



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

C/- PO Box 280 Deakin West ACT 2600 ABN 64 051 645 674
www.healthreform.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

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7 BETTER WAYS TO SPEND \$7 BILLION – DENTAL HEALTH CARE

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance today called on the Government to re-direct funding in the Federal Budget 2017/18 from the inefficient and inequitable \$7 billion private health insurance (PHI) rebate into dental services, in order to improve the oral health and well-being of all Australians.

AHCRA is a coalition of peak health organisations working together to create a better and fairer health system for Australia's future.

“The \$7 billion PHI rebate is an inequitable and inefficient use of funding which should be re-directed into transforming oral health services for all Australians” AHCRA spokesperson Dr Bruce Simmons said today.

“Dental health is essential for overall health and well-being but dental care is one of the most inefficient and inequitable areas of the Australian health system. Less than 50% of adults currently receive adequate dental care with access highly dependent upon income. In fact, those earning over \$140 000 p.a. are more than twice as likely (57%) to receive regular check-ups as those earning less than \$30 000 p.a. (27%).

“Those adults who are eligible for public dental services often experience long waiting times for care, during which time problems can become more serious, leading to potentially preventable tooth loss.

“Poor access to dental care compounds the disadvantage already experienced by many low income and disadvantaged groups. Without good dental health it is very difficult to maintain employment or participate fully in education and social life. Poor dental health can also seriously complicate the management of multiple other chronic diseases.

“Currently, the most socio-economically disadvantaged people have the poorest oral health and greatest treatment needs. This is already a major problem that will only become more serious with the ageing of our population.

“87% of dental care in Australia is provided in the private sector and dentistry in general operates within an outdated bio-medical model of care which is inflexible, insufficiently engages patients as partners and is too disease and treatment oriented.

“To meet the future health care needs of our community we need to break down the division between primary health and oral health and ensure that all Australians can access timely screening and referral, dental check-ups and basic and preventive dental care. This requires cooperative actions from both the Commonwealth and state/territory governments to bring oral health care within the universal Medicare health system and oral health promotion within national prevention programs.

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“Re-directing the \$7 billion currently going to the PHI industry into a major strengthening of public dental services and the re-orienting of private dental services would markedly improve the equity and efficiency of the whole dental care system and promote health and wellbeing generally,” Dr Simmons said.

For further information and/or comment:

Dr Bruce Simmons, ACHRA spokesperson - 0451 457 335

Jennifer Doggett, AHCRA Chair - 0403 325 980

This proposal forms part of AHCRA's '7 better ways to spend \$7 billion' campaign. The aim of this campaign is to highlight the benefits of redirecting funding from the private health insurance rebate to areas of greater need in the health system. #7billionhealthbucks www.healthreform.org.au