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Nursing Taskforce  
Department of Health and Aged Care  
MDP 411 GPO Box 9848  
Canberra ACT 2601  
10<sup>th</sup> February 2023



**RE: Increasing access to health and aged care: a strategic plan for the nurse practitioner workforce “the Plan”**

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is recognised as the principal non-government organisation for public health in Australia working to promote the health and well-being of all Australians. It is the pre-eminent voice for the public’s health in Australia and seeks to drive better health outcomes through increased knowledge, better access and equity, and evidence informed policy.

PHAA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback on the Plan. We overall agree that expanding the nurse practitioner (NP) workforce is important to improving health service provision and access. However, we note that the strategies listed which may influence the Plan’s implementation (p.3) does not explicitly consider Australia’s National Oral Health Plan 2015-2024.

Oral health is fundamental to overall health, wellbeing, and quality of life. Yet dental conditions rank third as a reason for acute potentially preventable hospitalisations, oral cancer is among the top 10 cancers for mortality in Australia, <sup>(2)</sup> and one third of Australians aged >15 have advanced gum disease.<sup>(1)</sup> Greater levels of oral disease are experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people on low incomes, rural communities, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and dependent older people.<sup>(2)</sup>

The importance of an oral health trained workforce is recognised at an international level. The World Health Organization’s Global Oral Health Action Plan outlines in Global Target 3, *Innovative workforce model for oral health*, that by 2030, “50% of countries have an operational national health workforce policy, plan or strategy that includes workforce trained to respond to population oral health needs”.<sup>(3)</sup>

At a National level, Australia’s Aged Care Royal Commission Report calls for immediate funding of health provider training to improve quality of aged care, including oral health care (recommendations 79, 114).<sup>(4)</sup> Already, NPs are integral to the aged and home care sectors through implementing twice-daily oral health care, detecting dental diseases, and referring for dental treatment. The National Preventative Health Strategy (identified in the Plan as a consultative source), also highlights the importance of enabling, educating and fully utilising the health workforce to implement preventative health practice (p.10) – which the Strategy identifies oral health as being part of this practice.

PHAA urges the Taskforce to utilise Australia’s National Oral Health Plan 2015-2024 as an implementation-guiding document. Poor oral health is a major burden to wellbeing and has severe deficits in accessibility and availability, deepening Australia’s health inequities. NPs are crucial for health promotion, reaching all demographics particularly at a primary care level. Any plan to expand and greater utilise the nurse practitioner workforce must include education to expand their scope of practice in oral health care.

Yours Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Terry Slevin in black ink.

Terry Slevin  
Chief Executive Officer  
Public Health Association of Australia

Handwritten signatures of Tan Nguyen and Sneha Sethi in black ink.

Tan Nguyen & Sneha Sethi  
Co-Convenors of the Oral Health Special Interest  
Group

## References:

1. Australian Research Centre for Population Oral Health. Australia's Oral Health: National Study of Adult Oral Health 2017-18 [Internet]. University of Adelaide, South Australia; 2019 [cited 2022 Feb 8]. Available from: [https://www.adelaide.edu.au/arcpoh/national-study/report/Australias\\_Oral\\_Health\\_2017-18.pdf](https://www.adelaide.edu.au/arcpoh/national-study/report/Australias_Oral_Health_2017-18.pdf)
2. Commonwealth of Australian Governments Health Council. Healthy Mouths, Healthy Lives: Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2015-2024 [Internet]. Australian Government; 2015 [cited 2022 Feb 8]. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/04/healthy-mouths-healthy-lives-australia-s-national-oral-health-plan-2015-2024-australia-s-national-oral-health-plan-2015-2024.pdf>
3. World Health Organization. Draft Global Oral Health Action Plan (2023-2030) [Internet]. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2022 Aug 12 [cited 2022 Feb 8]. Available from: <https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/ncds/mnd/eb152-draft-global-oral-health-action-plan.pdf>
4. Government of Australia. Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety Final Report – List of Recommendations [Internet]. Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission; Canberra; 2021 [cited 2022 Feb 8]. Available from: <https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/2021-03/final-report-recommendations.pdf>