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European Dental
Students' Association

WHO Global Strategy and Action Plan on Oral Health 2023-2030

European Dental Students' Association

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CONTENTS

PAGE

1. Introduction.....	3
2. Purpose.....	4
3. Scope.....	5
4. Policy Statement.....	5
5. Roles and Responsibilities.....	5
6. Definitions	6
7. Related Documents.....	6
8. Contact	6
9. Policy Review	7
10. References	7

1. Introduction

The WHO Global Strategy and Action Plan on Oral Health sets important rules for improving oral health systems and results nationally and globally. The improvement of dental care relies heavily on strong teamwork across various healthcare fields (WHO et al. Plan on Oral Health 2023–2030). Over the years, different healthcare organizations have emphasized the need for collaboration and thorough public health training to achieve good healthcare outcomes worldwide, including basic oral health care in national health services as part of Primary Health Care is key to Universal Health Coverage. Adequate prevention in terms of early identification, management of associated health conditions, and equal access to high-quality care are just a few benefits of this important integration. Recent evidence showing that 5.0% of EU citizens still lack access to dental treatment, however, is alarming, given the significant advancements that have taken place in the last years in public health education (Eurostat, 2022). Given the limited resources available to dental professionals, addressing the growing demand for dental care requires a detailed strategy, careful assessment, and alignment of healthcare systems with the real needs of the population. Health workers providing oral health services must actively participate in the primary healthcare team.

In line with WHO's goal of enhancing oral health's role as a significant component intricately linked to overall health, collaboration amongst healthcare sectors makes it possible for everyone to access healthcare services (WHO, 2023). Nowadays, significant obstacles to oral health accessibility among public health goals are presented by the ageing of the population and the widening of socioeconomic gaps (WHO, 2023). Including dental prevention in the primary health care structures enables extensive dissemination of crucial health-related information focused on the importance of oral health in the general health context. It is essential that people from all socioeconomic statuses, including refugees and immigrants, have access to dental care from prevention to treatment and rehabilitation. This is because oral health is a fundamental human right. Oral health is a core component of general health, so no one should be excluded. Nevertheless, developing common care pathways for oral and general health conditions can enhance coordination and improve patient outcomes.

Patients will greatly benefit from this integration because it simplifies access to comprehensive care and improves health management. Achieving integration requires policy changes, training healthcare providers to collaborate effectively, and promoting a holistic approach to healthcare. Education of the workforce as well as medical and dentistry students and providing active collaboration by ensuring both sides understand the links between oral health and general health will ensure that the health sector, united, will work together for the best benefit of our patients by looking at them as a 'whole'.

Although great efforts have been made to ensure advancement in health services, the promise that 80% of the population would have access to essential oral health care has not yet been achieved. Current unmet needs and access continue to vary among people belonging to different socioeconomic statuses and regions of the country, and we should redouble our efforts to equalize provision.

The three key objectives related to oral health – cutting down on sugar, smoking cessation and delivering fluoride effectively – are key elements in public health protection globally. It is realistic to implement policies such as taxation on sugar-sweetened beverages and introducing healthier nutrition in schools. However, the stress of the food and beverage industry makes these policies difficult, and a comprehensive approach and aggressive public health advocacy are needed.

Of course, we know that in real life, due to social determinants of health and nutrition, it is not possible for people to have access to vegetables, fruits, and healthy products due to their extremely low purchasing power. For that reason, we need to make upstream interventions on social and commercial determinants of health. A society with equity is the key to ensuring a more healthy society because an equal society is a healthy society.

In any case, providing low-cost fluoride toothpaste and supplements and investigating the possibility of adding fluoride to drinks will lead to a broad-range control of tooth decay throughout the country.

Otherwise, the WHO global strategy tries to implement the inclusion of essential dental products in national healthcare systems, empowering dental professionals to act as pillars of reforming the current socio-political landscapes (WHO, 2023). This is also in accordance with the necessity for interdisciplinary collaboration to address public health goals efficiently.

2. Purpose

The aim of this policy is to express EDSA's recognition of the major importance of public health integration into dental education frameworks. This is an excellent start to a commitment to promoting the reduction of the oral disease burden across countries, aligned with the WHO strategy. This policy focuses on the need for cross-European standardization in both undergraduate and postgraduate curricula when it comes to Dental Public Health with the final goal of shared values amongst dentistry students from different backgrounds, while at the same time respecting community-specific needs of the local population.

3. Scope

This policy applies to the wider EDSA community by raising awareness of interdisciplinary collaboration between dental care and public health specialists. It wants to integrate dental students into collaboration with educational institutions, non-profit organizations, and policy-makers to enable the implementation of healthcare strategies based on evidence on oral health disparities and socioeconomic challenges.

4. Policy Statement

EDSA calls upon educational institutions to:

- **Integration of Public Health in Educational Curricula:** Implement the public health components firmly and without exception in dental education curricula, preparing students to recognize the significant interactions between oral health and public health (WHO, 2023).
- **Promoting Prevention:** Teaching and initiatives to reduce oral health inequities.
- **Research:** Ensure support of population-based research on Dental Public Health, where this leads to new policy, regulation and legislation (WHO, 2023)
- **Evaluate Existing Health Sectors:** The primary step will be a thorough examination.
- **Engage diverse specialities:** Encourage experts from different disciplines (e.g., epidemiologists and medical doctors) to participate in the development of holistic training.
- **Support Student Advocacy:** Join students in promoting oral health
- **Indicating Desirable Directions for Future Work Community Projects:** Community projects encourage students to bring public health promotion-related evidence-based strategies to the public.

EDSA calls on dentistry students and young dentists to:

- **Reassess** dental treatment frameworks within healthcare systems.
- **Align** with WHO, FDI, ADEE and other related policy guidelines.
- **Utilize** technology for enhanced preventive care strategies.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

EDSA Delegates, Board of Directors and Officers, Supervisory Board, and members are responsible for policy awareness promotion. Educational institutions are accountable for implementing the policy's recommendations as part of a combined effort to promote public health equality and equity. However, this policy does not only target the managers of dental institutions but also the wider dental health workforce, including undergraduate students.

Through international exchanges, research collaborations and advocacy, EDSA plans to provide platforms for students to share best practices and gain broader perspectives on global oral health.

6. Definitions

PUBLIC HEALTH (PH)

Aims to improve the health of populations by improving their health and preventing disease (European Observatory on Health Systems and Policies).

DENTAL PUBLIC HEALTH (DPH)

Science and art of preventing and controlling dental diseases and promoting dental health through organized community efforts (Schütte & Walter, 2008).

PRIMARY HEALTH CARE (PHC)

A strategy that addresses people's healthcare needs, from prevention to treatment, ensuring equity in allocating healthcare practices (WHO, 2023).

SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

The circumstances in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age. These non-medical-related factors significantly affect health outcomes (CDC, 2022).

7. Related Documents

This Policy should be read in conjunction with:

- WHO Global Strategy on Oral Health 2023–2030
(<https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240090538>)
- FDI Vision 2030
(<https://www.fdiworlddental.org/vision2030>)
- ADEE Profile and Competences for the Graduating European Dentist
(<https://adee.org/graduating-european-dentist>)

8. Contact

Any queries regarding this policy should be directed to the EDSA Policy Officer.

9. Policy Review

The policy is subject to review by EDSA for continual enhancement and alignment with global health strategies.

10. References

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