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Media Release

Teens brush government's dental vouchers

BATTLING teenagers are missing out on a Federal Government subsidy that would improve their dental health, according to one of the nation's leading dental services providers.

Dr Daryl Holmes, managing director of listed dental group 1300SMILES, said potentially hundreds of thousands of eligible teens were yet to use government-funded dental vouchers worth \$150.

As part of its plan to target teenage health, the Rudd government introduced the Medicare Teen Dental Voucher (MTDV) scheme on July 1.

Under the scheme nearly 1.1 million vouchers have been sent out.

To be eligible for the vouchers, teens must be aged between 12 and 17 and be receiving a Youth Allowance or Abstudy. Teens are also eligible if their parents are receiving the Family Tax Benefit A.

Dr Holmes said just over 1500 of the vouchers had been used at 1300SMILES practices across Queensland.

"While our practices represent just a snapshot of dental practices across the State, it does indicate there may be tens or hundreds of thousands of teens in Australia that are yet to use them," said Dr Holmes.

"It's a case of use the voucher or lose it. If the teens don't get in prior to Christmas, they'll miss out.

"It's very common for teenagers to shy away from visiting dental or medical practitioners for as long as 7 to 10 years.

"A lot of the time teenagers don't visit dentists due to financial reasons. But the government had taken a very positive and proactive step towards helping to fix teenage oral health."

The vouchers cover one annual preventative dental check consisting of an oral examination and, if required, x-rays, a scale and clean, fluoride treatment, oral hygiene instruction, dietary advice and fissure sealing.

Eligible teens will receive a new voucher at the start of the 2009 and 2010 calendar years.

“At some dental practices, teenagers can use their vouchers and not hand over a cent for their check-ups or other preventative procedures,” said Dr Holmes.

“We would hope that parents are urging their children to make the most of the opportunity.”

Dr Holmes said that Christmas was one of the worst periods for diet and oral hygiene, particularly amongst teens.

“When students are on holidays, they tend to be more relaxed with their daily routine of caring for their teeth morning and night,” he said.

“It goes without saying that the amount of junk food consumption tends to lift considerably around Christmas and during most holiday periods.”

Teenagers who need more information about the MTDV scheme can visit www.medicareaustralia.gov.au, call 132 011 or go to any Medicare office.

For further information contact Shane Russell on 0408 010 932 or shane@barepublicity.com.au

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