



AUSTRALIAN DENTAL ASSOCIATION INC.

MEDIA RELEASE

Dr Neil Hewson, Federal President

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Award Modernisation restricts access to Dental Services.

"The Health Professionals and Support Services Award 2010 prepared by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission (AIRC) will restrict the ability of Australians to access dental care," Dr Neil Hewson, President, Australian Dental Association (ADA) said today.

"Demand for dental services at times convenient to patients exceeds the ability to deliver such services. The Award has failed to address the unique nature of dental practice and delivery of dental services to Australians and puts Australians' dental health system under further stress at a most inappropriate time"

"Currently most dental practices provide flexible working hours for staff that enable patients to access their dental treatment at appropriate times that are convenient to them and at reasonable cost. Our patients come from diverse work groups and many cannot attend surgeries during the normal Monday to Friday - 9 to 5 slots. Previous Industrial Awards enabled dental surgeries to operate in such a way as to allow patients to attend on weekends and at times outside normal "business" hours without penalty. The ADA's proposed national "Dental - Private Practice Award 2010" would maintain the flexibility and staff structure required. These awards provide flexible work arrangements with staff that suited the practice, staff and patients alike and allowed affordable treatment to be delivered."

Despite logical and strong arguments from the ADA to create a separate award reflecting the individual arrangements required for dental health delivery, including training staff on site, the AIRC has now created a generic health Award that will impact poorly on the provision of dental care. The one size fits all award simply does not work. Costs have been identified as a factor in patients not seeking care and if these have to be increased then it will be to the detriment of their health.

The ADA has called for the removal of a 50% loading on wages paid for Saturday work. What the ADA fears is that practices will either not open on Saturdays and weekends due to the increased cost of operating or fees for Saturday and weekend treatment will have to increase. This seems a very harsh penalty imposed on those patients that have to present for treatment at these times.

"Flexibility", "no disadvantage", "easy to understand and apply", "not increase costs for employers" were the undertakings of Minister Gillard's pursuit of Award Modernisation. These assurances have not been delivered with the proposed "Health Professionals and Support Services Award 2010" and their non delivery is to the disadvantage of working Australians-who themselves have become subject to new Award structures in this process.

Dental practices are unique small labour intensive businesses providing services to individuals that also provide training. They are not corporations providing commercial services to individuals. Due to the very personalised services that are provided, flexibility in work practices has to be maintained so as to allow patients to continue to receive the treatment they need when they can access it. Individuals often develop a deep sense of trust in their dentist and these Award changes put that relationship at risk.

The ADA calls on the AIRC to reconsider its position on this issue so that it does honour the Minister's undertakings and ideally introduce a "Dental - Private Practice Award 2010" so that it will not impact adversely on the health of Australians.

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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.