

Oral Health

Oral health is fundamental to overall health, wellbeing and quality of life. A healthy mouth enables people to eat, speak and socialise without pain, discomfort or embarrassment.

Despite improvements over the last 20–30 years, there is still evidence of poor oral health among Australians.

- More than 90% of adults and 40% of young children have experienced tooth decay at some stage in their life.
- Three out of ten adults have untreated tooth decay.
- Only four out of every ten Australian adults have a favourable visiting pattern, i.e. seeing a dentist once a year for a check-up, rather than waiting to treat poor oral health.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and adults who are socially disadvantaged or on low incomes have more than double the rate of poor oral health than their counterparts.
- People with additional or specialised health care needs or those living in regional and remote areas find it more difficult to access oral health care.
- Oral conditions are the third highest reason for acute preventable hospital admissions in Australia with more than 63,000 Australians hospitalised each year.

Australia's National Oral Health Plan 2014–2024 outlines a blueprint for united action across jurisdictions and sectors to ensure all Australians have healthy mouths.

Translation of the National Oral Health Plan into practice will require all jurisdictions and sectors to work together to protect and improve the oral health of Australians

AHHA POSITION:

- ✧ The Child and Adult Public Dental Scheme (caPDS) is a welcome shift to bipartisan Commonwealth support for dental care as an important part of the Australian health system, but more detail is needed to address a range of concerns.
- ✧ Many of the people who will be eligible for the new caPDS are already eligible for public dental services but face long waits for care.
- ✧ The Commonwealth's funding commitment will be dependent on the calculation methodology for the efficient price the Commonwealth has indicated it will pay, and the capacity of the states and territories to meet co-funding requirements.
- ✧ There is risk of variation across Australia in the availability of care under the caPDS.
- ✧ Under the caPDS, adults with high immediate needs for dental treatment will be competing for public funded care with children requiring preventive care, as a result of the move away from the previous scheme which promoted better dental care in childhood.
- ✧ Administrative processes will need to align with service requirements and support access to care, particularly for vulnerable population groups and to ensure that children remain in scope for care.
- ✧ The appointment of an Australian Chief Dental Officer is necessary to provide national coordination of oral health policy development and program implementation.

For information: Alison Verhoeven, Chief Executive, 0403 282 501

© Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association, 2016. All rights reserved.

Released 3 May 2016