



Victorian
Oral Health
Alliance

An Oral Health Resource for Local Governments in Victoria

What can you do?

Strategies to Improve Your Population's
Oral Health Status

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ORAL HEALTH RESOURCE FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN VICTORIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Given local governments' unique relationship with, and range of services for, its residents, we believe they are well-placed to help improve the oral health status of their residents through a range of relatively straightforward strategies. These are described below as a resource that councils can tailor to their own circumstances and priorities.
- VOHA invites you to contact us to discuss these strategies in more detail if you wish.

CONTEXT

- Poor oral health is a key marker of disadvantage, with the worst outcomes experienced by people on low income, dependent older people, Aboriginal people, people in rural areas, people with disability and immigrant groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- Children are also at particularly high risk of oral disease, which are also the most common cause of potentially preventable hospital admissions, especially for children aged 0-9 years.
- Further the above groups are also those most reliant on the very limited public oral health (dental) services. Waiting times for non-priority clients have always been long, and current data indicates 50% of clients wait more than 16 months, and sometimes up to 48 months.
- The major oral diseases that cause poor oral health are tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancers. About 90% of all tooth loss can be attributed to tooth decay and gum disease. Dental decay is the second most costly diet-related disease in Australia, with an economic impact comparable to heart disease and diabetes.
- Good oral health is important for general health and wellbeing. Poor oral health, or the presence of oral diseases, is associated with major chronic disease and can cause pain and discomfort, making eating difficult. This in turn can cause dental infection and has been associated with low self-esteem and reduced quality of life.

NEXT STEPS

- The World Health Organisation (WHO) has more recently developed a Global strategy and action plan on oral health 2023–2030 in recognition of the importance of this issue and this highlights the contribution local governments can make to their population's health
- The WHO strategy articulates an important role for local authorities, encouraging them to be partners in integrating oral health in health promotion programmes into a range of settings including, workplaces, long-term care facilities, health care settings, community-based settings and public venues.

Continue reading for further details...



LINKING ORAL HEALTH TO POTENTIAL COUNCIL ACTIONS:

1. HEALTHY EATING & FOOD SYSTEMS

- Oral health is directly impacted by diet quality and sugar consumption.
- Actions to link to oral health:
 - Remove vending machines selling sugary/ultra-processed foods in council facilities.
 - Promote programs like INFANT (feeding and nutrition for young children).
 - Advocate for fluoridated water access as part of equitable food systems and drinking tap water as a main drink.
 - Education on sugar reduction and its link to dental decay.



2. NICOTINE-RELATED HARM (INCLUDING VAPING)

- Smoking and vaping increase risk of gum disease, oral cancers, and tooth decay.
- Actions to link:
 - Include oral health messaging in tobacco/vaping harm campaigns.
 - Highlight oral cancer risks in smoking cessation programs.
 - Partner with local health services to integrate oral health checks in nicotine harm reduction initiatives.



3. MENTAL HEALTH

- Poor oral health can lead to pain, low self-esteem, and social withdrawal.
- Actions to link:
 - Train Maternal & Child Health Nurses and aged care workers to identify oral health issues that affect wellbeing.
 - Include oral health in mental health promotion activities (e.g., self-care workshops).
 - Advocate for oral health as part of holistic wellbeing strategies.



4. FAMILY VIOLENCE / DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

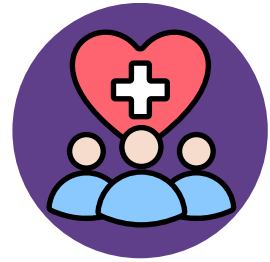
- Victims often experience untreated dental trauma and barriers to care.
- Actions to link:
 - Ensure oral health resources are available in family violence support services.
 - Train community support officers to identify oral health needs during assessments.
 - Partner with local networks to provide emergency dental care pathways.





5. CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION

- Oral health is linked to diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and poor nutrition.
- Actions to link:
 - Integrate oral health education into chronic disease prevention programs.
 - Promote Child Dental Benefits Scheme alongside healthy lifestyle campaigns.



6. HEALTH PROMOTION

- Promote the availability of the Child Dental Benefits Scheme (more than \$1000 towards dental care for eligible individuals and families) by printing and posting resources available here: adavb.org/resources/for-the-public/posters
- Run education sessions at community events or group or health sessions (e.g. in partnership with a local health service).
- Ensure Maternal & Child Health Nurses (MCHNs), Aboriginal Healthcare Workers, childcare workers and aged care workers, have access to training in oral health promotion (preventive care).
- Promote the message of 'spit, don't rinse':
 - i.e., recommending spitting excess toothpaste out after brushing but not rinsing with water afterwards so that the fluoride has a chance to strengthen teeth.



7. POLICY

- Council recognising the impact on health and wellbeing of poor oral health, especially on the children in the municipality.
- Council recognising the value of water fluoridation as a WHO endorsed, safe, affordable and highly effective means of preventing tooth decay.
- Council recognising that many children in rural and regional municipalities do not currently have access to fluoridated water and the negative impact on their oral and general health.
- Incorporating oral health strategies in all applicable plans, e.g. Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plans, Early Years Plans, etc.



8. ADVOCACY

- Council identifying non-fluoridated towns in their municipality.
- Council supporting the distribution of information to residents alerting where they do not have access to fluoridated water.
- Council advocating actively to the local water authorities and the Victorian Department of Health to fund and implement water fluoridation in non-fluoridated towns (population >1000) within the municipality, as a matter of urgency.
- Council supporting action by the local community to advocate for water fluoridation.





9. EARLY YEARS

- Encourage local Midwives to complete the Midwifery Initiated Oral Health Education Program online:
 - Oral Health Victoria will sponsor eligible Victorian midwives to do this course for free.
 - Expressions of Interest via MIOH|ohv.org.au or by emailing healthpromotion@dhsv.org.au
- Encourage the MCHN team to book an oral health workshop delivered by Oral Health Victoria:
 - Victoria Healthy Families, Healthy Smiles|ohv.org.au
 - Baby teeth count too! |ohv.org.au
- Partner with other health services to provide oral health awareness education at immunisation sessions
- Support the implementation of the INFANT (INfant Feeding, Active play and NuTrition) program for young children|infantprogram.org
- Encourage Council-managed kindergartens to participate in the Oral Health Victoria's Smiles 4 Miles program |ohv.org.au that aims to improve the oral health of preschool aged children.



10. OLDER PEOPLE

- Ensure Council's Community Support Assessment Officers talk to older people about the benefits of regular check-ups, correct-fitting dentures etc. during assessments and provide information about dental services if needed.
- Ensure care workers in Residential Care Facilities have received oral health training and/or are aware of available oral health resources. E.g.,
 - seniorsmiles.org.au/resources/
 - fdiworldddental.org/discover-new-resources-aimed-improving-oral-health-care-older-adults
 - palliaged.com.au/Practice-Centre/Training-and-Education/Online-Learning/Oral-Health-Care-in-Aged-Care



11. OTHER ADVICE

- Oral Health Victoria has also published a useful guide, available at ohv.org.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/256174/Local-Government-Area-Action-guide-210624.pdf



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VOHA MEMBERSHIP



Australian Dental
Association Victoria



Australian Dental Health
Foundation



Australian Dental Prosthetists
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Asylum Seeker Resource
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Council on the Ageing
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East Grampians Health
Service



Holstep Health



IPC Health



University of Melbourne
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Network for Integrated Oral
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Oral Health Association of
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Victorian Alcohol and Drug
Association



Victorian Aboriginal Health
Service



Victorian Healthcare
Association



Violet Vines Marshman
Centre for Rural Health
Research



Your Community Health



Monash Health (Affiliate)

The Victorian Oral Health Alliance (VOHA) is a group of the key professional, welfare and consumer organisations, and community dental services, committed to improving Victorians' oral health and access to dental care.