



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

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MEDIA RELEASE

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An excellent start on dental care – but we need a house (for everyone) of bricks, not straw

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance (AHCRA*) today welcomed the Federal Government's announcement of over \$500m of expenditure on dental care over the next four years, with two riders. The first is that whatever future is decided for the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme (CDDS), there is a net increase in Commonwealth investment in dental health and more targeted use of it. The second is that next Tuesday's announcement is the first step towards a universal national oral health scheme.

"The foreshadowed expenditure sounds like a substantial move to plug one of the worst long-term gaps in the health system," said Tony McBride, Chair of AHCRA. "It could be the beginning of a journey that the vast majority of the Australian community will welcome. Everyone needs dental care, but currently only 40 per cent of Australians are getting adequate regular care. It is a very unequal system."

The expected package provides a balanced focus on some crucial areas: addressing immediate need for people on waiting lists, increasing the preventive effort, assisting the creation of more services in rural Australia, and increasing the workforce to meet increased future demand.

"But AHCRA is disappointed the Government has not yet indicated the final destination of this journey - universal dental care - and how we're going to get there," added Mr. McBride. "By themselves these welcome announcements do not create an equal and fair system, nor tackle the high cost of private treatment for average to low income earners," he said.

The Government needs to take a lesson from the Three Little Pigs and move the current system from the equivalent of a set of fragmented straw huts, some built on shifting sands, to a single, consistent national structure built on solid foundations. Such a system needs to ensure equitable universal access for all Australians. We have a high quality oral health workforce but need to grow it and the funding structures so that everyone can access the preventive and restorative dental care they need.

AHCRA recognizes the significance of this decision by the Government in such a tight Budget environment and congratulates them for it. It also congratulates the Greens on their steadfast commitment to universal dental care. In their negotiations about the future of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme (CDDS), AHCRA urges both parties to make real the commitment to universal care.

** AHCRA is a coalition of 35 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.*