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GOVERNMENT INACTION DOESN'T MEND MILLIONS OF DECAYED TEETH & INTENSE ORAL PAIN

Dental peak body slams Canberra for doing nothing to fix endemic problem

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THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT HAS run out of excuses for not fixing the broken dental system, says the nation's peak body for dentists.

With millions walking around with untreated tooth decay, waiting lists for public dental years long and vulnerable groups suffering and in terrible pain for long periods due to lack of access and affordability, a complete overhaul of the dental system is beyond overdue.

When the Australian Dental Association President addresses the Senate Inquiry into Dental Access* on Friday (October 20), he won't be sugar coating the message from the nation's dentists.

"The Albanese Government came to power on promises of fixing access to dentistry so more people had access to more services," said ADA President Dr Stephen Liew.

"Before they were elected Labor said that their goal was to 'provide universal access to affordable dental services for all Australians, and an elected Labor Government will engage a consultative process with all relevant stakeholders to begin this work.'

"Yet 17 months later absolutely nothing has happened. The ADA and the nation's dentists couldn't be more disappointed and frustrated. Our patience and that of millions of long-suffering Australians, is wearing thin."

The ADA worked closely with the Gillard Government and the Greens in setting up the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) in 2014 so kids under 18 whose parents receive a Commonwealth benefit, get \$1056 in dental treatment every 2 years.

"The infrastructure and the legislation is there to introduce additional dental schemes - so what's holding the Health Minister up in instigating a similar scheme for seniors, followed by other ones for our most vulnerable groups?"

"When we ask to meet with the Minister to push for these changes, we're met with a wall of silence."

Costings supplied by the Treasury show that at \$77.6 bn a decade, the cost of putting mouths into Medicare is prohibitively expensive for most governments. However, instigating smaller schemes like the one the ADA designed for those in aged care, its Seniors Dental Benefits Schedule, would cost just a fraction of that at \$100m a year.

Once that is set up, schemes for other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, people with a disability and those on low incomes, could easily follow.



“It’s a simple, straightforward strategy which provides a roadmap for the future, whilst initially improving the oral health of Australians who need it most,” said a frustrated Dr Liew.

“It’s better to provide decent care to vulnerable groups than spread the dollars out too thin and give everyone very basic care that wouldn’t cover anything beyond the occasional checkup every few years.

“The question is: why hasn’t the current Government set this up already?”

Notes to Editors

* Dr Liew will be putting the ADA case for an overhaul of dental access in Australia when he appears at the Select Committee into the Provision of and Access to Dental Services in Australia on Friday 20 October.

* The current public system while proving excellent care, is drastically underfunded and oversubscribed so people wait 2 or more years for appointments. Also with the short term arrangements under Future Funding Agreements (FFA), dentists don’t have job security of more than 2 years at a time so the system disincentivises dentists from working in the public sector.

* Funding for the public dental system currently only covers 30% of those eligible, leaving the vast majority languishing without care.

* 85% of dentistry in Australia is done by dentists in the private sector, some for public patients with a healthcare card under the FFA voucher system – but the majority is for private patients. Some of these private patients have private health insurance and some don’t. Using the CDBS model solves the issue of access by allowing those that qualify under the Dental Benefits Act to access private infrastructure.

* **Oral health statistics:**

(i) **Child decay stats:** **1 in 3 kids** has experienced decay and **1 in 4** has untreated tooth decay, while **10 kids in every 1,000** are hospitalized annually for dental conditions.

(ii) **Adult decay stats:** **1 in 3 adults** has untreated tooth decay and **1 in 3** have untreated periodontitis which if left untreated is a precursor to a range of serious health issues from heart disease to Alzheimer’s, stroke, kidney disease and low birthweight and premature babies.

(iii) **Dental decay:** is Australia’s most preventable health problem which results in dental spending of **\$4.5bn** in 2019-2020 alone.

To interview Dr Liew (pictured), call ADA Media Advisor Jenny Barlass 0484 869 086.

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