

Oral Health and Non-Communicable Diseases: How to Integrate?

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Received: May 11, 2022; **Published:** May 19, 2022

DOI: 10.55162/MCDS.01.028

Non-communicable diseases (NCDs) are a group of conditions that affect modern lifestyle, and are the result of a combination of genetic, physiological, environmental and behavioural factors. They includes four major NCDs namely: cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and chronic respiratory diseases. NCDs are one of the major challenges for health and sustainable human development; characterized by a long disease phase, and then became the leading cause of death in our society. Each year, it can cause 41 million people deaths, which is about 71% of all global deaths. In addition, NCDs kill >15 million 30-69 year-old people while low- and middle-income countries bearing the brunt of burden, accounting for 85% of premature deaths [1].

Oral diseases are among the most common and preventable NCDs worldwide. Major oral diseases and NCDs are closely linked and share modifiable risk factors including tobacco use, harmful consumption of alcohol, unhealthy diets and poor nutrition, and the same socioeconomic determinants. Accordingly, a common risk factor approach is desirable and more rational compared to those disease specific. With the growing burden of oral diseases and NCDs worldwide, there is an urgent need for local, national, regional, and global action. An integrated action of oral health into NCDs prevention and control must be considered regarding risk factors related to different diseases. According to the WHO, it is needed to focus not only how to reduce the disease occurrence, but also how to tackle/ intercept its causal factors (roots), involving to address various determinants of health. Therefore, the necessity to integrate strategies on oral health promotion, prevention and treatment into NCDs policies, and it can be address by applying a multi-sector approach with the suitable policies and/or strategies [2, 3].

To accelerate action on oral health and NCDs, FDI World Dental Federation collaborates with the ASUS NCDs Alliance to improve the oral health and reduce the NCDs burden, and developed a briefing note for policymakers with the upcoming global strategy 2022 on oral disease control. The briefing note is structured around five key evidence-based messages on the association between oral health and NCDs and the role of oral health care in health systems [4]. The followings are the key messages to motivate action;

1. Oral health is a key indicator of general health, well-being, and quality of life, which is why oral diseases should be prioritized as part of the NCD and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) responses.
2. Since oral diseases and NCDs share the major common risk factors, joint preventive approach would be able to be done with a multi-sectorial response through the current solutions by cost effectively.
3. A good oral health is a fundamental component of well-being and thus poor oral health is one of the risk factors for NCDs. Integrating oral health prevention, promotion and effective oral health care services could be optimized and strengthened the better health systems for all.
4. Therefore, good oral health may lead to a positive impact on NCD outcomes. In addition, more multidisciplinary research and inter-professional collaboration are necessary to invest.

5. In order to successfully integrate oral health into the NCD and UHC responses, it is crucial to engage health professionals, communities and people with oral diseases.

Along with the above mentioned key messages, FDI and NCD Alliance also called to action in which to ensure to address NCD risk factors as an action plan in 2023, relative to the oral health response, with a focus on public regulation and population-wide interventions. In addition, it should be implemented existing cost-effective measures (including recommended interventions for NCD by WHO) to reduce tobacco use, alcohol use, and unhealthy diets, in particular sugar intake, including through tax increases, advertising restrictions, clear nutrition labelling, improving food environments in public institutions, and increasing awareness and access to clean water, and reduce consumption of sugary drinks [5-8].

Summary and recommendations

- Oral health care is one of the most important lifestyle-related determinants of health, and thus people should be motivated for healthy behaviour to fight common oral and variety of NCDs.
- It is essential to adopt “Common risk factor approach” and fully integrate oral health into NCDs prevention and control.
- Essential oral health services should be involved into UHC packages.
- Multi-sectorial, complete, full-scale and integrated approach is necessary.
- The oral health workforce through multidisciplinary care teams should be strengthened.
- Improving oral health surveillance: further researches to strengthen evidence on prevention, oral health disparities, oral disease associations with other NCDs such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke, kidney disease, mental and neurological disorders, chronic respiratory diseases, and cancers.

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Volume 1 Issue 5 June 2022

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