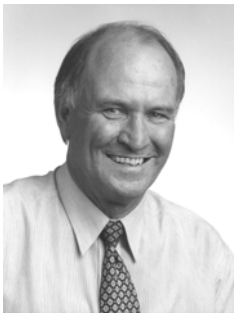

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Media Release

29 July 2010

Support for Dental Medicare grows

Support for having dental work covered by Medicare is growing with the National Oral Health Alliance made up of 14 well respected health service associations calling for political leaders to address the "decaying" state of the Australian dental care system.

The Independent Member for New England, Tony Windsor has been a long time advocate of this proposal and is joining the National Oral Health Alliance and the Australian Greens in calling for more affordable and timely dental services, particularly for low-income Australians who are most likely to suffer from poor oral health.

"The basis of the Greens support is a national Galaxy poll of over 1000 people that shows 82% of Australians would support the Federal Government establishing a universal dental-care scheme.

"A survey of the New England electorate that I conducted in mid 2004 with one of the questions being **'Would you be prepared to pay an increased Medicare Levy from 1.5% to 2% if this higher levy was used to increase bulk billing levels, extend payments for dental care and deliver more medical services?, 8,380 people responded with 81% saying Yes** – 12.5% No – 6.5% Undecided

"In 2006, a petition organised by Bendemeer residents Ruth and Charles Mathews saw thousands of people sign to support the introduction of a 1% levy to pay for a National Dental Health Scheme and the efforts of Armidale dentist, Dr Chris Cole in pushing for a "Denticare" scheme to be introduced should also be recognised.

"As I have said in the past, dental health cannot be separated from overall bodily health.

"If you can't eat properly because of your dental problems, this means you may not be able to get the nutritional needs to be healthy and therefore the flow on costs to the Medicare system can be increased as a result.

"Increasing levies or taxes is always a risk for a Government but I think from the positive response to the surveys and petitions over the years, increasing the Medicare levy if the higher levy was used to extend payments for dental care would be met by most in the community as something they could do to improve our health system.

"Denticare is a program that's time has come," Mr Windsor said.