

Free Dental Care for all

Smile! The Green Party is promising free dental!

The Green Party will make dental care free for everyone.

Our health and wellbeing relies on healthy teeth and gums - and everyone should have access to the dental care they need to thrive and participate fully in their communities.

For decades, successive governments have chosen to exclude dental care from the public health system. Dental care is now so expensive that 40 percent of people go without the care they need. For Māori, it is even worse.

This is a political choice. Different choices can be made.

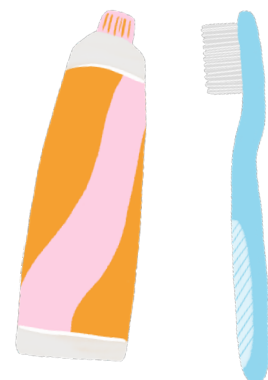
Right now, millions of people are putting off going to the dentist because it is too expensive.

The average trip to the dentist currently costs \$350 - which is about 40 percent of the weekly income of someone earning the minimum wage.

The consequences of delaying a trip to the dentist, or not treating problems with our teeth and gums can be devastating for people's lives. It can lead to severe health issues and more expensive interventions in the long-run.

In Aotearoa, we choose to resource our public health services because we recognise that everyone deserves to be looked after. We already make sure children under 18 years old can access free dental care.

The time is now to extend that care to everyone.



The Green Party will make dental care free for everyone - and we'll pay for it with a fair tax system.

Our plan will bring dental care into the public health system and make it free, so everyone's teeth and gums can be looked after - and we'll pay for it with a fair tax system.

Free dental care will give everyone the peace of mind that no matter what, they can visit the dentist when they need to. Together with the Income Guarantee and Pledge to Renters, the Green Party's plan will lift incomes and improve social services so everyone can meet their needs and live a good life.

The Green Party will create the New Zealand Dental Service, for community-based dental care that will provide:

- Free annual check-ups and cleanings available to everyone in their local community.
- Free basic dental care, such as fillings, sealants, and teeth removals for anyone who needs them.
- Mobile dental vans, portable clinics, and funding for community dental clinics, including on marae, so no one has to travel long distances to look after their teeth.
- Specialist care for people when they're in significant pain, require oral surgery or need complex treatment.

The Green Party will also provide:

- Funding for by Māori, for Māori community and whānau oral health services.
- A plan to train the next generation of dentists. We will meet the increased demand for dentists by lifting the cap on training placements and supporting more Māori and Pasifika into careers in dentistry.

Situation

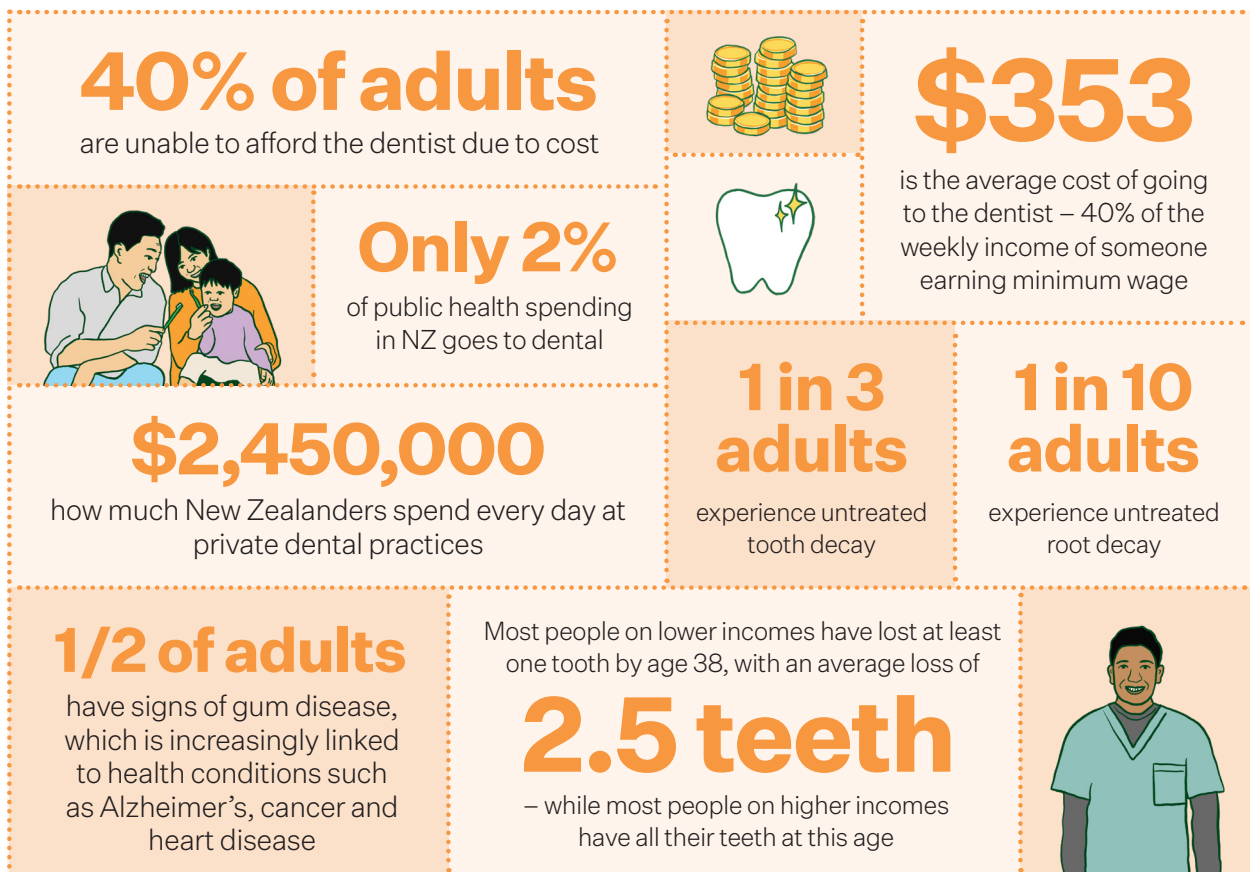
Healthy teeth and gums are crucial to our wellbeing. A clean, bright smile can make a big difference to how we feel about ourselves and give us the confidence we need to go about our daily lives.

When people experience poor oral health it can affect their lives in many different ways.

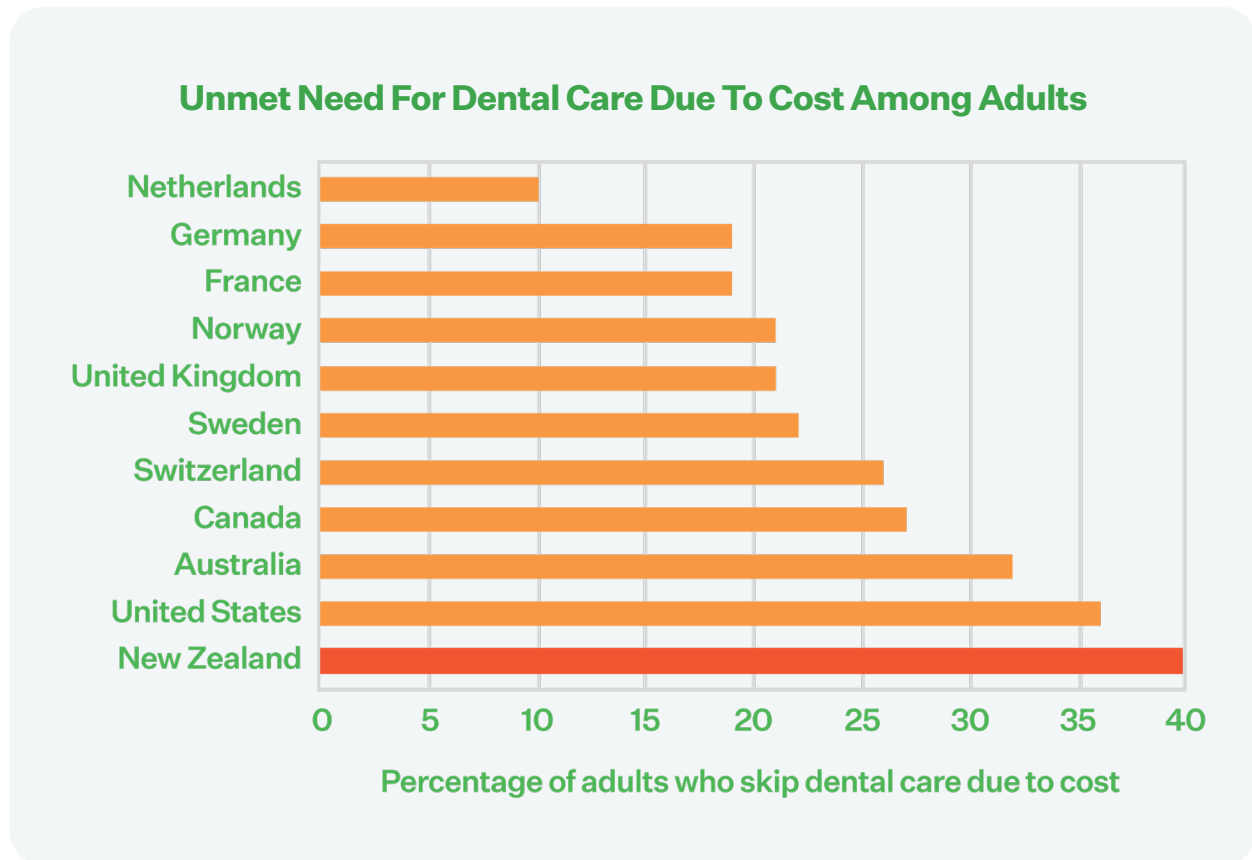
For some it can lead to a life of constant pain, and lack of sleep. Others can feel isolated and self-conscious because of oral health issues, for example when interviewing for a new job. Poor oral health can also lead to other health complications, which in some cases can be quite severe.

A trip to the dentist can be life-changing.

But right now, far too many people cannot afford to go to the dentist. A recent poll revealed that seven in ten adults in Aotearoa delay going to the dentist because of the cost. Over 1.5 million people over 18 years are unable to afford dental care altogether. For Māori and Pasifika, these inequalities are even greater, with 50 percent of Māori and Pasifika unable to access dental services due to cost.



It is no wonder then that Aotearoa performs poorly compared with other similar countries. There are more people in New Zealand who skip going to the dentist because of the cost than in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom.



No one should be turned away from healthcare because of their income. The time is now to make sure everyone can access the dental care they need.

Free Dental Care for All

The Green Party will make dental care free for everyone - and we will pay for it with a simple, fair and practical wealth tax.

Aotearoa is a wealthy country. The money we need to look after everyone's oral health is available. But successive governments have decided not to use it.

There is no excuse for the choice governments have made to keep excluding dental care from the public health system. Caring for teeth and gums is one of the only forms healthcare in Aotearoa where people are expected to pay the full cost in the private market.

This is a political choice - and different choices can be made.

By collecting the revenue from those most able to pay, the Green Party will be able to provide free dental care to everyone.

Wealth Tax Recap

The Green Party's wealth tax will be **paid by just 0.7 percent of New Zealanders** - the wealthiest few property owners in the country, who can afford to contribute more.

Only couples worth more than \$4 million (minus mortgages and other debt) and individuals worth more than \$2 million will pay the wealth tax.

The net wealth tax would cover most forms of wealth and assets, like property, shares, and bonds. Everyday household goods like furniture, appliances, electronics, and vehicles with values less than \$50,000 will not be covered.

Under our plan, 95% of New Zealanders will be better off.

Read more at:
greens.org.nz/ending_poverty_together



New Zealand Dental Service

The Green Party will create a new community-based New Zealand Dental Service.

Everyone in Aotearoa will be able to use the New Zealand Dental Service to access free annual check-ups, cleanings, fillings and tooth removals as needed at a local dentist.

We will also provide mobile dental vans, portable clinics and funding for local dental clinics, including on marae and in community hubs, so no one has to travel long distances to look after their teeth.

The New Zealand Dental Service will also provide emergency and complex dental services through local hospitals or specialist sites so people can get treatment to address things like abscesses, pain, and infection before it impacts their general health.

The Green Party will create a New Zealand Dental Service so everyone can keep their teeth healthy, and access treatment when they need it.

Community Services

Annual:

Check-ups and cleanings

As needed:

Free basic dental care such as filling, sealants, and tooth removal

Specialist and secondary care

As needed:

Oral surgeries, root canals, implants, and other medically necessary specialist care

Free dental care will be life changing for tens of thousands of people right across Aotearoa.

Removing cost as a barrier will mean everyone can look after their teeth and gums and access the care they need, when they need it.

Regular community check-ups and free basic treatments like fillings and sealants will support everyone to keep their teeth healthy. Preventative care will help spot any problems before they get worse. Treatment will also be available for anyone experiencing pain or with more complex needs.

Example

Sharon and her husband are expecting their fourth baby and she's nervous about the health of her teeth. Sharon experienced significant tooth decay during her last pregnancy which cost a lot to sort out.

With free dental services, Sharon makes an appointment for a check-up at the mobile clinic outside the local kindergarten. Her dentist is very reassuring and lets her know that her teeth are in great shape, but she does need a small filling. Her dentist can give her the filling right away, with some helpful advice on caring for her oral health throughout the rest of her pregnancy.

The whole appointment costs Sharon nothing, which is a great relief as her family plans financially for their newest arrival.



Example

Ralph is studying to be a teacher, but lately his wisdom teeth have been causing him pain and disrupting his study time. A year ago, he saw a private dentist who quoted him \$1800 to get them removed, but he couldn't afford the treatment and has been living with constant pain ever since.

When a free dental clinic opens at the Student Centre alongside the GP, he registers and books an appointment. The dentist confirms that Ralph's wisdom teeth need to be removed to prevent infection. A follow up appointment is booked.

Ralph is very relieved this care is now available free of charge. After a few days recovering, he is back to his studies and pain-free.



Equitable Oral Health for Whānau Māori

The Green Party's plan for free dental will also prioritise kaupapa Māori approaches.

The Green Party will properly resource kaupapa Māori oral health services and enable providers to take a whānau ora approach to achieve the best outcomes for Māori.

The Green Party will:

1. Resource Te Aka Whai Ora, the Māori Health Authority, to support existing Māori oral health providers.
2. Provide additional funding to support iwi, hāpu, kaupapa Māori and Pasifika health providers, to develop their services and offer community dental care.
3. Ensure continuity of care and flexible, whānau-based treatment through strong links between Māori providers and other general and oral health service providers, including child and adolescent providers.

Māori and Pasifika are much less likely to access dental treatment than others, with more than half of all Māori and Pasifika going without having their dental care needs met. Kaupapa Māori services will enable culturally safe and responsive care, so Māori and Pasifika can take care of their oral health needs.

Māori health needs have been neglected by successive governments. The recent Waitangi Tribunal Health Services and Outcomes Inquiry identified consistent failures of the Crown in its commitment to achieving equity of health outcomes for Māori. Oral health is no different.

The time is now to ensure that Te Aka Whai Ora has the resourcing it needs to support Māori dental providers.

There are many examples where kaupapa Māori health and oral health providers have been successful in their communities. However, these services are not supported to reach everybody they need to.



Case Study

Ngāi Tahu runs **Te Kāika** – a kaupapa Māori ‘one-stop health shop’ and hub of integrated health, social and education services taking a holistic approach to improving and maintaining whānau wellbeing. Registered Te Kāika Dunedin patients can access low-cost kaupapa Māori dental services alongside reduced cost GP services, mental health support, physiotherapy and much more. With Te Aka Whai Ora funding, Te Kāika would be able to offer free and expanded community dental treatment to all their patients in Dunedin.

Example

For Ataahua, it’s been years since she went to the dentist - she’s been so busy with mahi and her mokopuna. But now that Ataahua is retired, she starts to think more about checking up on her oral health.

The Māori healthcare provider she has been going to for years lets her know they’re now offering check-ups and cleanings for adults – Ataahua trusts her doctor, so she books an appointment and takes her eldest moko, Mia, with her so she can have a check-up too.

Ataahua’s teeth have no cavities, but the dentist notices a few areas that could benefit from some preventative fissure sealant, and is able to apply this at the appointment. Mia doesn’t need any treatment following her check-up, but gets a free toothbrush and reusable water bottle.

The whole process is free of charge for Ataahua and Mia.



Workforce

The Green Party's plan for universal free dental care will meet the demand for new dentists by training and developing hundreds of people to work in dentistry.

The Green Party will recruit, train, and develop the next generation of dentists, specialists and support staff.

Right now, Aotearoa has fewer dentists relative to the population compared to almost all other OECD countries. Nearly half of our dentists and dental specialists (47 percent) have overseas qualifications.

There are approximately 2,500 practicing dentists in Aotearoa, only 55 of whom are employed by Te Whatu Ora – mostly in child dental services. This is fewer than 3 percent of dentists.

To deliver a public dentistry workforce, the Green Party will:

Increase domestic placements for dentistry

Despite the clear need for more dentists, successive governments have capped the number of training places at just 60 per year. The Green Party will fund an additional 20 placements from 2024. We'll review training pipelines and placement numbers in subsequent years to ensure we're meeting demand for dentists. This will start to close workforce gaps and ensure the increased demand for public dental services can be met.

Boost the Māori and Pasifika Workforce

When whānau visit the dentist, it is important they feel safe and comfortable accessing the services they are entitled to. A key part of this is making sure the dentistry workforce reflects our communities. Right now, only 5 percent of dentists are Māori or Pasifika. The Green Party will support Māori and Pasifika pursue careers in dentistry by:

- Introducing scholarships.
- Ensuring Māori and Pasifika are supported to access domestic placements and complete their dentistry studies.
- Ensuring the Health Workforce Plan 2023/24 actions to boost the Māori and Pasifika workforce apply to dentistry.

Training and upskilling Oral Health Therapists

The Green Party will provide pathways for oral health therapists to treat adults through community providers. We will make sure licensing and workforce training reflects this and lift the cap on the domestic placements for oral health therapists.

Recruitment

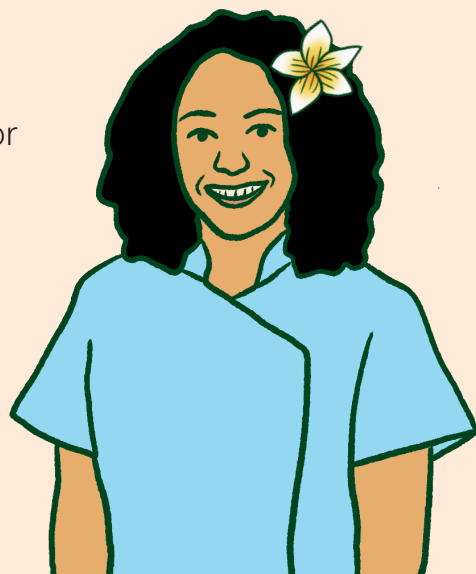
In addition to providing more training and career opportunities for people currently in Aotearoa, the Green Party will also maintain recruitment of internationally qualified dentists and specialists. We will develop recruitment actions in the Health Workforce 2023/24 Plan to apply to oral health professionals.

Example

Leilani is due to graduate from high school, and she's been thinking about pursuing a career in healthcare. Her school holds a Careers Day and the local Pasifika-run dental service gives a talk to the students about careers in dentistry.

Leilani decides she wants to be a dentist, working with people and giving back to her community. Leilani's excited she's eligible for a scholarship to study dentistry and is well supported throughout her studies by the Pasifika centre and academic advisors at her university.

She returns home to Mangere to begin her first years working in the public dental service, doing important work to engage her community in oral health.



The Pathway to The New Zealand Dental Service

Phase 1: Dental Services in Communities

Our plan will get to work immediately on making sure everyone can access basic dental care services in their local community.

By the end of 2024 people will be able to access services in a range of places such as local health services, existing clinics, marae, workplaces, and community centres.

We will establish primary dental care in communities so everyone can access annual cleanings, check-ups, and basic treatment in the places where they work, live, and spend their time.

To achieve this, we will:

- Make use of existing private and public workforces, equipment, and clinics by contracting for dental services with private dentists to extend care to adults.
- Begin training, recruiting and hiring more public dentists.
- Provide additional resources for new mobile vans, portable clinics and equipment in existing community centres and public venues, starting in communities with the highest need.
- Resource Te Aka Whai Ora, the Māori Health Authority to fund kaupapa Māori oral health services.
- Provide that Te Whatu Ora covers the cost of urgent care when anyone goes to a dentist with severe pain or with emergency dental needs.
- Work with dentists to review the adolescent service agreement to ensure funding is sustainable and enhanced workforce planning benefits both the children and adolescent dental services.

Phase 2: Boosting Specialist Care

Our plan will establish comprehensive care so people can get medically necessary dental treatment when they're in significant pain, need oral surgery or specialist care.

Extensive oral health treatment will be available from 2025, with comprehensive care in all hospitals and specialist sites across Aotearoa by the end of 2027.

Starting in 2025, we'll resource Te Whatu Ora to provide more specialist and secondary care in hospitals and specialist sites in Aotearoa.

To achieve this, we will

- Provide additional funding to Te Whatu Ora so they can expand their existing specialist and complex oral health care.
- Continue the roll-out of a comprehensive New Zealand Dental Service, in all communities.
- Continue to train and hire more public dentists to support expansion of services and reduce reliance on contracts with private dentists.



Costing

Operating Expenditure (\$ millions):

Initiative	2024	2025 & 2026
Primary services for adults	1200	1200
Secondary Services	[NA]	300
Kaupapa Māori Dental Services	200	200
Boosting the Workforce	10	10
Total	1410	1710

Capital Expenditure (\$ millions):

Initiative	Across 4 years
Mobile Vans, Clinical Buses, Portable and Fixed Equipment & Clinics	150

Costing Methodology

This scheme has been costed using existing estimates of the cost of public dental care for adults, including in the paper ‘Lightening the Load’ by Max Rashbrooke for the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists and estimates by the Ministry of Health, which also appear in ‘Tooth Be Told’ by the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists. Information on the current cost of dental care to households, combined with findings about unmet need has also been used, including in the paper ‘Biting Costs’ by the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists and the 2019 Household Expenditure Statistics which includes spending on dental care.

Cost estimates for workforce supports and capital expenditure on equipment, clinics and vans was prepared with thanks to all those dentists, academics, and oral health experts who generously shared their time, knowledge and experiences with us. Parliamentary Written Questions were also used and are cited in the source list.

While we have used the most robust information available and cautious estimates throughout, limitations in data mean that these are indicative, rather than comprehensive modelling. Our costings consider limitations in data, higher demand in the first years of the scheme, and the proposed service design. However, figures here are estimates for the next three years only. We anticipate that costs will decrease long-term as a greater focus on preventative care improves oral health outcomes for all New Zealanders.

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