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## DENTAL PROFESSION SAYS ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

Australian dentists today called on all political parties to slash the inequality in our dental system by making access to dental care around the nation a right - not a privilege.

Announcing its electoral statement at the Australian Dental Association's (ADA) 38<sup>th</sup> International Congress in Adelaide today, the dentistry peak body will use the Federal election to campaign hard across four major issues affecting delivery of dental services nationally.

The ADA will also urge the major parties to make drastic changes to the system of inequality that deprives many Australians of being able to seek regular dental care.

The end result of extremely limited access to government funded dental treatment and inadequate state and Federal funding for public dental services, is that many Australians who can't afford private care will wait years for treatment, their oral health declining as they wait.

### Latest AIHW data reveals:

- \* the number of potentially preventable hospitalisations related to dental conditions in 2016-17 was over 70,000,

- \* 42% of children aged between five and 10 experience decay in their baby teeth, and

- \* people over 15 typically have around 12.8 decayed, missing or filled teeth.

"These statistics are a wakeup call to parties of all persuasions," said ADA Federal President Dr Carmelo Bonanno.

"Most services are provided within the private sector and those who cannot pay suffer from poor oral health including tooth decay, gum disease and tooth loss.

"The nation is divided into the haves with the good teeth and the have-nots with the poor teeth. This is a first world country and this should not be happening," he said.

The ADA is calling yet again for more funding to meet the oral health needs of people on low incomes or who are socially disadvantaged, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, those in regional and remote areas and people with specialised health needs.

"We want to see a **Commonwealth dental benefits scheme for these groups**," he urged.

Further, many older people experiencing complex oral health issues, face long waiting lists for anything but emergency dental treatment through the public system, leaving many suffering "immense pain and diminished quality of life".

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As a consequence, the ADA is also lobbying the major political parties to introduce a **Commonwealth dental benefits scheme for older Australians** similar to the CDBS.

Some patients wait years for treatment in the public system, as the demand for public dental services far outweighs the capacity of the public sector.

This has been improved to a certain extent in the past through National Partnership Agreements (NPAs), allowing states to buy dental services from clinicians in the private sector with excess capacity. These have the added benefit of avoiding the need to fund new infrastructure for public dentistry.

The ADA therefore urges the major parties to **future proof NPAs through a long-term commitment to earmark sufficient funds to reduce public waiting lists.**

Finally – the issue of private health insurance rebates and customers being ripped off by their insurance company with different rebates depending on which dentist they go to. Patients who see their own preferred dentist rather than one deemed a ‘preferred provider’ by their insurer, can often be out of pocket by hundreds of dollars.

In 2016, 76% of consumers with private cover were dissatisfied with the dental rebates received on their policy. Coupled with premium increases of up to three times the CPI over the last five years, this level of dissatisfaction is unsurprising.

Rebate equality is the underlying principle of Medicare which enshrines real choice of provider by offering the same rebate amounts for services, irrespective of the provider. Therefore the ADA urges all parties to adopt the Senate Inquiry recommendations of 2018 to **prohibit differential rebates for the same treatments** by amending the current legislation.

The election announcement by the Labor Party last week to provide \$2.4bn in funding for low income older Australian goes some way to addressing the inequities.

“We congratulate Catherine King for recognising and beginning to address the problem, though we will continue to talk to Labor over some of the concerning detail of the policy to ensure it properly meets the needs of older Australians.

“We believe that if a future government seriously considers and introduces these targeted, sustainable and cost-effective measures, it will go a long way to addressing the huge gaps in access and need for millions of Australians every year,” said Dr Bonanno.

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All media are invited to attend the 38<sup>th</sup> ADA Congress. To arrange attendance or to set up an interview with President Dr Bonanno or another clinician, contact the ADA’s Federal Media Advisor Jenny Barlass on 0484 869 086 or email: [jenny.barlass@ada.org.au](mailto:jenny.barlass@ada.org.au)




For the full programme click here: [https://www.ada.org.au/congress-2019-website/Program-Book/ADA\\_2019Congress\\_A4\\_Official-Program.aspx](https://www.ada.org.au/congress-2019-website/Program-Book/ADA_2019Congress_A4_Official-Program.aspx)

**Note to Editors:**

The ADA is the peak body representing dentists in Australia, with over 16,000 members. It exists to promote the art and science of dentists and to promote the oral health of Australians.

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**Interviews available with: Dr Carmelo Bonanno, President**

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