

KEY MESSAGES

Oral health policy: International implications for Australia

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Policy context

Policy studies (i.e. the scholarly, peer-reviewed analysis of the nature of the processes by which policy is formed) is a very small research area within oral health. The study of, and advocacy for policy, has traditionally been conducted by government, the private sector and professional organisations.

The debate about the policy relevance of research is ultimately about values. However, there should be an alignment between research and national oral health policy, so that there is an evidence base to policy. Currently, no studies exist of the congruence of oral health evidence to policy and the implications of this congruence for developing more policy-relevant oral health research are unknown.

The content of research can be determined through an analysis of research databases and indicative evidence of oral health policy priorities exists in the form of oral health policy statements produced by national governments. This study describes the conceptual content of the entire corpus of oral health research abstracts for the period 2000-2012 and compares it to the content of national oral health policy documents (those of Australia and other English-speaking countries). The study aims to build an understanding of the nature of the evidence-policy divide so that research can better serve policy efforts to address oral health inequity.

Key messages

- > There is a striking degree of disconnection between clinical concepts and health care system and workforce development concepts.
- > Oral health research and policy are so different as to raise doubts about the extent to which research is policy-relevant and policy is evidence-based. The notion of policy relevance encompasses the lack of willingness of policy advisers to embrace research, and the need for researchers to develop research that is, and is seen to be, policy-relevant.