

Driving oral-health transformation in South Africa: The need for a roadmap to implementing the WHO Resolution

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The World Health Assembly's adoption of the Resolution on oral health in 2021 was a turning point in the worldwide effort to advance oral health outcomes. The resolution underlines the significance of promoting oral health, integrating oral health care within the primary health-care system, and ensuring universal coverage, shifting the paradigm from a curative to a preventive approach. In this editorial, a prospective action plan is explored that would include a national oral health survey, short-, medium-, and long-term goals, as well as appropriate regulations and procedures to fulfill the WHO's 2030 target. With the roll-out of the National Health Insurance (NHI) bill, complying with these resolutions are becoming more important and urgent.

It is essential to conduct a thorough national oral health survey before the implementation process can begin. Such a survey would offer useful baseline information, evaluate the population's oral health condition, and highlight common oral health problems and inequities. It would aid in comprehending the infrastructure and resources already in place as well as in assessing the present oral health promotion and prevention initiatives. Indicators of oral health, oral hygiene practices, the prevalence of dental caries, periodontal disease, and the quality of life associated with oral health should all be included in the survey's design.

Immediate actions

Raising awareness and encouraging oral health in families, schools, and workplaces should be the immediate goal of

the action plan. To underline the value of oral health and the importance of preventive measures like routine brushing, flossing, tobacco-use cessation programs, and keeping a balanced diet, education and awareness programs among others should be launched. The incorporation of oral health promotion programs into curriculum and workplace wellness initiatives can be made easier by collaboration with businesses and educational institutions.

Additionally, regular basic healthcare visits must include dental health exams and preventive measures. Oral health will be integrated into the primary healthcare system by forming partnerships with primary healthcare practitioners and instructing them in the most fundamental oral health interventions. Additionally, community outreach initiatives can be set up to give oral health education and preventive care to underprivileged communities.

Mid-term actions

The inclusion of oral health within the non-communicable disease (NCD) agenda should be given a high priority in the mid-term plan. Collaboration between experts in oral health and other healthcare fields is essential for successful implementation. To improve the comprehension and coordination of oral health care as part of comprehensive healthcare delivery, interprofessional education and collaboration should be encouraged. The gaps between the many healthcare fields might be filled by joint conferences, workshops, and research projects. The incorporation of oral



health therapies in universal health care programs is another crucial component of the midterm plan. Services for oral health, such as preventive, restorative, and emergency care, should be included in current health insurance programs. For these programs to be sustained, adequate funding, reimbursement procedures, and incentive programs for oral health professionals' participation are required.

Long-term actions

According to the worldwide strategy on oral health, the long-term goal intends to attain universal health coverage for oral health by 2030. This necessitates an all-encompassing strategy that includes policy adjustments, infrastructure construction, workforce planning, and research improvements. Governments should give oral health top priority by allocating enough funds, enacting beneficial policies, and creating regulatory frameworks to direct oral health services. I must emphasize that this is dependant on the data that will be gathered by performing a new national oral-health survey.

Infrastructure growth should concentrate on enlarging dental clinics and integrating them with current medical facilities. The current picture of oral healthcare access is very unclear at a provincial and national level. Rural communities, underserved places, and underprivileged groups need special consideration. To address the rising demand for oral health services, it will be crucial to increase the workforce capacity, alongside appropriate equipment and facilities provision in this field through training programs, ongoing education, and recruitment efforts. The link between system and overall patient health and well-being, and oral health, must be reinforced regularly and evidence must be presented to policy-makers and managers in various structures and organizations.

To develop evidence-based interventions, assess the efficiency of preventative measures, and track progress towards reaching the WHO targets, significant research activities need also be launched. To promote innovation and spread best practices globally, collaborative research networks, financing possibilities, and knowledge dissemination platforms should be formed.

Contributions from the private sector

The success of the WHO strategy on oral health depends in great part on the private sector, which includes a variety of organizations from small private dentist offices to huge dental corporations. Private dental offices, as crucial providers of oral healthcare, can actively participate by integrating the preventive strategy promoted by the resolution into their services. In their practices, they can place a strong emphasis on prevention, patient education, and oral health promotion, inspiring patients to practice good oral hygiene and make well-informed choices about their oral health. These practices should be encouraged to create local outreaches to schools, and similar community outreach projects. Additionally, private dental clinics can work with academic institutions and public health organizations to take part in community outreach initiatives that target marginalized groups and raise awareness of oral health.

On the other hand, the private sector's dentistry businesses can make a difference by developing new products. These businesses can create novel technologies, materials, and



treatment methods that promote restorative and preventive oral healthcare by investing in research and development. Collaborations between dental businesses and academic research facilities can accelerate the conversion of scientific findings into real-world clinical applications, which is advantageous to both the public and commercial sectors. Dental businesses can also sponsor conferences and symposiums, support programs to educate people about oral health, and help the spread of knowledge and best practices.

The active participation of the corporate sector in the WHO plan has many benefits, including the mobilization of resources, knowledge, and financial support. Dental enterprises can help make oral healthcare goods and technologies more affordable and accessible by utilizing their market clout and business savvy. In order to build patient-centred policies and programs, private dental practices, which are motivated by patient-centred care, can provide insightful input based on their direct encounters with patients.

To make sure that the private sector's contributions are in line with the broad objectives of the WHO resolution, it is essential to promote cooperation and communication between the public and private sectors. The strengths of both sectors can be effectively used to accomplish the desired results through transparent collaborations that are led by shared values and beliefs. In the end, the private sector's involvement will strengthen the WHO plan's viability, scope, and impact, advancing the goal of achieving universal oral health coverage by 2030.

Conclusion

A planned and comprehensive action plan must be in place in order to implement and comply with the WHO resolution on oral health. A national oral health survey can help create short-, medium-, and long-term plans to ensure that oral health promotion, prevention, and care are integrated throughout the healthcare system. By adopting an all-encompassing strategy, governments and healthcare systems may pave the path to obtaining universal oral health coverage, thereby enhancing the outcomes and general wellbeing of people and communities around the world.