

Submission  
No 154

## INQUIRY INTO DENTAL SERVICES IN NSW

**Organisation:**

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**Telephone:**

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**Theme:**

**Summary**



**NORTHERN TABLELANDS**  
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1 June 2005

The Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Legislative Council, NSW Parliament  
Macquarie St, NSW 2000

RE: The Inquiry by the Standing Committee on Social Issues into Dental Health

Dear Sir/Madam

As a mother and the Program Manager for a Disability Day Program Service in Inverell, NSW, I have long been concerned about the degrading state of dental health, service and education, and welcome the Upper House Inquiry into this neglected area of health care.

I am aware of many people who suffer significant pain and disability from poor dental health, and am dismayed by the lack of adequate services to relieve their pain and restore their lives to normal function.

Tooth ache is not only intensely painful, but also prevents consumption of a normal diet essential for good health, as does the lack of proper dentures for those missing teeth. Both of these factors can contribute to placing a person at risk of choking or developing diseases of the gum or gastro intestinal track; and in worse case scenario, even death. Also, in a society where personal appearance is considered important, badly degraded teeth causes great psychological pain for many, and does little to promote social integration for vulnerable members of our community. I understand that there are further links between general and dental health, so that poor dental health is having a negative impact on our community in more ways than one.

It is particularly worrying to me that there is an increase in the extent of untreated dental disease. I am also aware that this in part reflects a shortage of trained dental clinicians, with significant shortfalls predicted by 2010. The workforce shortage appears to be due to a lack of sufficient training positions for dentists, as well as dental therapists, hygienists, technicians and prosthetists. It worries me that despite the fact that there are many young people who would love to enter these professions, and the significant community need, the necessary training positions have not been created. I also hear that the educational staff in the training institutions are working in difficult circumstances, and am worried that if this is not reversed the dental workforce will be further degraded.

I recognize that public dental services are patchy, with some areas receiving comparatively good care and most of the eligible population unable to access routine dental care in a reasonable time. This is particularly true for many of our services users,

I am concerned that people living in rural areas are often unable to find a dentist, or are forced to wait several months for treatment, despite being able to pay for service, and am further worried by the prospect of dental shortages in metropolitan areas.

The lack of adequate preventive dental programs and insufficient fluoridation worry me, as prevention of disease seems even more important in the absence of enough dental clinicians to treat existing dental disease.

Finally, I am concerned that despite there being many internal and external reports of these problems to both State and Federal governments, including no new funding for dental health has been allocated. I hope that the current inquiry results in positive action being taken to address these concerns, and expect the State Government to accept its responsibility for ensuring adequate dental health, services and education for NSW.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Marley Wilks', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marley Wilks  
NTCP Key Worker