

Media Statement - 11th November 2007

Federal Labor To Introduce Medicare Teen Dental Plan

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A Rudd Labor Government will invest up to \$510 million over three years to assist over one million Australian teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 with dental costs – under a targeted program – to help our kids keep their teeth in good health.

Under Federal Labor's **Teen Dental Plan** families will be able to claim up to \$150 towards the cost of an annual dental preventative check for each of their teenage children through Medicare.

The cost of a comprehensive dental check-up – comprising oral examination, clean, scale, and x-ray – is around \$290.

In its first year of operation (from 1 July 2008) this benefit will be paid via a voucher for eligible families while we ensure that all dentists have access to Medicare provider numbers and that the necessary systems are in place.

This initiative is an important first step in Federal Labor's longer term plan of providing broader dental coverage for Australian families through Medicare.

The **Teen Dental Plan** builds on Federal Labor's investment of \$290 million to provide up to 1 million additional dental consultations and treatments to help clear public dental waiting lists around the country.

This brings Federal Labor's current investment in better dental health to \$800 million over the forward estimates period.

The annual \$150 payment – under Federal Labor's **Teen Dental Plan** – will be available for over one million teenagers in families receiving Family Tax Benefit A, from 1 July 2008.

Many primary school children receive school dental services, but these services are not as widely available to teenagers.

Federal Labor's *Commonwealth Dental Health Plan* will require the States and Territories to at least maintain current service levels.

Under our **Teen Dental Plan**, Federal Labor will provide financial assistance to parents to help pay for the cost of keeping their teenagers' teeth in good health. By targeting teenagers, Labor will encourage young adults to continue to look after their teeth once they become independent and move out of home.

As many as one in three Australians report avoiding a visit to the dentist because of the cost involved.[1]

Federal Labor will provide financial support to parents so that their teenage children obtain a dental health check up at least once each year. Preventative check-ups help prevent cavities and other dental diseases, and the need for more expensive dental procedures later on.

According to the OECD, the dental health of Australian adults ranks second worst in the OECD, with a rapid deterioration in dental health observed in the teenage years.[2]

According to dental health experts, there is a four-fold increase in dental decay between 12 and 21 years of age, and almost half of all teenagers have some signs of gum disease.[3]

Tooth decay ranks as Australia's most prevalent health problem, while gum disease ranks fifth highest. Untreated dental decay in the Australian adult population stands at 25.5%: a quarter of Australians not getting the dental care they need.[4]

The impact of this neglect is a very real problem for many Australians. A recent study found that one in six Australians – 17.4% of the Australian population aged 15 and above – were unable to eat certain foods because of problems with their teeth during the last 12 months.[5]

Everyone recognises that having healthy teeth is important to a teenager's self-confidence, especially important at a time when many are first seeking employment. Just as importantly, good oral health is closely connected to a person's overall health and well being.

That's why Federal Labor will invest \$800 million in better dental health for Australian working families.

NOTES

[1] Australian Research Centre for Population and Oral Health, *Australia's Dental Generations – The National Survey of Adult Oral Health 2004-06*, 2007.

[2] Spencer, 2001, Australian Health Policy Institute, Sydney.

[3] Spencer, 2001, Australian Health Policy Institute, Sydney.

[4] Australian Research Centre for Population and Oral Health, *Australia's Dental Generations – The National Survey of Adult Oral Health 2004-06*, 2007.

[5] Australian Research Centre for Population and Oral Health, *Australia's Dental Generations – The National Survey of Adult Oral Health 2004-06*, 2007.
