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Media release

Dentists welcome Fee Review commitment

The Government's commitment to review the fees paid for young people's dental care is welcome, and dentists want to thank the Ministers who made it happen.

Dr Mo Amso, NZDA Chief Executive, says the review is the right next step.

"We want to thank Health Minister Simeon Brown, who listened to dentists and took our concerns on board, and Minister Matt Doocey for announcing the Fee Review. Dentists have been asking for this for a long time, and it shows the Government is taking the cost of care seriously.

"We look forward to working with the Government and Health NZ to get it right."

The Government has confirmed about \$78 million for child and adolescent oral health services. This continues the existing \$75 million with an uplift for cost increases.

Most care for 13- to 18-year-olds is delivered by private dentists under the Combined Dental Agreement, which sets the rates they are paid.

NZDA's *Cost of Dentistry Report* compared those rates with market rates for 19 common treatments.

In every one, the rate paid was below the cost of providing the care. The report estimates the shortfall at about \$60 million in 2023.

Dr Robin Whyman, NZDA Director of Dental Policy, says the numbers show why the review matters.

"Dentists and, in practice, adult patients have been covering that gap. The number of dentists holding a contract has fallen 10% since 2017, and the share of teenagers getting care each year has not improved from around three-quarters for many years.

"Fixing the rates helps keep dentists in the programme and gets more young people into the chair."

The report also found that dental prices have risen about 90% since 2007, compared with about 50% for prices overall.

NZDA has been working with Health New Zealand through the agreement's annual review process, and sees the Fee Review as a step towards a fairer, longer-term arrangement.

"We will bring the data and the clinical experience to the review. We also ask that it look at how rates keep pace with the real cost of care each year."

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