



MEDIA RELEASE

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Tuesday 2 June 2009

SA GOVERNMENT CHANGES POSE PUBLIC HEALTH RISK

The South Australian government's proposal to expand the scope of practice for dental therapists from July 1 2009 poses an unacceptable public health risk according to the Australian Dental Association (SA Branch) (ADASA).

The government's proposal to allow therapists to treat people over the age of eighteen without any additional education and training will compromise the quality and safety of care provided to older South Australians, particularly those with heavily worn and fragile teeth.

The Australian Dental Association today said "it appears that the Government and the Minister have ignored the advice of the ADASA and other expert bodies that dental therapists will need additional education if they are to provide care to adults".

The Minister's statement that the advent of an 18th birthday doesn't change the complexity of dental treatment is misleading and ignores the needs of an ageing population.

This has been recognised by the Dental Board in Victoria which requires dental therapists to undertake additional education. Currently there are no Australian courses approved by the Victorian Board that permit therapists to treat adults over the age of 25. ADASA will now make representation to the South Australian Dental Board to adopt a similar safety net.

The ADASA challenges the Minister to provide evidence to support his claims that this proposal will provide South Australians with access to more affordable dental treatment. Public patients will face the same level of co-payments for treatment regardless of who provides the service, and in private dental clinics the cost of materials and overheads will remain the same.

ADASA is also concerned that the proposal could see dental therapists move away from dental care for children at a time when decay rates are rapidly increasing in this age group.

For the record, ADASA wishes to state it is disappointed with the consultation process and the inference that it supports the changes to dental therapists' scope of practice.

There has been no opportunity to see the final regulations, which are likely also to include changes to the roles of dental hygienists and dental prosthetists.

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