

Policy Statement 6.21 – Dentistry and Environmental Sustainability

Position Summary

The environmental impact of dental care delivery should be minimised without adversely affecting the safety and quality of dental treatment. The Australian Dental Association supports and promotes environmentally responsible behaviours and sustainable dental service provision.

1. Background

- 1.1. In 1987, the United Nations Brundtland Commission defined sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”.
- 1.2. Climate change, environmental concerns and sustainability are important issues in Australia and are recognised as aspects of a wider commitment to socially responsible behaviour.
- 1.3. The environment directly affects health.
- 1.4. Sustainability is a continuous process.
- 1.5. Sustainability in dentistry is multifaceted and involves many stakeholders including manufacturers, distributors, dental equipment technicians, dentists and staff, patients, waste collectors and processors.
- 1.6. The practice of dentistry in Australia requires maintenance of high levels of quality and safety which includes:
 - infection control, including utilisation of single-use materials, where indicated;
 - energy and water consumption;
 - a complex set of waste management arrangements; and
 - the management of chemicals which may constitute a hazard in the delivery, application or waste management in dentistry.
- 1.7. Most dental equipment and materials are manufactured outside Australia and so incur significant carbon emissions related to transportation.
- 1.8. The Minamata Convention on Mercury (a multilateral environmental agreement that addresses the adverse environmental effects of mercury) was signed by the Australian Government on 10 October 2013. The Australian Government ratified the Minamata Convention on 7 December 2021.

Definitions

- 1.9. SUSTAINABILITY is maintaining or improving the quality of human life while living within the carrying capacity of supporting eco-systems.

2. Position

- 2.1. The environmental impact of dental care delivery should be minimised.
- 2.2. Sustainability measures must not adversely affect the safety and quality of dental treatment.
- 2.3. The ADA and its Branches should ensure their facilities and activities are environmentally responsible.
- 2.4. Dental practices should be supported to engage in continuous improvements to ensure environmental best practice (see ADA Guidelines for Sustainable Dental Practices).
- 2.5. Dental practices should be supported to be environmentally responsible.

¹ This Policy Statement is linked to other Policy Statements: 5.6 Dental Industry, 6.1 Infection Control, 6.11 Amalgam Waste Management & 6.20 Social Responsibility

- 2.6. The ADA works with other stakeholders to improve the sustainability of dental care delivery.
- 2.7. Environmental regulation must have demonstrably clear benefits, be evidence-based and cost-effective.
- 2.8. The ADA should develop a Dental Sustainability Charter with the Australian Dental Industry Association.

Policy Statement 6.21

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

Amended by ADA Federal Council, November 13/14, 2014.

Amended by ADA Federal Council, April 6/7, 2017.

Amended by ADA Federal Council, August 21, 2020

Amended by ADA Federal Council, August 18, 2023