



## Editorial

# Oral health integration in global health security: A professional obligation

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The World Health Organization's recent Pandemic Agreement represents a key opportunity for oral health to take its rightful place within global health security frameworks. While the agreement does not directly address dentistry, its provisions on surveillance, infection control, essential health service continuity, and workforce protection have clear implications for dentistry.<sup>[1]</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic revealed significant vulnerabilities in oral health systems, with widespread clinic closures, disrupted supply chains, and exclusion of dental professionals from emergency response efforts. This situation underscored the essential role that oral health services play in managing pain, preventing infections, and addressing trauma. As such, dentistry must now align its practices and policies with the broader global health goals articulated in the agreement.<sup>[2]</sup>

To move forward, the dental profession must focus on strengthening infection control measures, updating national regulations on ventilation, sterilization, and personal protective equipment, and ensuring that oral health is integrated into digital health systems. It is also crucial that dental materials and essential supplies be included in national stockpiling and procurement strategies, ensuring their availability during global health emergencies. Furthermore, dental professionals must be formally included in national workforce protection protocols, receiving the same occupational health support as other health workers during crises. These measures will help prevent the erosion of oral health services in the face of future health emergencies.<sup>[2]</sup>

Another pressing issue that aligns with the agreement is antimicrobial resistance (AMR). Dentistry contributes significantly to the global problem of AMR, particularly through the overuse of antibiotics in oral health care. National strategies to combat AMR must include dental stewardship programs, emphasize responsible antibiotic use, and ensure better access to treatments that do not rely on antibiotics as a substitute.<sup>[3]</sup>

Ultimately, the focus of oral health professionals should be on prevention. Oral diseases remain among the most prevalent and preventable health conditions worldwide. By expanding preventive oral health services and advocating for their inclusion in universal health coverage packages, we can ensure that essential oral health services remain accessible, even during times of crisis. This approach not only aligns with the objectives of the Pandemic Agreement but also supports long-term global health resilience.

The time has come for the dental profession to demonstrate leadership in the global health arena. The Pandemic Agreement provides a framework, but its true impact will depend on the profession's commitment to action. It is through proactive integration of oral health into global

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health security policies that we can ensure the sustainability of essential oral health services worldwide.

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