



MEDIA RELEASE

**ADAVB WELCOMES GOVERNMENT'S DENTAL WAITING LIST PLAN
BUT URGENT ACTION STILL REQUIRED!**

Dr. Vlad Hardi, President of the Victorian Branch of the Australian Dental Association (ADAVB) today welcomed the announcement by Victorian Health Minister Bronwyn Pike, that the State Government will invest a small sum in streamlining the system of waiting lists for public dental services, as the ADAVB has long advocated such measures.

The amount of funds allocated to actually provide those services still requires significant increase if it is to considerably reduce the waiting lists in the short term, he said. The waiting list strategy is an important development but it is not the comprehensive solution required.

This issue is not new, and the ADAVB has been campaigning for increased funding to address this major public health problem for some years now. The measures announced this week may not take full effect until July 2004. The urgent needs of those presently on the waiting list require immediate action, and a major funding boost for the existing Victorian General and Emergency Dental Voucher Schemes is required to allow private sector dentists to help reduce the number of people waiting for up to 4 years or more for dental treatment.

The new Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne is a most welcome facility as it replaces a building that was obsolete and tired. The \$52m spent on this facility is a capital expense however, and the recurrent funding required to address the waiting lists for dental treatment is a separate matter. Victorians still need to see serious funding increases by the Government to fix this growing problem.

Professor John Spencer, of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, estimated in 2001/02 that a total of \$610.7m per annum would be required to turn the national situation around. This represents an increase over current funding levels (approximately \$270m) of around \$341m. On a population share basis, this means that Victoria would need at least an extra \$85m p.a.

The ADAVB has discounted the projections made by Prof. Spencer in proposing that an additional \$30m p.a. is required to provide an acceptable minimal level of care to disadvantaged Victorians.

Victoria has the lowest per capita funding of public dental care of all Australian States. If an extra \$30m p.a. were to be allocated, this would bring Victoria more into line with the National average.

“Dental Health Services Victoria has advised that there were **213,446 people on dental waiting lists in Victoria as at February 2003**, and this figure is likely to have increased again since then given the lengthening waiting times reported by DHSV as at June this year”, Dr Hardi said.

As at today (1 August), the waiting time for general dental care at the new Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne is 39 months, whilst the longest waiting periods in Victoria are in Portland and Warrnambool, where people are required to wait 52 months for general care and 42 months for dentures.

“The small amounts of additional funding allocated by the State Government in recent budgets generally only absorb increased numbers of eligible people being added to the list. According to Victorian Council of Social Services modelling, the increased funding in 2003 actually represents a reduction in real funding of 1.26% or \$1.1m, when inflationary factors are taken into account. These funds have done nothing to shorten waiting times, and it will be many months before the measures announced yesterday will have significant impact, Dr Hardi said.”

Over 60% of those treated are classed as emergency patients, and in many parts of Victoria the system has become a ‘dental casualty ward’. This means that public sector dentists are being expected to treat a large proportion of emergency cases, and only provide stopgap measures. Dentists are being driven out of the service because they can’t see when they will be able to improve their patients’ oral health and practice all the aspects of the general dentistry they trained for and enjoy.

