

Global perspectives on oral health

Collaborative efforts to tackle a global challenge. By Iveta Ramonaite, Dental Tribune International.



Although oral health is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of overall health, significant disparities in access to care and preventive measures persist. In response, global efforts to address these challenges have gained momentum, and organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO), FDI World Dental Federation and the European Federation of Periodontology (EFP) are leading the charge. This article gives an overview of international initiatives and collaborative policies aimed at combating oral disease.

Oral disease affects nearly half of the world's population, and research indicates that the burden is disproportionately higher in low- and middle-income countries, where preventive dental services are often inaccessible. In Lebanon, for instance, this is exacerbated by a combination of financial constraints, political instability and lack of public awareness about the importance of regular dental visits and the role of oral

health in overall well-being. Moreover, conflicts and natural disasters have displaced a significant number of people, many of whom are refugees fleeing developing countries, and they face numerous health challenges, including untreated dental caries, periodontal disease, oral infections and trauma.

Turning the tide: Advocacy and policy

In recent years, significant progress has been made in elevating oral health as a global public health priority. Greater awareness of the systemic links between oral and general health, research into the economic burden of oral disease and educational campaigns promoting oral hygiene have all contributed to this progress. Innovations such as artificial intelligence, teledentistry, mobile clinics and minimally invasive treatments have further improved accessibility and care delivery, drawing increased attention to oral health.

A defining milestone was reached in 2021 when WHO member states adopted the resolution on oral health. Speaking to Dental Tribune International (DTI), Dr Benoit Varenne, a dental officer with WHO's oral health programme, commented: "The resolution emphasises that the prevention and control of oral disease should be firmly integrated into non-communicable disease programmes and universal health coverage initiatives." Building on this, WHO launched its *Global Strategy on Oral Health* in 2022 and its *Global Strategy and Action Plan on Oral Health 2023-2030*,

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which aligns closely with FDI's *Vision 2030*. These initiatives set ambitious goals for reducing oral disease, addressing oral health inequities and promoting prevention.

FDI President Dr Greg Chadwick highlighted the growing momentum around oral health in his remarks to DTI: "We are at a critical stage in the global response to oral health. Decades of advocacy efforts led by multiple stakeholders, including FDI, are paying off, and governments, with support from WHO, are paying unprecedented attention to oral disease."

Additionally, dental organisations continue to play a leading role in advancing best practices in periodontics and implant dentistry. For example, the EFP has developed S3-level clinical practice guidelines for treating periodontitis and peri-implant disease, and additional guidelines on gingival disease and mucogingival surgery are anticipated by 2026. Beyond clinical practice, the EFP has also influenced health policy through collaborations such as its work with global insights and advocacy platform Economist Impact. Their white paper *Time to put your money, where your mouth is: Addressing inequalities in oral health* advocates for increased investment in preventive oral health measures.

Challenges and the road ahead

Despite these advancements, significant challenges remain. Oral disease continues to impose a greater burden than many other common health conditions, and access to care remains uneven across countries and healthcare systems. Many nations face shortages of dental professionals, insufficient infrastructure and low public awareness of the importance of oral hygiene. Additionally, the high cost of dental treatment remains a significant barrier, particularly in underserved communities.

"Addressing disparities in access to oral healthcare across different countries and healthcare systems



FDI president Dr Greg Chadwick says that global efforts to improve oral health are gaining momentum.



For EFP president Prof. Moritz Kebschull, the most important priority is that global oral health strategies focus on reducing disparities in access to care and prioritising prevention.

laid a strong foundation for progress. Cooperation among governments, non-governmental organisations, academia and the private sector is crucial to tackling oral health challenges and fostering innovation. It can help promote oral health as an integral part of overall health and support research, education and public awareness.

To overcome the challenges ahead, it is essential to integrate oral health services into primary care, strengthen healthcare systems and

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and promoting prevention as a primary anchor should be central to global oral health strategies," Prof. Moritz Kebschull, president of the EFP, shared in a conversation with DTI. He continued: "Dental professionals must continue to advocate for comprehensive oral health education in order to ensure that it becomes a core element of general health awareness."

Although the state of global oral health reflects persistent disparities, collaborative efforts by organisations such as WHO, FDI and the EFP have

promote public health interventions. Partnerships between governments, international organisations and civil society will be critical in reducing the global burden of oral disease and achieving universal oral health coverage by 2030. Additionally, professional events can contribute meaningfully. IDS 2025 will provide a valuable platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration, further advancing global oral health, as will upcoming events such as EuroPerio11 in May and the 2025 FDI World Dental Congress in September. ◀

