



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health and Ageing**

**SECRETARY**

Dr Ian Holland  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia

Dear Dr Holland

Please find attached the Department of Health and Ageing's written submission to the inquiry into *Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012* (the Bill).

The Bill establishes the framework for the Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS), announced by the Government as part of the Dental Reform Package on 29 August 2012. The CDBS is in addition to the other measures announced in the Dental Reform Package and the 2012-13 Budget measures relating to dental health.

I trust that the attached information is of assistance to the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Jane Halton PSM  
Secretary

Y October 2012



**Australian Government**  
**Department of Health and Ageing**

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY AFFAIRS**

***Inquiry into the Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012***

**Background**

On 29 August 2012, the Minister for Health announced a six-year Dental Reform Package which included:

- \$2.7 billion over six years for an individual entitlement under a Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS) for all children aged 2 to 17 years in Family Tax Benefit-A (FTB-A) eligible families (currently estimated at 3.4 million children). The benefit would be capped at \$1,000 per child over a two year period with private dental services qualifying for the entitlement and public services qualifying if the patient is bulk-billed.

The new CDBS will replace the existing Medicare Teen Dental Program (MTDP), expanding services for the eligible teenage cohort and extending coverage to younger age groups. The MTDP will close on 31 December 2013 and the CDBS will begin on 1 January 2014.

- \$1.3 billion over six years in funding for adults through state public dental services under a National Partnership Agreement (NPA) to expand services to low income concession card holder adults. State and territory governments ('the states') would be expected to redirect the funding for their basic child services to adults. The NPA will start on 1 July 2014; and
- \$226.4 million over six years for a flexible grants program for both the private and public sectors to build on the foundations of dental reform that the Commonwealth began in the 2012-13 Budget, including dental infrastructure and workforce initiatives. The flexible grants program will start on 1 July 2014.

The Dental Reform Package also involves the closure of the Chronic Disease Dental Scheme (CDDS) to new patients from 8 September 2012 and all patients from 1 December 2012.

### **Establishing the CDBS via the *Dental Benefits Amendment Bill 2012***

The *Dental Benefits Act 2008* (the Act) currently provides the legislative framework for the MTDP.

This Bill, once enacted, will amend the Act to replace the MTDP and establish the framework for the CDBS by extending the age range of people eligible for dental benefits to children aged at least 2 years but under 18 years. (The Act currently provides for eligibility for children aged at least 12 years but under 18 years.)

Other aspects of the CDBS will be established under the Dental Benefits Rules made under the Act. These will include a schedule of basic dental prevention and treatment services and a benefits cap of \$1,000 for a consecutive two calendar year period. The development of the schedule will be undertaken after consultation with stakeholders including the Australian Dental Association (ADA), Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association (ADOHTA), and state and territories.

### **2012-13 Budget Measures**

The Dental Reform Package is in addition to the 2012-13 Budget measures which provided funds for a number of dental measures.

#### *Alleviating pressure on public dental waiting lists*

The Government will provide \$345.9 million over three years to alleviate pressure on public dental waiting lists. A National Partnership agreement will be negotiated with states and territories to provide treatment for an estimated 400,000 adults on public dental waiting lists, including supporting the Indigenous population. The funding will enable states and territories to supplement existing public services, including through the purchase of private dental services if necessary.

#### *Increasing the capacity of the dental workforce*

The Government will provide \$158.6 million over four years to increase the capacity of the dental workforce. Under this measure, the Government will:

- introduce an Oral Health Therapists (OHT) graduate year program and provide funding for developing curricula, up to 50 OHT places per annum (from 2014), OHT mentors, infrastructure to support the OHT places, and incentive payments at the completion of the program. This element will cost \$45.2 million over four years;
- expand the Voluntary Dental Graduate Year Program by up to 50 additional places by 2016, which will provide support to participating dental graduates through a structured program to enhance practical experience and professional development, particularly in the public sector and areas of need. This element will cost \$35.7 million over three years; and
- fund infrastructure and relocation grants for dentists who relocate their practice to regional, rural or remote areas. This program will provide different levels of incentive payments according to remoteness, and contributions towards dental infrastructure supporting approximately 300 dentists. This element will cost \$77.7 million over four years.

*National oral health promotion activities*

The Government will provide \$10.5 million over three years to deliver national oral health promotion activities in consultation with key dental health organisations. This funding will be used to develop a National Oral Health Promotion Plan in 2012-13 to guide the implementation of evidenced based oral health promotion activities over the following two years.

*Pro bono dental services*

The Government will provide \$0.5 million over three years to support the delivery of pro bono dental services by oral health professionals. This funding will assist the National Dental Foundation with the capability to coordinate the provision of dental services free of charge to priority groups, including concession card holders, Indigenous Australians, the homeless, women and children living in shelters and refugees.