



**Public Health Association**  
AUSTRALIA

The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP  
Minister for Health & Ageing  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Email: [tanya.plibersek.mp@aph.gov.au](mailto:tanya.plibersek.mp@aph.gov.au)

14 December 2011

Dear Minister,

Firstly, allow me to say congratulations on your appointment to the Health and Ageing Portfolio. As discussed on the phone yesterday morning the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA) is looking forward to working closely with you across a wide range of issues as we have done effectively with your predecessor, and now Attorney General, Hon Nicola Roxon MP.

We note from the media that you intend to make oral health one of your health priorities. Therefore, in this instance I am writing on behalf of the Public Health Association of Australia and its Oral Health Special Interest Group to congratulate you on your commitment to dental reform and to urge you to implement a universal population-based oral health care system in a deliberate, detailed and phased manner. We would like to offer any support that we can to assist you in this endeavour.

The substantial inequities in oral health in Australia are well documented. Oral disease is a key marker of disadvantage, and greater levels of oral disease are experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people on low-incomes, people in rural and remote areas, some immigrant groups from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (particularly refugees) and dependent older people. Young children in low socio-economic groups experience almost twice as much dental caries as those in high socio-economic groups, and concession card holders have on average 3.5 less teeth and are 6 times more likely to have had all their teeth extracted than non card holders.

Barriers to people accessing oral health care include financial barriers for people on middle and low incomes, extended waiting times for users of public dental services, and difficult access to both public and private dental services in rural and remote areas. People subjected to infrequent dental attendance are almost four times more likely to have a tooth extracted when they do attend.

The Public Health Association of Australia urges the Commonwealth to commit to a national population-based oral health care system as part of its dental reforms in 2012.

Dental reform must reflect the Government's vision for an oral health system that ensures "affordable and high quality oral health care". It must address affordability of oral health care in the national context that universal health care is already available to all Australians through Medicare –

which provides ready access to hospital and primary health care services free or at low-cost. There is no logic or fairness for excluding essential dental care from Medicare.

The PHAA strongly urges the Commonwealth Government, in a national partnership agreement with State and Territory Governments, to develop a detailed, long-term 'road map' for oral health care system reform, based on Medicare. This plan should identify clear timeframes, milestones and responsibilities for the phased introduction of a national oral health care system that ensures universal access to comprehensive care with an emphasis on safety and quality through patient-centred service delivery.

All Australians should have access to safe, affordable, timely and culturally secure oral health care, not just those minority of Australians who can currently afford to pay for regular dental checkups and treatment from a private practice.

If you would like any further information please contact Dr Bruce Simmons, (08) 8952-1802 or [bruce.simmons@ozemail.com.au](mailto:bruce.simmons@ozemail.com.au) or feel free to approach me at PHAA on 0417 249 731.

Sincerely



Michael Moore  
CEO  
Public Health Association of Australia



Dr Bruce Simmons  
Co-Convenor  
Oral Health Special Interest Group PHAA