

## Oral health in children on the autism spectrum

Investigating relationships between oral health and clinical phenotypes in children on the autism spectrum

### Background

Oral health is an essential component of overall health, well-being, and quality of life. Individuals on the autism spectrum are at higher risk of poor oral health and experiencing oral diseases such as dental decay.

A greater understanding of the oral health status of children on the autism spectrum, including specific challenges and needs, will help inform tailored and effective oral health interventions and supports.

This study investigated parents' reports of oral health and dental needs of their children. Participants were recruited through the Australian Autism Biobank, with parents and guardians of 140 children on the the autism spectrum (aged under 18 years) completing a survey.

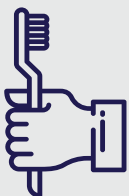
### Overall oral health and symptoms



**33% of parents/guardians** reported that their child's oral health was much **worse than other children** their age.



**One-quarter (26%)** thought their child had **untreated dental problems**, and about a fifth (22%) did not know.



**Half of the children (49%)** needed help **brushing their teeth**. Of these children that needed help, most carers (65%) did this often.

### Access to oral health services



**69% of children** had visited a local family dentist at some stage.



**34% of children** had visited a 'specialist dentist'.



**One-quarter of parents/guardians (26%)** had not heard about Medicare-funded Child Dental Benefits Schedule\*.



**35% of families** who had heard of the schedule **had not used these benefits**.

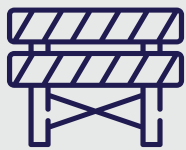
\*Child Dental Benefits Schedule, available to families who get Family Tax Benefit A or Carer Payment, <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/child-dental-benefits-schedule>

## Oral health in children on the autism spectrum

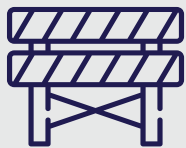
Investigating relationships between oral health and clinical phenotypes in children on the autism spectrum

### Barriers to accessing oral health care

Barriers to children accessing oral health care were associated with:



**adaptive functioning**, including challenges with communication, daily living skills, socialisation and motor skills.



**cost**, with 59% of parents/guardians reporting that dental care was too expensive.

### Use of general anaesthetic



**32% of children** had undergone a general anaesthetic (GA) for dental procedures at least once, most commonly for tooth extraction.



Children who had undergone a GA for dental procedures had significantly **more challenges with adaptive functioning** than those who did not receive a GA.



Children who had ever undergone a GA were **more likely to also have co-occurring** intellectual disability or global developmental delay.

### Who did the research



AutismCRC  
Biobank



Australasian Academy  
of Paediatric Dentistry



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN  
AUSTRALIA

The Australian Autism Biobank is an initiative of Autism CRC, which receives funding from the Australian Government.

Approval to conduct this study was provided by the University of Western Australia's Human Research Ethics Office: RA/4/20/6435

### Australian Autism Biobank

The Australian Autism Biobank is Australia's largest collection of biological, behavioural, environmental and medical information of children on the autism spectrum and their families. Almost 3,000 autistic and non-autistic children and adults participated from across Australia.

Permission to recontact for future research was provided by parents or other guardians.

For more information, visit [autismcrc.com.au/biobank](https://autismcrc.com.au/biobank)



AutismCRC  
Biobank