvement model and toolkit which will enhance quality of oral health care and patient safety and ultimately ensure access to innovative, sustainable and high quality health care.

The DELIVER's pathways towards impacts encompasses the right dialogues, with the right stakeholders. On the right topics, within the right context, to get the right decisions towards meaningful improvement of oral care quality.

**The message from Bangkok is clear:  
There is no health without oral health.  
The time to act is now.**



Ave Pold (Prudent Project), Stefan Listl (Project Lead), Paula Vassallo (Work package Lead of DELIVER and Richard Watt (Member of the DELIVER Scientific Advisory Board)