Local government plays an important role in supporting the objectives of the Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008 by protecting, improving and promoting public health and wellbeing within their municipality.

Councillors can make an impact on their residents’ oral health by helping to create environments that promote oral health.

This guide outlines a range of evidence-informed actions that councils can consider when preparing their Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plans, Municipal Early Years Plans and other strategies.

The proposed actions are consistent with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (VPHWP) 2015-2019; that identifies oral health as one of the key issues related to healthier eating and active living.

**Why promote oral health?**

- Most oral diseases are amenable to prevention, however improving oral health requires access to healthy diets, fluoride in water and toothpaste, good oral hygiene and regular preventive care.
- The major oral disease that cause poor oral health are tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancers. Oral diseases are among the most common and costly health problems experienced by Australians.
- Tooth decay is the most common health problem in Victoria with half of all children and adolescents and over 90 per cent adults affected. Tooth decay is five times more common than asthma in children. A quarter of Victorian adults have untreated tooth decay.
- Moderate and severe gum disease affects a quarter of Victorian adults and increases with age.
- Oral cancer is one of the causes of disease burden in Victoria with an average of two new diagnosis every day.
- Poor oral health is the single highest cause of preventable admissions to hospital for children and adolescents under 25 years and the second highest cause for all ages.
- Oral conditions are the second most expensive disease group to treat – just below cardiovascular disease. $2.7 billion was spent on dental treatment in 2012-13 in Victoria.
- Oral disease is a key marker of disadvantage, with greater levels experienced by people on low income, dependent older people, Aboriginal people, people in rural areas, people with disability, and immigrant groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (particularly refugees).
- Oral disease is a prevalent chronic disease and shares common risk factors with a number of other chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer and stroke.

**While there have been improvements in oral health over the last decade, tooth decay is still over five times more prevalent than asthma among children**
Opportunities for councils to improve oral health

Identify community oral health needs
- Access Local Government Area oral health profiles\textsuperscript{11} which contain population oral health information for your local area, for example rates of smoking, fruit and vegetable intake, soft drink consumption, toothbrushing frequency and breastfeeding rates.

Create healthy environments
- Improve access to drinking water in public places through the installation of drinking water fountains.
- Use and promote the Rethink sugary drink campaign resources\textsuperscript{12}.
- Councils can implement healthy eating strategies for events, for example soft drink free events in Whittlesea\textsuperscript{13}.
- Encourage healthy vending in public spaces.
- Encourage councils and local schools, workplaces, hospitals, health services, sport and recreation centres and childcare services to contact the Healthy Eating Advisory Service (HEAS)\textsuperscript{14} for information and advice about providing healthy food and drinks.
- See the VicHealth action guide for more suggestions on healthy eating\textsuperscript{15}.

Support oral health promotion in children's settings
- Support Maternal & Child Health Nurse services to work with dental providers to develop referral pathways for children with identified dental needs\textsuperscript{16}.
- Support and encourage participation of early childhood services and schools in the Achievement Program, particularly with achievement of the healthy eating and oral health benchmarks\textsuperscript{17}.
- Encourage early childhood services and schools to adopt healthy eating policies. Services may engage HEAS for a menu assessment or use the HEAS online resources\textsuperscript{14}.
- Access information about oral health promotion resources and programs including Smiles 4 Miles via Dental Health Services Victoria’s website\textsuperscript{18, 19, 20}.

Promote oral health in aged, disability, youth and refugee programs
- Integrate oral health promotion into existing healthy eating initiatives.
- Include oral health promotion in the assessment and care plans of Home And Community Care (HACC) clients as outlined in Strengthening assessment and care planning: a guide for HACC assessment services in Victoria 2010 - Part B 8.10, page 73\textsuperscript{21}. Also consider meal planning and support for personal oral care as well as assistance to access dental care.
- Include an oral health promotion focus in youth and refugee programs.
- Reduce recreation related oral injuries by promoting the use of mouth guards for contact sports.

Build capacity for oral health promotion in Council programs
- Provide training and resources to enable staff working in relevant programs to deliver evidence based oral health promotion\textsuperscript{22}.

Create Local Government as a healthy workplace
- Register with the Achievement Program as a health promoting workplace and choose the healthy eating priority\textsuperscript{17}.
- Implement healthy catering handbooks such as the one developed in Mildura to help workplaces, associations and groups make healthier catering choices\textsuperscript{23}.

References