



Media release

From the Health Minister

Monday, 30 October 2006

WHAT WILL BAILLIEU CUT TO FUND DENTAL PROMISES?

The Health Minister, Bronwyn Pike, has called on Liberal leader Ted Baillieu to outline which public health services he plans to slash to fund today's dental announcement.

Ms Pike said Mr Baillieu's promise added to the Liberal's massive \$2.7 billion worth of commitments, promises that can only be funded by sacking teachers and nurses and closing schools and hospitals.

"It may be only \$33 million, but it all adds up when you're traveling around the State acting like a mobile ATM," Ms Pike said.

She said the Liberal's pledge was not only financially irresponsible, but was also cynically designed to take the pressure of the Federal Government, just as calls are mounting for it to again pull its weight when it comes to funding public dental services.

"The worst thing ever to happen to dental services in Australia was John Howard's decision to axe the Commonwealth Dental Program when he came to office in 1996," Ms Pike said.

"That program provided dental care to concession card holder and their dependants and helped the States keep waiting lists low.

"And Canberra has added insult to injury by failing to create enough dental places at universities – meaning Victoria's public dental system has vacancies across the State, including one at Bentleigh Community Health Centre, where Ted Baillieu announced his policy today.

"Central to the policy is \$30 million to employ more public sector dentists. The problem is they don't exist because they aren't being trained."

Ms Pike said the dental policy appeared to focus exclusively on workforce issues – a responsibility of the Federal Government.

"Instead of using his standing in the Liberal Party to get his mates to pull their weight on dental services, he in effect supports their negligence," Ms Pike said. "Clearly Ted Baillieu is taking advice from his campaign Director, Petro Georgiou, who is a member of the Government that abolished federal support for public dental services."

Ms Pike said the Government's decision to invest an extra \$96 million into the public dental system two years is reaping results, with dental waiting lists having been cut by more than 150,000 people, or 60 per cent, since the end of 2004.

"Over the past 15 months at Bentleigh, and despite the vacancy, the number of people waiting for denture care has been slashed by more than 500, from 1703 to 1179," Ms Pike said.

"The Bracks Government's dental policies are making a real difference in bringing down waiting times. In contrast, the Liberals have a shocking record on dental services. They can't be trusted."

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