

# OpenVoiceNews Australia

Transparent. Unbiased. Yours.

## Pressure Builds on Federal Government to Add Dental Coverage to Medicare Amid Soaring Wait Times

July 20, 2025

— Categories: Human Rights



The federal government faces growing calls to include dental care in Medicare, as public dental wait times stretch to unbearable lengths. With patients waiting months or even years for non-urgent care, advocates argue that expanding Medicare to cover dental services is long overdue. This article explores the mounting pressure, the challenges of implementation, and the potential costs, while

questioning the government's priorities in addressing this healthcare gap.

Australians are grappling with a dental care crisis, with public system delays leaving many in pain and unable to afford private treatment. Peter Breadon, Health Program Director at the Grattan Institute, highlights the system's strain, noting that "about 60 per cent of dental care funding comes directly from patients' pockets" compared to just a fraction for general practitioner visits. This disparity hits hardest for low-income and elderly Australians, like Queensland pensioner Don Batty, who has waited nearly two years for public dental care, unable to cover private costs. His story underscores a broader issue: without reform, dental neglect continues to harm diets, confidence, and overall health.

The Greens, leveraging their Senate influence, are pushing hard for Medicare to include dental coverage, with Senator Jordon Steele-John vowing to "pull every lever" to make it happen. Yet, Health Minister Mark Butler has downplayed the urgency, focusing instead on rebuilding general practice, leaving dental care as a long-term "ambition." This hesitation frustrates many, as two-thirds of surveyed dental practitioners support Medicare expansion for dental services. Critics argue the government's reluctance reflects a failure to prioritize a critical health need, especially when poor oral health contributes to serious conditions like diabetes and heart disease.

Implementing dental coverage under Medicare wouldn't be cheap. The Australian Dental Association estimates a seniors-focused scheme could cost \$1.1 to \$1.4 billion annually, while a broader program might reach \$8 billion over a decade. Phased approaches, targeting vulnerable groups first, could ease the burden, but the government's fiscal caution raises doubts about its commitment. As wait times grow

and public frustration mounts, the question remains: will the federal government act decisively, or will dental care remain a neglected cornerstone of Australian healthcare?