

Media release

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World Oral Health Day – Time to Prioritise Oral Health and Stop the Neglect in Aged Care

On World Oral Health Day on 20 March, dental health professionals around the world are asking people to be proud of their mouth. The Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch is calling on the Federal Government to establish a Seniors Dental Benefits Scheme as a matter of urgency, so that older Australians and those living in residential aged care can be proud of their mouth too.

There are more than 220,000 Australians living in residential aged care, and many more living in various in-home care arrangements, who experience great difficulty accessing dental care. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety highlighted countless stories of neglect, with many residents experiencing pain and discomfort, and an inability to chew their food. Basic oral hygiene care is rarely prioritised, leading to significant oral health problems.

A/Prof Matt Hopcraft, CEO of the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch and a long-time advocate for improving oral health in aged care, believes that it is time to prioritise oral health and stop the neglect. "One of the biggest challenges currently facing the dental profession in Australia is the provision of quality and timely dental care to older Australians, thanks in part to improvements in oral health over the past 60 years that have seen more people retaining their own teeth," said A/Prof Hopcraft. "With an increased risk of disease, and links between poor oral health and general health, the challenge is for public health policy makers to engage with the dental profession to ensure a system that enables older Australians to access timely dental care."

A key recommendation of the Royal Commission is the establishment of a Seniors Dental Benefits Schedule, to fund dental treatment for people living in residential aged care or who live in the community and receive

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the aged pension or qualify for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card. This would ensure that residents and seniors in the community can access dental care in either the public or private dental system and would encourage outreach models of care to ensure that people who may not be able to travel can have care provided in their home or place of residence.

“One of the benefits of bringing dentistry into Medicare is that senior Australians would no longer need to languish on public dental waiting lists – which are 17 months on average but over two years in many parts of Victoria,” said A/Prof Hopcraft.

“This would also allow people the choice of continuing to see their regular dental care provider, which is important for quality health care,” he said. With a population that is ageing, it is important that we put measures in place now to ensure that this cycle of neglect does not continue for future generations.

Media enquiries

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

Further information about WOHD: www.worldoralhealthday.org

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