



**Public Health Association**  
AUSTRALIA

The Hon Nicola Roxon MP  
Minister for Health and Ageing  
Parliament House Canberra 2600

11 November 2008

Copies to:

- Peter Dutton MP
- Senator Rachel Siewert
- Senator Nick Xenophon
- Senator Steve Fielding

**RE: COMPROMISE ESSENTIAL TO SAVE NEW COMMONWEALTH DENTAL HEALTH PROGRAM**

Dear Minister,

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is joining calls for an urgent political compromise to save the new Commonwealth Dental Health Program (CDHP). We are deeply concerned that implementation of the CDHP has been stalled since the middle of the year when the Senate blocked the closure of the former Coalition government's Medicare Enhanced Primary Care (EPC) Dental scheme. This continues to mean rapidly escalating funding in order to provide dental care for people with chronic illnesses.

We understand why Senators wish to save the best elements of the EPC scheme which is why we advocate a compromise. State and Territory Oral Health Services are desperately waiting for the promised additional funding of the new CDHP to provide additional services for those highly disadvantaged people who currently cannot afford even basic dental care. We therefore join with the Australian Healthcare & Hospitals Association (AHHA), Council on the Ageing (COTA), the National Rural Health Alliance and the Australian Dental Association in urging a compromise position that would allow for essential care for those most in need under the EPC scheme but remove the more costly complex care.

In the past year, 'enhancements' to the EPC scheme have seen highly costly procedures like implants and crowns increase. Furthermore, the increase in individual patient funding to \$4250 over two years has encouraged rapidly increasing numbers of people to access the scheme with a consequential massive blowout of costs. As the EPC Dental Medicare scheme is not means-tested it can be accessed by all those who meet the current broad definitions of chronic disease. If the criteria can be tightened to focus on the most critical chronic illnesses and the scope of treatment can be limited to basic needs only, then there should be sufficient funds left over to implement at least a modified CDHP.

The PHAA is seriously concerned about the inequities in the current funding arrangement that allow wealthy people to gain free and easy access to care from their private dentist and have their crowns and implants funded by taxpayers while pensioners and other disadvantaged people in our community cannot afford to access even the most basic dental care. We urge all of the elected members to reach the compromise needed to ensure that the current EPC Dental Medicare scheme is made available to those most in need while access to basic dental services is extended through the CDHP to those most disadvantaged around our country.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Moore".

Michael Moore  
CEO Public Health Association of Australia