

MEDIA RELEASE

15 March 2023



DENTAL HOSPITALISATIONS SOARING, NEW DATA SHOWS

NB: Release embargoed until 12.01am Friday, March 17 but Dr Rohan Krishnan is available for pre-recorded interviews. Contact ADA NSW Media Advisor Stuart Turner on 0451 002 466 or email stuart.turner@adansw.com.au

With new figures showing potentially preventable hospitalisations for dental conditions in Australia have rocketed past 80,000 a year – soaring particularly among young children - dentists say better promotion of a vital Medicare-funded dental treatment scheme for kids is now essential.

Today's Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *Oral Health and Dental Care in Australia* data shows there were more than 30,000 potentially preventable hospitalisations for dental conditions among Aussie children aged 0-14 during 2020-21 - increasing by about a third on 2019-20.

"These deeply concerning figures illustrate what happens when families don't access preventive dental care, starting from a young age," Australian Dental Association New South Wales (ADA NSW) President Dr Rohan Krishnan said. "They also underline that increasingly dental disease is leading to serious health outcomes for children, requiring admission to hospital.

"The Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) is a terrific scheme that already exists, offering Medicare-funded dental health to eligible Australian children aged 0-17. Yet sadly, due to a lack of awareness, less than 40% of eligible patients are currently accessing the scheme.

"Promotion of this scheme would help the oral health of Australian kids, but also help relieve the burden of potentially preventable hospitalisations on the overstretched hospital system.

"These figures indicate the importance of the prioritisation of oral health to improve the awareness of the CDBS among community members who most need it. These include families from regional areas, culturally and linguistically diverse, low socio-economic and Indigenous backgrounds."

AIHW data showed there were almost 83,000 potentially preventable hospitalisations for dental conditions in 2021 – an increase of more than 20,000 since 2011. In NSW alone there was a rise of about 6,000 potentially preventable hospitalisations in 2020-21 from the previous year.

The CDBS provides Medicare-funded dental treatment to eligible children aged 0-17 worth up to \$1052. The money can be used over a two-year period and covers treatment including check-ups, x-rays, cleaning, fillings, root canals and extractions but, more importantly, "embeds preventative oral health education and its importance to children and their families to reduce the burden of oral disease in the community," Dr Krishnan said.

The last review of the scheme showed only 37.9% of eligible Australian patients were using the scheme and called for better promotion of the CDBS, including improving notification for parentsⁱ.

About: ADA NSW is the peak body representing dentists and dental students in NSW and the ACT, with about 5,000 members. We have been supporting dentists and promoting good oral health in the community since 1929.

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“We applaud the NSW government’s efforts to focus on the future of children but this should also extend to healthcare. The focus should be on grass roots education and prevention so that the oral health of our future generations improves,” Dr Krishnan said. “One way to do this is to promote the CDBS more effectively to the public.

“Most dentists are already onboard with the CDBS, providing essential oral health services to kids whose family know about the scheme. The challenge is to get to those kids who need it the most.

“A comprehensive multimedia campaign promoting the CDBS, especially targeting First Nations, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and other vulnerable communities is needed. Greater promotion in child and family health centres, community groups, preschools and primary schools would also help.

“Good oral health is vital whatever your age, but ensuring kids get off to a good start and continue with regular visits to the dentist for life is the only way to improve the health of the community in the long term.”

KEY STATS:

Total number of potentially preventable hospitalisations for dental conditions in Australia in 2020-21: 82,916 (up from 66,809 the previous year)

Total number of potentially preventable dental conditions among Australian children aged 0-14 in 2020-21: 31, 107 (up from 24,606 in the previous year)

Percentage of eligible patients utilising the CDBS: 37.9%

What the CDBS covers: <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/whats-covered-child-dental-benefits-schedule?context=22426>

ENDS

For more information, interview opportunities or image requests, contact ADA NSW Media Advisor Stuart Turner on 0451 002 466 or email stuart.turner@adansw.com.au

ⁱ <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/04/report-on-the-fourth-review-of-the-dental-benefits-act-2008.pdf>

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