

ADAVB welcomes Aged Care Royal Commission report and recommendations to improve dental care

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety handed down their final report today, and amongst many of the findings was that of significant neglect of oral health in residential aged care settings.

CEO of the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) and public dental health expert A/Prof Matt Hopcraft said the report findings were no surprise. “Having been involved in research into oral health in residential aged care over many years, the findings of significant neglect are unfortunately no surprise,” said A/Prof Hopcraft. “Our research has shown that most residents suffer from poor oral health, with high levels of untreated disease and limited access to dental care.”

The dental profession has been advocating for greater recognition of the problems facing older Australians, and particularly those in residential aged care for many year, and for sustainable funding to improve access to dental care.

“The Australian Dental Association in partnership with Dementia Australia developed a series of resources for practitioners 5 years ago, recognising how important this issue was for residents and their families. This was an important step in helping dentists to provide support and care to people living with dementia and those living in aged care. We know that there are strong links between poor oral health and medical conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and aspiration pneumonia. In addition, quality of life is often impacted, with many residents suffering pain and discomfort, and an inability to eat well, impacting on their nutrition.”

Evidence to the Royal Commission highlighted that daily oral hygiene needs are not treated as priorities, and this often stemmed from lack of staff and inadequate training. Nonetheless, the report highlighted that ***‘there can be no excuse for failing to brush older people’s teeth and clean their dentures daily.’***

One of the key recommendations from the Royal Commission is to establish a Senior Dental Benefits Scheme by January 2023, to fund dental services for people living in residential aged care or in the community.

“This is a welcome recommendation, and one that we have been pushing for over. There is a need for greater Commonwealth funding for dental care, and this model will help to ensure that older Australians will be able to access necessary dental care,” said A/Prof Hopcraft.

“According to the latest research, around half of the residents of nursing homes have their own teeth but have on average only around 15 of their own teeth – less than 20 required for a functional dentition. More than 70% have untreated tooth decay and more than one third have active gum disease,” said A/Prof Hopcraft. “It’s simply not acceptable, and we need to ensure that the recommendations of this report are acted upon.”

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Interviews are available with A/Prof Matt Hopcraft on 0412 487 853.