

# Lifelong Oral Health

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## Context

People are living longer worldwide. Maintaining lifelong oral health<sup>1</sup> contributes to an improved quality of life and well-being<sup>2</sup>. Globalization, urbanization and changing social norms, and technological developments are influencing health behavior<sup>3</sup>. The public health response should be to take these major changes into consideration in order to frame policies.

## Scope

Oral health must be integrated into a healthy-life approach that spans all stages of life. This approach will require an adaptation of health systems, as well as the development of comprehensive systems of long-term care, which includes a coordinated response from other sectors and at various levels of government<sup>4</sup>.

## Definition

**Lifelong oral health** aims to maintain good oral health and an optimal quality of life<sup>4</sup> through oral health promotion, risk assessment, disease prevention, early diagnosis and intervention at all stages of life. The goal of reaching as advanced an age as possible with a full set of teeth is feasible, if preventive measures and oral healthcare are available through life<sup>5</sup>.

## Principles

This policy statement calls for an integrated health approach at each stage of life<sup>6</sup> and in all oral health training at institutional levels, workplaces and living environments.

## Policy

FDI advocates educating, promoting and raising awareness of oral health and its impact on general health and well-being through all stages of life. FDI also supports all political, legislative, and decision-making processes related to improving oral health promotion and care throughout life. The risk of caries development and/or periodontal disease and oral cancer in adulthood is not only determined by prevailing risk factors, but also by factors in the prenatal period, childhood or adolescence.

Governments, non-governmental organizations, National Dental Associations, communities and individuals should create supportive environments for advancing oral health and well-being through all stages of life, for example by:

- Considering health in all public policies – i.e. nutrition, smoking, and sugar policy
- Strengthening prevention of chronic diseases and oral diseases by integrating oral health into general health promotion activities.

- Using the common risk factors approach in combating non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
- Encouraging the development of a lifelong preventive approach to good oral health in main community settings such as nursing homes, schools, workplaces, senior homes, nursing homes.
- Requesting that national insurance services/companies or any non-governmental funding support regular access to care (as determined by risk assessment research) for all age groups.
- Targeting people with special healthcare needs through specific interventions including preserving or reestablishing occlusal support e.g. by providing training and education for caregivers (professionals and family) who support with daily oral hygiene routines.
- Ensuring that appropriate measures for providing oral care are integrated into a primary oral care model which encourages multi-disciplinary collaborative approaches adapted to national environments.
- Advocating recognition of the fundamental leading role of dentists in promoting and providing oral care to achieve optimal lifelong oral health among all stakeholders and competent authorities.

## Keywords

Lifelong oral health, health promotion, health integration

## 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 and socio-economic and other constraints.

## References

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