

## **PRESS STATEMENT** 20 September 2007

### **GOVERNMENT AND OPPOSITION MUST ANSWER DENTAL NEEDS OF THE ELDERLY**

The COTA Over 50s (Council on the Ageing) and the Australian Dental Industry Association today called on the Government and Opposition to ensure that their health policies meet dental needs of Australians over 65 years of age.

COTA Over 50s and ADIA presented new research showing that the Government and community could save \$42 million per year on dental and costs associated with related ill-health if it extended the dental entitlements of the Department of Veterans' Affairs Gold Card holders to all Aged Pension Card holders over 65 years of age.

Executive Director of COTA Over 50s, Dr Geoff Bird, said that elderly Australians show double the rates of periodontal (gum) disease of younger people and have a higher total health treatment bill to respond to illnesses caused by oral ill-health such as coronary heart disease, stroke, peripheral vascular disease and pancreatic cancer.

"COTA Over 50s and the ADIA today told the Ministers for Health and Ageing and the Shadow Minister for Ageing that elderly Australians had particular dental health needs and required greater Government support," Dr Bird said.

According to research by the economic modeler Econtech commissioned by COTA Over 50s and the ADIA, elderly Australians suffering from periodontal illness and consequently at risk of other disease would save \$3,730 per year if improved dental care led to a permanent improvement in dental health.

ADIA President Pam Clark said many older Australians missed recent advances in dental care such as fluoridisation and treatments not based on full extraction of teeth.

"Many older Australians have limited access to dental services due to cost and the almost total lack of services for those in residential aged care."

"The COTA Over 50s / ADIA report shows that there is a net social benefit in funding better access to dental care and that the task now is to ensure that the dental profession can be permitted to extend dental hygienist services more broadly especially to aged care facilities," Ms Clarke said.

The report found that the cost of providing adequate dental care to the over 65s was \$672 million per year but the total of savings to the Government and individuals through lower spending on dental ill health and periodontal illness

related disease was \$714 million per year, a net social gain of \$42 million annually.

For more information:

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Copies of the report are available on [www.cotaover50s.org.au](http://www.cotaover50s.org.au)