

14 September 2006

Website shows up holes in dental health services

Victorians concerned about the long waiting lists for dental treatment can now express their views to politicians using a new website. A group of non-aligned organisations - the Victorian Oral Health Alliance (VOHA) - has given them a dedicated website so they can help the parties contesting the Victorian State election to recognise the need for additional dental health policy measures.

Centres in which long waits apply include Portland (66 months) Moe (65 months) and Sale (62 months) according to the Department of Human Services - <http://svc023.wic022p.server-web.com/yourhospitals/dental.asp>.

Launched today, the advocacy site – www.voha.org - highlights oral health problems facing Victorians: public dental waiting times up to five years; elderly, Aboriginal and other people missing out on dental care; and lack of oral disease prevention programs for many Victorians, including unfluoridated water for about 20% of the population, mainly in rural areas.

“Dental care should not be a luxury,” said Mr Tony McBride of the Health Issues Centre, on behalf of VOHA. “The state of your mouth reflects the state of your general health. Poor dental health causes pain and suffering, affects general health, and can contribute to low self-esteem, which stands in the way of training and employment.”

VOHA created the website to highlight Victoria’s oral health issues. It enables people in Victoria to locate their nearest public dental clinic, check waiting times, and send email or fax messages to their local MP, their local election candidates or Health Minister Bronwyn Pike to express their concerns about hundreds of thousands of Victorians denied timely oral health care.

VOHA estimates that an extra \$84 million for dental health in Victoria will:

- Reduce the waiting lists from an average of nearly two years to less than 12 months
- Allow all eligible primary school children to receive annual checkups and treatment
- Provide all pre-school children with free dental examinations
- Provide dental treatment for those with special needs, such as the elderly who are either in residential care or home-bound and Aboriginal people
- Continue the program of fluoridating all Victorian water supplies.

Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch Inc. ● Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists Association ● Brotherhood of St. Laurence ● Council on the Ageing Victoria ● Dental Hygienists Association of Australia, Victorian Branch ● Doctors' Reform Society of Australia ● Health Issues Centre ● Public Health Association of Australia Inc. ● Rural Workforce Agency of Victoria ● Victorian Aboriginal Cooperative Community Health Organisation ● Municipal Association of Victoria ● Victorian Council of Social Service ● Victorian Healthcare Association.

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VICTORIAN ORAL HEALTH ALLIANCE BACKGROUNDER

VOHA's Ideal Dental Health Policy Platform

The VOHA website, www.voha.org includes a more detailed outline of an ideal dental health policy platform which has been recommended to the parties contesting the Victorian election in November 2006. It also lists the public dental waiting times, shows where the public dental clinics are, provides contact details for MPs, and facilitates Victorians sending email or fax messages to the Health Minister, Ms Bronwyn Pike and MPs expressing concerns about the waiting times. When the names of candidates for the election are confirmed, they will be listed along with their contact details.

Inadequate dental care for disadvantaged Victorians is caused by lack of access to publicly funded care, with some people waiting more than five years for public dental treatment. This leads to pain and suffering, impacts on general health, and can be a barrier to training and employment.

The VOHA estimates that an extra \$84 million would enable Victorians to achieve better oral health.

This includes \$43 million to reduce waiting lists, around \$6 million to overcome workforce shortages, \$3 million for special needs care and \$32 million on prevention measures.

VOHA says that this funding will:

- Reduce the waiting lists from an average of nearly two years to less than 12 months
- Allow all eligible primary school children to receive annual checkups and treatment
- Provide all pre-school children with free dental examinations and oral hygiene instruction
- Provide dental treatment for those with special needs, such as the elderly who are either in residential care or home-bound, and Aboriginal people
- Continue the program of fluoridating all Victorian water supplies.

About the Victorian Oral Health Alliance

The Victorian Oral Health Alliance (VOHA) is an informal and non-aligned group of consumer, welfare and professional bodies committed to improving public dental health. VOHA was formed in 2004 in the lead up to the last Federal Election, and campaigned for the improvement of oral health. Its current focus is the Victorian election to be held on November 25. VOHA members include:

Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch Inc., Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists Association, Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Council on the Ageing Victoria, Dental Hygienists Association of Australia, Victorian Branch, Doctors' Reform Society of Australia, Health Issues Centre, Public Health Association of Australia Inc., Rural Workforce Agency of Victoria, Victorian Aboriginal Cooperative Community Health Organisation, Victorian Council of Social Service, Municipal Association of Victoria and Victorian Healthcare Association.