

## ADA NSW Position on the Cost of Dental Services

ADA NSW supports affordable health care for all patients and the provision of accurate information about oral health conditions and treatment options, including information regarding expected out of pocket costs.

Unlike Medicare for general health care, the Australian Government does not fund universal dental care and the vast majority of costs for oral health services in Australia are privately-funded. In the absence of a paradigm shift in Federal Government policy around funding of oral health care services, many Australians will continue to struggle to afford comprehensive oral health care. ADA NSW continues to advocate for improvements in oral health care for all Australians, especially those most vulnerable members of our community including Indigenous Australians, the elderly and those from disadvantaged social backgrounds.

NSW and ACT Health provide limited oral health services for people receiving Centrelink support but these services for adults are often not comprehensive and there are waiting lists for treatment. Private health funds cover some of the cost of dental treatment for members with “Extras” but this generally covers less than half the dental fees (depending on the treatment provided).

Dentists must have discussions about fees with their patients and gain informed consent, including financial consent, prior to treatment. These discussions must include the risks of the treatment options, as well as the risks of not proceeding with recommended treatment. Patients should be empowered to discuss fees with their dentist and if the fees quoted place them under severe financial stress, dentists should assist patients in finding alternate options for their oral health care. Patients are encouraged to approach their dentist for further consultation and explanation of the proposed treatment and consider obtaining a second opinion with another dentist if they believe that the fees or the treatment plan offered is outside their expectations. Patients should be encouraged to proceed with dental treatment only after they are completely satisfied regarding the information received about their condition, the proposed treatment and the fees quoted.

Dentists are highly skilled, well-trained health professionals and the public should be reassured that the treatment performed will be done competently and have the patients’ wellbeing and safety as the first priority, regardless of the setting. The costs involved in running a dental clinic are closer to a small operating theatre than a doctor’s consulting room. The level of infection prevention and control measures that are routine in Australia are world-class and regulated to ensure patient safety.

ADA NSW believes that the public oral health schemes are chronically underfunded and that a significant increase in funding and service redesign is urgently required.

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