

MEDICARE-FUNDED DENTICARE

Ensuring publicly funded dental care for all Australians

If you break a toe, your doctor and local hospital can provide the treatment you need, free of charge. But with dental care excluded from Medicare – what do you do if you break a tooth? Poorly funded and highly restricted public dental care, and huge out of pocket costs in the private health system, means millions of Australians put off visiting the dentist. All Australians should be able to visit the dentist when they need to. That's why the Greens will invest \$5.8 billion to provide Medicare-funded dental care to all young people, aged pensioners and concession card holders.

THE GREENS WILL:

- Invest \$5.8 billion to provide Medicare-funded dental care to all young people, aged pensioners, full benefit recipients and concession card holders



INTRODUCING DENTICARE

Untreated dental disease can have a huge impact on your quality of life. If you have ever woken up with a toothache, it's easy to understand that being unable to access proper treatment due to its cost, would make your life a misery.

Untreated dental disease can have very serious consequences, such as leading to low birth weight and premature babies¹, increased risk of heart disease² and life-threatening infections. Poor dental health can also lead to social isolation, poor diet, and depression, not to mention financial consequences.³

For those who can't afford to see a private dentist, state government attempt to provide care through public dental hospitals. But these struggle to meet demand, and many parts of regional and remote Australia have no access to these public dental hospitals. There are hundreds of thousands of people stuck on state waiting lists, with wait times reaching up to years depending on the treatment required. Since 80% of the dental workforce works in the private sector, it's clear public dental hospitals are only part of the solution.

The Greens have a costed, affordable plan to provide access to essential dental care for millions of Australians. Over the next four years, we will expand current federal government funding of dental services to cover the most disadvantaged groups in our society. Our vision is to bring dental care into Medicare over time so that everyone can access dental care.



Under the Greens' plan, people will be eligible for \$1000 over two years for essential dental care. These people will still be able to choose their dentist, while having the costs covered by Medicare. We'll introduce the new benefits through a staged commencement:

Eligible group	Year
All children under 18 years	1 July 2019
All aged pensioners	1 July 2020
All full benefit recipients	1 July 2021
All other concession card holders	1 July 2022

¹ Silk H, Douglass AB, Douglass JM & Silk L 2008. Oral health during pregnancy. *American Family Physician* 77:1139–44

² Bristol University, Bleeding gums increase risk of heart disease, 2008, <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2008/5880.html>

³ Department of Health, Final Report of National Advisory Council on Dental Health, 2012



WEALTH AND POSTCODE SHOULDN'T DETERMINE HEALTH

Cost is a huge barrier to accessing a dentist in Australia. The lower your income, the more likely you are to have chronic dental problems: low income earners have more than twice the rate of untreated dental decay as high income earners. For people in rural and regional Australia, First Nations people, and older Australians, the numbers are even worse. More than a third of remote area residents and an appalling 57% of First Nations Peoples live with untreated tooth decay.⁴ The largest part of this burden falls on children. Four out of ten young children and three out of ten older children have experienced tooth decay.⁵

This is even more pronounced in children from low income families. Specifically, children from low socio-economic areas are more than 70% more likely to have poor oral health than children in higher socio-economic areas.⁶

Untreated dental conditions are the third highest cause of acute potentially preventable hospitalisations⁷, third only to kidney infections and gastro. While direct costs of these visits to the health system haven't been estimated recently, we do know that each year nearly \$10 billion is spent on oral health, with 57% of these costs falling on the individual. This is over four times more than other health services, of which only 12% of the cost falls to the individual.⁸

In the first year of our plan, all children under 18 will be able to go to their local dentist. This will mean that the next generation will grow up with better access to essential services and better access to opportunities.

4 RFDS, Filling the Gap, Disparities in Oral Health Access and Outcomes in Remote and Rural Australia, 2015, https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/assets/magazine/file/RN020_Filling_the_Gap_Dental_Research_Report_D6.pdf

5 AIHW, Oral health and dental care in Australia, 2018, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/dental-oral-health/oral-health-and-dental-care-in-australia/contents/introduction>

6 COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Health Council 2015, Healthy mouths, healthy lives: Australia's National Oral health plan 2015-2024, <http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports/ArtMID/514/ArticleID/81/Australias-National-Oral-Health-Plan-2015-2024>

7 COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Health Council 2015, Healthy mouths, healthy lives: Australia's National Oral health plan 2015-2024, <http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports/ArtMID/514/ArticleID/81/Australias-National-Oral-Health-Plan-2015-2024>

8 COAG (Council of Australian Governments) Health Council 2015, Healthy mouths, healthy lives: Australia's National Oral health plan 2015-2024, <http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports/ArtMID/514/ArticleID/81/Australias-National-Oral-Health-Plan-2015-2024>