

MEDIA RELEASE

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ADA NSW WELCOMES GRATTAN INSTITUTE REPORT

ADA NSW welcomes the Grattan Institute report *Filling the Gap: A universal dental care scheme for Australia*.

Tooth decay is the most common chronic health condition affecting both adults and children. It is also the most common reason children are hospitalised for a general anaesthetic – and yet dental disease is largely preventable.

“Good health begins with a healthy mouth. Improving access and affordability to oral health care is long overdue. Oral health outcomes are directly associated with socio-economic status and the poorest in our community bear the burden of dental disease,” the President of ADA NSW, Dr Neil Peppitt, said.

Public dental health services are chronically underfunded. About a third of the Australian population is eligible for public dental services. However, there is only capacity to provide services for about 20 per cent of those who are eligible.

The Grattan Institute report is an important initiative that policy makers should seriously consider. Dental disease is largely preventable by daily brushing and flossing, avoiding added sugar and visiting the dentist regularly. A universal dental care scheme would cultivate a preventive approach to dental care.

Every dentist is working to improve the oral health of Australians and we welcome initiatives that help improve access and affordability. Any solution that is going to improve the oral health of Australians in the long term will need to include the private sector workforce.

“Dental health should be a much higher priority for government, it should be part of the primary health care system, and be adequately funded. There is currently only one general Medicare funded dental program, the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS). It is a means tested program for children aged 2-17 years. There is very little awareness of this program. It is a great scheme that allows eligible children to receive bulk billed treatment in a private dental practice,” Dr Peppitt said.

“Dentists see the pain and problems resulting from dental disease in the mouths of patients every day. It affects people’s overall health and quality of life. Sadly there are millions of Australians missing out on treatment because they aren’t well covered by private dental insurance, they don’t receive government support for private dental care and are forced to wait on long waiting lists for dental care in the public system, which is currently under-resourced,” Dr Peppitt said.

Under the current Medicare system, GPs are entitled to set their own fees regardless of the Medicare rebate. GPs choose who they bulk bill. This approach should form the basis of a Medicare funded dental care scheme.

About: ADA NSW is the peak body representing dentists and dental students in NSW and the ACT with 4,500 members. ADA NSW has been supporting dentists and promoting good oral health in the community for 90 years.

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With regard to the proposal put forward by Private Healthcare Australia (PHA), the preferred provider arrangements PHA advocates for the provision of the universal dental care are not supported by ADA NSW. These schemes have not shown to provide better patient outcomes compared to either private or public dental services and may have the potential to disrupt the continuity of care received with the trusted patient-centred care model that forms the existing backbone of private dental care in Australia.

The Grattan Report encapsulates the state of oral health of this nation, and it is not a pretty picture. ADA NSW is calling on the Australian Government to reform dental health care to improve access for all Australians.

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