

17325 - New submission from Early Years Strategy - Public Submissions

Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) supports the Australian Government's proposed direction for The Early Years Strategy and ask that consideration is given to the inclusion of oral health as an outcome of interest.

We too believe that every child deserves the opportunity for the best start to life and that health and wellbeing are critical factors in achieving this, including good oral health.

Early childhood caries, the most common chronic disease of childhood, can lead to poor health outcomes, quality of life by causing:

- Pain and discomfort
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulties chewing; affecting nutrition, growth and development
- Poor self-esteem and social isolation
- Speech development problems
- Damage to developing permanent teeth
- In rare cases, mortality.

Pain and sleep problems can also have a negative impact a child's learning (1).

Oral health is also essential for overall health and wellbeing. A range of health conditions have been associated with oral disease including diabetes, aspiration pneumonia and infective endocarditis, rheumatoid arthritis, adverse pregnancy outcomes and coronary heart disease. (2)

Sadly more than 2 in 5 Australian children experience dental caries in their primary teeth. In Australia, early childhood caries is also the highest cause of acute, preventable, hospitalisation in children .(3) We also know that decay is a disease of disadvantage where 20% of Australian 4 year old have 90% of decay for that age group (2).

DHSV is actively working with the early childhood sector to improve oral health outcomes in young children and contribute to achieving the target, established in the Victorian Action Plan to Prevent Oral Disease 2020-30, of all children entering school free from oral disease. For information about our oral health promotion programs in the early years, visit <https://www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-programs>

The national oral health plan, Healthy Mouths Healthy Lives Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2015 – 2024 could be considered for inclusion in Attachment A– relevant Commonwealth Government initiatives under the Health and Wellbeing list.

The early years are a critical window of opportunity when habits of a lifetime are established. Inclusion of oral health in the early years strategy will support improved outcomes not only for child oral health but for general health.

References

1. Holt K, Barzel R 2013. Oral health and learning: when children's oral health suffers so does their ability to learn (3rd ed) Washington DC; National Maternal and Child Oral Health Resource Centre [learningfactsheet.pdf](#) (mchoralhealth.org)
2. Rogers JG. Evidence-based oral health promotion resource. Prevention and Population Health Branch, Government of Victoria, Department of Health, Melbourne, 2011
3. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2020). Australia's children. Cat. no. CWS 69
4. Rhodes, A. (2018). Child oral health: habits in Australian homes. Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne, RCH National Child Health Poll. <https://www.rchpoll.org.au/polls/child-oral-health-habits-in-australian-homes/>