

21st January 2020

The Honourable Tony Pagone QC and Ms Lynelle Briggs AO
Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety
Via: Email



Open letter: Older Australians deserve better oral health

Dear Commissioners,

We are aware of the findings of the Royal Commission's Interim Report documenting the woeful state of oral health, alongside poor food quality and inadequate hydration, that have been identified as significant contributors to malnutrition, oral pain and other general health risks in the elderly.



Witnesses at the hearings and community forums have shared first-hand their experiences as health practitioners, carers or patients themselves, of how poor oral health has led to detrimental outcomes such as weight loss, chronic illness and poor quality of life. Something has to change!



It is time to stop the rot and ensure that oral health is a priority for our older Australians. Without oral health there can be no easy way to maintain good nutrition, maintain a healthy weight and maintain good self-esteem allowing comfortable social interaction. **Without oral health there is no health.**



What has to change?

Australia needs to ensure that every Australian over the age of 75 has access to regular oral health assessments that inform their ongoing care requirements. This can only be achieved when government steps in to provide for those in need. This requires both funding and regulatory frameworks that ensure oral health is maintained throughout the life cycle – and afford our vulnerable populations access to timely, culturally-appropriate oral health services that meet their needs.



As a group we have identified the following minimum requirements to improve what can only be described as a dreadful situation:



- **Funding Requirement:** As a minimum, all older Australians must be able to access regular oral health assessments and care planning by a registered Dental Practitioner and we recommend this to be included as a Medicare-funded assessment for adults 75 years and over.
- **Regulatory Measures:** ACAT assessments and RACF quality standards must have mandatory oral health requirements that are enforced.
- **Awareness:** All health care providers, families and carers must be educated about the importance of good oral health for older adults and have clear referral pathways made available for patients.



As a group representing the peak and professional organisations who routinely care for and advocate on behalf of older Australians in NSW and the ACT, we urge you to take oral health into consideration when redesigning the aged care services for the future. In NSW there are currently models of care and workforce capability that can be scaled up to achieve these goals.



All older Australians, whether they live independently in the community or within a RACF, whether Indigenous or non-Indigenous, regardless of their socio-economic status or geographic location deserve better. Oral health is not too much to ask for. Please listen to our call and help us to improve oral health for all Australians.



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