



# The Council of European Chief Dental Officers

## POSITION PAPER

### **CECDO position paper on public-private mix**

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In Europe there are a wide variety of systems for the provision of oral health care. The balance between the provision of oral health care funded publicly, from local or national taxation, and privately, by the patient paying the dentist directly also varies. In some countries the government (national or local) funds a large amount of oral health care through the provision of publicly owned clinics, whose staff are employed by the state and the treatment is either free or subsidised. In other countries the dentists operate on a private basis, independent of the state and are paid by fees from patients or insurance organisations. In many countries there is a mix of both public and private provision and the mix changes over time.

Although these differences are largely the result of culture and past political decisions, the members of the CECDO have felt the need to reflect on what is a good public/private mix for oral health care provision. Therefore the Chief Dental Officers (CDOs) within the CECDO have discussed this topic. They unanimously agree that it is a human right that every member of the population should have equal access to oral health care. From this point of view the provision of oral health care should be considered as a public responsibility. However, this is not to say that all oral health care should necessarily be provided by the state or by state related institutions. Furthermore, as oral diseases are largely preventable by simple means, the individual has a responsibility to maintain their own oral health.

Therefore the CDOs regard the provision of oral health care as a public task, which can be delivered by public or private institutions or professionals focusing on empowering the individual to take responsibility for keeping his or her mouth in good order.

In the current economic situation it is essential that there is clarity on which aspects of oral health care should, as a minimum, be covered by public services or funds. Or alternatively, what can be left to the 'market' and what not? The appropriate mix should be aligned with the dominant system for care delivery in a country to guarantee that oral health care is not a 'stand-alone' provision but is embedded within an integrated system for health care.

Although CECD0 recognizes the right of individual countries to have their own policy, there are common principles based on social solidarity and the aforementioned human rights. These call for:

- The provision of good oral health care for all children and for adults with special medical or social needs (by way of prevention, health promotion and the supply of sufficient and adequate provision of care and treatment) and
- 2. The provision of free care for the relief of oral pain and life threatening conditions such as oral cancer and severe oral infections.

Public authorities should provide services to meet these objectives in all circumstances and at all times, either by supplying actual services or by covering their costs.