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**For immediate release**

## **Pressure mounting on public dental campaign**

A peak Victorian healthcare group is intensifying pressure on federal opposition parliamentarians to support a compromise plan to inject more money into public dental services in the New Year.

The Victorian Healthcare Association's campaign is gaining support from a mounting list of public healthcare advocacy groups that want the Federal Government's Commonwealth Dental Health Plan (CDHP) up and running, as a matter of priority.

The VHA supports a compromise developed by the Australian Health & Hospitals Association that would restrict unnecessary cosmetic dental treatments under the Medicare dental program to free up funds for the CDHP.

"This will inject an extra \$72.7 million into Victoria's public dental system or provide an estimated 258 000 dental services to low-income Victorians," the VHA's chief executive, Mr Trevor Carr, said.

"The compromise is a win-win for all parties that retains the Medicare dental program, developed to assist people with a chronic illness, but ensures the CDHP can commence for the benefit of all Victorians."

A growing number of healthcare advocacy groups are calling on federal parliamentarians to act in a bipartisan spirit to enact the legislation in the New Year. It follows the refusal of opposition parties in the Senate to dismantle the former Howard Government's Medicare dental program.

A letter campaign by the VHA's member agencies is inundating Victorian federal senators with calls for them to support the compromise plan. Public dental patients are also adding their own individual letters to the campaign.

Federal Health Minister, Ms Nicola Roxon, issued a media release today calling for support for the CDHP and citing two new reports that paint a dire picture of the oral health of public dental patients.

One report - The Health Issues Centre's: *Why he is not smiling: the dental costs study* - surveyed 246 public patients on dental waiting lists and found less than four per cent had healthy teeth and gums.

The Health Issue Centre's chief executive, Mr Tony McBride, echoed calls by the VHA for the federal Senate to end the impasse on the CDHP:

"The Senate impasse on the CDHP is denying thousands of low income earners and pensioners access to the dental care they need when they need it," Mr McBride said.

Key elements of the VHA/AHHA Compromise Plan include:

- Retaining the existing Medicare dental program but the restricting the range of services available. Services restricted would include expensive crowns, bridges and orthodontics. This will free up \$100 million a year to get the CDHP up and running
- Currently, disadvantaged Victorians who do not have a chronic illness miss out on Medicare funded dental services
- The CDHP will improve access to public dental services for low-income earners, pensioners and Indigenous Victorians

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The VHA's member agencies will maintain pressure on federal parliamentarians in the lead up to Christmas so that the public dental issue is not forgotten over the festive season.

Average waiting times in Victoria for public dental services is 23 months, but figures from the Victorian Oral Health Alliance show waiting times are longer in some regions.

The VHA is the major peak body representing the public healthcare sector in Victoria. Our members include public hospitals, rural and regional health services, community health services and aged care facilities. Established since 1938, the VHA promotes improvement of health outcomes for all Victorians from the perspective of its members.

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