

6 March 1998

Peak Body Calls for Dental Services for Low Income Australians

The NRHA today called on major political parties to take the opportunity to include proposals for oral and dental care in their election platforms this year. By this means governments will be able to co-operate in the delivery of subsidised dental services for people on low incomes and others with poor access to dental services. Improved workforce policies for oral health are also urgently required.

The Public Health Partnership is the appropriate framework for Commonwealth, Northern Territory and State Governments to provide such a service. People in rural Australia already have difficulties accessing dental care and prevention services. If they are poor, these people are doubly disadvantaged. They would therefore be key beneficiaries of the new service envisaged.

Currently Queensland is the only State which has picked up the CDHP model from its own funds and Western Australia is the only State which has a broad dental health program for needy adults. In other States, the amount of subsidised dental care was reduced when the CDHP was first established and has not been replaced since CDHP ended.

The National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) was giving evidence to the Senate's Inquiry into Public Dental Services.

NRHA spokesperson Leonie Short, an oral health expert from Queensland, also called for a new Public Dental Health Partnership to protect and enhance the oral health of low income earners, unemployed people and those in rural and remote areas with poor access to dental care.

"The majority of oral diseases can be significantly reduced or prevented", Ms Short said. "Increased attention to both research and policy development in the area of public dental health is also required. There should be a thorough evaluation of the way oral health services are delivered and public health principles should be the basis for improvements."

Marg Brown, Chairperson of Health Consumers of Rural and Remote Australia, also presented evidence to the Senate Inquiry.

"People in rural and remote areas are among those penalised by the absence of a subsidised program for dental care because of their isolation from services. A new program based on a partnership between the Commonwealth and State Governments would help to cover this major gap in the basic health services which should be available to people wherever they live and whatever their level of income," Ms Brown said.

The NRHA represents nineteen national organisations involved with rural and remote health services.

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