



# DENTICARE

## BRINGING DENTAL CARE INTO MEDICARE

*The Greens plan to ensure all Australians have access to dental care.*

Millions of Australians are unable to afford proper dental care. Many more put off dental visits and struggle to pay dental bills when emergencies arise. It's time we fixed this gaping hole in our world-class health system.

The mouth is part of the body and dental health should be part of our universal health care system. The Greens will bring dental care under Medicare so that everyone can get necessary treatment no matter what their circumstances may be.

### > PUBLICLY-FUNDED DENTAL CARE

The Greens plan, Denticare, adds dental treatment to the Medicare Benefits schedule, meaning dentists can bulk-bill dental services like doctors do. **Our plan for Denticare will:**

- **Provide dental treatment covered by Medicare.** Phased in over five years, Medicare will cover preventative and restorative dental treatment so that everybody can afford to go to the dentist.
- **Start with the most disadvantaged.** Low income earners, kids and teens, pensioners and concession card holders will be among the first to access dental treatment under Medicare, before rolling out the scheme to everybody.
- **Ease pressure on the public system.** Because of the Greens, billions of extra dollars are being injected into public dental services. By maintaining this investment, public dental services will be able to treat complex cases and hard-to-reach sectors of the community without sending waiting lists skyrocketing.

Through our work in Parliament, the Greens have already secured the biggest reform to dental health in a generation. It's time to extend the benefits to all Australians.

### > FIXING A HEALTH CRISIS

Australia's oral health is poor and getting worse. Less than half of Australians have good oral health and dental visiting patterns. This is largely due to the high cost of dental treatment. 60% of dental care is paid for out-of-pocket by consumers, with the result that a third of people say they can't afford to go to the dentist or delay going to the dentist because of the expense.<sup>i</sup>

Good oral health is important for overall health and wellbeing. Complications from dental disease can make other medical issues worse and lead to life-threatening situations.

Untreated dental disease results in an unnecessary burden on the health system: Up to 10% of GP visits are due to poor dental health<sup>ii</sup>, and more than 60,000 potentially avoidable hospital visits a year are due to dental issues<sup>iii</sup>. This costs the country approximately \$500m in direct costs and up to \$2 billion in lost productivity every year<sup>iv</sup>.

An estimated 400,000 people are on waiting lists for public dental care, with average wait times of 27 months and in some cases higher than 5 years.<sup>v</sup>

Just as the mouth is an integral part of the body, so too should dental care be an integral part of the public health system. The Greens propose that dental care should be incorporated into Medicare under a universal dental health scheme: Denticare.

### > A FAIR AND MORE CARING SOCIETY

The evidence shows that the health burden of dental neglect falls heavily on disadvantaged groups. Low income earners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the elderly and people in rural and regional areas are all significantly more likely to suffer from untreated dental disease.

Dental neglect can have serious consequences for people's lives. It can lead to poor nutrition. It can disturb sleep. Cosmetic issues can lead to social isolation and could potentially prevent somebody from getting a job or finding rental accommodation.

It is unacceptable that disadvantaged Australians are left to suffer or must endure never-ending waiting lists to get basic treatment many of us take for granted. Under Denticare, nobody is left behind.

Australia can afford to be a more caring country.



## > MAKING DENTAL HEALTH A PRIORITY

The Greens have made dental health reform a top health priority. After the 2010 election, the Greens helped establish a National Advisory Council on Dental Health which made recommendations for future reforms. In the 2012 budget, the Greens secured over half a billion dollars in new funding for dental health. Less than six months later, the Greens negotiated one of the biggest dental health reforms in Australia's history.

Thanks to this reform, for the first time, many Australians will be able to access publicly-funded dental care.

**The new dental health package announced in August 2012 by the Greens and the Government provides an extra \$4.1b for dental services over 4 years from 2013-14.** The package includes:

- **\$2.7 billion for a Medicare-style entitlement for children aged 2-17 to get dental care in public or private dental practice.** 3.5 million children in families that receive Family Tax Benefit A will be eligible to access the scheme which will provide \$1000 in benefits over each 2-year period.
- **\$1.3 billion in Commonwealth funds for public dental services, to be administered by state dental services.** Over the 4-year period this represents almost 50% in extra funding to public dental services. This will allow the states to drastically cut waiting times and invest in much needed new infrastructure and staff. This money is in addition to the \$346 million in public dental funding announced in the 2012-13 budget.
- **A further \$246m set aside for flexible grants to fund programs that fill gaps in the dental system** particularly in indigenous communities and in rural and remote areas.

In parallel, workforce reforms will ensure that dental health professionals are on the ground to carry out the services and that the money is spent as efficiently as possible.

## > A REFORM WE CAN AFFORD

The Greens Denticare plan has been fully costed by the Parliamentary Budget office with a cost of \$4.87 billion over the forward estimates. The Parliamentary Budget Office estimates the Denticare scheme when fully implemented will cost \$8.5 billion in 2018-19.

The Greens' election platform will be fully costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office, and all spending will be balanced by revenue measures.

Australia can afford Denticare and the Greens will make it a priority.

## > JUST LIKE GOING TO THE DOCTOR

Under Denticare, dentists in private practice will be able to access up to \$1000 in Medicare items per patient every two years, covering a range of preventative and restorative dental services provided directly to the public. This will work just the way it does with doctors, and dentists will be able to bulk-bill Medicare without any out of pocket cost to the patient.

Simply present your Medicare card - just like going to the doctor.

## > THE PATH TO DENTICARE

Denticare will be phased in over 5 years, starting with those most in need of treatment and growing to become universal in the fifth year.

2014	Children 0-17 in Family Tax Benefit-A eligible families.
2015	Pensioners, Newstart and other income support recipients, FTBA children up to 18.
2016	All concession card holders, and FTBA children up to 19.
2017	All children and young adults to 20 years old.
2018	All Australians.



<sup>i</sup> AIHW, Dental attendance patterns and oral health status (2011)  
<sup>ii</sup> Menzies Centre for Health Policy, Dental and Oral Health: Policy Issue Paper, p. 2.  
<sup>iii</sup> AIHW, Oral health and dental care in Australia: Key facts and figures 2011, p. 16.  
<sup>iv</sup> Menzies Centre for Health Policy  
<sup>v</sup> Report of the National Advisory Council on Dental Health 2012, p. 16