



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate distribution

Role for dentists in taking action on family violence

MELBOURNE – Friday 5 August 2016

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is calling for dentists to play a greater role in identifying and responding to women experiencing family violence in their new Issues Paper, *Women and oral health*, published during Dental Health Week.

Head, face and neck injuries are the most common type of physical injury in women experiencing family violence. Family violence can result in injury to the teeth, gums, jaw, lips and cheek. Dental neglect, caused by restricting access to dental care, can also be a sign of financial abuse.

WHV's recommendation echoes the findings of the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence. The Royal Commission identified dentists as potential allies in responding to family violence, noting that they could screen patients and offer support and referral, as well as providing dental care. WHV recommends that training on family violence be made a core part of the curriculum for dental students and professional development for dentists.

Women and oral health also identifies some of the other ways that sex and gender influence women's oral health. Hormonal changes expose pregnant women to a higher risk of tooth decay and gum disease. Women are also more likely than men to: have decayed, missing or filled teeth; have few or no teeth; suffer tooth erosion due to eating disorders; and to report financial barriers to accessing dental treatment.

WHV's *Women and oral health* Issues Paper and Fact Sheet can be viewed [here](#).

Quotes from Rita Butera, Executive Director of Women's Health Victoria

"We are proud to have produced a comprehensive overview of the issues affecting women's oral health, as well as identifying gaps where more research is needed."

"The impact of family violence on oral health is not often recognised. By building the capacity of dentists to identify and refer women to support services, there are additional avenues for women experiencing family violence to seek help."

Quote from Dr Rick Olive, President, Australian Dental Association

"The release of the WHV's Issues Paper on *Women and oral health* is a timely reminder during Dental Health Week, which focuses this year on Women and Oral Health, of the special needs of women. It shows that not only do we need to improve diet and oral health behaviours among women at an individual level, but we also need to address structural barriers to care. The Issues Paper also reinforces the need for all health practitioners to be cognisant of the signs of abuse or eating disorders in women and particularly dentists who may be the first to suspect there is an issue."

For media enquiries and interviews, please contact:

Kylie Inserra, Communications Coordinator, Women's Health Victoria
Ph: 03 9664 9316
M: 0409 119 101
Email: kylie.inserra@whv.org.au



About Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a not-for-profit, state-wide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service, focused on improving the lives of Victorian women. WHV works collaboratively with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. The work of WHV is underpinned by a social model of health and a commitment to reducing inequities in health which arise from social, economic and environmental determinants.

For more information, visit www.whv.org.au