



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Dental Services

SPEECH

Monday, 17 March 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Monday, 17 March 2014
Page 2149
Questioner
Speaker Rishworth, Amanda, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (12:03): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) the importance of a well-resourced dental system in improving the oral health of our most vulnerable citizens; and

(b) that well trained and well supported dental graduates are critical to improving the oral health of our nation;

(2) shows extreme concern at the Government's announcement to cut \$40 million from the Voluntary Dental Graduate Program (VDGP); and

(3) calls on the Government to reverse this decision and ensure that the 36 public dental services that were set to host the VDGP in 2014 are able to do so.

It is a very important motion that I move today. Oral health is often overlooked when we talk about health care, but it is vitally important to one's overall health and wellbeing. Poor health of one's teeth and gums can cause or exacerbate a wide range of other diseases and health conditions. There are also the psychological effects that occur. People who have poor dental health can feel very embarrassed if they are missing teeth or have other issues around oral health, and they can withdraw from society. That is why it is very important that, in addition to a private dental healthcare system, we have a strong public dental healthcare system. Importantly, that system must deliver to those most vulnerable citizens, those citizens most at risk, who do not have the means to ensure that they get good oral healthcare treatment. That is why the Voluntary Dental Graduate Year Program is a very important program that ensures that there is encouragement for new dentists, graduating dentists, to go into the public dental system. It is also great for dentists. It ensures that graduate dentists gain extra professional experience and support through a structured program and have important access to and experience in the public dental sector.

That is why I am very concerned that this government have axed this program—a cut of close to \$40 million to the Voluntary Dental Graduate Year Program. It is a real problem. I do not understand this sort of tradition of the Liberal Party of cutting the public dental system. The Howard government cut close to a billion dollars from the public dental service—actually it was quite a lot more than that in real terms today. It took Labor to commit \$4.6 billion back into our public dental system, including money for children to get their checks.

This \$40 million of funding was designated to increase the number of places to 100 for graduate dentists who want to get some experience voluntarily. The program also placed dentists in public dental facilities across the nation, thereby ensuring that health workforce shortages that often occur in the public system were provided for. The impact of these cuts are going too deep. Young, graduate dentists who want to get this experience will not be able to access this scheme. I think it is time that the government reversed this decision. This \$40 million cut is ill thought out.

We have seen the mess that the Liberal Party have made when it comes to the dental system.

Mr Ewen Jones interjecting—

Ms RISHWORTH: If you have a question, you might want to ask one instead of interjecting, member for Herbert. It is no wonder you are embarrassed about this cut.

The government need to explain a number of questions. Once again, there are issues with the transparency of this cut. The government website still says that there are 100 positions. It has not been updated to reflect this cut.

This is very concerning for people applying for these positions. Also, the government need to explain which of the 36 dental services that were set to host this program in 2014 will have their funding cut. The government have not been transparent about who will receive cuts.

They need to explain to the Australian community what the coalition's plan is for public dental health care. Under Labor, we saw a huge investment that improved waiting times and access to services right across Australia. Of course, there is more work to be done and more work to ensure that those on waiting lists can get access to public dental services. One of the big issues in this regard is ensuring that the workforce is in place. Unfortunately, and not surprisingly, we have seen the public dental system earmarked by the coalition for cuts.

I think it also very concerning that the coalition are failing to support graduate dentists. This program was not only about ensuring there is the workforce in the public dental system but also about providing extra support for graduates to receiving training. Unfortunately, the coalition have shown that they refuse to support graduate dentists—and this is from a government that said there would be no cuts to health. Of course this is just the start of many more cuts. I hope the coalition will release their proposed cuts, because the Australian people have had enough of their secrecy. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Goodenough): Is there a seconder for the motion?

Ms Hall: I second the motion.