Policy Statement 2.3.3 – Delivery of Oral Health: Special groups: Aged Persons

Position Summary

Government must focus on the increased dental needs of the ageing population through education and funding, and ensure aged care facilities provide a dental check-up on admission as well as ongoing dental treatment by a dentist.

1. Background

1.1. The number of aged persons in Australia is increasing. In 2014 3.5million (14.7% of the population) were older than 65 years of age. This is estimated to increase to 5.8 million in 2031 and to between 9.0 and 11.1 million in 2061.

1.2. The percentage of aged persons in Australia remaining dentate is increasing. In 1987-88 57.3% of persons aged 65 to 74 years and 36.9% of persons aged 75 years and over were dentate. In 2010, 79% of persons older than 65 years were dentate.

1.3. Expectations of good oral health during old age are increasing.

2. Principles

2.1. Medical status, behavioural problems, and attitudes in aged persons affect treatment requirements and treatment planning.

2.2. Dentate aged persons with dementia have special needs requiring further research and planning.

2.3. Diminished mobility among aged persons, especially those who are homebound, institutionalised or hospitalised, may inhibit access to dental care.

2.4. Dentists as the team leader have the broad education to appropriately manage the special dental needs of aged persons.

2.5. Adequate government funding should be available for dental treatment for aged pensioners.

3. Position

Dental Care for Residential Aged Care Residents

3.1. All residents of residential aged care facilities must be examined by a dentist on admission and thereafter on a regular basis.

3.2. The direction and management of dental care in residential aged care facilities must be by a dentist.

3.3. Some care may be provided by suitably trained allied dental personnel under the prescription and supervision of a dentist.

3.4. Whenever possible, aged persons in residential aged care facilities should be treated in dedicated dental surgeries.

3.5. Suitable facilities for the dental care of aged persons should be developed within private practice, clinics and residential facilities for the care of aged persons.

3.6. Staff in residential aged care facilities should have an appreciation of the need for dental care of aged persons, and should be able to assist in the maintenance of oral hygiene of aged patients.

Education

3.7. The dental profession, the community and government must recognise the increasing proportion of aged persons in the community, their changing needs and expectations for appropriate dental care.
3.8. Dental Schools should provide educational programmes at undergraduate and graduate levels addressing treatment of the aged community.

3.9. Health authorities should develop public educational programmes which encourage the establishment of habits of regular care and their continuance into old age.

**Funding**

3.10. Governments must provide enhanced levels of funding to ensure adequate levels of dental care for aged persons who qualify for public oral health care.

3.11. Government health authorities must contribute to population health initiatives to address the oral health needs of aged persons.

**Policy Statement 2.3.3**

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