

New Zealand Dental Association

Roadmap

Towards Better Oral Health for New Zealand



Summary



**New Zealand
Dental Assoc.**

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NZDA.org.nz

2025-2030

Introduction

The New Zealand Dental Association (NZDA) represents over 98% of dentists and dental specialists in New Zealand and actively promotes evidence-based policies for oral health care and equity.

The NZDA believes oral health is a human right which also affects a person's general health. Unfortunately, the oral health of some New Zealanders is affected by high levels of oral diseases, especially dental decay.

There are longstanding and persistent inequalities in oral health, including significant disparities affecting Māori and Pacific communities, major gaps in service delivery, growing workforce issues, public policy settings that obstruct best practice oral health care, and the absence of a contemporary national oral health strategy.

The *Roadmap* outlines the state of oral health in New Zealand and draws on national and international evidence to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based platform for improving it.

The NZDA hopes this *Roadmap* will be a catalyst for political, clinical, and community engagement to help bring about systemic change.

It promotes this *Roadmap* as a framework that will help ensure good oral health for all New Zealanders.

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Current State of Oral Health in New Zealand

Many oral conditions are preventable, but the state of oral health in New Zealand reveals significant issues, including high rates of untreated dental decay and gum disease.

- In 2023/2024, 321,000 adults and 31,000 children had teeth removed due to decay, abscesses, infection or gum diseases. Tooth decay, which is largely preventable, is the most common chronic disease in New Zealand.
- 19% of children suffer from molar hypomineralization (a condition where teeth have reduced mineral content in their enamel, making them softer and more prone to decay and breakdown), contributing to early tooth loss.
- Early childhood oral health has not improved significantly in 15 years.
- Many oral diseases impact the health and wellbeing of Māori and Pacific people, people with disabilities and people with low incomes disproportionately.
- Children in high deprivation areas are over three times more likely to have teeth removed.
- Oral conditions have risk factors in common with other chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and respiratory diseases.



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Strategic Priorities

The *Roadmap* examines the key issues affecting the state of oral health in New Zealand and outlines the NZDA's position and recommendations on each. The NZDA considers three areas to be particular priorities:

Future-proofing New Zealand's Oral Health Workforce

- The dental workforce is spread unevenly around New Zealand. Some regions, particularly rural areas, have minimal numbers of dentists, and Māori and Pacific peoples make up only a small number within the general dental workforce.
- Declining numbers of dental therapists, changing scopes of practice for oral health therapists and workforce shortages in publicly-funded dental care are impacting access to dental care for children.
- NZDA calls for an increased number of Government-funded dental student positions, to improve representation of Māori and Pacific people in the dentist and dental specialist workforces, improve the regional distribution, and to improve low baseline levels of access to dental care.
- The *Roadmap* also recommends actions to improve wellness within the workforce, to establish appropriate sector leadership within Health NZ and the Ministry of Health, and it wants oral health to be considered central to policy development in the health sector and across Government.
- The NZDA also recommends more use of data and digital services to create system efficiencies, to improve the connection of oral health systems to wider health information, to enhance patient care outcomes and to improve population oral health monitoring.

Tackling the Major Risk Factors Impacting New Zealanders' Oral Health

- The NZDA strongly supports Community Water Fluoridation (CWF) as an effective, safe, and affordable public health measure, endorses fluoridated toothpastes and recommends their use for all ages.
- The *Roadmap* advocates for the introduction of a levy to reduce the consumption of sugary drinks.
- It also wants measures to better control advertising and marketing of sugary drinks, and the introduction of policies that encourage, and in some cases mandate, healthier alternatives.
- The *Roadmap* highlights the oral health dangers of tobacco, and supports smoking cessation tools, including vaping, but with stronger regulations to minimise youth vaping.
- It supports alcohol cessation programmes, such as measures to reduce alcohol harm among at-risk groups, including Māori, Pacific people and the less socio-economically advantaged. This includes steps to limit alcohol advertising and sponsorship.
- The NZDA also notes the importance of investing in oral health research that supports population health, workforce development and improved clinical practice.

Removing Access to Care Barriers and Inequities

- The cost of dental care is a significant issue for many New Zealanders; 52% of people in high deprivation areas avoid dental care due to cost. There are particular access inequities for young people and Māori and Pacific children.
- The NZDA supports the goal of 'equal access to oral health services for all populations'.
- It wants targeted preventative care for children, adolescents and young adults at particular risk.
- It advocates for –
 - funding of dental care for young adults
 - designing dental service models relevant to specific communities and for high-need population groups
 - introducing adult oral health care programmes that meet the needs of local communities and high-need population groups
- The *Roadmap* supports considering dependent older adults as a vulnerable population group when designing, funding, and delivering oral health programmes.
- It also supports the professional development of general dentists, specialist dentists, and oral health professionals who support people with disabilities and complex health needs.



Conclusion: Delivering Optimal Oral Health for All

The publication of the *NZDA Roadmap Towards Better Oral Health for New Zealand 2025-2030* reflects both the profession's growing concern about the unequal state of New Zealanders' oral health, and the sense of responsibility New Zealand dentists share to provide well-reasoned, evidence-based solutions.

The *Roadmap* stresses that oral health contributes to a person's overall health. Investing in it will have far-reaching benefits, improving quality of life, particularly for those most at risk. It would also relieve pressure, and reduce costs across the health system.

The *Roadmap* identifies the key issues and outlines a comprehensive series of practical, scalable interventions, including three priorities:

- The introduction of workforce development measures.
- Changes to population health policy settings.
- Breaking down access to care barriers.

The NZDA believes this *Roadmap* provides a platform for policy development, sector collaboration, and system transformation. With renewed political commitment, resourcing, and clinical leadership, the FDI World Dental Federation's vision of "Delivering Optimal Oral Health for All" can become a reality.

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Queries and Comments

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