



The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

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Senator Jordon Steele-John
Chair
Select Committee into the Provision of and Access to Dental Services in Australia
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Dear Senator Steele-John

Thank you for your letter of 21 September 2023 seeking information on the eligibility criteria for public dental services in Victoria and for the opportunity to contribute to the work of the *Select Committee into the Provision of and Access to Dental Services in Australia*.

The Victorian Labor Government is committed to improving the oral health of Victorians and is investing \$250.7 million in dental services in 2023-24. This investment will provide public dental care to 332,150 eligible Victorians and support the continued rollout of the School Dental Program (Smile Squad).

I note that, while the Victorian Government has maintained its investment in public dental services in recent years, the Commonwealth Government's level of dental investment through National Partnership Agreements/Federation Funding Agreements has significantly declined since 2016-17.

In Victoria, public dental care is provided through the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne and over 50 integrated and registered community health services. Care is targeted to people who generally cannot afford the cost of private dental care and would have little or no access to dental care.

The department's *Eligibility and priority access for public dental services* policy identifies those who are eligible to access public dental services and those who have priority access, with further details provided in **Attachment 1**. Priority access groups are specific population groups recognised to be at greater risk of poorer health than the general population. This includes children, homeless people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Victorian Department of Health developed the eligibility criteria for public dental services in the early 1990's as part of the establishment of the Victorian Community Dental Program. The eligibility criteria for adults in the Victorian program closely matched the criteria for the Commonwealth dental health program which was established in 1994 and closed in 1996 following a change in government.

The Victorian Department of Health has regularly reviewed the eligibility criteria to ensure that care is provided to the most vulnerable members of the community. Previous reviews have extended eligibility for public dental treatment to:

- **all** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, regardless of concession card status, **from 1 July 2021**
- **all** clients in youth justice custodial care, regardless of age – **from March 2020** (*the previous policy was eligibility applied up to 18 years of age*)
- **all** children and young people in out-of-home care provided by the now Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – **from 2012** (*to ensure that children and young people in kinship and foster care were also included*)

The Government will continue to work with key stakeholders to review policies and ensure that public dental services are targeted to those people most in need.

I trust this information has been of assistance and thank you again for taking the time to write to me about this matter.

Yours sincerely

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

19/10/2023

Att: Access to Victoria's public dental care services

Access to Victoria's public dental care services

Victorians who are eligible for public dental care

The following people are eligible for public dental care:

- all children aged 0–12 years
- young people aged 13–17 years who hold a healthcare or pensioner concession card, or who are dependants of concession card holders
- people aged 18 years and over, who are health care or pensioner concession card holders or dependants of concession card holders
- all children and young people in out-of-home care provided by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH), up to 18 years of age (including kinship and foster care)
- all people in youth justice custodial care
- all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- all refugees and asylum seekers.

About priority access

Victorians who have priority access to dental care are offered the next available appointment for general care. They are not placed on the general waiting list.

If the person has denture care needs, then they will be offered the next available appointment for denture care or placed on the priority denture waiting list.

People who have priority access

The following people have priority access to public dental services:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- children and young people
- people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- pregnant women
- refugees and asylum seekers
- people registered with mental health or disability services, who have a letter of recommendation from their case manager or a special developmental school.

All other people seeking routine dental or denture care need to place their name on a waiting list.