



The Irish Dental Association Election 2020 Manifesto –

‘Patients Deserve a Better Deal for Oral Health’

Oral health is hugely important for people young and old. Not only does good oral health have a positive effect on a person’s quality of life, it also has a significant impact on overall health and general wellbeing.

Dentists play a critical role in disease prevention and oral health management, recognising that both realistic public service funding and supports for private, independent dentists are essential to maintain a well-functioning dental care system.

The Irish dental care system is now at a crossroads after years of underfunding and under-resourcing. As a result, during the course of the general election, the IDA will be campaigning on five key issues:

A new deal for oral health

The IDA was not consulted on the proposed National Oral Health Policy, details of which were published by the Department of Health in 2019. That policy seeks to eliminate our current satisfactory – if underfunded – risk-based, targeted public dental service model which has been in place for many decades, whereby public service dentists reach out via primary schools to children who need treatment, offering an integrated safety net and continuity of care.

Instead, the National Oral Health Policy proposes to change to a system whereby children are seen only if they attend in private dental practices – and are ignored if they do not present.

The IDA has produced its own vision for a better oral health plan and wishes to be involved in discussions with the next Government on reforms which are workable for patients and which dentists can support.

Evidence shows that the children who are most in need of support (those with additional needs or in families with reduced socio-economic circumstances) are those who will not seek to access care and will have difficulty navigating the system proposed by the Department of Health.

This policy published last year by the Department of Health would worsen dental care for children, reduce benefits for medical card patients and offer nothing



new for adults or seniors. Dentists need to be central to a properly funded new oral health plan which delivers better care for all and enjoys the support of the dental profession.

Reversing Government cuts and increasing the provision of public service dentistry

Public service dentistry has suffered hugely in the last decade – Ireland has seen an increase of 20% in the amount of children under 16 who are eligible for treatments alongside a 30% reduction in the number of dentist who are employed to treat those patients. This has led to soaring waiting lists of 24 to 30 months for specialist treatments.

Furthermore, increasing numbers of children are only being offered examination and dental care for the first time at sixth class (the oldest age group) – instead of three age groups (first/second, fourth and sixth classes). HSE documentation has confirmed this as policy in Cork, for example. This increases patients' reliance on access to emergency dental care which also has serious implications for dentists currently working within the services.

New Focus on Prevention

A new focus on prevention is needed with the next Government. A clear focus on early dental visits, special dental programmes for children, ring-fencing sugar taxes to improve oral health and

better labelling of food and drinks are key elements of this new approach.

Enable Better Access for Patients

Patients are experiencing greater difficulties in accessing dental care. The unfit for purpose medical card scheme needs to be overhauled by the next Government, supports and reliefs need to be provided to patients to meet the cost of dental care, and investment in hospital services is required to improve quicker access to vital acute dental care.

Build capacity

Dentists wish to build independent family practices to care for their patients. Their patients need support from the new Government to attend their dentist more regularly – this will improve patients' oral health and build better capacity in general practice.

The 30% reduction in public service dentists to care for a 20% rise in child patients must be reversed and resources need to be provided by the next Government to care for other vulnerable groups.