



Reducing Dental Health Costs For Those In Need

February 2011



Having healthy teeth shouldn't have to cost an arm and a leg.

As Premier of NSW, I am committed to improving oral health services for low income families and other disadvantaged people.

We want to provide fairness for families and this means more affordable dental services to help with rising costs of living.

The NSW Government has increased funding for dental health to a record \$169.4 million in 2010/11 – an increase of nearly \$50 million since 2005/06.

We know that if good oral habits are established early in life it will help prevent oral disease later on. Therefore in NSW we have invested heavily in early intervention and prevention approaches to oral health care, particularly for children.

Oral health will become an increasingly important part of our health system, particularly with population growth and ageing over the next two decades.


Labor has always been committed to helping those most in need, and that is why we will further expand dental health services in the next four years.

To assist pensioners and give NSW families a fair go, we will introduce new measures to improve access to dental care in both the public and private health system.

To reduce dental costs and improve access to oral health care for those in need, a re-elected Keneally Labor Government will invest new funds of \$12.5 million and continue our existing programs to help make dental healthcare more affordable for those in need. We will:

- Provide 10,000 extra dental vouchers over 4 years for eligible people to receive dental care through their local dental provider;
- Expand the Pensioner Denture Scheme;
- Expand Children's Dental Health Services;
- Provide new dental chairs and equipment;
- Continue existing programs to promote good oral health.

These fully costed plans will build on my determination to provide fairness to families and reduce the cost of living in NSW.



Kristina Keneally

Our approach to dental health

The Keneally Labor Government recognises that good oral health is fundamental to good overall health and well-being.

As a Government, we are committed to improving equity and access to oral health services in NSW, and at the same time improving the quality and effectiveness of oral health care in throughout the State.

The NSW Government has demonstrated an ongoing funding commitment to public oral health services, with significant new funding allocated to improve and expand the public sector dental workforce and for major public oral health infrastructure improvements. The total oral health budget in NSW stands at \$169.4 million this year.

One of Labor's great successes to improve oral health has been the fluoridation of water program. Evidence both here and overseas shows that up to 50 % of dental decay experience in children and adolescents can be prevented by water fluoridation. One of the greatest benefits of water fluoridation is that it crosses social and economic barriers, improves equity in oral health outcomes and reduces the need for both general anaesthetics for children and for treatment of dental disease in children. We are close to completing our \$17 million program to fluoridate water supplies.

The Government places priority on improving access to oral health services for older people families on lower incomes and Aboriginal people.

We want to make sure people do not neglect their oral health because they are struggling with rising costs of living.

Our dental health initiatives will improve the way we provide dental services in our public system and work more effectively with the private dental sector so that services are more available and affordable for those in our community who are most in need.

Our Dental Health Policy

To reduce dental costs and improve access to oral health care for those in need, a re-elected Keneally Labor Government will invest new funds of \$12.5 million over the next four years to:

- ✓ Provide 10,000 extra dental vouchers over 4 years for eligible people to receive services through their local dental provider. This \$4 million investment will help those in need to receive dental care from private dentists for procedures such as fillings and extractions.
- ✓ Provide new dental chairs and equipment with a new \$2.5 million public dental infrastructure package – this will enable an additional 4,400 additional patient courses of care to be provided each year;
- ✓ Expand the Pensioner Denture Scheme with an additional \$5 million in funding – this will reduce waiting times with an additional 5000 dentures for pensioners across NSW over 2 years; and
- ✓ Improve dental health services for children with \$1 million in new funding for 500 additional general aesthetic procedures over 4 years at the Westmead Centre for Oral Health, Sydney Dental Hospital and other regional centres.

Labor's Plans for Dental Health

Expansion of the Pensioner Denture Scheme

- An additional \$5 million will be provided for the Pensioner Denture Scheme. This will result in an additional 5,000 full and partial dentures for pensioners across NSW over two years. This will significantly reduce waiting times.

Holders of pensioner concession cards, health care cards and Commonwealth seniors' cards are eligible to receive a free denture or partial denture through this scheme following a clinical assessment.

There will be a particular focus on reducing waiting times for full and partial dentures in rural and regional NSW.

Expand the Oral Health Fee for Service Scheme

- A total of 10,000 extra dental vouchers will be provided under the Oral Health Fee for Service Scheme to eligible people so that they can receive dental care from private dentists for procedures such as fillings and extractions.

All holders of pensioner concession cards, health care cards, Commonwealth seniors' cards pensioners, dependents listed on cards and all children under 18 who have been assessed will be eligible to receive these vouchers.

The voucher can be used for general dental care, dentures and emergency care.

Expand Children's Dental Services

- An extra \$1 million will be provided for additional general anaesthetic procedures at the Children's Hospital Westmead, Westmead Centre for Oral Health, Sydney Dental Hospital and regional centres at Newcastle, Orange, Albury and Wagga.

Provide new dental chairs and equipment

- A \$2.5 million funding package to improve public dental infrastructure, with \$1.5 million for the Westmead Centre for Dental Health and Nepean Dental Clinic for new and replacement dental chairs and equipment; and a further \$1 million for building refurbishment, new and replacement dental chairs and equipment at Kempsey, Maitland Muswellbrook and Broken Hill.

This package includes 100 dental chairs with 78 replacement chairs and 22 new chairs. Once these chairs are in place approximately 4,400 additional patient courses of care will be provided each year.

Continue existing programs to promote good oral health

- We will also continue existing programs including general dental services for eligible children and adults, the Early Childhood Oral Health Program, Toothsmart, ongoing implementation of water fluoridation, and culturally appropriate Aboriginal oral health services through Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations and Local Health Networks.

We will add a new oral health section to the Healthy Kids website, a one-stop shop at www.healthykids.nsw.gov.au which provides resources and information about programs that promote healthy living. And we will translate basic oral health information into community languages and develop a curriculum package with the Aboriginal Health College.

Our Record

LABOR

- Increased the oral health budget from \$122.5 million in 2005/06 to \$169.4 million in 2010/11, with additional funding directed to oral health promotion, including fluoridation, increased clinical services, incentives to attract and retain dental clinicians and increased resources for Aboriginal people, older people and refugees.
- Improved fluoridation of water supplies through a five year \$17 million infrastructure program, with 95% of NSW residents now having access to fluoridated water.
- Introduced the Toothsmart Program to reduce the impact of oral disease in high risk children, reduce the need for ongoing dental treatment and improve oral health for children and families.
- Established the Early Childhood Oral Health Program to prevent oral health problems in early childhood, establish good oral health care habits and ensure health professionals receive appropriate training.
- Developed early childhood oral health guidelines for child health professionals and training packages for early childhood staff
- Developed new resources encourage parents and carers to check for any early signs of tooth decay – this is given to new parents and around 85,000 are distributed each year.
- Added an oral health section to the Personal Health Record given to each child, known as “the Blue Book”.
- Established an Oral Health Promotion Grants Program which included projects such as “Better Oral Health for Diabetic Kooris”, “Improving Aboriginal Family Oral Health” and “Smile Wide with Pride”
- Established the Priority Oral Health Program to improve access to public dental health services.
- Over \$3 million in capital funding since 2005 to health services for new equipment, including 22 replacement chairs, 16 autoclaves and 45 sets of digital x-ray sensors.
- New dental clinics at Gilgandra, Bathurst, Dareton, Newcastle, Queanbeyan, Tumut, Orange and Royal North Shore Hospital.
- Major upgrades of dental clinics at Ingleburn, Port Macquarie, Goulburn, Wyong and Moruya.
- Provided \$4 million towards a new dental clinic in Dubbo in partnership with Charles Sturt University.

COALITION

- The NSW Liberals and Nationals did not stand up to John Howard’s abolition of the Commonwealth Dental Program.
- While the new Federal Labor Government is now working to overturn Howard’s slash and burn approach to dental health funding, Tony Abbott and the Federal Liberal and National parties have blocked legislation for a new public dental scheme.

These actions have not been opposed by Barry O’Farrell and the NSW Coalition.
- To date, Barry O’Farrell has failed to put forward any plans or new ideas to improve the affordability of dental health services in NSW.



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