

« the Dental Association of Malawi and the Malawian Ministry of Health and Population using a repurposed Scottish Government grant. Together, we produced a digital training programme to refresh the knowledge of 25 northern dental therapists. The programme aimed to teach them to teach rural oral health promoter volunteers to cascade vital oral health messages to their communities. With the expertise of Bridge2Aid and ProDental CPD, a 12-module course was produced and hosted on the ProDental CPD platform. The project was a great success and with appropriate funding will be rolled out in the central and southern regions. More than 40 Oral Health Promoters are now working in their communities spreading important oral health messages which are culturally appropriate and community-led.

From 2024, Smileawi hope to return to Malawi with groups of volunteers to work in mobile pain relief clinics in rural areas. We plan to place a much stronger emphasis on the prevention of dental disease and to continue to strengthen the projects currently underway.

We are writing this article in Malawi where Smileawi are involved in the National Child Oral Health Survey as part of the implementation of the Malawian Oral Health Policy launched in April 2022. It is hoped that the data collected can be used in the development of a Malawian version of the Scottish ChildSmile Programme.

At Smileawi, we feel we are contributing in a small way to the improvement of dental services in Malawi. However, for the world to reach SDG targets by 2030, it will require an enormous collaborative exercise and acceleration of relevant activities, which we are happy to be a part of and hope will be achieved. ■

## References

1. UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The 17 Goals. Available at <https://sdgs.un.org/goals> (accessed October 2023).
2. Matanhire-Zihanzu C N, Chambers S, Bagg J, Chimimba P. Assessing Malawi's recent development of a National Oral Health Policy – learning for the future. *J Global Health Rep* 2022; DOI: 10.29392/001c.57368.

# Tobacco: Government needs to show same ambition across prevention agenda



Following plans for a phased ban on tobacco, the British Dental Association (BDA) said Government must now show the same ambition across public health, given consistent failure to grasp the nettle on prevention in the face of deep and widening inequality.

The Prime Minister has proposed annual rises in the legal age for purchasing cigarettes. The move, echoing an approach already in force in New Zealand, has potential to ensure the next generation grows up smoke free.

Dental professionals are on the frontline in the battle against oral cancer – which claims more lives each year than car accidents – and gum disease. Smoking is one of the key drivers for both conditions.

The BDA stresses ministers must now show they are serious about prevention across all areas of health. The ongoing access crisis in NHS dentistry is fuelling widening inequalities, with unmet need for NHS dentistry in 2023 estimated at one in four of England's adult population. The first oral health survey of five-year-olds published since lockdown showed no improvements in decay levels and a widening gap between rich and poor.<sup>1</sup> The government pledged a recovery plan for NHS dentistry in April 2023 that remains unpublished. Its official response

to the Health and Social Care Committee's damning inquiry into NHS dentistry has been overdue since 14 September.

The BDA has lamented drift on bans on prime-time junk food advertising and on buy one get one free offers for products high in sugar.

Despite the Health and Care Act 'simplifying' the process for water fluoridation, there is no indication capital funding is being brought forward for rollout.

The public health grant – used by local authorities to fund vital preventive services – has been cut by a quarter since 2015 in real terms, undermining existing preventive schemes.

Mick Armstrong, Chair of the BDA's Health and Science Committee, said: 'Government seems willing to be bold and ambitious on tobacco but appears to be waving a white flag on the wider prevention agenda.

'Deep seated health inequalities in this country are widening with every passing day. We need real commitment to close that gap.'

## References

1. British Dental Association. Ministers remain asleep at wheel as child oral health gap widens. 23 March 2023. Available at: <https://www.bda.org/news-centre/press-releases/Pages/Ministers-remain-asleep-at-wheel-as-child-oral-health-gap-widens.aspx> (accessed October 2023).