



Dentists say no dental relief for Victorians

The State Government has effectively reduced access to public dental services, the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) claims, in light of the release of the 2008-09 State budget.

President of the ADAVB Dr Mark Bowman says that the Budget has increased spending on dental services by a mere 1%. With inflation running at 4% this means that Victorians needing public dental treatment will have to continue to wait many months – even years.

“Budget figures showed that the Government plans to treat a decreasing percentage of the eligible population as the State’s population increases”, say Dr Bowman.

“With 20% of eligible people on public dental waiting lists, this means that people will be on a five-year cycle for dental treatment. About three quarters of those eligible will not see any dental treatment this year. At least \$300 million is needed to provide basic dental care for all public dental patients in Victoria”, Dr Bowman states.

“With no plan to change to the average 22-month waiting time, the Government appears to believe that this is a reasonable time for people to wait for basic dental care,” he adds.

The ADAVB claims that the State Government had missed a ready-made opportunity to reduce the public dental waiting times by not increasing funding for the dental voucher schemes. If the Government had increased voucher payments for private dentists to treat public patients, it could have enlisted additional dentists to reduce waiting lists.

Victoria has three dental voucher schemes for public dental patients to receive treatment from private practitioners – general and emergency treatment and dentures.

Dr Bowman said that as payments for the schemes no longer meet the costs incurred by dentists, many private dentists no longer participate.

“Private dentists are community conscious but cannot treat public patients below cost – they need to be fairly remunerated.

“If the Government increased the payments for dental vouchers, more private dentists would willingly treat public patients and make an impact in cutting the waiting lists.”

The ADAVB has welcomed the additional funding for dental health in rural and regional Victoria, the continuing commitment to fluoridate Victoria’s drinking water, and the new dental school in Bendigo.

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