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New Federal plan is trying to do dental care using smoke and mirrors

The National Oral Health Alliance (NOHA – see below) has today expressed genuine disappointment about the Commonwealth Government’s new Child and Adult Public Dental Scheme (caPDS), which represents a cut in promised funding, not an increase despite the rhetoric.

In reality the announcement means several backflips. These include:

- Abandoning the Child Dental Benefits Schedule ignores advice from two recent reviews that reported it was running well and should be promoted more heavily. (If the scheme was being rolled out as claimed by the Minister, why didn’t these Government reviews pick it up?)
- The Government says 10.5 million people including children will be eligible under the new scheme, but also states that only an extra 600,000 every year will be treated. That means people will get one treatment every 17 years, or else receive \$40 per year for their care. And this 600,000 adults AND children is only 65% of the children alone being currently treated under the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (898,797 according to 2014/15 CDBS data). Those most likely to miss out are those in rural and remote areas.
- It has declared the \$415m in funding as an increase – yet is 33% less than the figure of \$615m promised in last year’s Budget.
- And in reality demand for this new scheme cannot possibly be met by the public sector (despite their dedicated staff). Each of the States will need to recruit private dentists through some arrangement of their own to provide some of the necessary care.
- The announcement means that the Federal Government is walking away from providing direct funding of dental care itself but handing this over to the States and Territories. However on the positive side it will legislate for this allocation, something NOHA applauds.
- Bundling together money for all Australian children with that for those adults with concession cards will force the States and Territories to make choices about allocations to each. The National Advisory Council on Dental Health in 2011 advised that these groups should be treated separately because they had such different needs: adults on concessions cards typically had high immediate needs whilst research shows that prevention and care for children was proven to be an investment in the next generation’s oral health as adults.

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National Oral Health Alliance

NOHA consists of 10 member national peak bodies and key organisations:

Australian Council of Social Service	Australian Dental & Oral Health Therapists Association
Australian Dental Association	Association Dental Prosthetists of Australia
Australian Health Care Reform Alliance	Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association
Consumers Health Forum	Dental Hygienists' Association of Australia
National Rural Health Alliance	Public Health Association of Australia

You can find out more at www.oralhealth.asn.au