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Media release

Dentists name three fixes for the next government

Dentists want the next government to secure young people's dental care, help those who find it hardest to get treatment, and train more dentists.

Dr Dave Excell, President of New Zealand Dental Association (NZDA), says all three can be done without overhauling the system.

"They come straight from our NZDA Roadmap and Report Card. Whoever is in government after 7 November, we want to see them get on with it."

Most dental care for 13- to 18-year-olds is provided by private dentists under the Combined Dental Agreement. The percentage of teenagers getting that care has not increased since 2013.

Dr Robin Whyman, Director of Dental Policy, says the agreement needs fixing so dentists can keep seeing teenagers.

"We support the work to improve care for all children and young people, and the agreement is a key part that needs attention.

"It has to be properly funded, fit for purpose and sustainable, for patients and for the dentists who provide the care."

New Zealand has 53 full-time dentists for every 100,000 people aged 15 and over, and almost one in five private practices has a dentist vacancy it can't fill.

"Oral health therapist training numbers are going up, and that's good. The gap is New Zealand training for dentists, and we can't close it without lifting the cap on training places."

Cost is the biggest barrier for adults. NZDA's *2026 Oral Health Report Card* found 43% of adults, around 1.775 million people, say cost stops them getting the dental care they need.

The public hospital waiting list for adult dental care barely moved in a year, from 1,348 to 1,274.

Dr Whyman says the place to start is the people with the greatest problems with access and the highest needs.

"Targeted, funded care for young adults and for seniors is practical and fiscally responsible. It stops small problems turning into big, expensive ones, and it needs to be sustainable so people can rely on it."

NZDA's *Roadmap Towards Better Oral Health for New Zealand* and the *2026 Oral Health Report Card* are at roadmap.nzda.org.nz.

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