

PUBLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA
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COMPROMISE SOUGHT TO SAVE NEW COMMONWEALTH DENTAL PROGRAM

The Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) has joined calls for a compromise to save the new Commonwealth Dental Health Program. The implementation of the initiative is under threat after the Senate blocked the closure of the previous government's Medicare scheme funding dental care for people with chronic illnesses.

“We understand why Senators wanted to save the current Medicare scheme that provides courses of dental care for people with chronic illnesses. However, it is also very important that the new Commonwealth Dental Health Program goes ahead because it will provide more services to disadvantaged groups that currently can't afford basic and essential dental treatment. We would like to see the Health Ministers Advisory Committee adopt a compromise position that would allow the best parts of the old scheme to stay, while cutting out the cosmetic procedure rorts that are currently occurring. These savings could then be used to ensure that the new Dental Health Program can also be implemented,” explained Michael Moore, Chief Executive Officer of the PHAA.

“In the past year, ‘enhancements’ to the Medicare-funded scheme have seen cosmetic procedures like implants and crowns increase, blowing out costs. The Medicare scheme is not means-tested, so can be accessed by the wealthy and the definitions of what constitutes a chronic disease are very broad. If the criteria could be tightened to exclude such expensive cosmetic procedures and focus on the most critical of chronic illnesses, the savings could be used to ensure that the planned Commonwealth Dental Health Program can also be implemented.

“It just doesn't seem fair that wealthy people will continue to be able to have their crowns and implants funded by taxpayers while pensioners and other disadvantaged people in our community can't afford to access basic dental health services at all.

“If access under the current Medicare scheme is tightened up in this way, those with chronic illnesses could still receive the treatment they need while access to basic dental services could also be extended to those who most need it around the country. This approach seems to offer an appropriate compromise for all,” added Mr Moore.

For further information/comment:

Michael Moore, Chief Executive Officer, PHAA

0417 249 731