



DENTAL EXPENDITURE: HOW THE STATES AND TERRITORIES COMPARE

October's *National Dental Update*¹ examined the growth in expenditure on dental care over the past decade and confirmed that like health expenditure more generally, dental expenditure continues to grow. In the period from 1994-95 to 2004-05, total dental expenditure rose from \$1.9 billion to over \$4.7 billion. Today, dental expenditure accounts for 5.7% of total health expenditure.

Expenditure by State and Territory Governments

An examination of expenditure on dental care by State and Territory Governments is important as States and Territories provide dental services to people on concession cards. As the table below shows, dental expenditure by State and Territory Governments ranges from a high of \$132.4 million in Queensland to a low of \$7.6 million in the Australian Capital Territory.

Just as total dental expenditure differs throughout Australia, there is also a considerable variation in per capita expenditure and expenditure per concession card holder by each State and Territory. (Although each State and Territory has different eligibility rules, an examination of expenditure per concession card holder is important as eligibility for public dental care is generally limited to people with concession cards.)

The Northern Territory spends the highest on dental services on a per capita basis (\$37.84) and per concession card holder (\$171.50). By contrast, New

South Wales spends the least per head of population (\$17.60) and per concession card holder (\$74.59) than any other State or Territory.

Australia's third most populous State, Queensland, spends the second highest on a per capita basis (\$32.81) and third highest per concession card holder (\$139.43). As only 5% of Queensland is fluoridated, it is perhaps not surprising that that both decay and levels of dental expenditure are highest in that State.

Time for the Commonwealth, States and Territories to work together

Despite the growth of expenditure on dental care, waiting lists, particularly for public sector dental care, are considerable, estimated to be over 600,000 throughout Australia.

While State and Territory Governments have increased funding for dental care in recent years, the burden of oral disease, particularly experienced by people from lower socioeconomic groups, is considerable.

As the ADA has previously pointed out,² there is an urgent need for the Federal Government to assume a leadership role, and to work cooperatively with States and Territories and the dental profession, to provide additional resources to improve access to dental care for those most in need. (See recent media release dealing with the ALP's plan for dental care delivery at: www.ada.org.au/_news_single.asp?id=8782)

Total expenditure, per capita expenditure and expenditure per health card holder for States and Territories, 2005-06

	Dental Expenditure (\$)*	Population**	Per capita expenditure	No of concession card holders***	Expenditure per concession card holder (\$)
NSW	120,000,000	6,817,100	17.60	1,608,864	74.59
VIC	126,300,000	5,078,500	24.87	1,254,324	100.69
QLD	132,400,000	4,035,700	32.81	949,566	139.43
WA	56,110,000	2,042,800	27.47	446,959	125.54
SA	47,200,000	1,552,300	30.41	432,513	109.13
TAS	14,500,000	488,700	29.67	149,879	96.74
ACT	7,585,500	328,100	23.12	50,607	149.89
NT	7,792,000	205,900	37.84	45,434	171.50
TOTAL	511,887,500	20,549,100	24.91	4,938,146	103.66

* Source: Australian Dental Association NSW Branch

** Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 3101.0 Australian Demographic Statistics. Accessed from www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3101.0 on 12 October 2006

*** Source: Centrelink

References

1. Australian Dental Association (2006) 'Oral Health Expenditure', *National Dental Update*, October.
2. Australian Dental Association (2006) 'Time for a New Commonwealth Dental Health Program', *National Dental Update*, September.

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