

# Australia needs to put its money where its mouth is

**Friday 4 October 2024**

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's Oral Health and Dental Care in Australia Update released today shows again that dental and oral health care remains out of reach to many Australians.

"It's really quite shocking to see these statistics in today's updated report," said CHF CEO Dr Elizabeth Deveny.

The report showed that in the 2022-23 period almost 90,000 Australians went to hospital for a dental issue which could have been prevented if they had been able to see their dentist.

"Staggeringly, the highest age cohort of those 90,000 people were kids aged 5-9 years old. I mean, what sort of country have we become where that is ok?"

"So today, I'm saying, enough is enough. We need real action now. Not after the election, not in 5 years' time, not sometime in the next decade – now," said Dr Deveny.

Dr Deveny said that every parent wants their child to be pain free and have the best oral health as possible and we needed to do much more to support parents support their children.

Dr Deveny noted that for a long time, the health sector has known about the dire problem Australians have in accessing and affording dental treatment, yet, every time it is discussed the same problems, namely the cost to implement a truly universal scheme, and solutions, starting out small investing in greatest need first, are put on the table. This only results in more Australians delaying or deciding to not get the care they need when they need it.

"We seem to live in a time where two different things in Australian healthcare are true at the same time. Firstly, we all love Medicare and think it provides us

with universal access to everything so if we get sick, we can access the care we need and won't have to pay for it.

“And yet our public dental system is so bad, has been so neglected for so long, that we have adults in some parts of the country waiting 500 or 600 days to get in on the public dental system. This clearly isn't a universal system which provides for all,” said Dr Deveny.

CHF is proud to be a member of the National Oral Health Alliance (NOHA), an alliance of consumer, dental and general health member organisations, advocating for universal access to affordable oral healthcare. In this year's budget submission process, [NOHA recommended five ways](#) this could be achieved.

“Yes, it will take greater investment from the government and cost billions, but we all have teeth, we all have mouths, all Australians should be able to benefit from this investment.

“But more than that, we also know that people need to be given the health literacy tools to be able to help themselves. This community health literacy needs to be for adults and children, particularly so parents feel well placed to help their child have great oral health as they grow up. But we don't currently do that. We don't fund communities to help themselves keep themselves well through knowledge and ways to change their behaviours,” said Dr Deveny.

Dr Deveny also called for greater political leadership in dental and oral care.

“We need politicians from across the parliament and in the different jurisdictions to be more ambitious. Do more to improve this situation and do it quicker. Show more and better leadership on this issue.

“I also want Australians to want more for themselves too. They should be demanding better of our political leaders in getting them to make a trip to the dentist easier and more affordable,” said Dr Deveny.

Dr Deveny said that unless politicians show leadership and provide more funding, nothing really will change, and we will continue to see Australians have less and less access and affordability to dental and oral healthcare.

“What we often hear in response to these calls for greater access and funding is ‘Well it's too expensive, it will cost too much and take too long, better to triage the current funding based on need’.

“But how will that response help the 7-year-old girl in hospital tonight because her parents couldn’t afford to take her to the dentist for the last 12 months, so the problem got so bad they had to take her to the emergency department? Where’s the fairness for that little girl? Where is her equity? How does her situation get better if we shrug our shoulders and for another time and say, the problems too big, it will cost too much, better to do something small in the meantime?” said Dr Deveny.

**Media contact**

Benjamin Graham

Public Affairs Manager – CHF

0461 545 392