



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION INC.

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Dr Neil Hewson, Federal President**

**16 February 2009**

## **AUSTRALIAN HEALTH and HOSPITALS COMMISSION REPORT**

### **MISSES THE MARK ON DENTAL CARE**

The recommendation from the Australian Health and Hospitals Commission (AHC) for a universal "Denticare" scheme is impractical, nonsensical, overly simplistic and flies in the face of much of the deliberations that have taken place on this issue over the past decade. It shows no appreciation of the real problems facing dental delivery in Australia.

Two comprehensive Federal Parliamentary enquiries and Australia's National Oral Health Plan (NOHP) saw no sense in attempting to deliver a universal dental health scheme such as that proposed in the Commission's report.

"Recognising that about 35% of the community have not been able to access proper dental care, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) has for some considerable time now been calling on the Federal Government to focus its attention on the delivery of care to those that find difficulty accessing dental care. Targeted funding to those in need is what is required," Dr Hewson ADA President said today.

"To make all dentistry universally available to the community through Denticare as is suggested by the Commission is not necessary and would be 'fiscally irresponsible' and unlikely 'to deliver quality dental care'. With current expenditure on dentistry being over \$6 billion per annum, the funding of a universal scheme could be crippling and could exceed \$11 billion. The ADA says target the funding where it is needed - to those who are not currently able to access dental care."

"Creating a mix of private and public cover where public services are identified in the Report as inadequate, suggests that most will opt for the private dental health plan. The community already have complaints about health funds-so why would you place universal dental care delivery in their hands? The proposed scheme will create two tiers of dental care and is supporting health funds: both inappropriate outcomes for government funding. Under any new scheme the Federal Government must be careful not to limit the nature of dental care to be delivered. To generalize that some treatment is elective and other treatment not elective is a gross oversimplification. The fact some Australians have difficulty accessing care should not mean that a compromised level of care is delivered to them. All Australians are entitled to expect that care delivered to them will be both safe and of the highest quality. Australian dentists are among the best in the world and general access to them for treatment should be available. Provision of poor dentistry for the poor is just unacceptable."

The ADA however does welcome that dentistry has been included in the draft report and supports in principle the recommendations for:

- an intern year
- a uniform approach to government funding of dental treatment
- a universal approach to promote oral health
- integration of oral health promotion into general health.

The ADA's limited consultation to the AHC was spent primarily educating the members about dentistry and regrettably the importance of targeted funding has been lost. The ADA now seeks proper consultation with the AHC to ensure limited government funding is focused on development of improved dental delivery to those Australians in need.

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The Australian Dental Association Inc. (ADA) is the peak national professional body representing about 10,000 registered dentists engaged in clinical practice. ADA members work in both the public and private sectors. The primary objectives of the ADA are to encourage the improvement of the health of the public and to promote the art and science of dentistry.