

Senate Finance and Public Administration Committees
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Ref: Medicare Enhanced Primary Care (EPC) Scheme

Dear Senators

My name is Janet Neal and I am writing to you in both a personal and professional capacity regarding the Medicare Enhanced Primary Care (EPC) Scheme for people with Chronic Disease.

As a front desk co-ordinator at a busy dental practice (Healthy Smiles Dental Group), I see on a daily basis, the many patients who attend our clinic who have multiple health problems to deal with in addition to their dental problems, which are quite often exacerbated by their chronic disease.

With such a backlog of patients waiting to see a dentist in the public sector, the EPC scheme offers those patients access to dental treatment more readily, enabling them to see a private dentist and have the cost of their treatment subsidised.

The patients we treat at our clinic are most grateful and appreciative of this Chronic Disease scheme and are genuinely in need of assistance in this area. It enables patients to attain such treatments as crowns, bridges and implants which, ordinarily, would be out of reach of many patients.

The dentists at our clinic, Healthy Smiles, provide these patients with a high standard of care and compassion at all times and spend a great deal of time liaising with the patients, their General Practitioners and Medicare to comply with the many guidelines demanded by this scheme. The amount of red-tape required by Medicare to allow patients to undergo treatment with this scheme goes above and beyond with comparison to other government subsidised programmes such as Veterans Affairs. Not only does it require a lot of work by dentists, GP's and their administration staff, it can be very confusing for the patients to understand. The auditing process which commenced back in 2008 and has directly impacted on our practice since 2010 has indeed caused more confusion for our patients and also more paperwork for the practice. Many patients have entered our practice demanding to know what all this means and asking why they have to complete paperwork. It not only inconveniences the patients but it brings the reputation of the dentists into question as many make the assumption that the dentists have done something illegal with regards to treatment.

On a personal level, I myself was diagnosed with a chronic disease about two and a half years ago. Since being diagnosed, the condition of my teeth has deteriorated over that time and I now find myself needing expensive treatment to prevent further loss and maintain a healthy mouth. This scheme is very beneficial and extremely crucial to the many patients with chronic disease in Australia, especially as chronic disease is becoming more prevalent in our country. Without this scheme it will create more pressure on other services and people who cannot afford the necessary dental treatment will neglect their teeth which in turn may lead to other chronic diseases such as heart disease.

Overall, this whole process has been quite damaging to the dental industry, an industry which already struggles to gain the confidence of the general public.

I therefore request you to forward my concerns to the Committee and look forward to, hopefully, a permanent extension of the Medicare Enhanced Primary (EPC) Scheme and an end to this unnecessary auditing of dentists.

Yours sincerely

Janet Neal