

EHMA 2024

Shaping and managing
innovative health ecosystems

Conceptualising 'essential' in oral health as a basis for defining an essential oral healthcare benefits basket in EU countries

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Background

- The **better integration of Oral Health (OH)** in public health systems is **gaining momentum**, and many countries are **investing efforts to enhance OH coverage**.
- Yet, there is a **lack of consensus** on **defining 'essential' in OH**, which represents a **challenge** when **deciding on a public benefits basket** that promotes **universal health coverage**.

Objective

- To address this research gap by **conceptualising the notion of 'essential' OH care** from the perspectives of both **OH and health system experts** and the **general population** across Europe.

Method

- Exploratory study applying a **qualitative approach**. **Ethically approved** by Newcastle University (Ref: 33388/2023).
- Data collected through in-person and online **Focus Group Discussions** (FGDs) among **OH and health system experts** and the **general population** from eight European countries. **Purposefully sampled** to reach **maximum variation in perspectives** (different country characteristics, roles, ages, and gender).
- **Semi-structured interview guide:**
 1. *What is 'essential' in OH?*
 2. *What is an 'essential' OH service?*
 3. *Which OH services should be publicly covered?*
 4. *Who should be publicly covered?*
- Data were examined through **thematic analysis** based on an **inductive approach**.

Results

	General Population	Experts
Number of FGDs	32	5
Number of Participants	202	29

Country	HU	DE	UK	FR	NL	EE	PT	DK
General Population	142	40	14	6	-	-	-	-
Experts	5	-	5	5	7	2	3	2

Specialized dentists	Dentists	Oral Health hygienist	Public Health	Health Economist	Health System specialist	Law specialist
2	11	1	5	9	1	4

Results

What is essential in OH?

- State of good OH
- Ability to perform essential functions
- Beyond basic needs
- A fluid concept

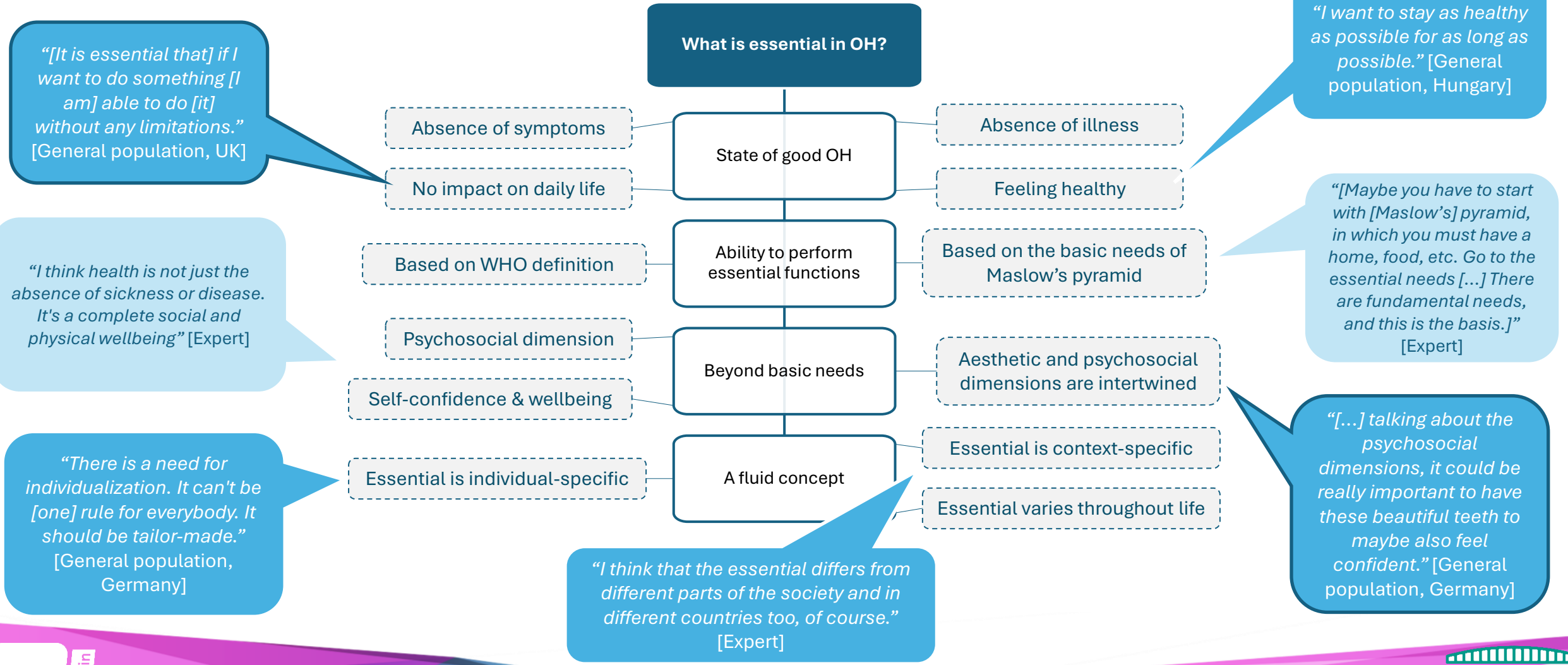
What should be considered to define an essential OH service?

- Contribution to OH
 - People-centred
- Morbidity
 - Societal values
- Economic considerations
 - Feasibility

What is essential for the OH System?

- Good integration between OH and general health
- Well-function (oral) Health System
- Responsiveness

Results

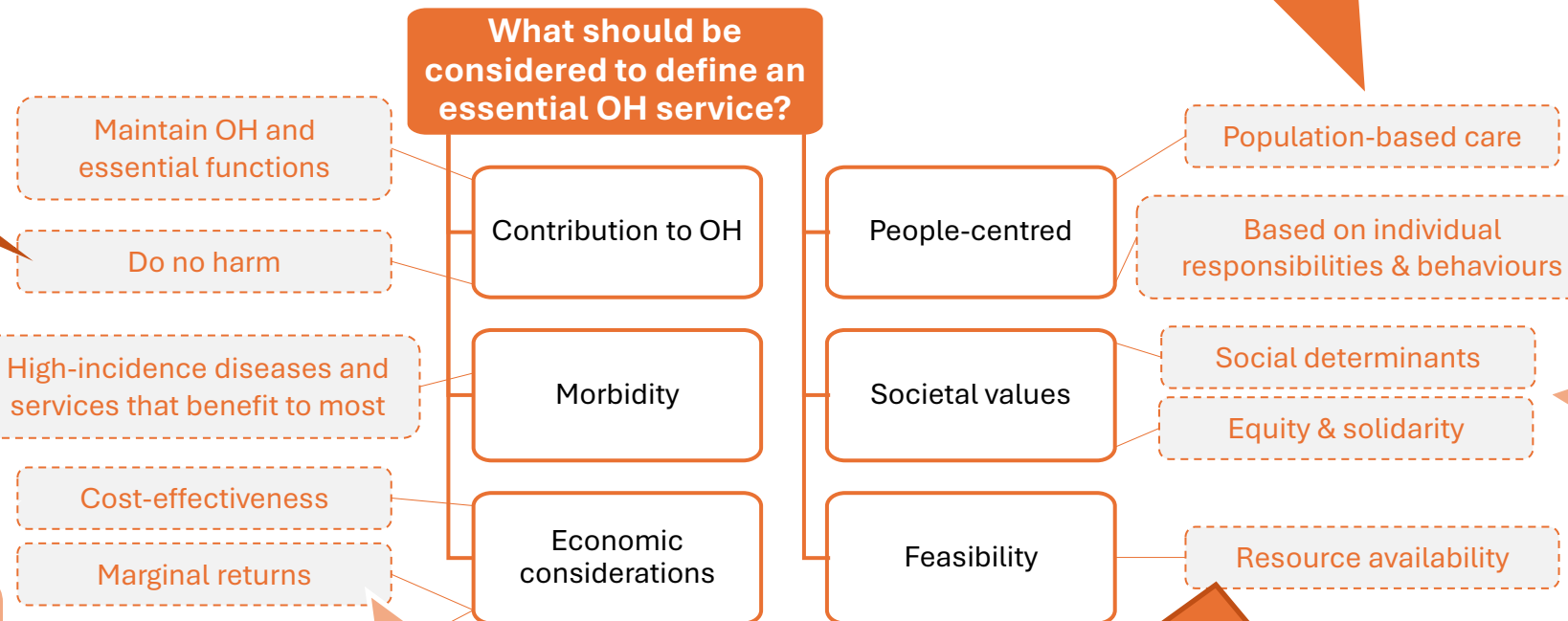


Results

"If there is clear evidence that [an OH service] is doing more harm than good, then [it] should be excluded." [Expert]

"At the level of society as a whole, when examining [OH] financing, it is necessary to look at the incidence of these diseases." [General population, Hungary]

"Detecting early some diseases or problems can save health expenditure later on." [General population, Germany]



"We want to, of course, ensure that the distribution of health care is based on population need." [Expert]

"If you've been given all the advice in the world on how to brush your teeth and still don't do it, then should you have priority?" [Expert]

"Obviously financial situation can be a good starting point [for prioritization] by helping those who are more disadvantaged." [General population, Hungary]

"One big problem is that resources are obviously becoming scarcer and the demand for care is increasing, so sustainability is the issue." [General population, UK]

Results

"We need to move to a point where we include OH in our considerations of overall health care and how much are we willing to pay for our healthcare system. Our willingness to pay shouldn't be for General Healthcare separately and then for oral health care separately."
[Expert]

"Early negative experiences in childhood lead to a decrease in the frequency of visits to the dentist in later life. So if we can gain the patient's trust, they will probably pay [more] attention to visiting the dentist [regularly]." [General population, Hungary]

What is essential for the OH System?

Good integration between OH and general health

Well-functioning (oral) Health System

Responsiveness

Health System functions

Health System objectives

Patients' trust in OH care and professionals

Choice

Transparency

"I think it is about making sure that you only have the treatment that you need, when you need it, and that it is delivered by the right person" [General population, UK]

"[OH] has to be affordable." [General population, UK]

"A transparent system, I think, is very important." [General population, Hungary]

Discussion



This work underscores the **multidimensionality** and **fluidity** of 'essential' OH care.



There is a **duality** in the definition of essential OH care, as it should **ensure vital functions** while also **going beyond** the basic health needs.



Participants' consensual views about the **role of oral aesthetics on psycho-social wellbeing** reveal a **potential discrepancy** between current **OH coverage** and **populations' concerns**.



There is a **myriad of criteria** that can help **define 'essential' OH service** and each country should **choose those that best fit** its values.



Responses reaffirmed that **OH care evolves in a broader health system**, which is **intertwined** and should be **better integrated** with the **general health system**.



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Thank you

Join Lukas Schöner at 9:30 tomorrow in Room 6 for the
second part!

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