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C-ECTF-23/12172

11 DEC 2023

Senator Jordon Steele-John
Chair
Senate Select Committee into the Provision of and Access to Dental Services in Australia
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Email: dental.services.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

Thank you for your letter dated 21 September 2023, requesting information on eligibility for public dental services for the Senate Select Committee into the Provision of and Access to Dental Services in Australia (the Committee). Queensland Health have provided the below advice to respond to the Committee's queries.

1. What are the eligibility criteria for public, or government subsidised, dental and oral health services in Queensland?

- **Adults:** For adults and their dependants to be eligible for free public dental care they must be a Queensland resident and, where applicable, receive benefits from any of the following concession cards:
 - a) Pensioner Concession Card issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs
 - b) Pensioner Concession Card issued by Centrelink
 - c) Health Care Card
 - d) Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
 - e) Queensland Seniors Card
- **Children and adolescents:** For children to be eligible for free public dental care they must:
 - a) be a Queensland resident or attend a Queensland school; and,
 - b) be eligible for Medicare; and
 - c) meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - i) be aged four years or older and have not completed Year 10; or,
 - ii) be eligible for the Medicare Child Dental Benefits Schedule; or
 - iii) hold, or be listed as a dependent on, a valid Centrelink concession card.
- These key eligibility criteria for Queensland public dental services are available on the Queensland Government website at <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/services/oral-eye-ear/dental-services#eligibility>. This information has also been enclosed for your noting.
- In addition, Queensland Health publishes an Oral Health Services Eligibility Guideline at https://www.health.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0030/646527/qh-gdl-444.pdf. This guideline with more detail for specific patient groups and specialist services has been enclosed to assist with your review.

2. *When were these criteria developed, and by whom?*

- These eligibility criteria have been long-standing in Queensland, with minor modifications.
- The Chief Dental Officer, Clinical Excellence Queensland, Department of Health, is the custodian of the eligibility guideline, while the Deputy Director-General, Clinical Excellence Queensland, is the approval officer.

3. *Since they were developed, have these criteria been reviewed? If so, when was this done, and what was the outcome?*

- The Oral Health Services Eligibility Guideline is reviewed regularly, approximately every three years in line with other Queensland Health policy documents, or as required in response to specific issues.
- The adult eligibility criteria have been largely unchanged for several decades.
- The child eligibility criteria were updated in 2014, to align with the introduction of the Commonwealth Government's Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS).

4. *Does the Queensland Government have any plans to review these criteria in the future?*

- The eligibility guideline is due for a regular review in 2024.

5. *Has the Queensland Government received any evidence - including significant anecdotal evidence - that these criteria may not be fit-for-purpose?*

- There are two aspects of the eligibility criteria that are under consideration in response to anecdotal issues:
 - a) Children aged 0 to 3 years: Currently only concession card holders and CDBS children are eligible for free public dental care in this age group. A review has been undertaken regarding expanding the eligibility criteria to include all children aged 0 to 3 years. This change would support prevention and early intervention for all children from birth.
 - b) Follow up dental care for head and neck cancer patients: Currently, ongoing outpatient public dental care is not routinely offered to patients who have been treated in hospital for head and neck cancer but are not eligible for public dental care. These non-eligible patients are expected to seek care through the private sector however this may be a financial barrier for some people. In addition, private dentists in some locations may not have the clinical expertise required to manage the particular dental issues faced by cancer patients.

Thank you again for writing to me. Should you require any further information in relation to this matter, I have arranged for Dr Mark Brown, Chief Dental Officer, Clinical Excellence Queensland, Department of Health, on telephone (07) 3328 9873, to be available to assist.

Yours sincerely

Shannon Fentiman MP

Minister for Health, Mental Health and Ambulance Services

Minister for Women

Member for Waterford

Home > Health and wellbeing > Dental, optical and hearing services > Public dental services

Public dental services

Public dental services are delivered via a range of facilities including mobile dental clinics, school dental clinics and community dental clinics.

Eligibility

Adults

For adults and their dependants to be eligible for free public dental care they must be a Queensland resident and, where applicable, receive benefits from any of the following concession cards:

- Pensioner Concession Card issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs
- Pensioner Concession Card issued by Centrelink
- Health Care Card
- Commonwealth Seniors Health Card
- Queensland Seniors Card (<https://www.qld.gov.au/seniors/legal-finance-concessions/seniors-card>)

Children and adolescents

For children to be eligible for free public dental care they must:

- be a Queensland resident or attend a Queensland school; and,
- be eligible for Medicare; and,
- meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - be aged four years or older and have not completed Year 10; or,
 - be eligible for the Medicare Child Dental Benefits Schedule; or,
 - hold, or be listed as a dependent on, a valid Centrelink concession card

Public dental care for children may be provided on-site at schools through fixed or mobile dental clinics or at larger community dental clinics by teams including dentists, oral health therapists, dental therapists and dental assistants.

Child Dental Benefits Schedule (CDBS)

CDBS is a dental benefits program by the Australian Government for eligible children that provides up to \$1,052 in benefits over two calendar years for basic dental services in either a public or private setting. This includes dental examinations, x-rays, cleaning, fissure sealing, fillings, root canal treatments and extractions. Benefits are not available for orthodontic or cosmetic dental work.

For children to be eligible for CDBS they must be:

- 0-17 years of age on 01 January in the calendar year
- eligible for Medicare
- getting an eligible payment, or have a parent getting a payment, from Centrelink at least once a year, including Family Tax Benefit Part A.

For more information about the CDBS, visit the [Services Australia website](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/child-dental-benefits-schedule) (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/child-dental-benefits-schedule>).

Oral Health Services Eligibility

Queensland Health Guideline

QH-GDL-444:2017

1. Purpose

This guideline provides recommendations regarding eligibility for public oral health services delivered by Hospital and Health Services to promote consistent and equitable access throughout Queensland.

2. Scope

This Guideline provides information for all Queensland public health system employees (permanent, temporary and casual) and all organisations and individuals acting as its agents (including partners, contractors, consultants and volunteers).

3. Guideline for oral health services eligibility

3.1. Adult eligibility criteria

For adults to be eligible for free public oral health services they must:

- Be Queensland residents; **and**,
- Be eligible for Medicare¹; **and**,
- Be receiving benefits from one of the following concession cards:
 - Pensioner Concession Card issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs;
 - Pensioner Concession Card issued by Centrelink;
 - Health Care Card;
 - Commonwealth Seniors Health Card; or,
 - Queensland Seniors Card.

For eligible adults, eligibility is extended to dependants named on their concession card.

Adults that reside in states or territories other than Queensland who are eligible for Medicare and hold a valid concession card are eligible if their closest public oral health facility is in Queensland.

All other adults from interstate who are eligible for Medicare and hold a valid concession card are eligible for emergency care only.

All prisoners in Queensland are eligible for free public oral health services.

¹ Eligibility for Medicare includes holders of green or blue Medicare cards but excludes yellow Medicare cards which are issued to visitors from countries with reciprocal health care agreements.

3.2. Child eligibility criteria

For children to be eligible for free public oral health services they must:

- Be Queensland residents **or** attend a Queensland school; **and**,
- Be eligible for Medicare²; **and**,
- Meet at least one of the following criteria:
 - be aged four years or older and have not completed Year 10; **or**,
 - be eligible for the Medicare Child Dental Benefits Schedule; **or**,
 - hold, or be listed as a dependent on, a valid Centrelink concession card.

For children eligible for the Child Dental Benefits Schedule, benefits will be assigned under bulk billing arrangements to the relevant Hospital and Health Service.

Children that reside in states or territories other than Queensland but attend a Queensland school and meet the other criteria listed above, are eligible for free public oral health services.

All other children from interstate who are eligible for Medicare and meet the other criteria are eligible for emergency care only.

3.3. Additional eligibility criteria

3.3.1. Public dental specialist services

Dental specialist services can only be accessed by referral from dental, allied health or medical practitioners.

Availability of dental specialist services varies between locations and HHS oral health services.

To be eligible for public dental specialist services:

- Adults must meet the eligibility criteria for free public oral health services.
- Children must:
 - Meet the eligibility criteria for free public oral health services; **and**
 - Hold, or be listed as a dependent on, a valid Centrelink concession card.

For some specialist services, such as orthodontics, additional clinical criteria may also be applied by public dental specialists to determine eligibility.

² Eligibility for Medicare includes holders of green or blue Medicare cards but excludes yellow Medicare cards which are issued to visitors from countries with reciprocal health care agreements.

3.3.2. Public hospital inpatients

Inpatients of public hospitals are eligible for limited public oral health services only while they remain an inpatient. Such care would be considered essential to the recovery and rehabilitation of the patient or for the treatment of dental emergencies, for example, pain, swelling or bleeding.

If a public hospital requests dental care due to an adverse event, these services should be provided at no cost to the patient.

3.3.3. Public hospital outpatients

Outpatients referred by a public hospital to a public oral health service must meet the eligibility criteria.

Eligibility criteria may be waived to expedite treatment where patients have been referred from a public hospital for the treatment of cancer, cardiac surgery or another life-threatening medical condition requiring urgent dental treatment prior to commencing medical care. This may apply in situations where there may be difficulty accessing timely private dental treatment. Such care would be considered essential to the recovery and rehabilitation of the patient.

3.3.4. Forde Foundation

Clients who are registered with the Forde Foundation can apply for a grant for public oral health services. If approved, Forde Foundation clients are eligible for a priority general course of care.

3.3.5. Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Scheme

To be eligible for treatment under the Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Scheme, a patient must meet all of these conditions:

- be enrolled in Medicare;
- have started treatment before turning 22;
- be under the age of 28 when receiving treatment.

Patients must also have been certified by a health professional before turning 22, as having one of these:

- a cleft lip
- a cleft palate
- other eligible condition.

Patients do not require a Centrelink concession card to be eligible for treatment by public dental specialist services under the Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Scheme.

3.3.6. Refugees

Refugees who meet the eligibility criteria (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2) are entitled to a priority general course of care. Following the initial course of care, eligible refugees can access public oral health services in the same way as all other eligible patients access care.

3.3.7. Asylum seekers

Asylum seekers are entitled to a priority general course of care. As proof of eligibility, a referral form is required from an authorised support agency or community health clinic.

3.3.8. Completing a course of care

Once an examination has been undertaken and a treatment plan established, an entire course of care should be completed, even if patient eligibility ceases during a course of care.

If a patient requires specialist care, this treatment should be considered a new course of care. If patient eligibility ceases prior to the commencement of specialist care, the treatment should not commence. If patient eligibility ceases during the course of specialist care, the course of care should be completed.

3.3.9. Non-eligible patients

In rural and remote locations where there is no private dentist available, any person can access public oral health services however people who are not eligible should receive care on a fee-for-service basis. Treatment costs should be charged according to the government oral health fee schedule.

Public oral health services may determine the nature and extent of treatment available to non-eligible patients according to local service capacity.

4. Document approval details

Document custodian

Chief Dental Officer

Approval officer

Deputy Director-General, Clinical Excellence Queensland

Approval date: 20 July 2021

Version Control

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	March 2017	New guideline
2.0	February 2020	Updated criteria related to prisoners, Child Dental Benefits Schedule, children from interstate, refugees and asylum seekers
2.1	July 2021	Updated Cleft Lip and Cleft Palate Scheme