

## **ADJOURNMENT**

### **Fadden Electorate: Dental Health**

Mr ROBERT (Fadden) (7.40 p.m.)—Just three weeks ago I received an inquiry from a pensioner living within the mighty electorate Fadden who had a raft of medical issues. This gentleman is an insulin dependent chronic diabetic. He had recently experienced a mini heart attack and was suffering from infected gums—an infection which his doctor had informed him was contributing to his already myriad health problems.

This man had spoken to his doctor and to a dentist, and they both informed him that a program which had existed under the previous government but which had been scrapped under the merciless current government could have helped him. Thankfully, this gentleman did not take that as gospel and contacted my electorate office. We were able to inform him that, while the government had announced that it would discontinue this program in March 2008 and that all funding would cease on 30 June 2008, the coalition had kept the program alive to benefit all Australians. The program in question is Medicare dental.

The coalition government introduced the Medicare dental scheme in September 2007, and it started in November 2007. Between its introduction and the end of April 2008, the scheme had provided 311,943 dental services. The scheme allowed people with chronic and complex health problems where dental health was a contributing factor or complication to access private dental treatment following a referral from their GP. Patients could receive up to \$4,250 worth of dental treatment and therapy over two years. Following a disallowance motion, introduced to the parliament by the opposition, dental services under Medicare will continue to be available. This moribund government cannot try to cancel the program via the same piece of legislation until at least the end of December.

The gentleman managed to have all his teeth removed under the Medicare dental scheme, despite the Rudd government's best efforts. His overall health is so much improved as a result, Madam Deputy Speaker, on which I am sure you would join me in saying 'well done'. His teeth were rotten to the root. There is no question that this gentleman's dental health had a negative impact on his general health.

This is not the only inquiry I have received at my office from local constituents concerned about the future of their dental health. A woman recently inquired on behalf of her daughter, a sufferer of both lupus and multiple sclerosis and a recipient of the disability pension. Due to dentists and doctors being misinformed by the government as to the status and future of Medicare dental, this woman found it difficult for medical practitioners to consider her case.

A 59-year-old woman on the disability pension also contacted my office this month. She suffers from chronic asthma, high blood pressure and chronic gum disease. Her teeth are so rotten she is scared to eat even an apple. This woman would also not be covered under the government's new scheme but, thanks to the coalition's measures, she is able to seek treatment and recompense.

I have received many other inquiries and complaints from people in my local area as a result of the confusion over the status of this program. People in the northern Gold Coast area have been very vocal in their support of Medicare dental. I am tremendously pleased that the program has continued to be in play and be available to people through to December 2008 at a minimum. The opposition will be doing everything we can to keep the program going and delivering dental care to those who desperately need it. I urge the government to reconsider its position on Medicare dental.