

- Oral health is important for **good quality of life**. Without good oral health, everyday activities such as eating, speaking and socialising can be difficult.
- **Women and men** have different oral health risk factors, conditions and ways of using health care.
- Oral health is also strongly influenced by other factors, particularly **socio-economic status**.

Overview of women's oral health

- **Tooth decay** is one of the most common diseases in the world. It affects more women than men, around 36% globally.
- Women have higher rates of **decayed, filled or missing teeth due** to tooth decay.
- Women on average have **more missing teeth** than men and are more likely to have no natural teeth.
- **Hormonal changes** during pregnancy, puberty, menstruation and menopause, can lead to increased risk for various types of **gum disease**.
- During **pregnancy**, women can experience **increased risk of gum disease and tooth decay** due to increases in the hormones progesterone and oestrogen.
- Over a third of women report **avoiding or delaying dental care** due to cost.
- More Australian women (42.5%) than men (33%) report a **financial hardship** as a barrier to visiting a dentist.
- Women who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, have a disability, live rurally, are in prison, or are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities suffer **poorer oral health** than the national average.

Relationship with other health conditions

- Injuries to the head, face and neck are the most common physical injuries suffered by women who experience **intimate partner violence**. Financial abuse may also result in dental neglect.
- Women with **eating disorders** may experience tooth erosion, tooth decay and gum disease.
- **Older women** can suffer poor oral health impacts associated with dementia and Alzheimer's Disease, Sjogren's Syndrome, xerostomia (dry mouth), and medications for treatment of osteoporosis.
- Four per cent of all Australian women and 10% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have **diabetes**, doubling their urgent dental treatment needs.

Improving women's oral health

Women's Health Victoria recommends:

- **Training dental professionals** to identify and refer women experiencing intimate partner violence and eating disorders to specialist services.
- **Educating women** about the impact of hormones on oral health, particularly during pregnancy.
- **More research** on the impacts of sex and gender on oral health, particularly among 'at risk' populations.

