



The result we want: Healthy children and young people

Every kid... needs healthy teeth

The situation we face

There is overwhelming evidence that low-income earners and their dependents are a significantly disadvantaged group in the area of oral health.¹

- Children in low socio-economic groups experience almost twice as many dental caries² as children in high socio-economic groups;³
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have around twice the caries rates seen in non-Indigenous children;⁴
- Rural children are over three times more likely to be admitted to hospital for dental care compared with their metropolitan counterparts;⁵
- There is a four-fold increase in dental caries between 12 and 21 years of age, and almost half of all teenagers have some signs of periodontal disease;⁶
- Rates of hospitalisation for dental treatment under general anaesthetics for children living in unfluoridated parts of NSW are three times as high as children living in fluoridated areas.⁷

There are long waiting times for public dental services for children and young people needing general care. Children and young people wait for over two and a half years for an appointment for general care in Sydney South West Area Health Service.⁸ Waiting times for children and young people experiencing pain can be up to 10 days⁹ in different parts of NSW.

There is a shortage in the dental workforce in NSW that is more apparent in the public sector and even more acute in rural areas of NSW.¹⁰ There is a high vacancy rate for public dentists of about 20%.¹¹

In 2004/2005, NSW had the lowest per capita dental expenditure compared with other states and territories. It was less than half that of the Northern Territory and Queensland, the jurisdictions with the highest per capita funding.¹²

What can be done?

The NSW Government can:

- Change the legislation to make decisions around fluoridating public drinking water the responsibility of NSW Health, not local councils;
- Increase per capita funding for public dental services to at least that of Queensland, the state with the highest per capita funding;
- Develop a cost-sharing arrangement with the Commonwealth in relation to additional funding for public dental services;
- Develop a comprehensive adequately staffed and funded child oral health program through schools;
- Negotiate with the Commonwealth Government to extend Medicare coverage to include special needs groups and children up to 16 years of age;
- Increase the number of dental and para-dental professionals in the public dental service, overcoming the chronic high vacancy rate for public dentists and therapists - by making wages and conditions more competitive with private practice;
- Establish outreach oral health promotion programs (backed-up with timely access to treatment) for pre-school and school-aged children, young people and disadvantaged groups.



Endnotes

- 1 Oral Health Promotion Statewide (NSW) Steering Committee, NSW oral health promotion: framework for action 2010. NSW Health, September 2004, p13.
- 2 Erosion and decay of the tooth caused by the effects of bacteria in the mouth.
- 3 Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, National Advisory Committee on Oral Health, 2004. Health mouths healthy lives: Australia's national oral health plan 2004 – 2013 – Adelaide: South Australian Department of Health.
- 4 Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, National Advisory Committee on Oral Health, 2004. Health mouths healthy lives: Australia's national oral health plan 2004 – 2013 – Adelaide: South Australian Department of Health.
- 5 Department of Human Services 2001, cited by Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, National Advisory Committee on Oral Health, 2004 p.20 Health mouths healthy lives: Australia's national oral health plan 2004 – 2013 – Adelaide: South Australian Department of Health.
- 6 Sanders and Spencer 2003, cited by Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, National Advisory Committee on Oral Health, 2004, p.7.
- 7 Greater Western Area Health Service, 2005. Cited by Sivaneswaran, Shanti, " Water fluoridation successes in NSW 2003 to 2006". In the news. vol 24, no2 June 2006, p9.
- 8 Sydney South West Area Health Service Submission to New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. Standing Committee on Social Issues " Dental Services in NSW" Submission no 96 <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/78032121313F132ECA257034001B4000> Accessed 7/6/06.
- 9 Alley, J and Clucas, R. 2005. UnitingCare Burnside submission to the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues Inquiry into Dental Services in NSW. North Parramatta: UnitingCare Burnside.
- 10 New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. Standing Committee on Social Issues, " Dental Services in NSW" <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/78032121313F132ECA257034001B4000> Accessed 7/6/06.
- 11 Association for the Promotion of Oral Health Submission to New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. Standing Committee on Social Issues, " Dental Services in NSW" Submission no 65. <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/78032121313F132ECA257034001B4000> Accessed 7/6/06.
- 12 New South Wales. Parliament. Legislative Council. Standing Committee on Social Issues, " Dental Services in NSW" Report no 37, March 2006, p25. <http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/prod/parlment/committee.nsf/0/E7BEDC88D5811798CA256BB90004893F> Accessed 31/08/2006.