

Our position

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

As important as it is, prevention of oral diseases isn't just about brushing teeth. It's about healthy communities, good nutrition, and policy settings that protect health from the start.

NZDA calls for a renewed national focus on prevention through community water fluoridation, food policies that reduce sugar consumption, and strong public health programmes that make healthy choices easy for every New Zealander.

The problem

Many oral health problems in New Zealand are preventable.

Tooth decay, for example, remains the country's most common chronic disease. It affects one in three adults and one in three children. 9,000 children annually require surgery for decay.

Without stronger prevention policies, many children and adults will continue to need dental treatment in clinics across New Zealand, and hospital admissions for dental disease will continue to rise. This is all putting avoidable pressure on the health system.

The background

The evidence is clear: community water fluoridation, daily use of fluoride toothpaste (NZDA recommends all toothpastes contain at least 1,000 ppm fluoride), and reduced sugar intake prevent dental decay and save money.

Yet, just 60 per cent of the population has access to fluoridated water, and sugar remains over-consumed and under-regulated. New Zealand is the third most obese nation in the OECD, and sugary drinks are highlighted as a key driver of obesity, diabetes, and dental decay.

The solution

- Expand community water fluoridation: ensure all New Zealanders have access to optimally fluoridated water, where it is technically possible.
- Implement stronger food policies that focus on reducing sugar intake: including sugary-drink levies, advertising limits, and "water-only" policies in schools and council facilities.
- Invest in oral health promotion: nationwide campaigns that normalise prevention and make healthy habits easy and maintain the focus on good oral health.
- Support oral health education in communities and schools: giving every child the best start in life.

Prevention is smart policy: it reduces the level of oral disease, it reduces hospitalisations for dental care, improves wellbeing, and ensures every dollar spent delivers lasting health benefits for all New Zealanders.

The NZDA is urging the incoming Government to include oral health prevention measures in core health policy.