Dental treatment – enhanced Medicare item for patients with chronic and complex conditions

Why is this important?

- People with chronic conditions and complex care needs often have poor oral health which can adversely affect their medical condition or general health. This measure will make it easier for these people to access dental services in the private sector when they need treatment or to receive preventive care.

- This will provide another avenue for dental services for these people, which will be particularly helpful for those who would otherwise have to wait for services.

Who will benefit?

- People with chronic conditions and complex care needs whose oral health is impacting on, or is likely to impact on, their general health will benefit from the changes to Medicare items this measure provides.

- Eligible patients will be able to claim Medicare benefits for a diagnostic dental consultation, as well as Medicare benefits for a range of dental treatment services up to a maximum of $2,000 (including Extended Medicare Safety Net benefits) each calendar year.

- To be eligible, patients will need to be referred to a dentist by their GP and have a GP Management Plan and Team Care Arrangements in place. For residents of an aged care facility, a GP must have contributed to a multidisciplinary care plan prepared for the resident by the facility in order to benefit from this measure.

- It is expected that around 200,000 patients will access the dental care items over the first four years. Subject to the passage of legislation, the items are anticipated to commence on 1 November 2007.

- Detailed arrangements, including the specific dental treatment services to be covered by the new items, will be finalised over the coming months in consultation with the dental profession and GP groups.

What funding is the Government committing to the initiative?

- The Commonwealth Government is providing funding of $377.6 million over four years.

What have we done in the past?

- Medicare dental care items introduced in 2004 under the Enhanced Primary Care arrangements allow eligible patients to access to up three dental services per year (with a Medicare rebate of $77.95 per service).
In other dental measures in this Budget, the Commonwealth is investing in the new School of Dentistry and Oral Health at Charles Sturt University, funding up to 30 annual clinical placements for dentistry students in established rural training settings, and creating dental scholarships to Indigenous students, through the Puggy Hunter Scholarship Scheme.

**When will the initiative conclude?**

- Funding is ongoing.