

Victorian community health dentists set to take unprecedented strike action



21 August 2018

Community health dentists set to take unprecedented strike action in support of reducing waiting times and increasing access to public dental care.

A lack of recognition, an enterprise agreement which expired 12 months ago, and unacceptable waiting times for public dental care, has driven Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) dentists employed at community health clinics, to undertake work stoppages across Victoria on Wednesday 22 August.

Dentists are frustrated at the lack of recognition by the Victorian Government for the critical dental care they provide to disadvantaged Victorians.

At Your Community Health in Darebin, the wait for eligible adults seeking general dental care is above the state average, at 22.8 months. Victorian dentists say this is due to insufficient funding, which results in the inability to retain experienced clinicians.

Dentists employed in Victorian community health centres are the lowest paid public sector dentists in Australia.

Dr Michelle Petterson, a senior dentist at Your Community Health, will be joining the strike action on the 22 August. “The work we do is so important to the overall health of disabled, elderly and disadvantaged Victorians, yet we all feel overlooked and under-appreciated by the Victorian Government,” said Michelle.

Victoria’s public dental system is in crisis. A new interactive map released by the ADAVB, exposed waiting times of up to four years for vulnerable Victorians. Less than 20 per cent of eligible Victorians are accessing care annually and there are more than 150,000 languishing on waiting lists. The current average waiting time for general dental care is 19.7 months, an increase of 67 per cent since 2014/15.

ADAVB President Dr Kevin Morris 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, which puts more strain on the public system.

“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,” Dr Morris said.

Other clinics taking action include Connect Health and Community, North Richmond Community Health, Co-Health, EACH, Link Health, Carrington Health, healthAbility, Inspiro and Merri Health.

ADAVB members will be holding a public demonstration at Your Community Health (formerly Preston and Northcote Community Health Service) at 300 Bell St from 12.30pm to 1pm on Wednesday 22 August.

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Media Release

Note to the Editor:

- The new interactive map released by the ADAVB illustrating dental care wait times across Victoria can be accessed at advocacy.adavb.org. The public dental care data presented in the map 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.
- 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.
- The ADAVB has been working with Professionals Australia to improve the pay and working conditions of Victoria's public dentists.

Media enquiries:

Media interviews are available with ADAVB President, Dr Kevin Morris.

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