



Public and primary health are vital elements of Victoria's health system, but chronic underinvestment means they're under serious strain. The Greens have a plan to boost investment in community healthcare to better serve local communities, reduce burdens on our hospitals, and put Victorians' health needs first.

Community health and public dental providers play a vital role in our health system. Services such as general practices, pharmacies, dentists, allied health and community nursing are often the first point of contact for a person entering the wider health system. Often, they play a central and ongoing role in provision of support and treatment.

These services are embedded in local communities, and provide a tailored, culturally responsive service to members of those communities. With a specific focus on supporting people in disadvantaged Victorians, they play a vital role in reducing health inequality. In serving the wider community, they are an important contributor to improving health outcomes for all Victorians. With the right pathways in place, they can also reduce demand on our overstretched public hospitals.

It's a great system and it provides healthcare on the frontline to people who most need it. But the system is under massive strain due to growth in demand and chronic underinvestment. As our health needs change – for a whole range of reasons – we need to be making our health investments work much harder, and much smarter. We cannot afford to continue to focus on crisis response, we need to fundamentally refocus on health prevention, and community health and public dental have a huge role to play in making that change.

The Greens have a strong track record in advocating for universal access to publicly funded dental care. We'll continue to push for an expansion of Medicare-funded dental care at a federal level, and in the meantime, the Victorian Greens will:

- Invest \$160 million to double the number of eligible people accessing public dental treatment;
- Leverage existing funds and provide a \$200 million boost to community health infrastructure and services, targeting areas of greatest need;
- Make community health services preferred suppliers for the Victorian Government; and
- Support a \$4 million pilot project to establish partnerships and treatment pathways between public hospitals and community health services.

DOUBLING THE NUMBER OF PATIENTS ACCESSING PUBLIC DENTAL

Cost is a huge barrier to accessing a dentist in Victoria. The lower your income, the more likely you are to experience chronic dental problems; low income earners



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have more than twice the rate of untreated dental decay as high income earners.

Waiting times for public dental treatment in Victoria have increased by 20% in the past year (currently at 20 months) and are predicted to increase to 23 months in 2018/19.ⁱ Longer waiting times result in preventable hospitalisation and huge accompanying costs to the health system. 16,000 Victorians experience preventable hospitalisation due to dental conditions each year – including more than 6,000 children – at a cost of \$60 million.ⁱⁱ

Dental problems are the largest single cause of all avoidable hospitalisations for Victorians under 25 and the second largest for Victorians as a whole.ⁱⁱⁱ The Greens will invest \$40 million per year to double the number of eligible patients accessing public dental.

BOOSTING HEALTH SERVICES FOR COMMUNITIES

Investment in community health has not kept pace with increasing demand for primary health services embedded in local communities. The Greens would:

- Allocate existing infrastructure funding to build new community health centres in Victoria's growth areas, to be run by existing health services.
- Establish a Community Health Service Capital Fund to ensure that existing community health services are able to meet growing demand from the communities they serve, with annual funding of \$50 million.

SUPPORTING HOSPITAL/COMMUNITY HEALTH PARTNERSHIPS

Hospitals play an incredibly important role in our health system. But they're best suited to urgent and technically complex health problems and too often, the demands placed on hospitals would be more appropriately met by community health services. A smart health system ensures that hospitals are used sparingly and appropriately, reducing costs to taxpayers and ensuring that hospital services are always available to those in urgent need.

Hospital diversion projects partner hospitals with community health services, establishing formal mechanisms to transfer people attending to hospitals to community health where appropriate. Several of these initiatives exist in Victoria and have demonstrated real potential. The Greens would invest \$4 million to fund six formal pilot hospital diversion projects, with a view to scaling these up based on findings and experience from the pilot project.

MAKE COMMUNITY HEALTH A PREFERRED SUPPLIER

The Victorian Government spends billions of dollars every year on the purchase of goods and services. Most goes directly into the pockets of private corporations. When it comes to providing health services to our communities, we think community health services are best placed to undertake this work, because that's their entire reason for being.

The Victorian Greens would make registered community health services preferred suppliers from the Victorian Government for provision of services to vulnerable communities. This would ensure that taxpayers' health dollars are reinvested into community health, not into the pockets of private businesses.



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ⁱ State Government of Victoria. Victorian Health Services Performance - Statewide - Average time to treatment for general dental care - Quarterly Data: State Government of Victoria; 2018 [Available from: <http://performance.health.vic.gov.au/Home/Report.aspx?ReportKey=18>]

ⁱⁱ State Government of Victoria. Victorian Health Information Surveillance System (VHISS), Ambulatory Care Sensitive Conditions 2018 [Available from: <https://hns.dhs.vic.gov.au/3netapps/vhisspublicsite/ReportParameter.aspx?ReportID=23&TopicID=1&SubtopicID=15>]

ⁱⁱⁱ 'Health and wellbeing status of Victoria Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2015–2019 companion document', Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, 2015: file:///C:/Users/knoble/Downloads/1507012_HWSV_VPHWP_Companion_FA.pdf