

The Chronic Diseases Dental Scheme - Where is it now?

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The Chronic Disease Dental Scheme (CDDS) is scheduled to wind up at the end of November.

People living with chronic disease who receive welfare support are eligible for dental treatment in a public facility, but those who do not satisfy these criteria will have to pay to maintain their own oral health. There are a growing number of people living with a chronic illness who are struggling with what they are already paying out to support their healthcare costs.

Support groups for people with chronic diseases say the growing class of working poor will be worst affected by the Federal Government's decision and have been lobbying government to retain the current scheme.

Many dentists who provided care under the old scheme also say patients in regional areas will now be forced to travel huge distances to see a public health dentist.

The government says the cancelled Scheme was poorly targeted, easily rorted, and too expensive.

The Health Minister Tanya Plibersek announced a new \$4.1 billion dental health care plan at the end of August, which will run over 6 years. This includes \$2.7 billion for a dental scheme targeted at children, and from July 2014 another \$1.3 billion going to the public dental system in States and Territories for low income earners.

Opposition health spokesman Peter Dutton last month moved to disallow a government determination to close the CDDS, saying closing the Scheme would leave thousands of people in pain and unable to get help for 19 months until the government scheme starts.

While the CDDS served around 1.5 million people, 80% of these patients were healthcare card holders and likely to be low income earners. The new scheme will be means tested, but directed more broadly across the population and not limited to those with a chronic disease.

UPDATE

On 9 October the Lower House voted to close the Medicare Chronic Disease Dental Scheme. Because the Senate is securely in the hands of the Labor Government and Greens, we cannot expect the Senate to protect the scheme when it comes to the Upper House for debate. As such, the scheme will now almost certainly close before the end of the year.

The wording of a petition to retain the scheme, which received 13,700 signatures, is now being adjusted to seek reinstatement of the Medicare Chronic Disease Scheme.

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