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Media Release

New national dental Plan is a beautiful vehicle – which must be given wheels

Tony McBride, spokesperson for the National Oral Health Alliance (NOHA), has welcomed the launch of Australia's second 10-year National Oral Health Planⁱ by the Standing Council on Health.

"The new Plan must be given legs through funding to make it happen," he said. "Otherwise it will join the myriad of other plans sitting on government shelves gathering dust".

"Despite some welcome improvements over the last 20-30 years, as a nation we are going backwards in oral health," Mr McBride said. The Plan itself notes that 63,000 Australians are hospitalised each year because of oral conditions – the third highest cause of unnecessary admissions. This is an avoidable and expensive burden on the health system. Many Australians have unacceptably poor oral health which, on average, is among the worst for adults in OECD countries.

"A recent AIHW report shows the proportion of Australians who experienced a toothache in the previous 12 months increased from 11% to 16% between 1994 and 2013."

NOHA calls on the Federal and State and Territory Ministers to make real commitments to this Plan in their upcoming Budgets to redress the major inequities we have in access to dental care.

The Standing Council has endorsed a bold program calling for the commitment of all governments and the total dental health care system to work together with consumers to make dental care available to all Australians. It also acknowledges the importance of providing extra care to those Australians with the poorest oral health and the greatest needs.

"Healthy teeth and a healthy mouth are indispensable to a good life", said Mr McBride. "Access to regular, affordable, appropriate dental care should be the right of every Australian. As data in the Plan clearly demonstrates, this is not the current situation. Governments need to make it happen by committing themselves to universal access."

The Plan states that many Australians face considerable personal, financial and organisational barriers in accessing services and the next 10 years must be focused on addressing these barriers to improve the oral health of all Australians. It calls for the stronger engagement of consumers in addressing these barriers.

The Plan confirms that "many aspects of oral disease are preventable and there are a range of effective oral health promotion strategies that can be implemented to reduce the occurrence and impact of oral disease and promote the dental health of all Australians".

In a tight fiscal environment, dental care is an investment in a healthier future. Without action there will be even higher levels of avoidable hospitalisation. There could be no better place in the health sector for additional investment than dental care and prevention.ⁱⁱ

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ⁱ The Plan is downloadable at www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports/ArtMID/514/ArticleID/81/Australias-National-Oral-Health-Plan-2015-2024

ⁱⁱ Savings options suggested by the Productivity Commission <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/completed/efficiency-health>;

- ADA Plan @ http://www.ada.org.au/app_cmslib/media/umlib/documents/products_publications/2016-17%20pre%20budget%20submission%20-ada%20australian%20dental%20health%20plan.pdf
- AHCRA Position Paper @ <http://www.healthreform.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/AHCRA-Position-Paper-Efficiency-FINAL.pdf>