

Victoria's peak dental body: State Government needs wake-up call about Victoria's oral health crisis



Dentists urge the Victorian Government to act on the State's oral health crisis and stop the blame game

A new AIHW report, [A discussion of public dental waiting times information in Australia 2013–14 to 2016–17](#), has exposed soaring waiting times in the public dental system, and while this information is clear in other states, the most recent data for Victoria is unavailable, with the Department of Health and Human Services citing 'data quality concerns' as the reason for this omission.

Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) President, Dr Susan Wise said, "Victorians deserve to know how their public dental system is performing. We urge the Victorian Government to publish the 2016-17 Victorian public dental waiting time data that is missing from the AIHW report".

ADAVB CEO, Associate Professor Matthew Hopcraft said, "The lack of detail in the report on Victorian wait times is highly concerning. Is the State Government trying to cover up the extent of the oral health crisis unfolding in Victoria? The continuous cycle of inadequate funding in both prevention and treatment for oral health has directly led to this rotten situation - State and Federal government need to resolve their funding disputes and take action now".

While Commonwealth funding for public dental services through the National Partnership Agreement has decreased, the Victorian Government needs to stop the blame game and take responsibility for dental health in their own backyard; commit to addressing increasing waiting times and inequitable access; and to appropriately fund and support the public dental workforce to deliver the care that Victorians need.

A/Prof Hopcraft said, "We can't afford to wait and delay any longer as waiting lists continue to grow, and the oral health of children and adults deteriorates as they wait for much needed dental treatment, which in turn impacts on their quality of life, well-being and even employment prospects. The Victorian Government needs to invest substantially more in our public dental system, with funding remaining almost static between 2013-2017. Due to population growth and CPI, this means that funding is in fact sliding backwards."

The public dental workforce is impacted by an unsustainable funding model, with employers experiencing difficulties in recruiting and retaining experienced staff, particularly in regional and rural areas. The public dental workforce is stressed and overworked as they attempt to

stretch limited resources to do their best to provide care for at risk, vulnerable and disadvantaged patients.

The ADAVB urges the Victorian Government to:

- Increase public dental funding by at least \$34-45 Million in the next budget
- Develop a long-term funding strategy, which recognises the need to invest in shifting the system from a treatment-focussed to a prevention-focussed system
- Introduce new measures to address long waiting times
- Adequately fund and support the public dental workforce, so that they can continue to deliver the care that Victorians need.

Supporting data

- As at 31 Dec 2017, average waiting times were¹:
 - 19.5 months for general dental care (an increase of 4.5 months on the same period in 2016)
 - 15.8 months for denture care (similar to the same period in 2016)
- Data within [ADAVB State pre-budget submission 2018-19](#) includes:
 - 40% of the care delivered in Victoria's public dental sector is emergency care – fixing mostly preventable problems and getting people out of pain
 - More than 2.5 million Victorians are eligible for public dental care, but less than 400,000 receive treatment in Victorian public dental clinics each year.
 - At current funding levels it would take more than six years to treat all eligible patients once.
 - The State is providing public dental funding of \$226.1M in 2017-18, and this amounts to just \$90 per eligible Victorian, which is woefully inadequate to provide for the needs of public dental patients.

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¹ Victorian State Government, Victorian Health Services Performance [website](#), Dental Care performance data, accessed 1-2-18