

# Media release

28 April 2022

## Stop the Rot

As part of the Australian Dental Association (ADA) Stop the Rot campaign, which calls on major parties to prioritise dental care for older Australians living in residential aged care this federal election, we're encouraging the community and the dental profession in Victoria to email their local candidates with personal experiences about why dental care is important.

### Key points

- The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommended the establishment of a Senior Dental Benefits Scheme
- Exclusive polling shows there is strong support from voters for a Senior Dental Benefits Scheme
- **Stop the Rot** encourages voters to contact their candidates to let them know that dental health is important to them when they vote
- The mouth is part of the body, but our healthcare system doesn't treat it that way
- Visit [adavb.org/stopherot](http://adavb.org/stopherot) for interactive maps about dental care in each Victorian electorate

The Australian Dental Association has launched the **Stop the Rot** campaign to shine a light on the important issue of oral health neglect for the nearly 200,000 people living in residential aged care. Despite significant improvements over the past 30 years, too many older Australians continue to experience poor oral health.

- 25% of people aged 75+ years have untreated tooth decay
- 51% of people aged 55-74 years have gum disease
- 22% of people aged 55-74 years have an inadequate number of teeth to chew and eat properly

These problems are exacerbated for people living in residential aged care, who may go years without a dental visit and suffer from significant dental problems. Poor oral health is linked to poor general health and well-being, our ability to eat, speak and socialise, and this is particularly important for older Australians where poor oral health continues to be one of the strongest indicators of inequality. We are extremely disappointed that the recent federal Budget delivered no new funding for dental care, and both the Liberal/National Parties and the Labor Party have been silent on dental policy during the election campaign.

These are important issues for Australian voters. Exclusive polling commissioned by the ADAVB (and conducted independently by Resolve Strategic from 30 March – 15 April 2022 using a nationally representative sample of n=1,976) found that:

- Dental care represented a major household health expense, second only to over the counter and prescription medicines.
- Around half of all people avoided making a dental appointment or put off recommended dental treatment because of the cost in this term of government.
  - This worrying behaviour was particularly high among females (54%), 35–54-year-olds (58%) and those voting Labor (58%).
  - There is evidence that this may be related to disposable income, with those working part-time (61%), looking after the home (76%) and of working age but not employed (59%) reporting this to be the case more often than others.
- There is strong support for extending government funding for dental treatment, with only 6% indicating that this should not be done.
  - 53% felt it should be extended to seniors and pensioners as a priority, with Coalition voters (66%), those aged 55+ years (71%) and retirees (69%) the most likely to nominate this group.
- Further, there was overwhelmingly strong support (91%) for implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety to establish a Senior Dental Benefits scheme to provide dental care to seniors with a concession card, with 48% strongly supporting and 43% supporting.
  - Just 9% opposed this proposal to any extent.
  - Strong majority support was consistent across voting intention, demographics and income groups.
- Half of those polled said the cost of dental care would be an important issue for their vote in the upcoming federal election, a view held consistently across voting intention, demographics and income groups.

**Stop the Rot** encourages voters to contact their local MP and candidates in the upcoming election to let them know that dental health is important to them when they vote, and there is an urgent need to implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety:

- Implement a Senior Dental Benefits Scheme
- Mandate that aged care providers meet minimum oral care standards
- Upskill the aged care workforce to ensure they are able to meet the daily oral hygiene care needs of residents.

There is also a need to ensure that the health assessment for over 75s also includes an assessment of oral health.

Voters can go to [adavb.org/stoptherot](http://adavb.org/stoptherot) to find more information, including an interactive map which highlights information about dental care in their electorate. They are encouraged to use the links to email their local MP or candidates in the upcoming federal election to let them know that it is time to **#StopTheRot**.

#### Media enquiries

Interviews are available with ADAVB President Dr Jeremy Sternson and ADAVB CEO A/Prof Matt Hopcraft.

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