



Public Health Association
AUSTRALIA



**NATIONAL RURAL
HEALTH
ALLIANCE INC.**



**Australian Health Care
Reform Alliance**

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Coalition must support dental Budget initiative

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Five national health organisations have welcomed the Government’s announcement of \$515million for public dental services in this year’s Federal Budget. “This new funding follows through on the Government’s promises in August last year and will significantly reduce the long waits for dental care endured by lower-income Australians. It is strong stepping stone towards a more equitable dental care system.” said Tony McBride, Chair of the Australian Health Care Reform Alliance and on behalf the Australian Council of Social Service , National Rural Health Alliance , Public Health Association of Australia , and the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association.

“In addition the incentives for dental graduates to work in the public sector and for dentists to set up practices in the country are also valuable initiatives that will benefit many people currently missing out on treatment.”

“The key question for the five organisations is now whether the Coalition will support this initiative to address this current inequity,” Tony added. “In his Budget Reply Speech the Leader of the Opposition has criticised the Government’s approach but has not proposed any alternatives.

Dental care is by far the most inaccessible element of health care. Consumers effectively pay between 85% and 100% of the costs of care, compared to an average 12% for the rest of health care. And waiting times in the public sector are often two to three years, especially in rural and outer metropolitan areas. Further, one in three adults delayed or avoided dental visits in the last year because of the cost.

This funding for adults now needs to be augmented by an injection of funds into children’s care. The Growing Up Smiling program is being developed but it appears to have received no allocation in the coming year. The oral health of children is now decreasing and is significantly worse than in the mid 1990s, and investment is urgently required to stem this tide.

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