

## Dentists urge flexible model for implementation of kids' dental program to ensure timely dental check-ups

Victoria's peak dental body, the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB), has urged the government to take a flexible approach to delivery of their school dental van program to ensure that all children have timely access to the dentist.

Dr Kevin Morris, ADAVB President said, "One in three Australian children have tooth decay in their baby teeth by the age of 5-6 years, so investing in regular visits to the dentist and preventive care is essential to tackle this issue. Mobile dental vans are appropriate in some circumstances where families cannot readily access a dental clinic, and there are plenty of dentists in existing public and private clinics around Victoria that can provide quality care to children. The dentist workforce is skilled and ready to assist families and the government to deliver on the promise of ensuring the good oral health of Victoria's children."

Dr Morris also urged parents to continue taking an active role in their child's oral health by discussing this with their dentist at each check-up, keeping up good brushing and flossing habits at home, and limiting the consumption of sugary foods and drinks.

He said, "Dentists are committed to helping people to keep their teeth for life. An important part of this is regular discussions with the whole family about how to help kids care for their teeth."

While access to dental care for Victorian children may be improved through this work, the ADAVB has some concerns about the program and is prepared to work with the government to address these including:

- Encouraging parental engagement or involvement in treatment and prevention
- Obtaining adequate informed consent without the parent present during treatment, particularly for younger children
- Impact on existing patient-dentist relationships by moving children from their current provider of choice to the school dental program, including the impact on practice viability

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- Continuity of care with different providers through the school dental program
- Logistics issues, including electronic records and referral systems
- Workforce issues, including recruitment and retention of sufficient workforce
- Provision of specialist dental care for complex cases.

The ADAVB also urged the government to remember the 126,000 Victorian adults, who are still on public dental care waiting lists across the state. While the average waiting time is currently 20.3 months, information obtained by the ADAVB about public dental services shows that some people are still waiting up to four years to see a dentist.

Dr Morris said, “There are adults in our community who are still waiting too long, and they need more assistance from the Victorian Government to access the dental care that they need. With such long waiting times, simple dental problems that could be reversed or repaired can become complex, requiring emergency dental care and tooth extractions.”

“The government is committed to spending millions of dollars to build vans, when this money could be better spent providing treatment to children and adults in existing dental clinics in both the public and private sector. Already they have cut \$74 million from the program promise that they took to the election,” said Dr Morris.

The ADAVB remains willing to work with the government to develop flexible solutions to help more people get access to the dental care that they need.

## **Interviews:**

Interviews are available with Dr Kevin Morris, ADAVB President

Contact Sophia Ljaskevic, Communications and Marketing Manager

[sophia.ljaskevic@adavb.org](mailto:sophia.ljaskevic@adavb.org) Tel: 8825 4600