



Media release
23 September 2004

Major parties show lack of care for oral health of Australians

An alliance of consumer, welfare and professional bodies has collaborated to deliver a 'report card' that indicates none of the major political parties are sufficiently committed to addressing the urgent, declining status of Australians' oral health.

The Oral Health Alliance, which includes representatives from the Health Issues Centre, Australian Dental Association, Victorian Branch, the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Council on the Ageing, Victorian Council of Social Service, Australian Dental Therapists Association, Public Health Association of Australia, Victorian Healthcare Association, and Catholic Social Services, believes that the major political parties are not proposing anywhere near enough funds to meet the conservative estimate of \$317 million needed per year for oral health care.

Currently there are over 4 million Australians who are eligible for subsidised healthcare. Of these, over 1 million people are currently on public waiting lists for dental treatment.

Additionally, data on hospital admission rates of 0-4 year olds for parts of rural Victoria show that 90% of these admissions were due to high levels of dental decay. Some Australians are waiting up to five years for treatment on public dental waiting lists.

Oral Health Alliance representative and Health Issues Centre CEO, Tony McBride says the Oral Health Report Card is being published in the lead up to the Federal election to help voters distinguish between the various policy positions taken by candidates in the election.

"Each of the parties was asked to respond to seven key issues. Whilst the Liberal Party did not respond, advice was received from the Australian Democrats, the Labor Party and the Greens."

"The Oral Health Report Card draws attention to the crisis faced in oral health services throughout Australia and helps voters better understand each party's response to addressing the problem. Estimates of funding need to address each issue are included for ease of comparison."

The Oral Health Alliance supports the call for the Commonwealth to:

- reduce dental waiting lists, especially in rural areas (\$200m p.a.)
- increase the supply of dental care providers, especially in rural and remote areas (\$10m p.a.)
- increase incentives for dental care providers to provide public services (\$25m p.a.)
- increase health promotion and disease prevention measures (\$20m p.a.)
- fund more research into both oral disease prevention and treatment (\$2m p.a.)
- provide basic oral health care via targeted strategies to the aged, Indigenous Australians and people with special needs, as per the National Oral Health Plan (\$60m p.a.)

The full text of each of the parties' response to the seven issues and a Fact Sheet outlining the current Government spending and the crucial oral health issues can be found at: www.healthissuescentre.org.au

The following Oral Health Alliance spokespeople are available for media queries and interviews:

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