

# BRING DENTAL INTO MEDICARE

## Our plan to make dental care free

Dental care is too expensive. Too many people can't afford to see a dentist.

In Australia, everyone can see a doctor using their Medicare card, and there's no reason that it should be any different for your teeth.

The Greens secured free dental for kids into Medicare in 2012. However, our healthcare system continues to prevent people from getting the care they need throughout their life, allowing treatable oral conditions to turn into serious illnesses.

The Greens will invest \$77.6 billion over the decade to provide free dental care to everyone who is eligible for Medicare, ensuring everyone can visit the dentist when they need to.

### THE GREENS WILL:

- ▲ Invest \$77.6 billion over the decade to provide Medicare-funded dental care for all.
- ▲ Ensure that everyone with access to Medicare is eligible for the clinically relevant dental service they require, including general dental, orthodontics and restorative services.
- ▲ Train the next generation of dentists through fee-free university courses to enable the expansion of dental care for all.

## PAYING FOR OUR PLAN

By making billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share of tax and winding back handouts to big polluters, we can build a better life for all of us.

1 in 3 big corporations pays no tax and many big corporations and billionaires send their profits offshore tax free.

The Greens will tax billionaires with a new 'billionaires tax', require big corporations making excessive profits to pay a 'corporate super-profits tax' and axe billions of dollars in handouts to the coal, oil and gas giants that are driving the climate crisis.

These measures have all been costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office.

When big corporations and billionaires pay their fair share, everyone can have the services they need for a better life.

## UNIVERSAL DENTICARE

Dental disease can be debilitatingly painful and have an enormous impact on your quality of life.

Each year 40% of Australians delay or don't go to the dentist because of the cost<sup>1</sup>. For those who go to the dentist, 58% of the cost is met directly by the person receiving the treatment. This is significantly higher than the out-of-pocket costs for medical primary care (11%) and prescriptions (12%)<sup>2</sup>.

This represents a fundamental failure in our healthcare system. Why is the mouth treated differently to the rest of the body when it comes to healthcare?

The consequence of delaying or not treating dental disease can be significant. Poor dental health can lead to life-threatening infections, increased risk of heart disease<sup>3</sup>, and pregnancy complications<sup>4</sup>. It can also lead to social isolation, poor diet, depression, and increased visits to the emergency department<sup>5,6</sup>. The Australian Dental Association has estimated that the avoidable costs of poor oral health to Australia exceed \$818 million per year.<sup>7</sup>

Hundreds of thousands of people are stuck on a waiting list for public dental treatment for years, depending on the treatment required. Moreover, many parts of regional and remote

<sup>1</sup><https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports-data/health-conditions-disability-deaths/dental-oral-health/overview>

<sup>2</sup> *Health expenditure Australia 2016–17*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018

<sup>3</sup>Bristol University, Bleeding gums increase risk of heart disease, 2008, <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/news/2008/5880.html>

<sup>4</sup> Silk H, Douglass AB, Douglass JM & Silk L. 2008. Oral health during pregnancy. *American Family Physician* 77:1139–44

<sup>5</sup>Department of Health, Final Report of National Advisory Council on Dental Health, 2012

<sup>6</sup> Filling the gap: A universal dental scheme for Australia, Grattan Institute, 2019

<sup>7</sup><https://www.ada.org.au/ADHP>

Australia have no access to public dental services.

The Greens know we must move to a well-resourced, publicly provided, universal dental care system that tackles dental disease proactively. Our plan would provide dental services for free to those who are eligible for Medicare. It would move dental care to a prevention-based approach that will improve public health outcomes.

Under our plan, people will still be able to choose their dentist. Routine and therapeutic dental services will be bulk-billed or rebated, including regular check-up and teeth clean, crowns, orthodontic treatment, oral surgeries, periodontics and prosthodontics. The plan would allow practices to choose whether to bulk bill or offer Medicare-rebated services, as with GPs. The full list includes:

- Diagnostic services (items 011–091)
- Preventive, Prophylactic and Bleaching Services (items 111–171)
- Periodontics (items 213–251)
- Oral Surgery (items 311–399)
- Endodontics (items 411–458)
- Restorative Services (items 511–597)
- Prosthodontics (items 611–779)
- Orthodontics (items 811–881)
- General Services (items 911–972)
- Miscellaneous (items 981 - 999).

The plan has been costed by the independent Parliamentary Budget Office at \$77.6 billion over the decade.

## FREE UNIVERSITY TO TRAIN THE NEXT GENERATION OF DENTISTS

Our plan to expand and enable access to oral healthcare will necessitate an increase in the size of the dentistry workforce in Australia. We will meet that growing demand for practitioners by guaranteeing access to fee-free university courses to train the next generation of dentists.

For more information about our plan to guarantee access to fee-free university and TAFE courses, check out our website: [Free TAFE and University \(greens.org.au\)](https://www.greens.org.au).