



# WORKING TOGETHER

Actively working towards the 2025 National Packaging Targets, Dentalife is a research and development, manufacturing and sustainability specialist of dental and infection control materials in Australia. Although only a small team of 30, the Melbourne based organisation has taken the approach of choosing to “focus on what we can do, in hopes that the smallest actions have the potential to be a ripple effect for change”.

APCO spoke to Dentalife to find out what sustainability means to them, and what support they’ve received from APCO’s resources and programs, as well as from AusIndustry and the Australian Institute of Packaging (AIP) in a Sustainable Packaging Project.

## How important is sustainable packaging to your business?

One of our core beliefs is ‘We are committed to playing our part in a sustainable future’. We understand our responsibility as a manufacturer and are conscious of the waste we leave behind. We have been actively collaborating with our suppliers to find more sustainable ways of packaging our products.

## What were the benefits of participating in the Sustainable Packaging Project?

We had exposure to planning and resources that a small business would otherwise not necessarily have access to. This included:

- Outlined roadmap to, and comprehension of, the 2025 National Packaging Targets.
- “One-to-one hour of power” with an AIP technical packaging expert to advise us on problematic materials.
- Access to workshops and seminars run by AIP.
- Clarity on the Australasian Recycling Label Program (ARL) led by APCO.
- Insight into current industry best practice and what work is being done for materials recycling in Australia.

## How have you engaged with your supply chain for sustainable packaging outcomes?

Most of our end users operate in the medical and/or dental industry where single-use and disposable packaging is highly prevalent. Waste in this industry is often classified as clinical waste and would be incinerated. Moreover, many patient consult rooms barely have the room for a bin, let alone a recycling bin. It became apparent to us that it would be difficult to segregate and recover waste at the end user stage now without any intervention from industry.

Whilst waiting for industry practices to evolve, we decided to shift our focus to sourcing recycled materials and reviewing our internal manufacturing operations to identify opportunities to eliminate waste and reuse wherever possible. We saw this principle adopted by one of our operators in the manufacturing team, who identified that we were throwing away used label cores every day and suggested the idea of returning these to our supplier for reuse. Our supplier was more than open to the idea and as a result started offering this service to their other customers as well.

As a small business, we, alone, would not make a significant impact to supply chains as we do not deal with large volumes. This was an especially proud moment for us as it demonstrated that with collaboration with others in the industry, even a small team like ours, can have a much bigger impact.

## Who champions sustainability within your business?

We’d like to think every Dentalife team member champions sustainability in our team. This was apparent during our most recent quarterly target where we had a goal to achieve at least 15 sustainability initiatives by the end of the quarter. Everyone, regardless of department, came forth with ideas on what sustainable improvements we should be making.

One of the reasons we had success in this was because we made a shift to become a purpose-driven company. Our purpose is, ‘To be a role model for having a positive impact on communities whilst developing the right healthcare solutions’. This purpose serves as our guiding star when making big decisions and small ones as well – from the products we develop to the suppliers we work with and team members we hire.

Collaboration is also essential. Over the years, we have learnt how to lean on one another when we encounter challenges and to empower each other to grow. With the amount of uncertainty and unknowns in the world, it is more crucial than ever for us to be leaning on each other to innovate together.

### More information

- **Dentalife:** <https://www.dentalife.com.au/>
- **Australian Institute of Packaging:** <http://aipack.com.au/>
- **AusIndustry:** <https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs/ausindustry>
- **APCO:** [www.apco.org.au](http://www.apco.org.au)