

# #let's talk about gums



## MEDIA RELEASE

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## COST OF LIVING AFFECTS DENTAL HABITS

**People know what to do but they can't afford to do it, survey results find**

**TWO THIRDS OF PEOPLE ONLY VISIT THE DENTIST** when they have a problem, and affordability is the main reason that keeps them away.

New data from the Australian Dental Association's annual oral health survey of 25,000 people also found that only one third (31%) of people go for a regular checkup.

The survey found that 61% of people delayed treatment in the last 12 months - a 17% increase in the last 13 years. Affordability accounted for 63% of respondent's reason for the delay, a 12% increase on 2022.

"All the more reason that there needs to be help from the government for a greater number of Australians so they can get the regular dental treatment they so badly need and often can't afford," said the Australian Dental Association's (ADA) President Dr Scott Davis.

"This is particularly the case for seniors in residential aged care, and our most vulnerable populations including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, those on low wages and people with a disability.

"If people saw their dentist regularly, they'd be less likely to face more complex treatment further down the track. Government-funded schemes for our most vulnerable populations would go a long way to making this a reality for millions of Aussies for whom at the moment a dental visit isn't a financial reality."

Of those who'd seen a dentist for a check-up in the last 12 months:

- only 7% had been in the last 6 months
- 10% in the last 6 to 12 months
- 21% in the last 1 to 2 years
- 36% in the last 2 to 5 years
- 23% in over 5 years.

With so few trips to get oral health needs met, little wonder that one third (34%) of people have suffered with tooth pain, gum pain, face swelling or infection in the last year – and those issues were more

prevalent with seniors. While almost half (42%) had their problem treated, a quarter (23%) did not, with cost the predominant barrier.

A third of people (32%) rated their oral health as 'poor' or 'very poor' and over half of these were aged over 65. One of the main reasons for the poor rating was that they admitted to 'not visiting the dentist often enough,' or attributed it to alcohol, smoking, diet or an existing dental or medical condition.

"What these statistics clearly demonstrate is that there isn't enough help for these vulnerable populations which number in their millions," said Dr Davis, a prosthodontist from Port Macquarie.

"The current system of government assistance for them is ailing - eligible people wait years on public dental waiting lists just to have their first appointment, often enduring years of pain. There are hundreds of thousands of Aussies suffering this way."

The ADA has the solution to this issue and has put it to the Health Minister Mark Butler, as well as to the recent Senate Inquiry Into Dental Access. Its final report prompted the Parliamentary Budgetary Office (PBO) to produce eight potential schemes for funding dental in Medicare in some form.

Of these, "the ADA favours the seniors scheme which the PBO has calculated would cost just \$15.7bn over a decade," said Dr Davis. "This is cheap compared to trying to deliver dentistry to every Australian at a cost of around five times that at \$77bn a decade, according to Treasury costings.

"The structure is in place to implement such a scheme, thanks to the existing Child Dental Benefits Schedule, and it can be introduced under the existing Dental Benefits Act. Once it's rolled out and evaluated, everything is in place to roll out successive schemes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, those on low incomes and people with a disability.

"So what's the Government waiting for?"

**To interview Dr Davis call ADA Media Advisor Jenny Barlass 0497 748 331.**

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