

Media Release

19 November 2018

Victoria's hidden health crisis now in the spotlight - making dental health a priority



A new report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is a timely reminder of the importance of good oral health as politicians debate dental policy in the lead-up to this weekend's Victorian State election. Governments, both state and federal, still have a long way to go to help improve community oral health.

The Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) has consistently advocated for increased public dental care funding and better access to dental care for vulnerable Victorians. Why is this important? Nationally, over 70,000 hospitalisations due to dental conditions occurred in 2016-17, with almost 17,000 of these hospitalisations in Victoria. These could have been prevented with earlier access to dental care. Tooth decay is also the leading cause of preventable hospitalisations in children under the age of five. Alarming, the number of children aged under nine years requiring a general anaesthetic for dental treatment dramatically increased to 2200 in 2017/18, up 39 per cent since 2013/14. Add to this the estimated cost of poor oral health to Victoria exceeding \$200 million each year and the need for further action cannot be ignored.

National figures also show that oral health tends to deteriorate as people get older. That's why it's so important that people of all ages who need public dental care can gain timely access.

The AIHW report highlighted that dental diseases can affect overall health in so many profound ways – the ability to eat, speak, go to school or work, and cause pain, embarrassment, loss of sleep and social exclusion. They can also exacerbate chronic conditions, including stroke, diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Dr Kevin Morris, ADAVB President, said, "Poor oral health is having a huge impact on our community and our health system. Regular preventive dental care is a key factor in tackling this problem. ADAVB has played a significant role in putting dental health at the forefront of policy debate during this election campaign by shining the spotlight on public dental waiting lists, which now exceed 20 months on average. Sustained investment is needed to ensure that vulnerable Victorians don't miss out on much needed care."

Media Release

In the lead up to this weekend's State election, the ADAVB is urging all political parties to commit to doubling the number of public dental patients treated annually within five years, so that more eligible Victorians can access the care that they need, when they need it.

Interviews:

Dr Kevin Morris , ADAVB President
Mob: 0411803390

A/Prof Matt Hopcraft, ADAVB CEO
Mob: 0412487853

Further information:

- AIHW 2018: Oral Health and Dental Care in Australia: web report 19 November 2018. Cat No. 231. Canberra: AIHW. Available at [Oral health and dental care in Australia](#)
- [Data obtained by ADAVB about preventable hospitalisations](#)
- [Data obtained by ADAVB about public dental care waiting times](#)