



**THE HON NICOLA ROXON MP
MINISTER FOR HEALTH AND AGEING**

Dear Dentist

MEDICARE TEEN DENTAL PLAN - ANNUAL PREVENTATIVE DENTAL CHECKS

I am pleased to advise you that, from 1 July 2008, dentists will be able to provide eligible teenagers with an annual preventative dental check under the Australian Government's new *Medicare Teen Dental Plan*.

The *Medicare Teen Dental Plan* delivers on the Government's election commitment to provide financial assistance to eligible families to help assess the health of their teenagers' teeth, and to introduce preventative strategies to encourage lifetime good oral health habits.

The Government is also introducing a new *Commonwealth Dental Health Program* which will provide additional funding to the states and territories to reduce public dental waiting lists. The Government is currently working with the states and territories on the implementation arrangements for the program. The *Commonwealth Dental Health Program* will commence on 1 July 2008.

The Australian Government has made a significant commitment to dental health with a total of \$780 million over five years provided for dental services in the recent Budget. This includes \$490 million for the *Medicare Teen Dental Plan* and \$290 million for the *Commonwealth Dental Health Program*.

Medicare Teen Dental Plan

Under the *Medicare Teen Dental Plan*, the Government will provide dental benefits of up to \$150 per year for each eligible teenager to receive a preventative dental check.

The term 'preventative dental check' refers to an annual preventative dental program for each patient comprising an oral examination and, if required, x-rays, scaling, cleaning and other preventative services. These services are covered by a single preventative dental check item (item number 88000) contained in a new Dental Benefits Schedule administered by Medicare Australia.

Dentists will need to have a Medicare provider number to provide services under the *Medicare Teen Dental Plan*. Most dentists are already registered with Medicare Australia and will not need to re-register to use the preventative dental check item. Dental hygienists and dental therapists will also be able to perform services on behalf of a dentist, under appropriate supervision or oversight. However, the service must be billed under the dentist's Medicare provider number.

Around 1.1 million teenagers aged 12-17 years in families receiving Family Tax Benefit Part A, and teenagers in the same age group receiving Youth Allowance or Abstudy, will be eligible for the program each year.

Medicare Australia will use a voucher system to administer the program. Each year, Medicare Australia will automatically send eligible families and teenagers a voucher for a preventative dental check, using client information provided by Centrelink. Most people will receive their voucher in July or August this year. In future calendar years, most people will be sent a voucher in January or February.

Once a voucher has been issued, the teenager (or parent or carer) can make an appointment directly with a dentist in private practice. Public dental clinics, including school-based clinics, will also be able to accept vouchers. The voucher will need to be presented at the time of the service and accompany all claims to Medicare Australia.

Medicare Australia will pay a benefit of up to a maximum of \$150 for the preventative dental check. The benefit payable will be indexed on 1 January each year.

As you are aware, dentists in private practice are free to set their own fees for services. However, the Government encourages you and all dentists to bulk bill preventative dental checks provided under the *Medicare Teen Dental Plan*. Preventative checks provided in public dental clinics will be bulk billed. The Government believes this will help encourage parents and teenagers to get into the habit of looking after their own teeth.

More detailed information about the *Medicare Teen Dental Plan* is contained in the enclosed fact sheet for dentists. Information is also available from Medicare Australia on **132 150** and on the Department of Health and Ageing's website at www.health.gov.au/dental.

Further information about the arrangements for public dental clinics will be provided to state and territory governments.

I hope that you will support this important preventative dental program for teenagers.

Medicare chronic disease dental scheme

You would be aware that along with our election commitments to introduce the *Commonwealth Dental Health Program* and the *Medicare Teen Dental Plan*, the Government made clear its intention to discontinue the chronic disease dental scheme as it was not targeted to patients most in financial need, complex for patients to access, and has had limited take up in many areas and from many needy populations. Consistent with the Government's commitment to responsible economic management, savings from the discontinuation of the chronic disease dental scheme were planned to offset the cost of the investments in the Government's better targeted *Commonwealth Dental Health Program* and the *Medicare Teen Dental Plan*.

As you may be aware, the Liberal Opposition blocked the discontinuation of the chronic disease dental scheme in the Senate. This means that, from 19 June 2008, all eligible patients again have access to the chronic disease dental items (85011-87777), and the scheme cannot close, as originally planned, on 30 June 2008.

The action in the Senate will create confusion for patients and health professionals. I need to make clear that the Government intends to honour its election commitments and remains strongly committed to responsible management of the Budget and the economy. The Opposition's actions on this issue put this at risk, to the detriment of the economic and social welfare of all Australians.

You should be aware that, subject to Parliament's agreement, the Government intends to close the chronic disease dental scheme to all patients at the earliest opportunity once Parliament resumes.

Decisions on the care of a patient should, of course, be made on the basis of what is clinically appropriate and necessary. Practitioners should, however, be aware of the anticipated funding changes and consider carefully whether to commence a course of dental treatment for a patient under the chronic disease dental items. Medicare rebates for dental services under these chronic disease items will not be available for any patients once the scheme has been closed. The Government does not anticipate there will be any transition period after the closure date during which patients would be able to complete treatment.

In the interim period while the chronic disease items remain available, the Government, through Medicare Australia, will continue to closely monitor their usage to ensure that it remains appropriate and consistent with the items' legal eligibility requirements. As long as the chronic disease dental items are available, dentists participating in this scheme must use items 85011-87777 and the existing bulk billing forms. Patients must have a referral from their GP. The Medicare Teen Dental Plan is a separate program. It uses a single item number (item 88000) and different bulk billing forms. Eligible teenagers will be issued with a voucher.

Questions about whether individual patients are eligible for Medicare rebates for the chronic disease dental items should be addressed to Medicare Australia on 132 150.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola', with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

NICOLA ROXON