



Public Health Association
AUSTRALIA

15 Oct 2008

Dear Dr Burges

Thank you for your letter 10 October. We are pleased that you are supportive of the new Commonwealth Dental Health Program proceeding and that you are in agreement that the EPC program needs some tightening. We are in total agreement with you that public dentistry is not poor dentistry for poor people and feel sorry that this may have been read into our media release. In fact our intention was to promote the services offered by the states public dental providers as well as the public dental schemes that use private dentists, which would be funded by the new Commonwealth Dental Health Program.

Our media release was trying to advocate for action on these points. While we used the emotive term 'rorting' it wasn't particularly pointed at dentists deliberately misusing government funds, but that the EPC criteria enables some people with chronic diseases that do not affect oral health to access EPC. (We understand that people with high cholesterol, arthritis and knee problems accessing the EPC).

As you would understand because EPC has been run through Medicare it is not possible to have an eligibility criteria linked to a means test to reduce the wealthy accessing EPC. However we believe that stronger definitions should be in place for the chronic diseases that are eligible for the EPC. We also believe that the current arrangement is not sustainable from a budget perspective.

In addition many dentists do not bulk bill meaning that poorer people in the population are unable to access EPC because they can't afford to pay the upfront fees and claim them back later.

While we agree that we used the term cosmetic dentistry loosely, when you examine the item numbers of funds that have been spent, a considerable amount of money has been spent on high end dentistry, including crowns and some implants. This means that population health principles of 'greater good for the greater number' are in jeopardy. Our argument is that less item numbers should be available or perhaps a cap should be in place so that many more of the population are able to access tax payer funded dental procedures. This supports oral health being integral to general health as more people would be able to have good basic dental care

As you mention we are in agreement on the main issues to promote oral health and the PHAA will continue to advocate for oral health in line with public and population health principles.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michael Moore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael Moore
CEO