



Australian Health Care
Reform Alliance



NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.



Media Release

25 March 2012

Federal Budget: D-Day for Dental

This Federal Budget is 'D-Day for Dental', offering the Government the last chance to address Australia's worsening dental crisis, according to peak health and community organisations: the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA), the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA), the National Rural Health Alliance (NRHA) and the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

These key bodies have reiterated their call on the Federal Government to invest in public dental care in the upcoming Budget.

Australia's public dental health services are at crisis point and the oral health status of many groups in the community is declining at an alarming rate. Untreated dental problems can impact upon people's ability to eat nutritious food, socialise and gain education and employment. If these issues are not addressed immediately, the long-term health, social and economic impact on our community will take generations to reverse.

Almost half a million Australians are currently on waiting lists for public dental treatment, with an average waiting time of two years. During this time, dental problems become more serious and thus ultimately require more intensive (and often more expensive) treatment.

2.

Often the only solution for untreated dental decay is an extraction. In fact, research shows that adults on the lowest incomes are almost 60 times more likely to have no teeth than those in the top 25% of incomes. Disturbingly, this trend is also showing up in children, with children in the lowest socioeconomic areas having 70% more decay in their teeth than children in the highest socioeconomic areas.

Economic modelling, commissioned by the Brotherhood of St Laurence, found that the cost to the economy of poor access to dental care was up to \$2.0 billion per year. This includes the cost associated with preventable hospital admissions (due to untreated dental problems) and foregone productivity with over one million work days lost due to poor dental health every year.

In order to address these problems, these peak health bodies are calling on the Government to fund a universal oral and dental health scheme, starting with services for those who need it most, such as children, the elderly, people with chronic and complex diseases, people in rural and remote areas and families on low incomes. Funding for the current Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme and the Medicare Teen Dental Program should be rolled into this universal scheme.

This would ensure that all Australians have access to basic preventive dental care, with a focus initially on those most at risk of developing serious problems. It would also reduce the current high cost to the community of poor dental health and contribute to a healthy and productive future for Australia.

For further information/comment:

Prue Power, AHHA: 0417 419857
Tony McBride, AHCRA: 0407 531 468

Gordon Gregory, NRHA: 02 6285 4660
Fernando de Freitas, ACOSS: 0419 626 155