

Our position

Accurate, connected and secure oral health data is essential to improving care, planning services and informing public policy. But, New Zealand's oral health information systems are fragmented, outdated and poorly connected to the wider health system.

Dentists, oral health professionals and policymakers lack access to reliable, timely data that could drive equity and quality improvement.

The NZDA is calling for an integrated digital ecosystem that connects dental practices to the national health system, supports evidence-based care, and enables better outcomes for patients and communities.

The problem

Oral health data in New Zealand exists in silos. Information on children's oral health is collected through public programmes, while adult data is sparse and inconsistent. Many practices operate independent management systems that are not linked to Health NZ's wider digital infrastructure.

This fragmentation makes it difficult to track population trends, plan workforce needs, or assess whether oral health services are reaching those most in need. It also means critical information about a patient's health that is needed to improve the quality of care – such as medications, medical conditions or allergies – is not easily shared between dental and medical providers.

The absence of connected systems often leaves oral health professionals working in the dark and weakens New Zealand's ability to plan and deliver equitable, efficient oral healthcare.

The background

The *NZDA Roadmap Towards Better Oral Health* notes that population-level oral health data is limited, inconsistent and poorly integrated into national health information systems. National monitoring is limited to five-year-olds and Year 8 children, with little ongoing surveillance of adults.

Dental workforce data is similarly patchy, and there is no comprehensive national view of oral health service delivery, outcomes or need. As a result, decisions about funding, prevention, and workforce development are often made without solid evidence.

Emerging technologies such as AI and predictive analytics offer significant opportunities to improve diagnosis, treatment planning and population-level insights. However, without clear governance, interoperability and data protections, these tools risk being under-used or misused.

The NZDA supports strong data governance, interoperability between dental and wider health systems, and investment in digital infrastructure to bring oral health into the modern health data landscape.

The solution

- **Build connected systems:** integrate oral health data into the national health information architecture so dental professionals can securely share and access relevant health information across providers.
- **Improve surveillance:** establish national oral health data collection across all age groups, with consistent indicators to track outcomes, equity and service coverage.
- **Support digital transformation:** invest in modern practice management systems, secure data exchange standards and interoperability that allow dentists to connect with Health NZ's platforms.
- **Strengthen governance:** create clear national protocols for data privacy, access, and ethical use of digital tools such as artificial intelligence in dentistry.
- **Empower decision-making:** ensure data insights are used to guide prevention strategies, workforce planning and public health policy.

The NZDA is urging this Government, and future Governments, to ensure oral health data is connected with the wider health system. This will enable New Zealand to move from reactive care to proactive prevention, and from isolated practice to integrated, people-centred healthcare.