

Greens reveal welcome plan to put money where our mouth is

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Cost barriers to dental care are dooming many Australians to avoidable pain and poor health and the Australian Greens policy to do more to remedy this plight is a welcome step, the Consumers Health Forum said today.

“Dental care should be part of Medicare just as the mouth is an inseparable part of the body,” the CEO of the Consumers Health Forum, Leanne Wells, said.

“We support the principle of the Greens’ policy direction to move in a staged way to ensure low income Australians can get the dental care when they most need it. Most of us have experienced the misery of toothache but millions of Australians are unable to afford the necessary treatment, at great physical cost to themselves and increased costs to the public hospital system that flow from delays in treatment.

“More than 60,000 Australians are hospitalised each year because of oral conditions, which is an unnecessary health burden for consumers and an unnecessary cost to the health system.

“Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show that people were more likely to delay seeing a dental professional in the last 12 months due to cost than any other health professional. Nearly one in five people who needed to see a dental professional delayed seeing or did not see one due to cost.

“In a 21st century health care system people should not be in a position where they are putting their dental health care needs last.

“In the long term the Consumers Health Forum seeks a universal dental health scheme that treats oral and dental health in the same way as any other part of the health system. In the shorter-term we want to see some increase in the provision of publicly funded dental health services.

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Consumers shaping health

“Despite a significant and growing body of evidence that shows the positive relationship between oral health and overall health status, there is no universal coverage in Australia.

“The Greens’ policy to invest \$5.8 billion for Medicare-funded dental care to all young people, aged pensioners and other beneficiaries is a worthwhile step that we hope will stir the major parties into supporting a more substantial dental program,” Ms Wells said.

ENDS

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