

Funding fix needed to bridge Australia's oral health divide

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'Oral healthcare is one of Australia's biggest out-of-pocket health expenses, and the system is failing too many Australians,' said Australian Healthcare and Hospital Association Limited's (AHHA Ltd) Chief Executive Tony Farley.

'We need national funding reform to include our oral health care system – not just more money, but smarter, fairer investment.'

A new Issues Brief released today by the AHHA Ltd's Deeble Institute for Health Policy Research, [*Universal access to essential oral healthcare through a priority-setting approach*](#), outlines a clear, staged and evidence-based funding strategy to transition from ad hoc responses to a sustainable, equitable, and high-value oral health system.

'Australians are currently paying more than 60% of oral health costs from their own pockets, totalling over \$6.6 billion annually. The reality is that many people delay or skip care altogether because they simply can't afford it. That's not just bad for their teeth, it's bad for their overall health, employment prospects and wellbeing,' Mr Farley said.

The Brief calls for a nationally consistent, evidence-based approach to defining essential oral healthcare, underpinned by a structured, priority-setting framework such as the Assessing Cost-Effectiveness (ACE) methodology.

'This isn't about reinventing the wheel,' said Mr Farley. 'Other areas of healthcare already use cost-effectiveness tools to guide public investment. Oral health should be no different.'

The Brief recommends:

- Define essential oral healthcare in Australia.
- Implement a formal priority-setting approach.
- Integrate oral healthcare into health technology assessments (HTA) processes.

'Public dental programs have been stuck in a cycle of underfunding, long waitlists, and one-off schemes. We can't keep patching the system. It's time for a unified, long-term funding approach that actually works.'

'This is about putting people first,' he added. 'The evidence is in, better oral health access leads to better health, fewer hospitalisations, and a more productive workforce. The government has an opportunity to act.'

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association Limited (AHHA Ltd) is the independent peak membership body and advocate for the Australian healthcare system and a national voice for universally accessible, high-quality healthcare in Australia.

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The online version of this [media release](#) can be found on the AHHA website.

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