



**Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson MLA
Minister for Health; Mental Health**

Our Ref: 76-27017

Senator Jordon Steele-John
Chair
Select Committee into the provision of and access to Dental Services in Australia
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

By email: dental.services.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Thank you for your letter of 21 September 2023 regarding the Select Committee into the Provision of and Access to Dental Services in Australia.

Information on eligibility criteria for public dental services in Western Australia has been prepared in the attachment below. This is in alignment with the responses provided by the Western Australian Department of Health to the Questions on Notice following the public hearing in Perth.

I hope this information is of assistance as the Final Report is prepared.

Kind regards

**HON AMBER-JADE SANDERSON MLA
MINISTER FOR HEALTH; MENTAL HEALTH
06 OCT 2023**

Att:

Attachment 1: Information on eligibility criteria for public dental services in Western Australia

Question 1: What are the eligibility criteria for public, or government subsidised, dental and oral health services in Western Australia?

Dental Health Services (DHS) provides the following clinical services to the eligible population of Western Australia (WA):

- The General Dental Services (GDS) provides urgent and general dental care to eligible patients 0-4 and 17 plus. To be eligible one must possess (or be named) on a current Health Care Card (HCC) or Pensioner Concession Card (PCC). In geographically isolated locations where there is not a private dentist within a reasonable travelling distance the public clinic will also treat non-card holders.
- The School Dental Service (SDS) is a free service available to all children aged 5 to 16 years who attend a Department of Education recognised school.
- The Special Needs Dental Clinic (SNDC) provides free care to patients registered with the WA Department of Communities in the categories of Intellectual Disability, Global Development Delay or Autism Spectrum. Further, many patients who meet the criteria for disability attend the GDS and are provided care as per the general eligible population.

The Oral Health Centre of WA is the provider for specialist and some general dental care in WA. To be eligible for public specialist dental services patients must be a holder of a current HCC or PCC.

Question 2: When were these criteria developed, and by whom?

On 1 October 1990, the then Minister for Health agreed that the eligibility criteria for patients attending the GDS were those who possessed an HCC or PCC and linked the eligibility to assessments approved by the then Commonwealth Department of Social Security.

The SDS commenced in its current form in 1973 and at the time all pre-primary and primary school children were eligible. Following improvement in oral health of WA school children, the service was expanded into high schools in 1987 within its existing resources in a staged approach commencing with Year 8 students and ending with Year 11 in subsequent years.

The then WA Disability Services Commission determined the eligibility criteria for the SNDC in the 1980s as the clinic was located within their West Perth facility.

In 2002, the Minister for Health and the Vice Chancellor, University of Western Australia agreed that specialist and some general public dental services for eligible adults would be delivered by the Oral Health Centre for Western Australia (OHCWA). The eligibility criteria for public dental services at OHCWA were carried over from those of DHS.

Question 3: Since they were developed, have these criteria been reviewed? If so, when was this done, and what was the outcome?

Eligibility for the GDC continues to be for those who possess a current HCC or PCC. Changes to a person's eligibility may occur according to their Commonwealth Department of Human Services assessment.

The SDS continues to provide free universal access for children aged 5 to 16 years attending a Department of Education recognised school.

SNDC eligibility criteria is under review, following the recent transition of the governance policy from the Department of Communities to DHS.

In 2021, in acknowledgement that WA did not provide a public dental service for children under the age of 5 years, the State Government committed to the establishment of the Early Childhood Dental Program. This program is currently in the commissioning phase with anticipated roll out from July 2024.

Dental treatment provided in public tertiary hospitals is universal for those patients with complex medical conditions or who require an acute medical intervention as a result of a dental issue.

Question 4: Does the West Australian Government have any plans to review these criteria in the future?

From a State Government perspective, WA is currently participating in the long-term dental funding reform discussions with the Commonwealth and Health Ministers. A range of funding reform options for public dental services have been identified for development. Criteria to access public dental services will be reviewed in line with the reform outcomes.

Question 5: Has the West Australian Government received any evidence including significant anecdotal evidence that these criteria may not be fit-for-purpose?

The existing eligibility criteria captures all school children and soon, with the commissioning of the Early Childhood Dental Program, all pre-school children.

In the absence of a universal program, the eligibility criteria for adults captures those in most financial need.

Those who do not qualify for an HCC or PCC and are low-income earners can find accessing dentistry in the private sector cost prohibitive.