



# Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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## Media Release

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### **AHCRA supports recommendations for a dental system for all Australians**

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) is urging the Health Minister, Tanya Plibersek, and the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, to support the recommendations of the just released report of the National Advisory Council on Dental Health.

“It is time to ensure all Australians get satisfactory, affordable and timely dental care, not just half of them,” said Tony McBride, Chair of AHCRA. “It’s time to see the health of our mouths as important as the rest of our bodies, and move towards a universal equitable system.”

AHCRA supports the recommendations, which urge the Government to commit to a system of equitable, universal access over time. It also supports the initial focus on children (with the future in mind) and on lower income Australians as they are those who are missing out most.

AHCRA notes Australia has a well-trained and experienced workforce of which we can be proud, but it needs to be larger to meet the needs of all Australians. This needs to grow over time.

Of the many reasons for significantly improving the dental health care system, four stand out:

- Australians pay on average 61 cents in the dollar for their dental bills, compared to 12 cents for the rest of their health care. This makes dental care difficult to afford for all Australians under average incomes. Over a third of Australians delay care because of cost.
- Those least able to afford dental care, or those waiting up to five years in places for public care, have the highest need (eg twice the rate of untreated dental decay)
- Over 40% of five to six year olds have untreated dental decay and on average children’s oral health is going down after years of improvement.
- The current fragmented and patchy dental care costs the economy an estimated \$1.4 billion per year in lost productivity.

However, AHCRA is concerned that if the Government goes ahead with its planned scrapping of the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme, that overall funding of dental care by the Commonwealth does not decrease but continues to grow.

AHCRA has previously welcomed the statement by the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, that his party would support the inclusion of dental care within Medicare. AHCRA urges the Opposition to bring forward their support to recognise immediate needs.

Tony McBride has previous experience as a member of the National Advisory Council on Dental Health.

*\* AHCRA is a coalition of 30 national and state peak health groups, including those representing the medical profession, nursing, allied health, the rural health sector, as well as consumer groups. AHCRA advocates for a fairer health system.*

**Tony McBride is available for interview on mobile 0407 531 468**