



NZDA Members' Advocacy Kit



Election 2026: Supporting the Roadmap Towards Better Oral Health for New Zealanders

NZDA's Advocacy Strategy for 2026

New Zealand is facing a worsening oral health challenge and too many New Zealanders suffer from poor oral health.

Many New Zealanders live with untreated dental disease, hospital admissions for preventable oral conditions continue to rise, and longstanding inequities affect Māori, Pacific peoples, disabled people, older adults, and those living in high-deprivation areas.

These issues translate to dentists in practice who frequently see people with difficult oral health issues that are difficult to address properly within existing systems.

NZDA is focused on making the case that the country's oral health is becoming a national health priority that Government can't continue to ignore.

The *NZDA Roadmap Towards Better Oral Health for New Zealanders* sets out a clear, evidence-based plan to fix this. It was developed after a year of conversations, meetings and consultation with our members. It outlines practical solutions Government can adopt now to significantly improve oral health outcomes across the country.

As we approach the 2026 General Election, NZDA is stepping up its advocacy to ensure that:

- Oral health is recognised as a national health priority,
- Government adopts policies that support a sustainable, equitable oral health system, and New Zealanders can access the dental care they need, when they need it.

But we cannot lead sector advocacy alone. Our members are NZDA's strongest voice, respected professionals embedded in communities, trusted by patients, and connected to local candidates and decision-makers.

This kit gives you the tools to support NZDA's election advocacy:

- Three clear advocacy positions drawn from the *Roadmap*
- Links to seven standalone position papers drawn from the *Roadmap* and that support the advocacy positions
- A set of ready-to-use talking points that reflect and simplify our advocacy positions and position papers
- Guidance on how to engage with MPs, candidates, media, and your community

Our goal is simple:

To ensure the next Government commits to oral health as a core health policy priority, and takes real action using the *NZDA Roadmap*. Government must implement the *Roadmap* now if it's serious about fixing our bleak and worsening oral health stats.



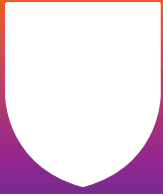
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NZDA's Three Advocacy Positions:

These three positions guide NZDA's election advocacy and are the most effective messages for influencing political parties and policymakers. They mirror the structure of the *Roadmap* and reflect the strongest evidence-based actions Government can take.

Advocacy Position 1: Build a Prevention-First Oral Health System

Our position

Prevention is the foundation of good oral health and the most cost-effective way to reduce disease and inequity.

The problem

New Zealand has extremely high rates of preventable tooth decay. Only around half the population has access to fluoridated water, sugar consumption remains high, and oral health promotion is inconsistent and under-resourced.

The background

Tooth decay is our most common chronic disease. Prevention measures – fluoridation, sugar reduction, and early education – are proven to reduce disease and save money.

The solution

Government must:

- Expand community water fluoridation
- Improve food policy to reduce sugar consumption
- Invest in national oral health promotion
- Provide consistent oral health education across communities, schools and ECE

[Read the full Prevention Position Paper](#)



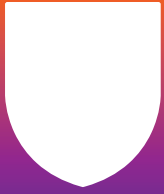
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Advocacy Position 2: Ensure Fair, Timely & Equitable Access to Oral Health Care

Our position

Every New Zealander deserves access to timely, affordable, high-quality oral health care.

The problem

Cost is the number-one barrier to dental care. More than half of low-income adults avoid care, tens of thousands of children are overdue for scheduled visits, and older adults, disabled people and rural communities face persistent barriers.

The background

Inequities in oral health are stark. Long delays, high costs, poor service integration and under-resourced hospital dental units all contribute to avoidable suffering.

The solution

Government must:

- Recognise oral health as essential health care
- Target funding toward high-need groups
- Modernise child and adolescent oral health services
- Build consistent hospital and community pathways for people with disabilities and complex needs
- Develop a national oral health policy for older adults
- Align funding across Health, ACC, and MSD

[Read the full Access to Care Position Paper](#)

[Read the full Older Adults Position Paper](#)

[Read the full Complex Needs Position Paper](#)



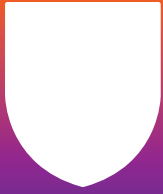
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Advocacy Position 3: Build a Strong, Future-Ready Oral Health System

Our position

New Zealand needs a sustainable, well-supported dental workforce and strong clinical leadership to drive system improvement.

The problem

Workforce shortages, under-representation of Māori and Pacific practitioners, burnout pressures, and weak governance structures all undermine service quality and access.

The background

There is no dedicated oral health unit within the Ministry of Health or Health NZ. New Zealand lacks a national oral health strategy and has fragmented data systems.

The solution

Government must:

- **Expand the number of training places for New Zealanders to train in dentistry and grow the workforce pipeline**
- **Improve regional distribution and workforce retention**
- **Embed clinician wellbeing into health workforce planning**
- **Re-establish oral health leadership structures across the system**
- **Build a national oral health strategy with strong governance and reliable data**

[Read the full Workforce Position Paper](#)

[Read the full Clinical Governance Position Paper](#)

[Read the full Data & Digital Position Paper](#)



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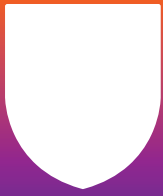
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NZDA Members' Talking Points

Members can use these when emailing MPs, meeting candidates, speaking to media, or advocating locally. Each is in **PREP** format (**P**oint – **R**eason – **E**xample – **P**araphrase)

[General Roadmap] Poor oral health is a problem for too many New Zealanders

Point:

Too many New Zealanders suffer from poor oral health – it's time to recognise oral health as a national health priority, hence the *NZDA Roadmap* which details strategies and actions to improve New Zealanders' oral health.

Reason:

Poor oral health affects everything from nutrition to employability and school attendance, yet it's been nearly 20 years since Government last had a clear plan for oral health.

Example:

The *NZDA Roadmap* shows one in three adults live with untreated decay, over 9,000 children need hospital surgery each year for rotten teeth, and oral health inequities continue to widen.

Paraphrase:

Oral health isn't a nice-to-have, it's a core part of overall health and wellbeing, and Government must start treating it that way.

[General Roadmap] Oral health inequities are unfair and avoidable

Point:

Oral health inequities between population groups are unacceptable and preventable.

Reason:

Māori, Pacific, disabled people, low-income communities and the dependent elderly experience the worst oral health outcomes – the result of systemic neglect and unequal access to care.

Example:

The *NZDA Roadmap* shows Pacific children are twice as likely to have teeth removed as non-Māori, non-Pacific children, and people in high-deprivation areas are three times more likely to need hospital treatment for decay.

The New Zealand Older People's Oral Health Survey showed 60% of older people in residential care and 40% of older living at home, with home-based support, had untreated dental decay.

Paraphrase:

Oral health equity isn't optional, it's a moral and public health imperative.

[General Roadmap] Government action now will deliver long-term benefits

Point:

Investing in oral health now, as outlined in the *NZDA Roadmap*, will pay social, political and fiscal dividends.

Reason:

Preventive oral health policies save millions in hospital costs, improve economic and social productivity, and enhance public confidence in the health system.

Example:

Implementing the *NZDA Roadmap*, especially around prevention, access and workforce – will reduce the burden of disease, support economic productivity, and improve New Zealanders' quality of life.

Paraphrase:

Fixing oral health isn't just good health policy – it's smart economics and smart politics.



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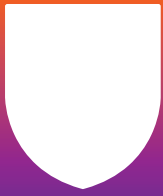
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NZDA Members' Talking Points ...

[Workforce] We need a stronger, better-supported dental workforce

Point:

New Zealand's oral health workforce is stretched thin and needs urgent investment to keep pace with demand.

Reason:

The number of dentists isn't keeping up with population growth, rural and provincial communities can't attract practitioners, and Māori and Pacific dentists remain under-represented.

Example:

The *NZDA Roadmap* highlights that the dentist-to-population ratio has actually declined in recent years, and Health NZ identified hundreds of vacancies for oral health therapists in the 2023-2024 Health Workforce Plan.

Paraphrase:

If we want equitable, timely dental care, we must rebuild and sustain all of the oral health workforce that delivers it.

[Prevention] Prevention is smarter – and cheaper – than treatment

Point:

We can't drill our way out of New Zealand's oral health crisis; prevention is key.

Reason:

Tooth decay is our most common chronic disease, but it's largely preventable through fluoridation, improved food policies that reduce sugar intake, and early oral health education.

Example:

Only half of New Zealanders have access to fluoridated water, and high sugar drinks and foods remain widely marketed to children. Both major drivers of tooth decay.

Paraphrase:

Prevention pays off. Fewer fillings, fewer hospitalisations, and fewer kids and adults in pain.

[Access to dental care] It shouldn't depend on your income or postcode

Point:

Every New Zealander deserves access to affordable, quality oral health care.

Reason:

Cost is the main barrier to care for adults, and too many children miss out because of delays or workforce shortages.

Example:

More than half of low-income adults skip dental visits because of cost, and one third of New Zealand's children are overdue for care, even though it's meant to be free and universally accessible.

Paraphrase:

Dental care shouldn't be a luxury. We need a fair system that ensures access based on need, not income.

[Older Adults] Oral health is essential to ageing well

Point:

Good oral health is vital to nutrition, communication and dignity in later life.

Reason:

Older people now keep more of their natural teeth, but many live with untreated decay and pain.

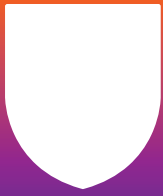
Example:

The Older People's Oral Health Survey found 61% of those in residential care had untreated decay, yet there is no national oral health policy for older adults.

Paraphrase:

Oral health must be recognised as part of healthy aging. It's not an optional extra.





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NZDA Members' Talking Points ...

[Older Adults]

They face systemic access barriers

Point:

Too many older New Zealanders cannot access dental care when they need it.

Reason:

Cost, transport, mobility and limited outreach services make routine care impossible for many.

Example:

Many aged-care facilities have no access to visiting dentists and no mandatory oral health plans.

Paraphrase:

It's time to build dental care into aged-care, not leave it to chance.

[Older Adults] ***Health care integration will deliver better outcomes for older adults***

Point:

Oral health for older adults should be integrated into wider health and aged-care services.

Reason:

Dentists are often disconnected from medical, nursing and social care teams.

Example:

Oral health assessments aren't routinely done on entry to residential care, despite proven links between oral disease, aspiration pneumonia and malnutrition.

Paraphrase:

By connecting oral health with the rest of the system, we can prevent hospitalisations and improve quality of life.

[Complex Health Needs & Disabilities]

These people face sizeable barriers

Point:

People with disabilities and complex health conditions face some of the greatest barriers to dental care in New Zealand.

Reason:

Services are fragmented and underfunded, with hospital units stretched and community practices often unable to meet complex needs.

Example:

The *NZDA Roadmap* highlights wide regional variation in hospital dental availability and workforce shortages that leave many without access to essential care.

Paraphrase:

Oral health care for people with disabilities isn't a luxury, it's a basic health right, and the system must connect so no one is left behind.

[Clinical Governance & Leadership]

We need more and better

Point:

Oral health needs a seat at the clinical leadership table – without it, oral health remains invisible in national health policy.

Reason:

There's no dedicated oral health unit in the Ministry of Health or Health NZ, and current clinical leadership roles are under-resourced.

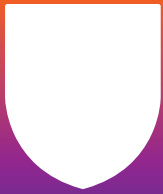
Example:

The *NZDA Roadmap* notes that the Ministry of Health's national oral health leader role was reduced in 2024, leaving very little capacity to guide policy or strategy.

Paraphrase:

It's time to bring oral health into the heart of the health system, with leadership that can make it count.





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NZDA Members' Talking Points ...

[Data & Digital]

More investment needed

Point:

Oral health data in New Zealand is fragmented and disconnected from the wider digital health information system, and that must be remedied.

Reason:

Without shared records and integrated data, dentists can't easily coordinate care or contribute to population-level health planning.

Example:

The *NZDA Roadmap* highlights that national oral health monitoring currently covers only children, leaving major gaps in adult and service data.

Paraphrase:

We can't provide safe care to all of the community without access to the information – connecting oral health data will help deliver smarter, fairer, more joined-up care.

How NZDA Members Can Advocate

Members' voices are powerful. Here are practical ways to support NZDA's election advocacy:

- 1. Arrange a meeting or site visit with your local MP or candidate**
 - Show them your practice
 - Discuss challenges patients face
 - Use the talking points to guide the conversation
- 2. Attend election community meetings**
 - Ask candidates what they will do to improve oral health access and outcomes.
- 3. Write to MPs and candidates**
 - Use the talking points and attach relevant NZDA position papers.
- 4. Promote the Roadmap locally**
 - Share messages on social media, in local networks, and in community newsletters.
- 5. Participate in National Oral Health Month 2026**
 - Help raise public awareness and support NZDA's advocacy objective.
- 6. Share your stories with NZDA**
 - Member insights help shape NZDA's advocacy programme.

Conclusion

NZDA is trusted as an influential and authoritative thought-leader on issues relating to oral health and oral health policy in New Zealand, and we are recognised as the 'go-to commentator' for those seeking credible, to-the-point commentary on oral health issues.

We have published the Roadmap as a clear, evidence-based 'blueprint' of practical solutions Government can put in place now to fix the poor state of oral health affecting so many New Zealanders.

With your support we can move the conversations to your local communities and to your local representatives. Your support is important to NZDA ensuring that oral health is finally recognised as a national health priority and that the next Government commits to implementing the *Roadmap*.

Thank you for standing with us, and for using your voice to drive meaningful change.



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