

NSW ORAL HEALTH ALLIANCE ELECTION QUESTIONNAIRE

STATE ELECTION 2003

Name:	Dr Arthur Chesterfield-Evans MLC
Party:	Australian Democrats

Will your party commit to the minimum service targets for public dental services, which states:

- (a) That no NSW resident will have to wait more than 24 hours to receive emergency dental care**
- (b) That treatment will be available for decayed teeth and oral health diseases in time to prevent expensive, complicated dental care or tooth loss**
- (c) That regular dental checkups are available?**

Democrats believe that oral health is an integral part of general health and well-being. We believe that all Australians have a right to affordable dental care to maintain their oral health.

We agree that minimum standards of public dental health as state above should be met.

We also believe that dental care should be part of Medicare, as it is illogical that the mouth is the only part of the body not covered.

What commitment will your party give to additional funding for public dental services to ensure that the minimum service targets are met?

The Democrats believe that the Commonwealth must lead the way in addressing these issues by developing a National Strategy for Oral Health in conjunction with the states.

Substantial ongoing Commonwealth funding must underpin the development of a National Strategy for Oral Health. The Commonwealth cannot justify spending approximately \$350 million subsidising dental services for middle and high income earners through the Private Health Insurance Rebate, whilst denying the most disadvantaged groups in the community access to basic dental health services.

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What else will your party do to ensure the oral health of the population of NSW? NCOSS is particularly concerned about the oral health care needs of disadvantaged people, especially those living in rural and remote areas.

The Democrats believe Australia's system of dental care is in desperate need of reform.

Dental decay is the most prevalent medical condition in Australia today. There are currently 500,000 people across Australia on waiting lists for public dental health services. Waiting lists are so long that in some cases people have to wait up to four years for treatment, and many more extractions are needed as teeth have decayed beyond repair.

The Government has failed to ensure that dental care is accessible to all Australians. This has resulted in an overall deterioration in the oral health of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in the community, such as:

- Low income earners and their dependents
- Indigenous Australians
- Aged people
- Mentally ill people
- Homeless people, and
- Refugees.

Denying disadvantaged groups access to dental health care reinforces social inequalities in the community and leads to a more unjust society.

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Substantial ongoing Commonwealth funding must underpin the development of a National Strategy for Oral Health. The Commonwealth cannot justify spending approximately \$350 million subsidising dental services for middle and high-income earners through the Private Health Insurance Rebate, whilst denying the most disadvantaged groups in the community access to basic dental health services.

With a focus on prevention, early treatment and properly targeted programs, all Australians can enjoy the benefits of good dental health.#

The Australian Democrats believe that the Federal and State Governments must co-operate to deliver health services and the subsidy scheme to dentists to deliver these services must be reinstated and funded.

For rural and remote communities the IPTAAS scheme must be improved by better co-operation between NSW State Government departments as part of improved co-ordination of all rural and remote services.