

# Policy Statement 2.3.6 – Delivery of Oral Health: Special groups: Individuals with Disabilities

## Position Summary

Government must fund dental services and facilities for those with disabilities and special needs, and provide education and training opportunities for dental personnel and carers. Assistance animals and carers must be allowed to accompany them where appropriate.

## 1. Background

- 1.1. There is a growing cohort of Australians with disabilities. The 2018 Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers Australia, indicated that 4.4million Australians or 17.7% of the population reported living with disability.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.2. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* requires that people with disabilities be given equal opportunity to participate in and contribute to the full range of economic, social, cultural and political activities and that access for people with disabilities, including access to the goods, services and facilities be provided by businesses.
- 1.3. Advances in technology, medical care, community support and methods of assistance, including the use of equipment and assistance animals, have resulted in many individuals with disabilities having improved quality of life, capacity to function in society and increased life expectancy.
- 1.4. Individuals with disabilities often have restricted employment opportunities and may be financially compromised in seeking dental care in private practice and thus financial burdens may be placed upon these individuals in dealing with their oral health.
- 1.5. While most patients with disabilities are treated by general dentists, the establishment of the speciality of Special Needs Dentistry recognises that more complex cases need specialised care.

## Definitions

- 1.6. An ASSISTANCE ANIMAL is a dog or other animal:
  - (a) accredited under a law of a State or Territory that provides for the accreditation of animals trained to assist persons with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability; or
  - (b) accredited by an animal training organisation prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph; or
  - (c) trained:
    - (i) to assist a person with a disability to alleviate the effect of the disability; and
    - (ii) to meet standards of hygiene and behaviour that are appropriate for an animal in a public place.
- 1.7. A DISABILITY is an ongoing presence of one or more limitations, restrictions or impairments.

## 2. Position

- 2.1. Individuals with disabilities are entitled to the same level of access to and range of oral health care services as other members of the community.
- 2.2. Assessment of an individual's ability to maintain oral health and prevent disease must be performed by a

<sup>1</sup> (<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/PrimaryMainFeatures/4430.0?OpenDocument>)

This Policy Statement is linked to other Policy Statements: 2.7.1 *Delivery of Oral Health Care: Facilities: Dental Hospitals* & 2.7.3 *Delivery of Oral Health Care: Facilities: Dental General Anaesthesia Procedure Facilities*

dentist.

- 2.3. Dentists must assess their ability to assist individuals with disabilities based on the practitioner's capacity, training and the availability of appropriate facilities.
- 2.4. Individuals with disabilities should be allowed access with carers, equipment and assistance animals where needed, provided that facilities are appropriate.
- 2.5. Whenever possible, the design of new dental surgeries and modification of existing facilities should endeavour to provide access for individuals with disabilities.
- 2.6. Government funding must be made available so that individuals with disabilities have improved access to oral health care.
- 2.7. Special facilities in hospitals should be available for individuals whose disability is too severe, or who are too frail or medically compromised, to be treated in a general dental facility. These facilities could be stand alone or attached to a general hospital or public dental clinic.
- 2.8. Education and training for health care workers and carers of individuals with disabilities regarding oral hygiene maintenance, dietary instruction and basic dental awareness should be readily available.
- 2.9. Dentists and allied dental personnel should be trained to provide care for individuals with disabilities within clinics, nursing homes and residential care facilities.
- 2.10. Government funding directed to assist dental care for individuals with disabilities and special needs should be directed to utilise private practices as set out in the ADA's Australian Dental Health Plan .

#### **Policy Statement 2.3.6**

Adopted by ADA Federal Council, April 7/8, 2005.

Amended by ADA Federal Council, November 12/13, 2009.

Amended by ADA Federal Council, April 14/15, 2011.

Amended by ADA Federal Council, November 14/15, 2013.

Amended by ADA Federal Council, November 10/11, 2016.

Editorially amended by Constitution & Policy Committee, October 5/6, 2017.

Amended by ADA Federal Council, August 21,2020