



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION INC.

MEDIA RELEASE

Dr Neil Hewson, Federal President

Nursing Home Oral and Dental Health Plan

“The announcement today by the Minister, Mrs Justine Elliott outlining steps to improve the oral health of nursing home residents is most welcome. It demonstrates the first stage of a concerted effort to improve the quality of life of the aged who for too long have had to endure poor oral health and a poor quality of life due to dental pain and discomfort”, Dr Neil Hewson, President of the Australian Dental Association Inc (ADA) said today.

“In past decades many Australians with poor oral hygiene had to resort to dentures and the problems experienced with them. Retention of teeth has improved the oral health and wellbeing of the elderly but somewhat ironically the improvement has brought with it the need for better ongoing care of those teeth; particularly when the elderly lose the ability to care for themselves. The prevalence of tooth decay, gum disease and oral cancer for people aged over 65 years, is higher than for the general population.”

This problem has been one that the ADA has been asking the Government to address for some time. To date Aged care facilities have been under resourced to deal with the dental issues confronting their residents. Staff were not trained to improve the oral hygiene of residents or be alert to recognition of dental problems and for too long these problems were ignored. Maintaining good oral hygiene and dental screening of residents was often non existent.

“The measures proposed are a significant step in the right direction for the Aged. When implemented they will bring about a much improved dental health status for this group. To have staff better educated to attend to residents’ oral hygiene and screen for problems will assist in allowing early intervention by dentists.”

The inclusion of the measures in the ACAT (Aged Care Assessment Team) process requires facilities to comply on an ongoing basis. The Government’s commitment to ongoing review in light of the ***Better Oral Health in Residential Care*** project currently being trialled in South Australia, NSW and Victoria through the *Encouraging Best Practice in Residential Aged Care (EBPRAC)* program is welcomed. This is an excellent program that has had the support of the ADA and will provide excellent advice to the Government for ongoing improvement.

“The ADA remains committed to seeing facilities being required to ensure that regular dental assessments of residents take place. It is willing to provide ongoing advice and support to Government in this area.”

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**Media contacts: Dr Neil Hewson – President – 03 9455 0111/0419 344 587
Mr Robert Boyd-Boland – Chief Executive Officer – 02 9906 4412/0417 677 607**

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 promote the practice of evidence-based dentistry and encourage access for all Australians to affordable preventive oral care.