

Position Summary

Government should adequately plan for the dental workforce to provide for the needs of the community. Education and training of dental personnel should be appropriate to the duties they are expected to perform. Dentists should be appropriately trained to make the full range of clinical decisions and should be the leader of the dental team.

1. Background

- 1.1. Dentists were one of the first formally trained health practitioners.
- 1.2. Dentists are the only dental practitioner who are registered to practise the full scope of dentistry.
- 1.3. Maintaining and improving the oral health of the community relies on adequate dental workforce and infrastructure.
- 1.4. Over the years dental workers other than dentists have been introduced into the dental workforce. This varies around the world depending on the particular country's existing dental workforce, resources, political climate but rarely have these decisions been made on evidence-based analysis.
- 1.5. The number of dental practitioners being educated should reflect the demand for services and this depends on population, demographic changes, levels of oral diseases, price sensitivity and access to quality care.
- 1.6. The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law recognises Dentists and the following other Dental Practitioners: dental hygienists, dental therapists, oral health therapists and dental prosthetists.
- 1.7. Other dental personnel in Australia include dental assistants, dental laboratory assistants and dental technicians.
- 1.8. Other support staff in dental practices include cleaners, practice managers and receptionists.
- 1.9. A dentist is the only dental practitioner entitled to use the title "dentist" and may also be known as a dental surgeon, surgeon dentist or by a specialist dentist title.
- 1.10. Dentist education and training involves different models with at least five years at university and so the Board and governments recognise dentists as the principal dental practitioner and team leader. This can be:
 - either a single primary dentist degree; or
 - a combination of initial general biological science degree and a postgraduate primary dentist degree the latter of which must be of at least four-year duration; or
 - a three-year primary dentist degree and a two-year postgraduate dentist degree.

Definitions

- 1.11. A DENTIST is an appropriately qualified dental practitioner, registered by the Board to practise all areas of dentistry.
- 1.12. BOARD is the Dental Board of Australia.

- 1.13. DENTAL PRACTITIONER is a person registered by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency via the Board to provide dental care.
- 1.14. DENTAL PERSONNEL are dental practitioners and other staff working in the provision of dental services.
- 1.15. A DENTAL TEAM comprises a mix of dentists and other registered dental practitioners and support staff and must at all times be headed by a dentist who is responsible for the diagnosis, treatment planning, delivery of dental procedures and continuing evaluation of the oral health of the patient. The dentist supports and directs the other members of the dental team working directly with them.
- 1.16. OVERSEAS QUALIFIED DENTISTS are dentists whose primary dental degree was gained outside of Australia.
- 1.17. AUSTRALIAN DENTAL COUNCIL (the ADC) is an independent authority assigned the accreditation functions for the dental profession by the Dental Board of Australia under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme.
- 1.18. VET - Vocational education and training. VET focuses on providing practical skills for work and may be completed off-the-job in education institutions such as TAFE institutes and private providers.

3 Position

- 3.1 All Australians should have access to modern, comprehensive oral health care provided by an appropriately educated and trained dental workforce.
- 3.2 Australia must be self-sufficient with regard to workforce supply. The dental workforce training numbers for each category of dental personnel should be based on necessity, the requirements and demand of the community.
- 3.3 Dentists, being the most completely and highly trained dental practitioners, are central to the delivery of dental treatment.
- 3.4 Dental personnel who perform invasive and irreversible procedures should be registered.
- 3.5 All dental practitioners must clearly identify themselves by their protected title and must not misrepresent their registration status.
- 3.6 Non-registered dental personnel should work under the supervision or prescription of a dental practitioner.
- 3.7 There should be clearly defined competencies for dental practitioners to assist:
 - educational institutions to provide national uniform training outcomes;
 - members of the dental workforce to understand each others' roles;
 - the public to understand each team member's role; and
 - the accreditation of allied dental practitioner training where appropriate.
- 3.8 Education and training institutions should use uniform nomenclature for qualifications for each category of the dental workforce.
- 3.9 The future dental workforce should provide services that:
 - are population based;
 - are patient focused;

- lead to the coordinated, non-fragmented provision of oral health services;
 - are preventively oriented;
 - ensure adequate availability in regional and remote areas; and
 - are delivered efficiently and effectively.
- 3.10 The dental workforce is best served by dental teams with the dentist as the team leader.
- 3.11 Education and training of dentists must be to degree level in a program conducted by a tertiary institution in the higher education sector and accredited by the Australian Dental Council (ADC).
- 3.12 Education and training of dentists must be to degree level with a total duration of at least five years conducted by a tertiary institution in the higher education sector. The programs that lead to registration as a dentist must be accredited by the Australian Dental Council (ADC) and approved by the Board.
- 3.13 Selection for entrance into such a program should not be based solely on academic performance and may include must possess the intellectual, ethical, physical and emotional capabilities required to participate in the full curriculum and to achieve the levels of competence at graduation required by the dental school and the Australian health practitioner regulation agency.
- 3.14 Overseas qualified dental practitioners must satisfactorily fulfil ADC and Board requirements before practising in Australia.
- 3.15 The dental workforce training numbers for each category of dental practitioners and support staff should be based on the requirements and demand of the community.
- 3.16 The training of dental practitioners should have a strong focus on prevention.
- 3.17 Education and training of dental hygienists must be to at least Diploma level and of at least two years' duration. The education and training should be conducted in either the higher education sector in a tertiary institution associated with the training of dentists or in the VET sector in a course dedicated to only graduate dental hygienists and accredited by the Australian Dental Council (ADC).
- 3.18 Education and training of oral health therapists must be to at least Degree level and of at least three years' duration. The education and training should be conducted in the higher education sector in a tertiary institution associated with the training of dentists in a course dedicated to only graduate oral health therapists and accredited by the ADC.
- 3.19 A dental prosthetist must first be qualified as a dental technician and then gain an Advanced Diploma or Bachelor Degree with a period of structured learning. The education and training must be conducted in the VET sector or tertiary institution and in accordance with Health training package and in programs accredited by the ADC.
- 3.20 Formal education and training of dental assistants should be at a minimum Certificate III level in the VET sector and in accordance with the Health Training Package. The title for such a qualification should be Certificate III in Dental Assisting.
- 3.21 The number and distribution of dental practitioners should be carefully monitored and there should be annual publication of workforce data in a timely fashion.

Policy Statement 3.1

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