



7 June 2019

2019-2022 Victorian Health and Wellbeing Plan Consultation

1. (a) Strengths of the current plan

The current plan addresses issues affecting multiple age groups, working towards positive health outcomes across the lifespan.

Consideration of oral health in the context of healthy eating and active living, and recognition that poor diet including sugary drink consumption is a large contributor to poor oral health.

(b) Opportunities for improvement

The ADAVB believes that the current plan covers important priorities in public health and wellbeing, however there are further opportunities to improve oral health in the following ways:

- Recognition that tobacco and alcohol consumption, two key priority areas, are strong risk factors for oral cancer. HPV is also implicated in development of oral cancer, tying in with another key priority area, sexual and reproductive health. In Victoria, oral cancer is the ninth most common cancer in men and the 12th most common cancer in women, and also has a low survival rate. This is recognised in the Victorian Cancer Plan 2016-2020,¹ which identifies a focus area of screening and early detection for individuals at higher risk of this disease. An increased focus on prevention through the Victorian Health and Wellbeing Plan would therefore complement efforts in other areas of the health system.
- Recognition that mental health is a predictor of oral health due to lifestyle factors and barriers to care for those living with mental health issues
- Improved access to dental care is mentioned, but there is no scope within the plan to implement new initiatives. An example, taking the age categorisation approach, is identification that older adults living in aged care facilities have great difficulty accessing dental care. Provision of unhealthy food and lack of oral hygiene training for staff compound this issue. Adding an indicator for improving the oral health of older people would therefore be beneficial.
- Extending water fluoridation to all regional and rural areas is a prevention initiative that will improve the community's oral health, benefiting those who need it most. Water fluoridation is an inexpensive measure with proven benefits to oral health. Australian data demonstrates that for every dollar spent on water fluoridation, between \$7 and \$18 is saved on dental treatment costs.²



2. Priority areas

(a) Tobacco-free living

The ADAVB is a partner in Smokefree Smiles, a collaborative project between the ADAVB, Quit Victoria, DHSV and the Department of Health and Human Services. This initiative delivers training and resources to oral health professionals, to provide a framework for them to support patients in their efforts to quit smoking. More information about the project is available at <https://www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-programs/smokefree-smiles>

Recommendations:

- Place restrictions on the sale of e-cigarettes and/ or implement targeted initiatives

The ADAVB would support further sale restrictions or initiatives to reduce the availability and use of e-cigarettes (regardless of whether they contain nicotine). Vaping may be viewed by consumers to be a healthier alternative to smoking cigarettes, however e-cigarettes containing nicotine may be harmful to the smoker and those exposed to it environmentally. It could also lead to nicotine addiction and development of a smoking habit. It has been demonstrated that adolescents and young adults who smoke e-cigarettes are more likely to progress to regular cigarette smoking.³ The potential for smoking of e-cigarettes to be a precursor to smoking regular cigarettes highlights the importance of addressing this use.

- Take further steps to ban smoking in outdoor drinking areas in restaurants and hotels

In 2017, legislation was introduced which banned smoking in outdoor dining areas in Victoria. While this was a positive step to reduce cigarette smoke exposure for hospitality staff and other diners and create barriers for people to smoke, this legislation does not go far enough to prevent smoking in public areas. Under the new laws, smoking is only banned in outdoor drinking areas if they are in close proximity to an outdoor dining area and not separated by a wall. Outdoor spaces are frequently utilised by restaurant and hotel patrons in the warmer months and when venues are busy, so these patrons are still exposed in designated outdoor drinking areas.

(b) Healthy eating

The ADAVB promotes healthy eating for optimal oral and general health by actively posting on social media, creating resources and carrying out advocacy work.



The ADAVB takes interest in healthy eating due to the link between oral and general health. Unhealthy eating, particularly consumption of food and drinks high in added sugar, is linked to various health issues including tooth decay, obesity, type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease.⁴

In turn, conditions associated with unhealthy eating, such as type 2 diabetes, can cause gum disease, tooth decay, dry mouth, oral thrush and poor wound healing in the mouth.⁵

Poor oral health has a significant impact on individuals, the healthcare system and the economy. The impact includes:

- Missing work, study, or reduction in usual activity
- Increased GP visits
- Preventable hospitalisations (over 17,000 episodes per year in Victoria)
- Reduced quality of life, wellbeing and general health⁶

The estimated financial cost to Victorians of the above-mentioned consequences of poor oral health exceed \$209 million per year.⁷

Recommendations:

- That unhealthy food and drinks are removed from or greatly reduced in retail food outlets in Victorian public health facilities
- That junk food advertising is banned on public infrastructure, e.g. public transport hubs

Removing access to unhealthy food and drinks in public health facilities sends a message that a healthy diet supports optimal health and wellbeing. This, in addition to exclusion of junk food advertising on public infrastructure, strengthens important objectives and initiatives to support healthy eating set by the Victorian Government and Department of Health and Human Services as part of the public health and wellbeing plan.

(c) Climate change

N/A



(d) Antimicrobial drug resistance

The ADAVB collaborates with peak bodies in the medical profession, such as the Australian Medical Association Victorian Branch and the Royal Australasian College of General Practitioners. As part of this collaboration, their members have been informed about best practice with respect to provision of antibiotics for dental infections.

The Federal office of the Australian Dental Association also offers information, expert advice and support on prescription medicines for dentist members.



References

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