

Media release

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Victorian community health dentists prepare to take industrial action

Key points:

- Public sector dentists have filed for industrial action in support of reducing long waiting times and increasing access to public dental care.
- Victorian public sector dentists are paid on average 20-30% less than their interstate counterparts.
- The Victorian Government is yet to make a formal offer to improve the pay and conditions of Australia's lowest paid public sector dentists.
- The Victorian Government continues to stick to their draconian wage policy, offering a miserly 1.5% salary increase and 0.5% for additional changes to allowances or other conditions at a time when inflation is running at over 6%.
- The Victorian public dental system is in a state of decay, with average waiting times increasing to 26.7 months in June 2022.

The Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) today lodged an application with the Fair Work Commission for a Protected Industrial Action Ballot in pursuit of their claims for a fair enterprise bargaining agreement for public sector dentists. Despite negotiating in good faith for months, the Victorian Government is yet to make a formal offer to improve the pay and conditions of Australia's lowest paid public sector dentists.

Victoria's public dental sector workforce is frustrated at a lack of recognition of the important work they do to improve the oral health of vulnerable Victorians. With their enterprise bargaining agreement (EBA) expiring more than two months ago and unacceptable waiting times for public dental care, they have been driven to prepare for industrial action.

The EBA for Victorian public sector dentists expired on 30 June 2022, and the ADAVB has been working with Professionals Australia to negotiate a new EBA since the end of last year. The Victorian Government continues to stick to their draconian wage policy, offering a miserly 1.5% salary increase and 0.5% for additional changes to allowances or other conditions at a time when inflation is running at over 6%.

"Our members feel disrespected by the Victorian Government, whose members happily accepted a 3.5% wage increase this year," said ADAVB CEO A/Prof Matt Hopcraft. "We understand that the Victorian Government has fiscal constraints, but this wages policy was set well prior to the current economic



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climate, and it's unfair to punish the dental sector. There are already significant recruitment and retention problems in the Victorian public dental system, and our members are looking for a fair deal that helps them to carry on their important work in improving the oral health of vulnerable Victorians. An inequitable deal now will cause further damage to a system that is already in crisis."

Victorian public sector dentists are paid on average 22% less than their counterparts interstate, but with larger gaps for new graduate dentists – 28% less than South Australia, 30% less than Queensland and 33% less than Tasmania.

"A dentist working in the Victorian public dental system would have to work for four years to get the same starting salary as a new graduate in NSW, five years to get the same starting salary as a new graduate in Queensland, South Australia or Western Australia and six years to get the same starting salary as a new graduate in Tasmania," said A/Prof Hopcraft.

"The Victorian Government is talking about recruitment of health workforce from interstate to address the significant workforce challenges that they face, but it simply won't happen in dentistry given these disparities."

The Victorian public dental system is in a state of decay, with average waiting times increasing to 26.7 months in June 2022, continuing the trend that has been going on since 2015 when the waiting time was only 11.8 months. Since 2018 the number of dentists working in the Victorian public dental sector has decreased by 19%, pointing to the problems with recruitment and retention tied back to employment conditions. Although the pandemic has had an impact, this data points to a longer-term issue that must be addressed. More information on public dental waiting times can be found at

adavb.org/advocacy/campaigns/public-dental-waiting-times

Media enquiries

Interviews are available with ADAVB CEO A/Prof Matt Hopcraft.

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