



Victorian  
Oral Health  
Alliance

19 March 2019

**MEDIA RELEASE**

## Alliance welcomes Grattan laser shining on dental gaps

An alliance of dental health professionals, providers and consumers has welcomed the Grattan Institute report *'Filling the dental gap: A universal dental scheme for Australia'* as a significant contribution to addressing one of the most inequitable and under-funded areas of healthcare in the country. 'Every federal and state-based politician needs to read this report, to both understand that many people are locked out of affordable and timely care, and to see a potential way forward to treating oral health in the same way we do for the rest of the body', said Tony McBride, Spokesperson for the Victorian Oral Health Alliance (VOHA).

'The Grattan Institute recommendations seek dental care funding in a similar way to general healthcare. By enhancing access to primary dental care for disadvantaged population groups making it an important feature of our healthcare system, we can improve public health, as well as individual social and employment prospects.'

VOHA is strongly supportive of Grattan's analysis, which highlights that the current system:

- treats health care for the mouth in a very different, and unequal, manner than health care for the rest of the body with no compelling medical or economic reason to do so
- is funded predominantly out of patients' pockets (in stark contrast to most other health care), which is a potential barrier for many people accessing care
- includes public dental schemes, which are inadequately funded and inequitable across jurisdictions, with most states having waiting lists of well over a year for public dental care (Victoria's average is 20 months), with the consequential worsening of people's oral health
- resulted in approximately 2 million people nationally who needed dental care in the past year either didn't get or delayed getting it because of the cost, with low-income people being the most likely to miss out on care.

VOHA broadly supports the recommendations for this long-term vision and the need for a realistic pathway to build this incrementally. It supports Grattan's call for a gradual expansion, led and funded by the Commonwealth Government, with a greater focus more on prevention, primary dental care and early intervention.

The report is an opportunity to alleviate the impact that poor dental health has on the wider health system, with oral health problems one of the leading causes of potentially preventable

**Victorian Oral Health Alliance**

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hospitalisations. In 2015-16 there were 67,266 potentially preventable hospitalisations for oral health problems, almost one-third of these were children under the age of nine years<sup>[1]</sup>. The call for the Commonwealth to head dental reform would create an important step forward towards co-ordinated and integrated dental care.

### Contact

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### VOHA Members

- Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association Victoria (ADOHTA Vic)
- Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB)
- Australian Dental Prosthetists Association (ADPA)
- Brotherhood of St Laurence
- cohealth
- COTA Victoria
- Health Issues Centre
- IPC Health
- North Richmond Community Health
- Star Health
- Victorian Alcohol & Drug Association (VAADA)
- Victorian Healthcare Association

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<sup>[1]</sup> Australian Health Policy Collaboration, 2018, *Nothing to smile about – oral health report*, Australia's Oral Health Tracker, Victoria University and Australian Dental Association (<https://www.vu.edu.au/about-vu/news-events/news/nothing-to-smile-about-oral-health-report>)