

CHF notes Government's response to Senate Select Committee dental report

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Consumers Health Forum of Australia (CHF) has noted the Australian Government's response to the Senate Select Committee's dental report titled *A system in decay: a review into dental services in Australia*.

The Committee's report which was handed down in November 2023 made 35 recommendations designed to better the access and affordability of dental services for Australians who most needed them but could least afford them.

In its response, the Government noted 24 of the 35 recommendations, supported in principle a further eight and supported the remaining three recommendations.

"Overall, the Government's response to the Inquiry is disappointing and inadequate. They acknowledge that oral health is fundamental to overall health, wellbeing, and quality of life and indicate that dental policy reform is a priority.

"There is a lack of commitment to any immediate actions or funding that will address the dental care access and affordability issues faced by consumers and a lack of clear prioritisation or timeframe for next steps," said CHF CEO Dr Elizabeth Deveny.

CHF believes that much more needs to be done to better the oral health of Australians, the Government must focus its immediate attention in three key areas:

- Establish a Chief Dental and Oral Health Officer
- Integrate dental and oral health into primary healthcare
- Establish a Seniors Dental Benefit scheme.

Of the recommendations supported, CHF is pleased to see the Government supporting:

- Increased research to inform oral health policy
- Clearer guidance on oral health supports under NDIS
- Commitment to National Oral Health Plan
- Expanded and increased role of dental hygienists and oral health therapists in delivery of oral healthcare
- An increased focus on First Nations, rural and remote access to oral healthcare
- Increased support for training oral health workforce.

“There are some positive things to take out of the Government’s response. We are really pleased to see the increased focus to better dental access for First Nations communities and rural and remote areas. This increased focus could bring about real benefit to these communities.

“Another positive area in the response is the attempt to provide clearer guidance to NDIS participants about what oral health supports they will have available to them,” said Dr Deveny.

CHF stands ready to work with the government on any measures which will help increase Australian’s access and affordability to dental and oral health services.

“Australians having fair and equal access to dental and oral health services which aren’t reliant on your postcode or bank balance is something we should all be working towards. Having good oral health is so important for people’s physical and mental health and our system in Australia at the moment just is not where it should be for a country like ours.

“Australians being able to better afford to access dental care must be something that the next parliament deals with as a priority,” said Dr Deveny.

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