



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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MEDIA RELEASE

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Use health insurance rebate to pay for better dental care

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA) is urging the Health Minister, Tanya Plibersek, and the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, to support the use of the private health insurance rebate to pay for dental care for those who are on lower than average incomes and who miss out the most on dental care.

“Lower income Australians are least able to pay for dental care, have the greatest need and yet they are effectively subsidising the private health insurance of those with the highest incomes. Withdrawing the rebate to the top 10% of income earners would make little difference to them but could fund dental care that would have major benefits for those struggling to afford reasonable care,” said Tony McBride, Chair of AHCRA.

Consumers pay a lot more of their dental bills than governments contribute. On average Australians pay 65 cents in the dollar for their dental bills, compared to 12 cents for the rest of their health care. This places a huge burden on low-income people who also have twice the untreated dental decay of those on high incomes. “So AHCRA strongly urges the Government to re-allocate the private health insurance subsidy for the highest 10% of income earners towards developing a nationally consistent dental scheme that would provide equitable access for all.”

AHCRA also welcomes the statement by the Opposition Leader, Tony Abbott, this week that his party supports the inclusion of dental care within Medicare. This recognises that dental care is the poor cousin of the health care system and that millions of Australians do not receive regular and adequate care. AHCRA urges Mr Abbott to bring forward what he called his ‘aspirational promise’ given the millions of Australians missing out now.

The current fragmented and patchy dental care costs the economy an estimated \$1.4 billion per year. Many on the lowest incomes wait two to five years for basic public care, over a third of Australians delay care because of cost, and over 40% of 5-6 year olds have untreated dental decay.

AHCRA urges the Government to take seriously the recommendations of the National Advisory Council on Dental Health when it sends its report in the next few weeks to the Minister.

** 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