

	Title: Position Statement 5: Oral Health Promotion	
	Date Reviewed: September 2014	Version PS5.14.0
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## Oral Health Promotion

### Position Statement/Media Release

#### Media release statement;

The Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association (ADOHTA) holds the view that the promotion of oral health should be seen as the aim of every public and oral health organisation and that dental and oral health therapists have both skills and expertise in this field. ADOHTA supports an articulated, collaborative and integrated approach to the promotion of oral health and endorses the implementation of the National Oral Health Plan.

#### Detailed position statement

Oral health is a fundamental element of a person's general health and is integral to their ability to eat, speak and socialise, and to their quality of life. Although oral diseases are considered to be mostly preventable, large inequalities exist in oral health status in communities and many people across Australia still suffer from discomfort and pain associated with oral diseases<sup>1</sup>. The ADOHTA acknowledges that oral health is integral to the health and well being of an individual and that a person's health has multiple causes and is determined by their social, cultural and economic circumstances, their physical and psychological well being, their environment and by the demands of their day to day circumstances<sup>2,3</sup>.

In recognition of the limited ability of health education and clinical treatment to effect improvements in oral health status, it is critical that approaches that address the determinants of health be adopted at many levels. Oral health promotion is an approach that works with policy, environments, intersect orally, with communities, organisations, health and education services and individuals and their families to improve oral health and reduce the need and demand for dental services across the whole population.

It is acknowledged that many health promotion interventions will also address oral health through common risk factor approaches such as diet and nutrition interventions, health and welfare funding, housing, education and early childhood interventions. While we strongly support common risk factor approaches and the inclusion of oral health in general health promotion, it is important that the profile of oral health is not diminished as a component of general health plans. Oral health promotion that is integrated into general health programs and recognises the mouth as an intrinsic component of a person's body and their health represent natural, holistic and best practice approaches<sup>4</sup>.

ADOHTA holds the view that oral health promotion should be seen as part of every local, state and territory health agency plan, and that dental and oral health therapists have skills and expertise in this field. Oral health agencies should support dental and oral health therapists' role in and ability to collaborate with different general health program areas to maximize impact with the overarching aim of reducing health inequalities and improving overall general health.

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In promoting oral health, the Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association endorses the principles of the Ottawa Charter for health promotion<sup>5</sup> and acknowledges that while these principles underpin good health promotion practice, there are many models of health promotion which will influence locally designed practice and health outcomes.

The tools available to promote oral health include primary, secondary and tertiary interventions. The focus of dental and oral therapists' work is in primary health care. This approach acknowledges the balance between the needs of the population and the demands of individuals for oral health care, collaborates across health professions and between communities and organisations, build oral health capacity and mediates to create environments which support oral health. It also supports the role of the dental therapist as an advocate for improved oral health for the community.

Oral health promotion programs should have a needs based focus and seek to form inter-sectoral and health network partnerships to maximise impact and the use of resources and be designed with sustainability in mind. The choice of a population or targeted high risk approach should be determined only following needs analysis which identifies barriers to improving oral health, understands the target group and its social and environmental influences and draws upon the evidence for effectiveness. Programs should seek to employ a range of strategies including and exceeding those of health education and should be rigorously evaluated. Evaluation must be based on improved health outcomes and should be published to foster a best practice approach<sup>6</sup>. There are many resources available to support these approaches some of which are listed at the end of this document.

The ADOHTA holds the view that the promotion of oral health should be seen as the aim of every public and oral health organisation and that dental and oral health therapists have both skills and expertise in this field. ADOHTA supports an articulated, collaborative and integrated approach to promoting oral health and endorses the National Oral Health Plan and supports its implementation.

#### **Recommendations:**

1. That the importance of oral health promotion be recognised and funded as a strategic approach to improving the oral health of Australia's community
2. That the expertise of dental and oral health therapists in oral health promotion be recognised and utilised by the community.
3. That dental and oral health therapists be supported by their employing organisations to participate in collaborative approaches to promoting oral health as part of their role.
4. That the current National Oral Health Plan be actively and collaboratively implemented across Australia

#### **References**

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#### Resources

The National Oral Health Promotion Clearinghouse at:

[www.adelaide.edu.au/oral-health-promotion](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/oral-health-promotion)

Department of Human Services (2003) Integrated Health Promotion: A Practical Guide for Service Providers, DHS Victoria available on line at: <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/phkb>

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If you can't find it using the direct address, go to <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au> then publications/health promotion/ F for Framework...

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