



Editorial

The journey of the Global Oral Health Action Plan 2023–2030 and its interplay with non-communicable diseases

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The Global Oral Health Action Plan 2023–2030 is a significant milestone in the field of oral health.^[1,2] The United Nations General Assembly recognized that oral diseases are major global health burdens and share common risk factors with other non-communicable diseases (NCDs).^[1] The action plan aims to achieve a 33.3% relative reduction of premature mortality from oral cancer and a 25% relative reduction in the prevalence of untreated dental caries of permanent teeth by 2030.^[3,4]

However, there is still a long way to go. The plan is in its early stages, and the journey toward achieving these targets is fraught with challenges. The recent Global Oral Health Status Report provides a comprehensive picture of the oral disease burden and highlights challenges and opportunities to accelerate progress toward universal coverage for oral health.^[4] One of the strengths of the action plan is its alignment with the Global Action Plan for the Prevention and Control of NCDs 2013–2030.^[2] This alignment allows for a more holistic approach to health, recognizing the interconnectedness of oral health with overall health. However, one weakness lies in the stark and persistent socioeconomic inequalities in oral diseases, with a higher disease burden found in disadvantaged and marginalized population groups. Public and private expenditures for oral health care have reached almost 390 billion US dollars globally, but this is unequally distributed among regions and countries.

The action plan presents an opportunity to strengthen and scale up efforts to address oral health as part of universal health coverage.^[1] It also provides a framework for tracking progress with clear, measurable targets.^[2] However, challenges persist. Environmental challenges related to oral health care include the efficient use of natural resources, such as water and energy; the use of safe and environmentally sound oral health supplies and consumables; sustainable waste management; reduction of carbon emissions; and the need to accelerate the phasedown in use of mercury-containing dental amalgam.^[1] The world is expressing unprecedented civil unrest, and a resultant economic meltdown poses significant challenges to the implementation of this action plan. These factors can potentially disrupt health-care services, exacerbate inequalities, and divert resources away from health. In such contexts, oral health often takes a backseat to more immediate concerns.

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Oral diseases are among the most common NCDs worldwide, generally related to the same risk factors associated with over 100 NCDs.^[4] They share modifiable risk factors with other major NCDs (cancer, cardiovascular diseases, chronic respiratory diseases, and diabetes), including all forms of tobacco use, harmful alcohol consumption, and intake of free sugars.^[2,4] Poor oral health is a risk factor for NCDs; thus, integrating oral health promotion into overall health care can optimize health systems.

While the world has taken some positive steps in realizing the Global Oral Health Action Plan 2023–2030, there is still much work to be done. It will require concerted effort from all stakeholders – governments, health-care providers, communities, and individuals – to overcome challenges and seize opportunities for better oral health for all. Civil and honor societies such as ADI can contribute more meaningfully by positive engagement with all stakeholders to realize the dream.

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