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Map highlights sorry state of public waiting lists for dental care in Victoria

A new fully interactive map released today by the Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) exposes the unacceptable length of time people are waiting for public dental care in every Victorian electorate - advocacy.adavb.org

The map shows that vulnerable Victorians with shocking dental problems are being forced to wait in some cases up to 48 months to see a public dentist.

ADAVB CEO Associate Professor Matt Hopcraft, said that Dental Health Week (6-12 August), was the perfect time to shed light on the sorry state of public dental waiting list times and for both State and Federal governments to support an increase in funding.

“Although cuts to Federal funding have had an impact, the reality is that this accounts for less than 10 per cent of the patients treated through the public system and is not the main reason waiting lists have increased so dramatically in recent years.

“At current funding levels, only 16 per cent of people who are eligible to access public dental care in Victoria were able to see a dentist in any given year - that is only 400,000 who get much needed treatment each year out of the 2.5 million Victorians who are eligible.

“For those stuck on a waiting list, there is an average waiting time for general dental care of 19.7 months which is just too long.

“People who are eligible for public dental care may have to endure pain, have difficulty speaking and eating, miss school, struggle to find a job, or develop other serious health problems in that time.

Some of the longest waiting times for general dental care in metro areas are:

- Brunswick – 32.2 months
- Epping, Dandenong, Cranbourne, Pakenham, Springvale – 28.6 months
- Lilydale – 28.4 months
- Altona, Hoppers Crossing – 27.9 months

Some of the longest waiting times for general dental in rural/regional areas are:

- Ararat – 30.1 months
- Geelong – 28.2 months
- Sale – 27.1 months

- Portland and Warrnambool – 26 months
- Moe, Morwell and Churchill – 25.9 months

Associate Professor Hopcraft said that while people are waiting for public dental care, existing dental problems can worsen, and as a result lead to emergency care being needed. This means that just over one third of all courses of care are for emergency treatment rather than routine care.

“The ADAVB is calling on both the State and Federal Governments to support an increase in funding, with a target to double the number of patients being treated on a yearly basis to 800,000 by 2023/24. This would represent approximately 29 per cent of the eligible population.”

The ADAVB have estimated that this would require an additional investment of \$40 million each year on top of existing funding for the next five years, lifting the funding from the current \$240 million to approximately \$440 million.

Associate Professor Hopcraft said additional capital funding and partnership with the private sector would be required as capacity growth is required, with a particular focus on growth corridors in Melbourne and areas identified as having a high demand for public dental services.

Key statistics from the ADAVB analysis:

- Average waiting time for general dental care Feb 2018 - 19.7 months
- Longest waiting time for general dental care Feb 2018 - 48 months
- Average waiting time for denture care Feb 2018 - 17.1 months
- Longest waiting time for denture care Feb 2018 - 49 months
- Victorians eligible for public dental care - 2.5 million
- Victorians who accessed public dental care in 2016/17 - 398,257
- Proportion of eligible Victorians who accessed public dental care in 2016/17 - 16%
- Funding for public dental services in 2017/18 - \$238.6 million

“We know that poor oral health is one of the strongest indicators of inequality and yet the waiting time for general dental care has increased 67% since 2014/15.

“That’s why it’s so important that all Victorians have access to regular dental care,” said Associate Professor Hopcraft.

Contact your local MP:

The ADAVB is also encouraging all Victorians to contact their local Member of Parliament, so they can tell them first hand just what impact long public dental waiting times are having on themselves and their families. The interactive map has a link within each electorate with contact details for the local Member of Parliament to contact so every voice can be heard.

Note to the Editor:

- The public dental care data presented in the map on the ADAVB website was obtained from a Freedom of Information request to Dental Health Services Victoria. The information on the Victorian State Election was obtained from the Victorian Electoral Commission website (www.vec.vic.gov.au). This map uses electoral boundaries from the 2014 State election.
- General dental care includes routine dental examinations or check-up, oral health advice, scale and cleaning, extractions, fillings, X-rays, fissure sealants and root canal treatments.
- The Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) is the peak Victorian professional body representing over 3500 Victorian registered dentists and dentistry students.
- The ADAVB is a not-for-profit professional membership organisation that aims to improve the oral health of Victorians, promotes the highest standards of professional dental care and supports and represents the dental profession.

For more on Dental Health Week, check out: www.dentalhealthweek.com.au

To arrange an interview with ADAVB CEO Associate Professor Matt Hopcraft or for more information on Dental Health Week, please contact:

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www.adavb.net

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