

# Editorial

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## National Oral Health Policy for India – A Necessity

Oral health is indispensable for the wellbeing and good quality of life. Poor oral health affects growth negatively in all aspects of human development. Historic evidence suggests that dental care existed in India about 3000 years ago during the times of great Indian surgeon Sushruta. Oral diseases remained still a public health problem for developed countries and a burden for developing countries like India. Prevalence of oral diseases is very high in India with dental caries (50%, 52.5%, 61.4%, 79.2%, and 84.7% in 5, 12, 15, 35-44, and 65-74 year old, respectively) and periodontal diseases (55.4%, 89.2%, and 79.4% in 12, 35-44, and 65-74 years old, respectively) as the two most common oral diseases. Consumption of tobacco products (smoking, and smokeless form) has also increased in the recent years. Hence, oral precancers and cancers are emerging as a major threat to younger people and are increasing to alarming proportion in India. Oral cancer is a life threatening condition and the available treatment modalities are expensive and are way beyond the reach of the common person. Oral diseases have also been linked to bacterial endocarditis, atherosclerosis, and chronic obstructive lung diseases. Oral health has been neglected over the years, especially in the underprivileged areas. Amongst many reasons, low level of awareness among the population and even the care providers has led to continued negligence of dental care.



Oral diseases can be prevented and controlled by public education and motivation to a significant level. Oral health is an integral component of general health and no one can disagree with this fact. Health policies play a crucial role in successfully implementing comprehensive health programs. In general, every country develops its own health policy aimed at defined goals.

The blueprint of the National Oral Health Policy that was drafted at the 4th Conference of Central Council of Health and Family Welfare in 1995 at New Delhi aimed at developing an efficient oral health care delivery mechanism to address the oral health needs of its countrymen still remains as a draft since last 15 years. India currently has the second-largest population in the world and is projected to overtake top-ranking China within forty years. Its residents comprise more than one-seventh of the entire world's population.

It is high time that the responsibility of oral healthcare of citizens should be taken over by the government. For this, governments require a policy. All the queries in attaining oral health for all can be answered by oral health policy. The drafted oral health policy should be implemented with suitable modifications so that it could be incorporated in the rapidly changing oral health system of this country. Indian government needs to set up a committee by involving dental professionals to plan to reduce the oral disease burden of the country in a more comprehensive and practical approach.

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