

18 August 2026

Media release

Dentists put in their own time to reach people the system misses

Dentists are going where the barriers to oral health care are highest, the focus of week three of National Oral Health Month.

Philanthropic support is helping community-led projects reach people the oral health system too often misses.

This year, \$25,000 in Oral Health Education Grants is supporting five projects grounded in the communities they serve.

They include a Talanoa-style education session for Christchurch's Tongan community, training for Auckland City Mission staff, and Te Niho Ora, a Dunedin initiative embedding oral health education into whānau services for Māori and Pasifika families.

These projects sit alongside Dental Aid Grants and Oral Health Access to Care Grants, which help get much-needed dental treatment to people facing the greatest barriers.

But funding alone does not deliver care. Dentists and their teams give up their own time to make it happen.

In 2025 alone, they contributed more than 1,810 volunteer hours and delivered more than \$360,000 worth of dental treatment.

Dr Dave Excell, NZDA President, says these projects show what's possible when people who understand their communities are given the tools to reach them.

"These are small grants, but they go to people who already have the trust of their communities, and that counts for more than money.

"But the grants are only part of the picture. Dentists up and down the country are giving up their own time and covering the cost of care themselves, because otherwise it doesn't happen at all.

"Our report card shows 43% of adults aren't getting the dental care they need because of cost. Dentists are stepping up to close that gap. It shouldn't be down to the profession's goodwill. The gap needs funding support by Government with an aspiration to ensure universal health coverage for oral health care for all of the population"

Throughout the week, NZDA will also be publishing *Day in the Life of a Dentist* videos from practices across the country.

The public can watch and take part at <https://nohm.nzda.org.nz/week-3tagging>, tagging @nzdahealthysmiles with #Connect and #NOHM26.

The week also spotlights the advocacy work NZDA members are doing ahead of the 2026 election, from MP meetings to sharing the 2026 Oral Health Report Card in their communities.

NZDA Chief Executive Dr Mo Amso says members are stepping up.

"Our members are meeting MPs, sharing the report card in their communities, and putting the case for oral health directly to the people who can change it.

"With an election coming up, we want oral health on the agenda, not left off it again."

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