

New dental scheme for kids

THE DETAILS

Assessment An assessment is undertaken at the start of the year to determine a child's eligibility for the schedule.

Qualify A child is qualified for the care if they are two to 17 years old, eligible for Medicare, a member of a family claiming family tax benefit A, or accessing youth allowance, Abstudy allowance, the disability support pension, parenting payments, special benefits, carer payments, a double orphan pension, the Veteran's Children Education Scheme if they are over 16, or the Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act Education and Training Scheme if they are over 16.

Covered Dental care covered includes examinations, x-rays, cleaning, fissure sealing, fillings, root canals and extractions, but does not include orthodontic or cosmetic dental work.

Eligibility To check if your child qualifies for the scheme, access your Medicare online account at www.my.gov.au or call 132 011.

By DAN HARRISON

More than 3 million children will be eligible for Medicare-funded dental care under a new scheme being implemented by the federal government.

The \$2.7 billion scheme is the final element of a dental package negotiated by the Greens with former prime minister Julia Gillard in return for their support for her minority government.

Under the scheme, families who receive Family Tax Benefit Part A will be eligible for \$1000 worth of Medicare-funded treatment over a two-year period.

About 3.4 million children between the ages of two and 17 are expected to benefit.

As opposition leader in January 2012, Prime Minister Tony Abbott declared it his "aspiration" to extend Medicare to cover dentistry.

Greens Senator Richard Di Natale used the launch of the children's dental scheme in January to challenge Mr Abbott to commit to a broader one.

Mr Abbott, addressing the National Press Club in 2012, said the big problem with Medicare was "that it supports treatment for every part of the body except the mouth".

As health minister in the



Free care ... children are the big winners of the new dental scheme.

Howard government, Mr Abbott in 2007 introduced a Medicare-funded dental scheme for sufferers of chronic disease.

The scheme was abolished by Labor to help fund the new one, but Senator Di Natale said the scheme was evidence of Mr Abbott's commitment to

including dental care in Medicare.

The Greens want Mr Abbott to implement their plan for Medicare-funded dental care for all Australians by 2018.

In the next stage, about 3 million pensioners and welfare recipients would be included in

2015, at a cost of \$1 billion a year. The full scheme would cost \$8.5 billion in 2018-19.

"We're challenging the Coalition to back up their rhetoric with a promise," Senator Di Natale said.

He said the Greens were open to negotiation on how such a scheme would be funded, and that while the party preferred it be paid for by a redesigned mining tax and by ending fossil fuel subsidies, it was prepared to consider an increase in the Medicare levy.

Senator Di Natale said universal dental care would deliver savings by preventing GP visits and emergency department presentations caused by untreated dental disease.

Health Minister Peter Dutton said the Coalition would like to improve dental care.

"There is a lot more the prime minister and I would like to do in dental but the level of debt we inherited from Labor is a nightmare," Mr Dutton said.

"The interest bill alone would pay three times over for a national dental scheme."

Labor frontbencher Shayne Neumann called on the government to quarantine the children's dental scheme from cuts being considered by the Commission of Audit.

Dr Stephen Miller & Dr Abhi Pathak



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Nowra



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