ORAL HEALTH PREVENTION MUST BECOME A CLEAR HEALTH POLICY PRIORITY
Policy Statement | Baltic Round Table 2026
Vilnius, Lithuania | 23 October 2026

Sustainable Investment in Oral Health: Treatment or Prevention?

Our shared concern
The discussions among representatives of Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Poland, together with the Council of European Dentists (CED), highlighted a common concern: **oral health and prevention require greater and more consistent attention from national health policymakers and decision-makers.**
Despite differences in national healthcare systems, financing arrangements and the organisation of dental services, participating countries face challenges related to access to oral healthcare, financial protection of patients, inequalities and the sustainability of healthcare financing.
The discussions demonstrated that the central policy question is not whether countries should finance treatment or prevention. **Both are indispensable. The challenge is to establish a sustainable balance between them and to create financing mechanisms that actively support prevention and long-term oral health.**

Prevention as an essential investment
Prevention should not be regarded merely as an additional activity within dental services. It is an essential component of a sustainable oral healthcare system and must be reflected in healthcare priorities, service organisation and financing arrangements.
Country presentations illustrated different approaches to preventive care, including regular dental examinations, preventive services for children, oral health education, financial incentives encouraging regular attendance and community-based initiatives.
The discussions also highlighted the importance of continuity of preventive care, particularly during the transition from publicly supported childhood dental services to adult oral healthcare.
A healthcare system cannot be considered sustainable solely on the basis of its capacity to provide treatment. It must also create conditions that help people maintain oral health and avoid preventable disease.

The responsibility of policymakers
Conference participants emphasised that differences in public financing and patient out-of-pocket expenditure can significantly affect access to oral healthcare. The existence of dental services does not, by itself, guarantee that people can afford or regularly access them.
The experience presented by participating countries demonstrated that no single financing model can be applied universally. Nevertheless, national systems should be assessed not only by their expenditure or organisational structure, but also by their ability to support prevention, ensure access and protect patients from financial barriers.
The discussions revealed an additional challenge: in several systems, expenditure on prevention cannot be clearly distinguished from expenditure on treatment because of differences in financing mechanisms, definitions and reporting practices.
Without transparent and comparable information, it is difficult to assess whether prevention receives adequate attention and financial support.

Priorities emerging from the discussions
The conference discussions provide a basis for calling on national health policymakers and decision-makers to:

1. **Give oral health and prevention greater visibility** in national healthcare strategies, policy priorities and financing decisions.
2. **Ensure that preventive care is clearly recognised, measurable and adequately funded** within oral healthcare financing systems.
3. **Strengthen continuity and accessibility of preventive services**, paying particular attention to children, the transition to adult care and populations facing financial, social, or geographical barriers, and oral health inequalities.
4. **Improve transparency and comparability of oral healthcare financing data**, including the distinction between preventive and treatment-related expenditure.
5. **Support continued European cooperation**, involving national dental organisations and CED, to exchange effective approaches and explore common indicators for monitoring financing, prevention and oral health outcomes.

A common direction for the future

The Baltic Round Table discussions demonstrated the value of moving beyond comparisons of national financing systems towards structured cooperation on sustainable oral healthcare.

Greater attention to prevention is not a call to reduce necessary treatment. It is a call to ensure that healthcare financing supports both present clinical needs and better oral health in the future.

The participating countries' experiences offer an important foundation for continued dialogue with national governments, health authorities and European professional organisations.

Oral health prevention deserves a clearly recognised place in health policy priorities, financing decisions and the evaluation of healthcare system performance.

Policy statement based on presentations and discussions at the Baltic Round Table, Vilnius, 23 October 2026. This text reflects themes and policy directions expressed during the conference.