

## Universal access to essential oral healthcare through a priority-setting approach

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Cost continues to be the most frequently reported barrier to accessing oral healthcare. Addressing this challenge will require reforms to payment models and pricing structures to improve affordability and equity in access.

While current funding models offer a strong foundation for reform, government support is presently directed toward low-income and priority populations. There is an opportunity to build on these targeted programs and progress toward a more integrated, population-based approach to oral healthcare.

The absence of a nationally agreed definition of what dental services should be government funded, limits the ability to allocate resources effectively. Adopting the WHO's concept of essential oral healthcare would provide a clear, evidence-based framework for defining service coverage.

By building upon the priority-setting approach, the Australian Government can work towards integrating oral health into the public health system with incremental funding changes. This should be enabled by including dental practitioners and dental services using the Australian health technology assessment (HTA) process

### Recommendations

- **Define essential oral healthcare in Australia:** Establish a clear, evidence-based definition of essential oral healthcare in Australia, aligned with the WHO framework, to guide resource allocation and ensure equitable access.
- **Implement a formal priority-setting approach:** A structured framework, such as the Assessing Cost Effectiveness of Oral Health Preventive Interventions (ACE-Oral Health Prevention) should be adopted, to support funding policy decision-making in oral healthcare, as successfully applied in other health areas.
- **Integrate oral healthcare into HTA processes:** To enable oral healthcare funding decisions and ensure investments are evidence-based, the priority-setting approach must be taken and its outcomes consider by existing HTA process mechanisms.

