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SOLUTIONS TO FIX A BROKEN DENTAL SYSTEM

The election presents a golden opportunity to remedy the enormous mess that the nation's dental system is in, the Australian Dental Association (ADA) says.

The peak body for dentists has a number of remedies on its election wish list to fix the system and is putting these to the major political parties for their pre-election consideration.

This is because the grim facts about the nation's oral health cannot be sugar-coated, including:

* Similar to the infamous "maggots in wounds" testimony heard by the Aged Care Commission, older Aussies in residential aged care can go days if not weeks, without anyone brushing their teeth or checking on their oral health, often with dire health consequences.

* Hundreds of thousands of people often wait two years on a waitlist to be seen by a dentist in the public dental system, their mouth health declining as they wait.

* One in three adults is walking around with untreated tooth decay while paediatric dentists are taking out teeth in kids as young as three due to decay and not seeing a dentist.

For children up to age 17 there is of course the Child Dental Benefits Schedule - but this is only used by one in three (38%) eligible families and is poorly promoted by the government.

This grim picture is entirely preventable. Over recent years the ADA has repeatedly called on the Federal Government to address the overwhelming and urgent need to set up a targeted and sustainable funding scheme to meet the needs of older, rural and low-income Australians.

"Yet here we are again in 2022 and nothing has been done – to say it is disappointing is an understatement," says ADA President Dr Mark Hutton.

"People often ask the ADA why there isn't such a scheme and I have no answer as to why this is not yet in existence. Governments of all colours have consistently failed to address this issue which effects millions."

This election is an opportunity, says the ADA, to address the issue by:

- establishing a **Dental Benefits Scheme** that provides older Australians with a capped entitlement to subsidised oral health services to address immediate needs,

- ensuring all over 75s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders over 55 and residents of aged care facilities get a mandatory and reportable **oral health assessment**,

- overhauling the inadequate **Aged Care Quality Standards** so providers must meet oral care standards, as urged by the Aged Care Commission, mindful that unmet oral care standards result in serious whole of body health consequences,

-implementation of **core oral health study units in the Cert III Aged Care Courses** to ensure staff are equipped to meet oral hygiene needs of residents, as there is currently a glaring inadequacy in this skillset.

“In the run up to the election, the ADA is contacting all the main political parties to firm up what their election commitments are to improve the oral health of our vulnerable Australians,” said Dr Hutton.

“We don’t want this election to be another groundhog day where no advances are made in righting this appalling situation.

“This situation is only going to get worse and worse - it’s expected that by 2056, one in four Australians will be over the age of 65, and 1.8 million people will be over 85.

“Increasing numbers of older people are retaining their natural teeth, resulting in high demand for ongoing dental care by the elderly, many who have complex and chronic medical conditions. A Dental Benefits Scheme would go a long way to addressing the issue of older Australians keeping their original teeth for longer.”

Ends.

To interview Dr Hutton, call ADA Media Advisor Jenny Barlass 0484 869086.