

# Advocacy Update

*New Labor Government - new health policies*



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ADAVB has welcomed the new State Government and Minister for Health, Ms Jill Hennessy. We look forward to meeting with Ms Hennessy and other politicians to advocate for oral health priorities and discuss dental policy matters, such as addressing dental workforce oversupply.

Labor's health priorities are listed in their election policy platform on their website: [www.viclabor.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Victorian-Labor-Platform-2014.pdf](http://www.viclabor.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Victorian-Labor-Platform-2014.pdf)

Labor has pledged to:

- Provide public dental care in community health centres across the State to ensure eligible Victorians have access to emergency and ongoing dental care when they need it
- Continue to promote and fund school dental programs through community health so that all children and young people have every opportunity to achieve optimum dental health. This includes dental hygiene programs and immediate access when necessary for dental treatment
- Work with the Commonwealth to ensure that the level of dental health is significantly improved, with particular reference to children, regional Victorians, the elderly and indigenous communities
- Urge the Commonwealth to ensure that significant gaps in provision of services are addressed, particularly where there are shortfalls in public dental services
- Expand the program of water fluoridation to areas yet to benefit from this important public healthcare measure

## **PUBLIC DENTIST EBA**

ADAVB is pleased to observe that EBA negotiations continue to progress well. Some parts of the negotiations are now complete and ADAVB is hopeful that members employed in public sector agencies will start benefitting from the positive outcomes in the coming months.

## **UPDATE ON WORKFORCE**

The New Year has brought cause for renewed optimism on employment. In January, labour force indicators reported increased workforce participation, decreased unemployment and a higher number of job ads. The ADA has noted an increased number of dentist job openings, although many of these continue to be part-time.

The long-awaited release of the Government's Oral Health Workforce report showed that, if no changes to policy are made, the dentist workforce could have an oversupply by up to 20% by 2025. ADA is hopeful this data will move the Government to

reconsider its immigration policies, and remove the occupation of 'dentist' from the Skilled Occupation List. This would reduce the number of overseas-trained dentists moving to Australia to work.

## **CHILD DENTAL BENEFIT SCHEDULE (CDBS)**

The CDBS is having positive impacts on child oral health and public dental waiting lists, but only about 30% of eligible children received treatment under the scheme in the first 10 months of operation. Some have cited low public awareness of the scheme due to limited publicity, but ADA expected the CDBS to build up slowly. ADA welcomed the news that the scheme's funding will continue into 2015-16. At its peak, 2.4 million children are expected to receive free basic dental care per year under the CDBS, which will attract annual Commonwealth funding of over \$650 million.

In January, several changes were made to CDBS item numbers and administrative procedures. Alongside this, the first round of CDBS audits was announced. The Department of Human Services has flagged that some unusual claiming behaviour by dental practitioners may be occurring, and is asking dentists to review their CDBS records to confirm compliance with the scheme rules (see [www.ada.org.au/members/schemes/govtschemes.aspx](http://www.ada.org.au/members/schemes/govtschemes.aspx)). Members with questions about this should contact an ADAVB Community Relations Officer on 8825 4600, or the ADA CDBS Hotline - 1800 678 383.

## **PRIVATE HEALTH INSURANCE PREMIUMS SET TO RISE**

At the time of writing, health funds were in the final stages of negotiating their annual premium increases with the Government. This year's increase could be as high as 7.5% for some policies - almost three times the rate of inflation. At the same time, the Government private health insurance rebate will only rise at the rate of inflation (currently at 2.3%). Insurance industry sources say that the rising cost of health insurance, as well as weak economic conditions may push policyholders to opt for cheaper cover that excludes certain services. Consumer advocates have called for an inquiry into private health insurance to inform evidence-based debate on the role of private health insurance in Australia. ADAVB continues to monitor the situation.

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