

3 Five pillars to pursue

In light of the society of 2040, we have positioned the following five major pillars as the initiatives we should aim for in the future in this vision.

- **Contribute to disease prevention and prevention of serious illness, with the aim of extending healthy life expectancy**
- **Promote dental care that benefits communities**
- **Ensure the high-quality and efficient dental care delivery system**
- **Support personal prevention and health promotion**
- **Contribute to entire society by addressing diverse needs**

This chapter will provide an overview, and the fourth section, starting on page 32, will detail specific strategies for implementing the pillars.

- **Contribute to disease prevention and prevention of serious illness, with the aim of extending healthy life expectancy**

As we enter the era of 100-year life span, extending healthy life expectancy has become a national policy. Recent research is producing more and more evidence showing a relationship between the number of teeth a person has to their overall health, a relationship between periodontal disease and systemic diseases, and a relationship of oral flora to cardiovascular disease. These relationships show the importance of maintaining oral health, including that of the teeth, in extending healthy life expectancy and the first key to this maintenance will be providing opportunities for people to undergo seamless dental checkups suited to the stage of life they are in.

Currently, periodontal disease is the leading cause of tooth loss in Japanese people and prevention measures are urgently needed. The key to maintaining good health in old age is to “eat with one’s mouth.” Given the insufficiency of the periodontal disease screening program now required by law, our goal is to make it mandatory and expand the scope of the program by FY2025. However, the checkups are limited to the early detection of periodontal disease and are insufficient as a “preventive” measure against the onset, recurrence, and severity of the disease. Therefore, we will work to accumulate evidence for dental care that are recognized as effective in preventing serious diseases, such as basic periodontal treatment and regular maintenance through regular dental visits, and link this to evaluation in medical reimbursement.

The 8020 Campaign launched in 1989 has produced a certain level of favorable outcomes and the Japan Dental Association decided in March 2015 to expand this into a new public movement that included measures for oral frailty. However, public awareness of oral frailty remains low. We will take on oral frailty, for example day care services in municipalities under the Preventative Nursing Care/Daily Life Support Project, facilitating practices for preventing oral frailty and restoring the health of the orally frail. Oral frailty, like frailty, which is physical decline, can be postponed and function can be restored if appropriate measures are taken, and the medical model indicates that such “reversibility” is possible. We will also seek, for insurance purposes, to propose new disease names for oral frailty. These and other undertakings will raise the public’s awareness of oral frailty.

Currently, medical insurance does not cover many dental care procedures provided for preventative purposes. While medical insurance coverage would surely help make preventative dentistry more widely available, substantial issues stand in the way. Nevertheless, there is merit in engaging in discussion toward expanding medical insurance benefits for prevention, including what measures can and cannot be used.

○ Promote dental care that benefits communities

With the declining birthrate and super-ageing and dying population placing an urgent demand on expanding community healthcare, family dentists, as providers of community-supporting dental care, will be expected to take on a wide range of roles in this environment. Dentists who provide treatment for patients only when they have dental or oral troubles can hardly be called “family” dentists. A true family dentist is a professional who strives to provide continuous maintenance and preventative care in all stages of life, including pregnancy, and is always there for patients to consult with about their health. In order to train family dentists, it is essential to improve their training, and the local dental associations and other organizations will take the lead in developing a training system.

In order to realize a integrated community care system, aiming to enable the elderly to continue to live their own lives in their familiar neighborhoods, it is essential to promote home dental health care to support those who are recuperating at home. Although approximately 20% of all dental clinics now offer visiting dental care services, we will double this number by FY2040. To this end, in addition to expanding the evaluation of medical service fees, we also aim to add domiciliary dental health care evaluation items in medical plans and make target values mandatory.

With the increase in the number of elderly people, the focus has shifted from “hospital-centered” to “community-centered,” and seamless provision of services from medical care to long-term care is now required in the community. Therefore, not only medical-dental cooperation but also multi-institution and multi-professional partnerships are essential. Oral rehabilitation and functional care are not only prevent aspiration pneumonia, malnutrition, and other conditions that may be life threatening, but also promotes a desire to eat for chronically hospitalized patients, people recuperating at home, and people in need of care. However, there are currently many elderly people at home who have difficulties to receive adequate dental care or oral health care because, for example, they are not connected to dental treatment from medical treatment. As dentists do not sufficiently coordinate with non-physician healthcare professionals and nursing care providers as well as physicians, building community networks is an urgent issue that may be led by regional dental associations.

The “Community-inclusive Society” concept proposed by the national government addresses community as a whole, going beyond categories such as the elderly, children, and disabled people. To realize such an entire society, we must promote community welfare and develop hospital-clinic and other cooperation aimed at expanding oral health care for groups such as disabled people and children on medical care who moved life from facility/hospital to community.

Providing support for children requires not only the support of the child in question but also an active contribution to the support of childrearing by the parents. In a society where it is difficult to say that women can safely give birth and raise their children due to a variety of factors, the dental professionals provide follow-up services for expectant and nursing mothers who are worried about postpartum depression and weaning during antenatal checkups and other occasions. Dental professionals must also become aware that they are in a position to detect the problem of child abuse plaguing society and strive to detect it in its early stages.

Finally, since regional dental associations play a significant role in promoting dental care that supports the community, efforts should be made to strengthen their functions.

○ Ensure the high-quality and efficient dental care delivery system

As medical collaboration advances, regional medical networks and online medical care, as well as online billing and eligibility verification, are becoming more widespread, and further use of ICT is required in dentistry as well. In addition, optical impression, CAD/CAM, AI diagnosis, and robot technology are emerging in dental technology, and these will be used to automate and streamline a series of dental treatment while ensuring quality.

Not only dentists, but also dental hygienists and dental technicians play an important role in dental care provision. As the importance of oral health care in extending healthy life expectancy and maintaining or improving quality of life is being stressed, all professionals must work together, sharing tasks, to facilitate the provision of efficient, high-quality care. However, both dental hygienists and dental technicians continue to face difficulties in recruiting students to take entrance examinations to training schools. To secure human resources, it is necessary to improve job appeals, working environment, and working conditions, and to promote support for returning to work for those who have left.

In establishing a high-quality and efficient dental care system, it is essential that the entire dental society be active. A vibrant dental community can spark new technological innovations. It is also true that at present, there are issues with information gathering and analysis capabilities and technological development capabilities to respond to the diversification of the dental needs of the public, and we will strengthen the “All Dental” initiative that we are currently promoting. The Japan Dental Association will have to cooperate with industry, dental academic societies, and the government to achieve this goal.

In addition, it is presumed that the demand for dental treatment will shift from the traditional treatment-centered approach, such as restoration of tooth morphology, to the management and coordination approach aimed at maintaining and restoring oral functions. In response to these changing circumstances, Japan Dental Association will work with the Japanese Association for Dental Science to propose new disease names for medical insurance purposes that will help new technologies to be implemented and developed.

The enactment of the Act on the Arrangement of Related Acts to Promote Work Style Reform has begun to diversify work styles in entire society. Although the application to physicians and dentists has been postponed until 2024, improved working hours will lead to the provision of quality dental care. We will support comprehensive work style reforms by offering employment support and increasing work efficiency with ICT.

As a basic premise, the qualifications of dentists must be maintained and improved if the profession is to continue to provide high-quality dental care to the public. It is necessary to enhance basic education and clinical clerkship at dental universities/colleges, and to establish a seamless educational system from the national dental practitioner examination to post-graduate training such as clinical training, and then to continuing education. It is necessary for the Japan Dental Association to train high-quality “family dentists” in cooperation with academic societies and to establish their position.

In order to resolve the various issues facing the dental society to improve dental care for the public, it is necessary to collaborate with politics and governments, as well as effectively advocate to the entire society. Individual efforts alone will be difficult and will require the strength of the organization. Since a high organization rate creates a strong position, we will increase the membership organization rate of the Japan Dental Association, which has been an issue for some time, through various measures.

○ Support personal prevention and health promotion

We are committed to lifelong dental and oral health promotion and prevention with the aim of extending the healthy life expectancy and improving the quality of life of the people. To that end the key will be comprehensively deploying a range of measures in individual communities, such as promoting and establishing a proper awareness about daily self-care routines, eating habits, and nutrition; creating an environment where the public can more easily access dental checkups and professional care; as well as enhancing health education and promotional activities.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the sustainability of Japan's medical insurance system, the correction of health disparities among regions and individuals has become a major issue. There is an urgent need for measures to prevent serious diseases (early diagnosis and early treatment) among those who have not yet been examined. In addition, health needs are diversifying, especially among middle-aged and older adults, and industry, dental academic society, and government are required to work together to create a health care system that can accommodate these needs. In the process of systematizing community health services, dental health services will be enhanced. One of these services is food-related support. The importance of eating through the mouth and oral functions will be widely promoted and educated among all generations, not only children and the elderly with impaired masticatory functions.

At the same time, the ageing of society and the declining birthrate have led to a diversification of lifestyles and it has become a major social issue to establish a symbiotic society in which the individual can live in peace and leveraging his or her individuality and abilities. We will clarify the roles of dental care institutions and dental professionals in the context of integrated community care and develop infrastructure to provide continuous oral health care to people with a variety of different lifestyles. In this context, family dentists will play a role to provide initial dental treatment and continuous oral health care to prevent serious diseases, in accordance with changing of local conditions.

In the context of health care education, dental education for preschool and school aged children is an essential starting point, establishing an awareness in children that they are responsible for their own health (i.e., awareness of health promotion). To improve this education, we will develop programs through an uninterrupted revision process, leverage ICT, and expand the range of health education to include universities and vocational schools.

Regarding the provision of dental information that is beneficial for people of their health promotion, there is often a gap between the information that the people are interested in and the information that dentists want to convey to them. Since limited people are in the habit of seeking regular examinations and have sufficient knowledge about their teeth and mouth, we will begin by conveying what people wish to know in a format they want and then expand our advocating efforts to encourage dental examination behavior.

Finally, in order to facilitate the people to voluntarily engage in promoting their health, it is extremely useful to establish a system, Personal Health Record (PHR) for central management of health information such as life course health checkup records. The Japan Dental Association will cooperate in the formulation of the “Standard Code Specification for Oral Examination Information.”

○ **Contribute to entire society by addressing diverse needs**

Japan, priding on a society of health and longevity, is moving further toward “The Society with the Dynamic Engagement of all Citizens.” In addition, as people’s lifestyles diversify and the structure of disease changes, social needs for medical care also diversify, and this is also true for dentistry. In recent years, the smooth provision of dental health and dental care to the ever-increasing number of home care patients, participation in cooperation among other professions in regional medical networks, contribution to health education in regional efforts, improvement of safety at sports sites, health support for victims in disaster areas, and early detection of child abuse are just a few of the many examples.

Today, sports are enjoyed by men and women of all ages, and it is essential to promote research and development in sports dentistry to maintain and improve the performance of athletes, mainly in the prevention of dental and oral trauma. In addition, the training system for sports dentists will be strengthened jointly with the Japan Sport Association to support the nation’s health promotion through sports and to contribute to the improvement of healthy life expectancy and quality of life. Furthermore, we will improve the environment so that dentists can be present at domestic and international competition venues.

Dentists are playing an increasingly large role in the actions taken in the many natural disasters which have been happening more frequently in recent years. In order to support the health of disaster victims, the main issues include the provision of urgent dental care, as well as ongoing experiments in oral health management during prolonged periods of condemnation, with a view to preventing disaster-related deaths caused by aspiration pneumonia and other causes. We will work to build partnerships with associated government agencies and groups and further develop human resources for such situations.

As another disaster-related activity, dentists work for identifying people based on dental findings at the request of the police and other authorities. Although there are differences depending on national land resilience and disaster mitigation measures, the preparedness system is not necessarily at a level that can cope with the assumed damage from the Nankai Trough or an earthquake directly under the Tokyo metropolitan area. To increase preparedness, we will continue to build network, standardize workflows, and distribute equipment and supplies centered on dental associations across Japan, to enhance education and training programs; and to work for legislation. In advancing the sophistication of identity verification work, the standardization of dental care information has progressed, and its dissemination will be promoted.

Japan is a developed nation in the field of dentistry. We will continue to conduct and expand international contributory activities, taking into consideration national health strategies such as the Asia Health and Human Well-Being Initiative (AHWIN). Specifically, the program includes the development of human resources who can contribute internationally, support for dental health activities in the Asia-Pacific region and developing countries, and participation in the international standardization of dental instruments, materials, and technologies. We will also cooperate with the activities of the FDI (World Dental Federation).