

20 March 2019



Media release

Dental Association calls for greater low-income adult dental access on World Oral Health Day

The New Zealand Dental Association (NZDA) is calling for better government funding for low-income adults to access dental care this World Oral Health Day (20 March).

NZDA is urging that a better approach is needed for targeting low-income adults who are unable to afford urgent and necessary dental treatment.

“We need to come up with a system that targets the most vulnerable members of society for assistance,” said NZDA President Dr Bill O’Connor.

“World Oral Health Day is a great opportunity to highlight the message that for some people, cost is a key barrier, in accessing dental care.

The data is very clear – New Zealand adults have experienced dramatic improvements in oral health since the 1980s with the lifetime experience of dental decay almost halving in people aged 20 to 24 and 35 to 44.

Whilst approximately half of New Zealand adults see a dentist very regularly - at least annually - many others attend only when they perceive a dental problem is occurring, and particularly low income and no income adults see cost as a significant barrier.

“Some truly cannot afford care, and for these groups we must do better, and that involves working with government on a better deal.”

NZDA’s Position Statement: **Access to Oral Health Services for Low Income Adults** recommends the development of a national action plan to reduce the barriers to access dental care.

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Notes to editors:

NZDA recommends;

- For low-income adults, there is a need to address the financial barriers to accessing oral health care services through public funding which would allow affordable access to oral health care;
- For low-income adults there is a need for creation of new minimum levels of service for publicly-funded oral health programmes and ensure that the resources to meet these standards are made available;
- The patient must pay some kind of cost of the care (i.e. some form of co-payment);
- Adult oral health services are best provided by an oral health team led by dentists;
- There is continuation of advocacy for water fluoridation

- Given the vast majority of oral health care for adults is delivered within the private sector and the public DHB services are focused primarily on meeting high needs and vulnerable patients, it is necessary to work with the private dental sector to devise a system to address financial barriers experienced by low-income adults.

The most recent survey on oral health was the 2009 New Zealand Oral Health Survey, which was the first nationwide survey to collect information on the oral health status of New Zealand adults and children in over 20 years. 4906 New Zealanders participated in the survey interview, with 3196 respondents completing a dental examination.

<https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/our-oral-health-key-findings-2009-new-zealand-oral-health-survey>

The Annual Update of Key Results 2016/17: New Zealand Health Survey included key data on adult and children dental health care worker visits.

<https://www.health.govt.nz/publication/annual-update-key-results-2016-17-new-zealand-health-survey>

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