



# Oral Health Hauora Waha

"I really liked the science behind things, discovering how pathology occurs and how products help protect against further destruction. I equally enjoyed the clinical aspect as there are certain things textbooks just can't teach you – it isn't until you've had that hands-on experience do you start to become a better clinician."

Ashlea Mulligan  
Bachelor of Oral Health

## The window to your body's health

Oral health affects everyone every day – and normally most people don't think about it. Good oral health allows you to speak, smile, kiss, smell, taste and chew with self-assurance.

The University of Otago's Bachelor of Oral Health is an exciting three-year degree programme at New Zealand's only Faculty of Dentistry, delivering excellent and innovative education in oral health.

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## Who is an oral health therapist?

An oral health therapist is a highly skilled professional member of the dental team. Oral health therapists have skills in dental hygiene, dental therapy, and oral health promotion. They educate patients about their oral health; preventive care is a key aspect of their work. They are skilled at promoting healthy lifestyles and have a strong awareness of the socio-cultural influences on health. Oral health therapists diagnose and treat oral diseases (such as gum disease and dental decay), and provide quality care for patients of all ages, including restorative care for children and adolescents.

## Why study Oral Health?

Good or bad, oral health impacts on people's daily lives and good oral health can be a big part of living life comfortably. As an oral health therapist, you become part of the dental team, developing the skills to provide dental and periodontal care and to foster lifelong positive oral health attitudes and behaviour in patients. You will also obtain skills in health promotion.

## Background required

In order to study Oral Health, you need to have attained a satisfactory standard in NCEA Level 3 biology or an approved equivalent. You will also need to like working with and caring for people, as well as be reasonably fit and healthy.

## Careers in Oral Health

Graduates will meet the requirements for registration as an oral health therapist. There is a high demand for oral health graduates. Employment opportunities include working in private dental practices, specialist practices, community-based clinics, iwi-based clinics, and hospital dental clinics. Graduates will also be able to apply knowledge about health and disease to health promotion in education, community development,

and public policy. Postgraduate study and research opportunities include the Master of Oral Health (MOH), Master of Health Sciences (MHealSc), Master of Public Health (MPH), and PhD degrees, as well as postgraduate diplomas

## What will I study?

The University of Otago's Bachelor of Oral Health is an exciting three-year degree at New Zealand's only Faculty of Dentistry. The programme delivers excellent and innovative education in oral health. Oral Health students work with undergraduate and postgraduate dental and dental technology students. This is made possible because the programme is delivered from within the Faculty of Dentistry.

From the beginning of your study, you will work as part of a dental team. You will also have constant access to highly qualified specialist staff. Graduates will be leaders in the field because the programme ensures its teaching and research are continually refined and improved to keep in step with oral health best-practice. The programme also focuses on enabling its students to be well-prepared for lifelong, self-directed learning.

In the first year of the degree, you will learn how the body works, particularly how oral tissues interact with their environment. You will learn the most effective use of information technology in the study and practice of oral health, and will complete a paper in Māori Society. Clinical practice begins in the first year as well; when you start to develop your clinical skills using models and phantom heads.

The second year introduces pathology, pharmacology, and medicine relevant to oral health. Students will also study a paper in Sociology and one in Public Health. A large part of the year is spent developing clinical skills by treating patients under supervision.

The third (final) year concentrates on further clinical training, community oral health,

and oral health promotion. You will also undertake a research project.

## Admission to the programme

Entry is competitive. To be admitted to the programme, applicants must be eligible to attend university, and should have attained a satisfactory standard in NCEA Level 3 biology or a recognised equivalent. Online applications can be made to the Health Sciences Admissions Office website from early August, and close on 15 September of the year preceding enrolment. Late applications may be considered.

## How do I apply for admission?

Application information for admission into the Bachelor of Oral Health (BOH) programme is available online:

[otago.ac.nz/healthsciences](https://otago.ac.nz/healthsciences)

For questions about  
Oral Health  
[otago.ac.nz/oralhealth](https://otago.ac.nz/oralhealth)



## PROFILE

### Marija Lovric

Bachelor of Oral Health | Oral Health Therapist

Marija Lovric began her career as a dental assistant – but when she saw “how amazing patients felt after receiving treatment and becoming healthy,” she thought “I wanna do that!”

After enrolling in the Faculty of Dentistry's Bachelor of Oral Health programme, Marija found her studies to be both hard work and very rewarding.

“You get to learn from some amazing people who are always happy to help. Also we had some amazing, supportive tutors who went out of their way to make sure that everyone was on the track,” she says.

Marija speaks fondly of the hands-on clinical experience that is an integral part of the programme. “From simulation clinics to patient clinics, there was never a dull moment,” she says.

“Each patient is different and unique. Our challenge was to create a treatment plan

that met not only their dental needs but also their needs as a person – this was the thing I enjoyed the most.”

During her studies, Marija also had the opportunity to undertake a Summer Research Scholarship, which gave her the chance to undertake dental research during her summer break.

“That made me even more passionate about my career, and also gave me a better understanding of the microbiology side of oral health and what it means to follow evidence-based practice,” she explains.

Now working as an oral health therapist in both private practice and for the Hutt Valley District Health Board, Marija says her Otago training has equipped her well for both roles.

“At Otago, we were exposed to many different dental environments – which makes Otago graduates adaptable and employable.”

