

FDI POLICY STATEMENT

Lifelong Oral Health

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CONTEXT

Maintaining lifelong oral health, encompassing functional, psychosocial, and structural integrity of the mouth and teeth, is fundamental to the improvement of quality of life, overall health, well-being, and full participation in society across the life course^{1,2}. Globalization, urbanization, evolving social norms, and technological advancements are shaping health behaviors and influencing the prevalence and management of oral and general health conditions³. The public health response should take these emerging challenges into account to inform policies that promote lifelong, person-centered oral health and its integration within overall health⁴.

SCOPE

Oral health should be embedded within comprehensive healthy-life strategies as an essential determinant of quality of life. Implementation requires adaptable health systems, integrated long-term care structures, and coordinated action among stakeholders across sectors and government levels to ensure accessible, equitable, and sustainable healthcare for all^{4,5}.

DEFINITION

Lifelong oral health aims to maintain good oral health and optimal quality of life through health promotion, risk assessment, disease prevention, early diagnosis, and intervention at all stages of life. The goal of reaching advanced age with a functional dentition is feasible if preventive measures and oral healthcare are accessible throughout life.

PRINCIPLES

This policy statement calls for the integration of oral health into general health and the promotion of a sustainable and universal health-coverage system at each stage of life. This approach includes prioritizing disease prevention and improving access to equitable health care, contributing greater well-being for all.

POLICY

FDI advocates educating, promoting, and raising awareness of oral health and its impact on general health and well-being throughout life⁴⁻⁶. FDI also supports political, legislative, and decision-making processes that enhance oral health promotion and care⁷. The risk of developing caries, periodontal disease, or oral cancer in adulthood is influenced not only by prevailing risk factors, but also by exposures during the prenatal period, childhood, and adolescence^{8, 9}.

Governments, non-governmental organizations, National Dental Associations, communities, and individuals should therefore create supportive environments, supported by adequate resources and sustainable financing¹⁰, for advancing oral health and well-being at all stages of life, for example by:

- **Public policies:** Considering oral health in all public policies— including nutrition, tobacco control, sugar reduction, and healthy ageing policies.
- **Disease prevention:** Strengthening the prevention of non-communicable diseases by integrating oral health promotion into general health initiatives and addressing shared risk factors such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet, and harmful alcohol consumption.
- **Community settings:** Promoting lifelong prevention in key community settings such as public health centers, schools, workplaces, and long-term care facilities.
- **Accessibility:** Urging national insurance providers and non-governmental funders to support regular access to care for people of all ages.
- **Special healthcare:** Supporting people with special healthcare needs by preserving or enhancing their oral function through training professional and family caregivers responsible for daily oral hygiene.
- **Primary oral healthcare:** Ensuring that essential oral health services are integrated within primary health care systems, promoting interdisciplinary collaboration and prevention-oriented approaches adapted to national contexts.
- **Dentist and dental team leadership:** Recognizing and strengthening the leadership role of dentists and the dental team in advocating for oral health, delivering preventive and therapeutic care, and contributing to health system planning and policy development.

KEYWORDS

Lifelong oral health, quality of life, health promotion, primary health care.

DISCLAIMER

The information in this Policy Statement was based on the best scientific evidence available at the time. It may be interpreted to reflect prevailing cultural sensitivities, socio-economic realities, and evolving international public health strategies.

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