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The NSW Oral Health Promotion Network wishes to acknowledge:

- *Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2004-2013: Healthy mouths healthy lives.*¹
- *the Consensus Conference on the use of Discretionary Sources of Fluorides*², which has provided up to date, evidence-based guidelines on the use of fluoride to prevent dental caries.
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Executive Summary

NSW Messages for a Healthy Mouth reinforces the notion that oral health is an integral component of overall health and that promoting good health and preventing ill-health is a shared responsibility between organisations, communities and individuals. The clear and simple messages include: Eat Well; Drink Well; Clean Well; Play Well; and Stay Well. These messages emphasise the belief that oral health education is a responsibility of significant importance and must be approached with the same dedication that is applied to the treatment of oral disease.

The information in this document can be widely dispersed by a variety of people in a range of settings.

For example:

- parents/carers in a home setting
- health professionals in health clinics
- early childhood professionals in preschools and day care centres
- education personnel in schools and tertiary education facilities
- aged care professionals in residential facilities

It can also:

- promote the inclusion of oral health in ‘general’ health promotion programs and activities; and
- assist advocacy groups with well-documented evidence-based information pertaining to oral health.

I Introduction

Promoting good health and preventing ill-health is a shared responsibility between organisations, communities and individuals. The *NSW Messages for a Healthy Mouth* includes key oral health messages with supporting evidence. These messages reinforce the belief that oral health education is a responsibility of significant importance and must be approached with the same dedication that is applied to the treatment of oral disease.⁴

Messages for a Healthy Mouth has been developed as part of the implementation of the *NSW Oral Health Promotion Framework for Action 2010* to “increase the awareness of the importance of oral health”⁵, which is mirrored in the draft *NSW Oral Health Strategic Plan 2005-2010*.⁶

The aim of the messages is to provide clear and easy to understand information that can be widely used by an extensive range of organisations, communities and individuals across NSW, in a variety of settings, with the ultimate goal of contributing to the improvement of overall health for all people in NSW.

2 Rationale

The mouth is the entrance to the body and reflects general health and well-being. The most predominate infectious diseases relating to the mouth are dental caries (tooth decay) and periodontal (gum) diseases; both of which ultimately lead to tooth loss if left untreated. However, they are largely preventable and reversible if identified and treated early.⁷

Oral health is not simply the absence of oral disease but is a state of wellbeing in which an individual can eat, speak and socialise without discomfort or embarrassment. Oral health is about the ability of individuals, groups and populations to have opportunities to make healthy oral choices promoting positive and sustainable wellbeing and contributing to general overall good health.* Poor oral health has a range of consequences including pain, difficulty in eating certain foods, impaired speech, loss of self-esteem, restricting social and community participation, and impeding the ability to gain employment. Generally, a person’s overall quality of life is affected.⁸ Poor oral health is also associated with an increased risk of cardiac problems^{9,10,11}, pre-term and/or low birthweight infants^{12,13} and poor diabetic control.¹⁴ The development of oral cancer can also lead to loss of function and loss of life.¹⁵

There is no one single factor that can prevent oral conditions. Rather, there are ranges of factors, which either favour the initiation and progression of the disease, or prevent or control the progression of disease. Most oral diseases involve long-term, chronic disease processes and a complex relationship between body resistant factors, personal hygiene, behavioural factors and social environments. Although continued research is still required to completely understand interactions of the causal and preventive factors in these diseases, the current level of scientific evidence permits us to identify key foundations for prevention.³ This approach is represented in the *NSW Messages for a Healthy Mouth*.

*This definition is adapted from the World Health Organisation [WHO] (1984) definition of ‘health’, and the UK Department of Health (1994) definition of ‘oral health’ cited in AHMAC (2001).