

29 February 2024

ADA NSW calls on the government to commit to funding for the senior's oral health scheme, three years on from the royal commission

Three years on from the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (RCACQS), the Australian Dental Association NSW Branch (ADA NSW) is calling on the government to fund in the upcoming Federal Budget to introduce a phased dental benefits scheme for senior Australians. This comes as more Australians are living longer and the number of people over 85 is set to double in the next 25 years (ABS). The cost of poor oral health for older Australians has been put at more than \$750 million per annum¹.

Back in March 2021, several key dental and oral health recommendations were made in the RCACQS final report. At the time, the ADA NSW welcomed the fact the Royal Commission had successfully resulted in the inclusion of new oral health requirements in the draft Revised Aged Care Quality Standards. Very few recommendations such as a Seniors Dental Benefits Scheme have been implemented, leaving an oral health care crisis in the making. There are estimated to be over 4.2 million Australians over 65 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, June 2023)

ADA NSW President Dr Dominic Aouad says "In line with the Federal ADA 2024-25 Budget submission, we at ADA NSW want to see more government investment in oral health care. We know this is offset by reductions in health care costs elsewhere."

For example, in 2021–22, about 78,800 hospitalisations for dental conditions could potentially have been prevented with earlier treatment. Those aged over 65 years accounted for around 13,791 potentially preventable hospitalisations due to dental conditions in 2021 to 2023.

The 2024-25 Budget submission made by the Federal ADA last month focuses on opportunities to:

- create a senior dental benefit scheme.
- enhance the child dental benefit scheme.
- adjust public dental services for adults funding arrangements; and
- consider the introduction of health savings accounts

"We want to ensure the recommended revised Standards from the Royal Commission findings in 2021 will lead to greater improvements in oral health including investment in seniors. The

¹ Lewis et al, op. cit; Welsh S. (2014). 'Caring for smiles: improving the oral health of residents', Dental Nursing, 10 (4), pp.224-228

About ADA NSW: ADA NSW is the peak professional association for dentists and dental students in NSW and the ACT with 4,400 members, representing 70 per cent of dentists. ADA NSW has been supporting dentists and promoting good oral health in the community since 1929.

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Government Response to the Royal Commission report indicates that this recommendation was subject to further consideration by 2023.5 In its submissions to the Royal Commission, the ADA outlined the need for an SDBS and its benefits relative to other models. Now is the time to put money behind this Scheme,” said Dr Aouad.

Recommendation 60 of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety is to Establish a Senior Dental Benefits Scheme (SDBS).

The introduction of such a scheme is supported by stakeholders including the National Oral Health Alliance, the Council of the Ageing, the Consumers Health Forum, and National Seniors Australia. A phased approach to the introduction of an SDBS would allow the Government to control expenditure.

Key features of the SDBS would include:

- Provide individual aged care residents with access to oral and dental care up to set limits. The SDBS should be established under the Dental Benefits Act 2008 so that rules existing under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) can be applied. Public and private dental service providers are familiar with the requirements of the CDBS and could therefore introduce services to this new cohort efficiently. Compliance measures existing under the CDBS could likewise be applied/extended efficiently by the Government.
- Support residential aged care staff. The introduction of an SDBS should be supported by efforts to increase the oral health literacy of care staff. This can be achieved by including mandatory oral health units of study in Certificate III in Aged Care.

The ADA could work in partnership to deliver any additional education required by staff with a Certificate III in Aged Care qualification.

- Ends

Background:

The ADANSW board and organisation supported branch submissions to the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (RCACQS) since 2019. ADA NSW is the peak organisation for the dentistry profession in NSW and the ACT and in the development of strong key stakeholder relationships within the Aged Care sector. From February 2019 – present, ADA NSW has been involved in the following advocacy:

- From 2019, three submissions, two joint key stakeholder letters and two further documents were submitted to the RCACQS
- In July 2020, the former ADA NSW President provided a witness statement and then appeared as a witness before the Royal Commission
- In March 2021 specific oral health recommendations were made in the final report.

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- In October 2022 specific oral health requirements are included in the draft Revised Aged Care Quality Standards.

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