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Media release

Dentists call for stronger oral health policies following PHAC report

Oral health remains one of New Zealand's most persistent and preventable health challenges, with thousands of Kiwis living with pain, infection, and reduced quality of life.

The Public Health Advisory Committee's (PHAC) new report highlights how health determinants shape wellbeing, and the New Zealand Dental Association (NZDA) says the findings must drive urgent change across all age groups.

The report, [*Determining our Future*](#), stresses that health is not just about access to services, but about the environments in which people live and the choices they are supported to make.

It is a message echoed in NZDA's [*Roadmap Towards Better Oral Health*](#), which calls for stronger investment in prevention, healthier food environments, and community-led solutions.

NZDA Director of Dental Policy, Dr Robin Whyman, said the report provides a valuable framework for progress.

"The report is an important step forward, and rightly highlights that improving health is about more than clinical services," Dr Whyman says.

"A healthy society is also determined by people's environments, their communities, and the choices they are supported to make. Oral health is a fundamental part of overall wellbeing, and we strongly support the report's direction."

While the report only highlights child oral health, NZDA is urging the Government to widen the focus. Many adults are already living with the consequences of untreated oral disease, pain, and social impacts that prevention alone cannot address.

"Prevention and early detection are vitally important, but they cannot be the whole story. Adults who are already living with poor oral health must not be left behind."

Dr Whyman also welcomes the report's recognition of diet and food environments as major determinants of health.

Reducing sugar intake is one of the most effective measures to improve population-wide oral health and a central recommendation of NZDA's *Roadmap*.

"Diet is central to oral health, and creating healthier food environments, especially by reducing sugar consumption, is critical if we are serious about prevention."

Oral health must be treated as inseparable from overall health, so Kiwis everywhere can access the care they need, when and where they need it.

"Poor oral health remains the daily reality for too many New Zealanders. The PHAC report provides a strong framework for change, but its recommendations must be applied in ways that reach all age groups," Dr Whyman says.

"We are ready to work with government, health agencies, and communities to turn the report's recommendations into action and ensure better oral health for all New Zealanders."

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