

# A Brush with Justice

## Improving access to Oral Health Services in NSW Correctional Centres

Samantha Cook, Mitchell Bourke and Elizabeth Twomey  
Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network

### Case for change

The provision of oral health services to patients in custody is integral to the provision of quality and safe healthcare by the Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network. Our patients present unique challenges due to their complex health needs and high prevalence of risk factors to dental disease.

- A patient in gaol complaining of constant toothache can wait up to 56 days to see a dentist. Long wait times increase the risk of symptoms worsening and their condition deteriorating over time.

*"I had a bad tooth, and I had to pull it out myself basically. ... it was a month after that they seen me."*

### Goal

To improve the utilisation of the oral health service to provide timely treatment and improve oral health outcomes for patients in custodial and forensic settings.

### Objectives

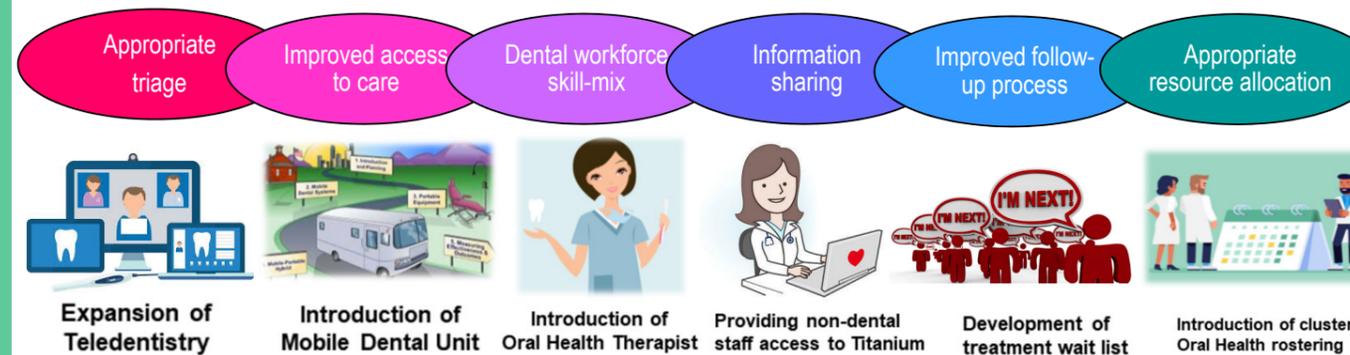
- To reduce the average waiting time for priority 3a patients by 88% from 56 days to 7 days by August 2021
- To reduce the average waiting time for priority 3b patients by 79% from 145 days to 30 days by August 2021
- To increase the average dental occasions of service per month by 20% from 567 to 680 by August 2021
- To maximise cost efficiencies and reduce expenditure on travel by 12.5% to a monthly average of \$10,793.50 by August 2021.

### Method

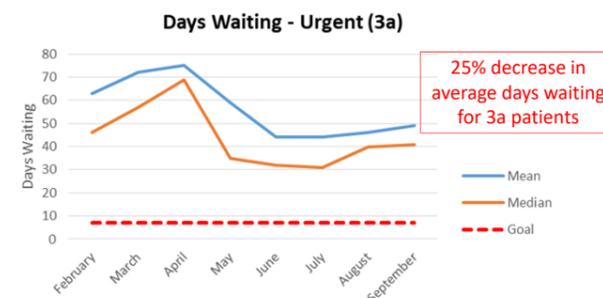
– Process Mapping – Data Analysis – Surveys – Workshops –



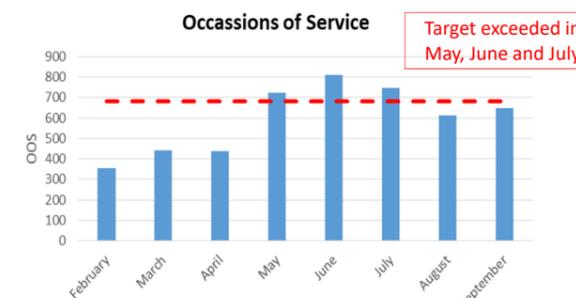
### Solutions



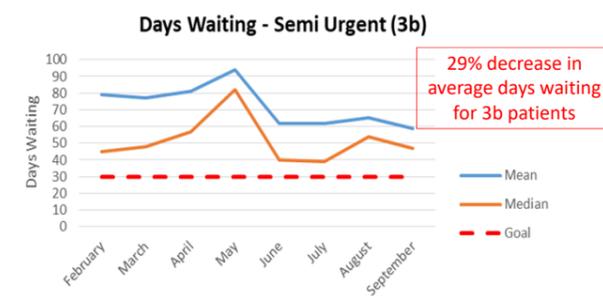
### Results



Graph 1: Mean and Median Days Waiting for Urgent (3a) Dental Appointment



Graph 3: Occasions of service per month



Graph 2: Mean and Median Days Waiting for Semi Urgent (3b) Dental Appointment

### Implementation Progress to Date

**Expansion of Teledentistry and Mobile Dental Unit (MDU)**  
Teledentistry clinics have commenced in conjunction with the Mobile Dental Unit at Hunter Correctional Centre. Initial results show improved outcomes including appropriate re-triaging of patients and reduced patient waiting times.

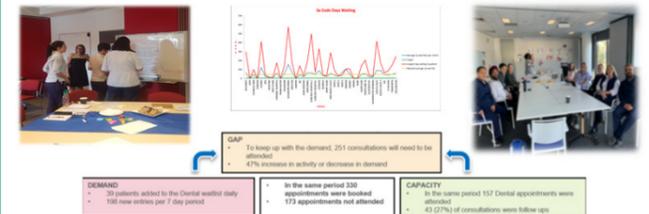
**Providing Non-Dental Staff Access to Titanium**  
Development of New User- Nursing staff access is complete. Training and trial implementation has been delayed due to COVID-19 resource constraints on nursing staff.

**Development of a Treatment Waitlist**  
Treatment waitlist for dentures is complete. Roll out to all custodial sites to be complete by December 2020.

### Diagnostics

#### STAFF SURVEY RESULTS

- 58% of responders state travelling time impacts the number of patients seen.
- 17% of responders agree that patients allocated a priority 3a or 3b have been correctly triaged.



### Sustaining change

Regular data collection, analysis and reporting is supported by newly developed Standard Operating Procedures. Outcomes are reviewed against objectives and inform operational decision making.

Operations Manager Primary Care is responsible for Project Management to completion.

### Conclusion

The clinical solutions of this project are transferrable outside of the custodial setting, and are currently in use in some local health districts. Further development of Teledentistry is particularly timely as the global pandemic has impacted ways of working and accessing patients.

Appropriate triage and follow up of patients, as well as the efficient use of resources and models of care to improve service delivery, are applicable across the spectrum of healthcare.

Lessons learned include; quick wins may not be possible if you are not in control of all aspects, be aware that organisational changes will impact project delivery, and nothing can prepare you for the challenge / disappointment / frustration of project implementation during a global pandemic!

### Contact

Samantha Cook [Samantha.Cook@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Samantha.Cook@health.nsw.gov.au)  
Mitchell Bourke [Mitchell.Bourke@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Mitchell.Bourke@health.nsw.gov.au)  
Liz Twomey [Elizabeth.Twomey@health.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Elizabeth.Twomey@health.nsw.gov.au)

### Acknowledgements

Sponsor: Rose Loughheed, Service Director Primary Care

Implementation Team: The Justice Health Oral Health Team, Operations and Nursing and Corrective Services NSW.