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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# National Dental Commission — Reforming India's Dental Education Is Only Half the Battle

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**SUBJECTS COVERED****POLITY****SOCIAL ISSUES****GS PAPERS****GS2****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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# National Dental Commission — Reforming India's Dental Education Is Only Half the Battle

The Hindu 22 March 2026 **GS2**

**TH** The Hindu | MAINS RELEVANCE: **GS Paper 2**



### INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"India has the most dental colleges in the world but poor dental health outcomes — can regulatory reform alone fix this mismatch?"*

### WHY IN NEWS

The constitution of the National Dental Commission (NDC) on March 19, 2026, replacing the Dental Council of India (DCI), represents a landmark healthcare governance reform — but the editorial argues that regulatory restructuring alone cannot fix India's dental health crisis without addressing deeper systemic issues.

## The Reform

The NDC replaces the DCI (established 1949 under the Dentists Act, 1948) with a modern regulatory framework featuring three autonomous boards — for education, assessment, and ethics. This mirrors the 2020 replacement of the Medical Council of India (MCI) by the National Medical Commission (NMC).

## The Numbers That Expose the Problem

INDICATOR	INDIA	WHO STANDARD
Dental colleges	~ <b>310</b> (largest globally)	—
Annual graduates	~26,000	—
Dentist-to-population ratio	~1:10,000	1:7,500
Rural dental coverage	Negligible	—
Caries prevalence (children)	~50-60%	—

India produces more dentists than any country on Earth — yet most Indians have **never visited a dentist**. The National Oral Health Programme data suggests that **80% of India's dentists are concentrated in urban areas**, leaving rural India virtually unserved.

## Three Deeper Issues the NDC Must Address

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### 1. The Fee-Quality Nexus in Private Colleges

Private dental colleges charge **Rs 10-25 lakh per year** for BDS programmes. Students who pay such fees naturally gravitate toward **cosmetic dentistry and urban practice** — the only way to recover their investment. Community dentistry and rural posting are economically irrational for debt-laden graduates.

The NDC's fee regulation mandate must create a framework where affordable education enables public service, not just private practice.

### 2. Curriculum Modernisation

Indian dental curriculum has not kept pace with global advances in:

- Digital dentistry (CAD/CAM, 3D printing)
- Minimally invasive techniques
- Tele-dentistry for rural screening
- Preventive and public health dentistry emphasis

The NDC's education board must mandate curriculum updates that produce **community-oriented dental professionals**, not just clinic operators.

### 3. Integration with Primary Healthcare

Dental care remains **siloed from primary healthcare** in India. PHCs and CHCs rarely have dental units. The editorial argues that:

- Every Community Health Centre should have a dental unit
- AYUSHMAN Bharat Health and Wellness Centres must include basic dental screening
- School health programmes need annual dental check-ups as a mandate, not an aspiration

## The NMC Experience: Lessons and Cautions

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The NMC (2020) provides both hope and caution:

- **Positive:** NEXT (National Exit Test) creates a uniform licensing standard; fee regulation reduced some private college excesses
- **Concerning:** Transition period created regulatory uncertainty; some NMC decisions faced legal challenges; bureaucratic composition drew criticism about true autonomy

The NDC must learn from NMC's missteps — ensure genuine autonomy, transparent appointment processes, and stakeholder representation including public health experts, not just dental college administrators.

**UPSC RELEVANCE**

NDC structure, Dentists Act 1948, NMC parallel, National Oral Health Programme.

**MAINS GS-2:**

Healthcare governance reform, regulatory bodies, quality of professional education, rural healthcare access.

**GS-4:**

Ethics in medical profession — should private dental college fees be regulated?

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### NATIONAL DENTAL COMMISSION:

Constituted: March 19, 2026

Chairperson: Dr. Sanjay Tewari

Replaces: DCI (est. 1949)

Repeals: Dentists Act, 1948

### INDIA'S DENTAL HEALTH:

Dental colleges: ~310 (world's highest)

Graduates/year: ~26,000

80% dentists in urban areas

Caries prevalence in children: ~50-60%

National Oral Health Programme: Under NHM

### HEALTHCARE REGULATORY REFORMS IN INDIA:

MCI → NMC (2020)

DCI → NDC (2026)

CCIM → NCISM (National Commission for Indian System of Medicine)

CCH → NCH (National Commission for Homeopathy)

Allied Healthcare: National Commission for Allied Healthcare Professions Act, 2021

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

First dental college in India: Nair Hospital Dental College, Mumbai (1938)

NEXT (National Exit Test): Common licensing exam under NMC

Ayushman Bharat HWCs: ~1.6 lakh Health & Wellness Centres target

PHC: Primary Health Centre; CHC: Community Health Centre

Sources: [The Hindu](#), [Free Press Journal](#), [ANI](#)

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