

# Why governments must Act on Mouth Health

Safeguard the oral health of your citizens to help protect their mouths and bodies

## About World Oral Health Day (WOHD)

Celebrated each year on 20 March, WOHD is the largest global awareness campaign on oral health. It was launched by FDI World Dental Federation in 2007 and is the culmination of year-long activities raising global awareness on the prevention and control of oral diseases.

► [www.worldoralhealthday.org](http://www.worldoralhealthday.org)

## About FDI World Dental Federation

FDI World Dental Federation (FDI) serves as the principal representative body for over 1 million dentists worldwide. Its membership includes some 200 national member associations and specialist groups in over 130 countries. FDI's vision is to lead the world to optimal oral health.

► [www.fdiworlddental.org](http://www.fdiworlddental.org)

## What is oral health and why is it so important?

Oral health is multi-faceted and includes the ability to speak, smile, smell, taste, chew, swallow and convey a range of emotions through facial expressions with confidence and without pain, discomfort and disease of the craniofacial complex<sup>1</sup>. You can't be healthy without good oral health – it's one of the main pillars of general health and well-being.

## What are oral diseases?

Oral diseases, such as tooth decay (dental caries), gum disease and oral cancer, are the most common and preventable noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) afflicting humankind<sup>2</sup>.

## What's the global burden of oral disease?

More than half of the world's population (3.5 billion people) suffer from untreated oral diseases<sup>3</sup>. Worryingly, untreated oral diseases have increased by 40% since 1990<sup>3</sup>, and with no improvement over the last 28 years, they will continue to rise unless governments take action now.

Currently, there are no global baselines or indicators for measuring oral health outcomes. To change this, FDI is working on a set of oral health measures with the International Consortium for Health Outcomes Measurement, which could ultimately develop into a measurement tool that helps countries monitor and survey their national oral disease burden.

► Reach out to us to find out more at [advocacy@fdiworlddental.org](mailto:advocacy@fdiworlddental.org).

## What's the economic cost of oral diseases?

The indirect costs due to oral diseases worldwide amounts to more than US \$140 billion yearly, which corresponds to economic losses within the range of the 10 most frequent global causes of death<sup>3</sup>.

## Why is oral disease surveillance important?

Oral disease surveillance is the systematic collection and analysis of data that provides information on a country's oral disease burden, population groups at risk, morbidity, risk factors and determinants. It helps inform a country's national response to the burden of oral disease and enables the monitoring of health outcomes, trends and risk factors.

## Why have a national oral health plan?

The most effective way to reduce your country's oral disease burden is through a national oral health plan that implements integrated, evidence-based and cost-effective interventions to improve oral health throughout the life-course.

## What do oral diseases and other NCDs have in common?

Oral diseases and other NCDs are closely linked and share modifiable risk factors, including unhealthy, high-sugar diets, tobacco use and alcohol consumption, as well as the same social determinants.

Research shows that effective regional and national strategies to promote oral health and prevent oral diseases result in population-wide improvement of oral health and can contribute to preventing the leading NCDs (cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and respiratory diseases).

## What's sugar got to do with oral health?

Sugar\*, a major contributor to obesity, is also the primary cause of tooth decay. Tooth decay is the most common chronic childhood disease affecting up to 90% of school-age children worldwide<sup>4</sup>, even though it is largely preventable.

The World Health Organization (WHO) recommends that adults limit their sugar intake to 6 teaspoons and children to 3 teaspoons per day<sup>5</sup>.

## How can sugar taxation improve oral health?

Sugar is fuelling the epidemic of obesity and tooth decay, particularly among children and adolescents. A regular 330 ml soda contains almost 9 teaspoons of sugar, equivalent to 150% of the WHO adult daily

sugar allowance and three times the daily sugar allowance for children.

According to WHO, taxing sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) can lower consumption and reduce obesity, type 2 diabetes and tooth decay. WHO also states that fiscal policies such as sugar taxation that lead to at least a 20% increase in the retail price of SSB can result in proportional reductions in consumption of such products<sup>6</sup>.

## Why is fluoride important in the fight against tooth decay?

The regular, appropriate use of fluoride such as fluoride toothpaste plays a key role in effective tooth-decay prevention strategies. There is a large body of scientific evidence from the last 70 years demonstrating the effectiveness of fluoride use in population-wide interventions.

## Why integrate oral health into primary care?

Globally, there are severe disparities in oral health and inequities in access to oral healthcare. Incorporating oral care services as part of comprehensive primary healthcare can help reduce cost and quality shortfalls by treating patients under the same system.

## Why implement the WHO 'best buys' and other recommended interventions?

The WHO's 16 tried-and-tested 'best buys' and 72 other recommended interventions<sup>7</sup> provide a menu of evidence-based options to help countries reduce their oral disease and overall NCD burden. The 'best buys' provide countries with a great return on investment – **for each USD \$1 invested in the WHO 'best buys' it yields a return of USD \$7 by 2030<sup>8</sup>**.

### NOTE

*Sugar* in this document refers to *free sugars* that are added to foods and drinks by the manufacturer, cook, or consumer, and sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juice and fruit juice concentrates. It does not refer to sugar that is naturally present in fruits, vegetables and milk.

### REFERENCES

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