

## **Children’s dental health is worth fighting for**

The National Oral Health Alliance (NOHA)<sup>1</sup> today called on the Senate to disallow planned changes to oral health funding.

Spokesperson for the Alliance, Mr Tony McBride, noted “the Alliance has been very pleased to see a softening in the changes announced in the 2016 Budget, with the Government’s December decision to retain the Child Dental Benefits Schedule. But we are very concerned about the proposed reduction in the subsidised care to a cap of \$700 over two years, instead of the current \$1,000.

“NOHA welcomes the Government’s change of heart but this 30% cut in the cap will affect over 25% of those currently using the scheme or likely to use it. In many cases, the children most affected by the reduction in funding will be those with the greatest dental needs.

“NOHA has done some modelling of costs<sup>2</sup>. The modelling indicates that, over a two-year period, children are likely to need:

- between \$410 and \$460 of care if at low risk of dental caries
- between \$758 and \$1123 of care if at moderate risk , and
- up to \$2050 worth if in the highest 10% need group.

“Children at lowest risk will be unaffected. But it is clear that the \$700 cap will provide nowhere near enough subsidy for those in highest need.

“NOHA fears the reduction in the cap will lead the families at greatest need to refuse treatment because they are unable to meet the additional costs. This includes significant numbers from rural and remote and Aboriginal communities.

“Getting children’s dental care right has long-term benefits to individuals and to reducing future government costs” noted Mr McBride.

The oral health system is the part of the health system in Australia with the most unequal access and highest out of pocket costs for consumers. The public dental system is struggling to meet demand and will be significantly impacted by the reduced funding available under the CDBS and the limited funding available under the National Partnership Agreement for adult care.

The Government is committing \$320m over 2.5 years for a National Partnership Agreement with States to co-fund public dental services for adults. The Government’s contribution to lower income Australians’ dental care in 2016–17 is at an all-time low from a promised \$391 million in the 2013–14 Budget. This will result in over 100,000 people losing access to timely and affordable dental care.

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<sup>1</sup> NOHA is an alliance of ten national consumer and professional bodies with a common interest in fair access for all Australians to timely dental care. NOHA believes access to oral health care in Australia should receive a higher priority and that the Federal Government needs to show leadership for ensuring more equitable access for all Australians

<sup>2</sup> This gives indicative figures only, as children’s needs change as they get older, and family and social context influences levels of risk, plus there can be different treatments to achieve the same end