

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## **Oral Health Inequity: ACC Excludes Qualified Dental Practitioners from Providing Injury Care**

Te Ohu Pūniho Ora o Aotearoa – the New Zealand Oral Health Association (NZOHA) is calling for urgent reform to ACC’s health provider policy, which continues to exclude oral health therapists and dental therapists from being recognised as Registered Health Professionals under ACC legislation.

This outdated policy means that thousands of skilled, regulated oral health practitioners cannot provide or claim injury-related dental care under ACC—despite being vital to the delivery of dental services across Aotearoa.

“These are qualified clinicians who are educated, licensed, and already serving communities every day,” says Anna Holyoake, President of NZOHA. “To exclude them from the ACC system is not only illogical—it directly harms access to care, especially in rural and underserved populations.”

### **Who Are These Professionals?**

Both professions are registered with the Dental Council of New Zealand and hold Annual Practising Certificates. They work within clearly defined scopes of practice:

- Oral Health Therapists provide hygiene and restorative care, especially for children and adolescents.
- Dental Therapists often work in schools or public health to deliver essential services for tamariki.

Yet these practitioners aren’t recognised under ACC legislation to provide injury-related dental care—despite being trained and competent to do so.

### **The Impact of Exclusion**

This policy creates unnecessary bottlenecks in the system. Patients who could be treated by a Dental Therapist or Oral Health Therapist are instead referred elsewhere, causing delays, higher costs, and further strain on the dental workforce.

“We’re in the middle of an oral health crisis,” Holyoake says. “We need all hands-on deck. Excluding an entire group of regulated professionals is a failure of health policy and a disservice to New Zealanders.”

## **A Call for Fairness and Reform**

NZOHA is urging ACC and the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to immediately review and update its health provider framework to reflect modern, team-based oral healthcare.

Recognising oral health therapists and dental therapists under ACC would:

- Expand access to timely dental care
- Reduce pressure on overburdened dental services
- Improve equity—especially for Māori, Pacific, rural, and low-income populations

“This is about creating a fairer, more efficient system that reflects how oral health care is actually delivered in Aotearoa,” Holyoake says. “We’re not asking for special treatment—we’re asking for recognition of what’s already happening on the ground.”

## **Next Steps**

NZOHA welcomes dialogue with ACC, MBIE, and other health stakeholders to modernise this policy and ensure all New Zealanders can access the care they need—when and where they need it.

NZOHA also represents Dental Hygienists who focus on prevention and periodontal (gum) health.

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