



Oral Health Advocacy Day 20 March 2007

The deep inequalities in access to oral health care for adult Australians are well documented, as are the problems suffered by so many as a result. Low-income Australians experience lengthy delays in treatment, or miss out altogether under an inadequately funded public system.

The Facts

- 650,000 people are on waiting lists for public dental care - average waiting time is 27 months;
- 5 million adults are eligible for public dental care, many of whom experience acute problems of access to dental services;
- 2.1m adults are not eligible for public dental care but costs make them delay or avoid treatment.

Low income adults, people living in rural and remote areas, indigenous people, nursing home residents, people with disabilities, young adults on income support payments and single parents are worst affected.

Over a quarter of Australian adults experience severe pain because of problems with their teeth, mouth or dentures. A quarter avoids solid foods and nearly a third finds it uncomfortable to eat. Just under a quarter of Australian adults feel self-conscious or embarrassed because of oral health problems.

These problems are largely the result of poor planning and under-funding by governments in preventive oral health and basic dental care for disadvantaged Australians.

Just as important, there has been until recently inadequate government investment in the development of a dental health workforce which is sufficient to meet current and future oral health requirements of those most in need.

The Solutions

We have three key recommendations to put to Parliament:

1. As a first step, the Commonwealth Government should ensure that all people on concession cards have a free basic course of dental care every two years. This preventative health measure would help improve the poor oral health of people on low incomes and lessen the number of tooth extractions and more expensive treatments needed.
2. The Commonwealth Government should provide the funding for this initiative through the States and Territories on the condition that the States and Territories bring their own expenditure up to the new level of Commonwealth funding, extend water fluoridation to all communities, ensure that all children and eligible adults receive one course of general oral health care every two years, and ensure that no one waits longer than 24 hours to receive emergency dental care for swelling, infection and bleeding, or serious and persistent pain.
3. The Commonwealth should conduct a full national review of the current oral health workforce.

Schedule for the Day

10.00-10.30	Welcome to Oral Health Advocacy Day from ACOSS and the ADA
10.30-10.50	Professor John Spencer
10.50-11.15	Lobbying tips and messages
11.15-11.30	The Hon Tony Abbott MP, Minister for Health and Ageing
11.30-11.45	Nicola Roxon MP, Shadow Minister for Health
12.00-12.15	Presentations from the Australian Greens and Australian Democrats