



MEDIA RELEASE

Dr John E Matthews, Federal President

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Proper dental care needed for indigenous children in the NT

The Australian Dental Association (ADA) welcomes the Government's proposal that voluntary health checks for all indigenous children under the age of 16 in the Northern Territory will include a dental examination.

A recent study found that the average number of decayed, missing and filled teeth is higher for Aboriginal compared to non-Aboriginal children.

Australian Dental Association's Federal President, Dr John Matthews said, "any steps that endeavour to improve the dental health of indigenous children is welcomed as decayed teeth can cause infection and lead to other health problems such as obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease later in life. These health problems are a matter of concern given that 90% of dental disease is preventable."

"As oral health is directly linked to the general health and well-being of all children, the ADA sees the initiative as having merit. What concerns us is that the Minister's announcement of the health team that will be involved. Whilst the team includes one doctor, two nurses, one Aboriginal health worker and one administrative support staff, there was no mention of a trained dentist on the team."

"Failure to include a dentist is an oversight. A screening exam by a healthcare worker not specialised in oral health cannot detect all but the most obvious caries and may overlook a number of significant health problems. This may provide parents with a false sense of security that their children have good teeth. Early detection and intervention is the best way to deal with incipient dental diseases."

The ADA believes that indigenous children deserve the best possible health care and this includes a proper dental health check by a qualified dental practitioner.

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