



# PRIME MINISTER

## MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGEING

### **One million Australian kids to benefit from Teen Dental Plan**

The Australian Government will invest up to \$360 million over three years in a Teen Dental Plan to make it more affordable for families to keep their kid's teeth in good health.

The Australian Government's Teen Dental Plan will assist one million Australian teenagers between the ages of 12 and 17 with dental costs.

Formally announced today the Government's Teen Dental Plan will become operational on 1 July 2008.

By establishing a Teen Dental Plan to help working families fix their kid's teeth the Australian Government is honouring another major election commitment.

Under the Teen Dental Plan eligible families will be able to claim up to \$150 towards the cost of an annual dental preventative check for each of their teenage children.

The cost of a comprehensive dental check-up – comprising oral examination, clean, scale, and x-ray – is around \$290.

While many primary school children receive school dental services, these services are not as widely available to teenagers. By targeting teenagers, the scheme will not only ease cost pressures, but will also encourage young adults to continue to look after their teeth once they become independent and move out of home.

Under the Rudd Government's Teen Dental Plan, over one million 12 -17 year old teenagers in families eligible for FTB(A) or in receipt of Abstudy or Youth Allowance will be eligible.

A new standalone teen Dental Benefits Schedule (DBS) would be established to administer the new scheme. The DBS would include a single means-tested, age-restricted item for the preventative dental check for teenagers.

Families would receive a voucher advising them of their eligibility for a Dental rebate of up to \$150 per year for a preventative dental check.

After seeing the dentist, the \$150 would be reimbursed through Medicare Australia. Once real-time eligibility systems are fully established, the dentist may also bulk bill the patient.

As many as one in three Australians report avoiding a visit to the dentist because of the cost involved.

Preventative check-ups help prevent cavities and other dental diseases, and the need for more expensive dental procedures later on.

According to the OECD, the dental health of Australian adults ranks second worst in the OECD, with a rapid deterioration in dental health observed in the teenage years.

According to dental health experts, there is a four-fold increase in dental decay between 12 and 21 years of age, and almost half of all teenagers have some signs of gum disease.

Tooth decay ranks as Australia's most prevalent health problem, while gum disease ranks fifth highest. Untreated dental decay in the Australian adult population stands at 25.5%: a quarter of Australians not getting the dental care they need.

The impact of this neglect is a very real problem for many Australians. A recent study found that one in six Australians – 17.4% of the Australian population aged 15 and above – were unable to eat certain foods because of problems with their teeth during the last 12 months.

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(02) 6277 7744**

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