

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Leader of the House
Minister for Health
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ambulance Services



Thursday, 18 July 2024

FREE DENTAL CARE FOR MORE THAN 100,000 VICTORIAN KIDS

The Allan Labor Government's *Smile Squad* program has now delivered free dental care to more than 100,000 students – helping thousands of parents save time and money and keeping Victorian kids happy and healthy.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas and Minister for Children and Acting Minister for Education Lizzie Blandthorn today visited Amsleigh Park Primary School to celebrate the successful program which is making sure thousands of children get the oral care they need – free of charge.

Delivered by mobile teams of dedicated oral health clinicians who travel across the state in bright orange vans, *Smile Squad* provides free check-ups, x-rays, teeth cleaning, application of fluoride and dental sealants, fillings, and root canals to school students.

Since the program launched in 2019 *Smile Squad* has delivered 200,000 free initial and follow up appointments to kids at government schools and provided more than 600,000 dental health packs which include a toothbrush and toothpaste.

A survey of students attending *Smile Squad* found that 36 per cent of them don't brush their teeth twice a day, and 16 per cent of them had never had their teeth checked by a dental professional before *Smile Squad* visited their school.

Across Australia, at least a quarter of children have experienced tooth decay and in Victoria dental conditions are the highest cause of preventable hospitalisations for children under 10.

Importantly, this transformational program has benefits that reach beyond Victorian kids. By delivering free dental care to Victorian kids, we are freeing up treatment places for more adults to be seen by our public dental services.

The *Smile Squad* program was first funded in 2019 with an initial \$321.9 million investment by the Labor Government– the most significant investment in public dental health in the state since 2004.

The program received a \$16.9 million boost in the *Victorian Budget 2023/24* which will support *Smile Squad* to expand into low-fee non-government schools from 2026.

Victorian parents are encouraged to keep an eye out for information about *Smile Squad* and sign their kids up when the service next visits their school.

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"Smile Squad is saving families time and money - ensuring that all Victorian government school students can get the high quality dental care they need, at school."

Quote attributable to Minister for Children and Acting Minister for Education Lizzie Blandthorn

"Good health is essential for staying focused at school. That's why we've rolled out Smile Squad across Victoria which has delivered oral care to more than 100,000 students."

Quote attributable to Member for Oakleigh Steve Dimopoulos

"Smile Squad saves families time and money by ensuring that all Oakleigh government school students receive the high-quality dental care they need, right at school."

Media contact: Millie Spencer 0458 755 274 | millie.spencer@minstaff.vic.gov.au