



Media Release

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Alliance urges Members of Parliament to address shrinking dental care – we'd never treat our feet this way!

The National Oral Health Alliance (NOHA) has today called on Federal and State/Territory Governments to take urgent action to reverse the decline in oral health services in Australia.

"Oral health is a crucial component of overall health and well-being but many Australians are unable to access affordable and preventive oral health care. This situation has worsened in the past 2-3 years as Federal Government support for dental services for Australians has declined. The resulting blow-outs in public waiting lists are leaving more Australians without any real options for oral health care," Tony McBride, spokesperson for NOHA said today.

"Currently, 23% of adults in major cities and 37% in remote areas have untreated tooth decay. These figures will increase as access to services drops, leaving Australia among the worst performers in the OECD when it comes to oral health. We would never treat our feet this way!"

"In addition, NOHA is concerned that the Federal Government is considering withdrawing from the successful Child Dental Benefits Schedule that has provided bulkbilled dental care to 30% of eligible children. Two recent government [evaluation](#) and [audit](#) reports showed this was an effective and well-run program. It needs promoting and expanding - not reducing - so that all eligible children (65% of Australian kids) are able to take advantage of it to keep their teeth and mouths healthy. Good regular care in childhood lays the basis for good oral health for life.

"Untreated dental problems cost our community millions in health care costs and lost productivity," Mr McBride said. "Every year around 63,000 Australians need to be hospitalised for preventable and treatable oral conditions. Many others are unable to work or fully participate in community life due to poor dental health."

If Federal and State/Territory governments jointly commit to act on this issue, the current situation can be reversed. This could be achieved through the National Oral Health Plan, developed by COAG to build on our current resources to address key areas of need.

"That Plan would ensure we address Australians' worsening oral health status and the growing number of unnecessary hospital admissions. However, unless the Plan is adequately resourced and implemented, things will get worse.

"Dental care is an investment in a healthier future and we call on all governments to commit to the full implementation of the National Oral Health Plan," Mr McBride said.

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