

2004-06 NATIONAL DENTAL SURVEY

Australia's dental generations — The National Survey of Adult Oral Health 2004-06, conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and launched on 17 March 2007 at the Australian Dental Association's (ADA) 32nd Australian Dental Congress in Sydney, has shown that many Australian adults are enjoying better oral health than earlier generations but that some Australians are continuing to miss out on benefits that are being achieved.

The report provides a detailed snapshot of the current oral health in the adult population, and is the first such survey for 17 years. It is based on a survey in which 14,514 Australians aged from 15 to 98 years were interviewed, and 5,505 of them dentally examined. This survey, together with the *National Oral Health Plan 2004-2013*, has Australia well positioned to address the question of how proper dental care can be delivered. The ADA is proud to have assisted in the funding of this Survey.

Some key findings in the Survey include:

- The report shows that members of the fluoride generation (those born since 1970) had about half the level of decay that their parents' generation had developed by the time they were young adults. "This finding provides evidence that exposure to fluoride in water and in toothpaste during childhood produced substantial benefits for oral health among Australian adults," said Prof. Gary Slade, head of the AIHW's Dental Statistics and Research Unit based at the University of Adelaide.¹
- The average number of teeth affected by dental decay ranged from 4.5 teeth per person in the 1970-90 generation to 24.3 teeth per person in the pre-1930 generation. 11.4% of people therefore had inadequate natural dentition (defined as those with fewer than 21 teeth).²
- When asked to rate their own oral health, 16% of Australians rated their oral health as fair or poor. Just over 15% said they had experienced toothache in the preceding 12 months, and about 17% said that they had avoided some foods due to problems with their teeth, mouth or dentures.³
- Many (30%) reported avoiding dental care due to cost, and about 20% said that cost had prevented them from having recommended dental treatment. Of these the

majority felt they would find difficulty paying \$100 for a dental bill.⁴ There are many factors why people avoid treatment, and the ADA supports assistance to those who seek treatment but can't afford it. Prevention and early intervention are the keys to good oral health. Dental care should not be seen as an option but rather a necessity.

- Slightly more than half (53.1%) of adults visited a dentist at least once a year. The percentage of people reporting a need for dental fillings or extractions was greater in 2004-06 than in 1987-88.⁵ "These statistics are sadly indicative that the community is prepared to spend hundreds of dollars on, for example, hairdressing and grooming but will not see its way clear to met this essential cost of health care," ADA President Dr John Matthews has said.

- The report also showed, however, that dental visits were less frequent and oral diseases were more common among the elderly and among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, suggesting a real need for a focus to be given to this sector of the population. "This comes as no surprise to us as the ADA has been advocating attention be given to this area for many years," Dr Matthews said.

- The generation born since 1970 was exposed to more dental prevention than any preceding generation, particularly through fluorides in toothpaste and drinking water. The percentage of Australian adults who have no natural teeth has halved between the two surveys with only 6.4% having no natural teeth.⁶

- Levels of untreated decay were more than twice as high among Indigenous Australians (57.0%) compared with non-Indigenous Australians (25.1%). Approximately one in five Australian adults had moderate (20.5% of people) or severe (2.4% of people) forms of gum disease.⁷

"There is plenty of evidence that dental health has improved but there is a long way still to go until Australia has the degree of dental health it deserves for a country of its wealth. The findings identify what has to be targeted and we will work with governments to bring about further improvement," Dr Matthews concluded.

The details provided above represent only some of the key findings of the Survey. For a full review visit: http://www.arcpoh.adelaide.edu.au/project/distribution/nsaoh_pdf%20files/nsaoh_report.pdf

Contacts: Dr John E Matthews, President

All correspondence to: Australian Dental Association Inc, PO Box 520 St Leonards NSW 1590

Tel: 02 9906 4412

Fax: 02 9906 4736

Email: adainc@ada.org.au

Mr Robert Boyd-Boland, Chief Executive Officer



References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). Media release. 20 March 2007.
 2. AIHW. Slade GD, Spencer AJ, Roberts-Thomson KF (2007) *Australia's dental generations — The National Survey of Adult Oral Health 2004-06*, p. xii.
 3. Ibid: p. xiv.
 4. Ibid: p. xiv.
 5. Ibid: p. 155.
 6. Ibid: Table 5.1.
 7. Ibid: p. 119.
- 