

QUESTION_ Dental Care_140513

Mr BROCK (Frome) (14:51): My question is to the Minister for Health. Can the minister advise what has been done in the last 100 days to provide and improve dental health services across South Australia?

The Hon. J.J. SNELLING (Playford—Minister for Health and Ageing, Minister for Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Minister for Defence Industries, Minister for Veterans' Affairs) (14:51): I thank the member for Frome for his question. He has been speaking to me regularly, as have the member for Mount Gambier and the member for Whyalla, about access to dental services, particularly in regional South Australia.

The South Australian government is rolling out services under the National Partnership Agreement on treating more public dental patients following an agreement by the commonwealth to an implementation plan for South Australia. The Premier signed a conditional agreement with the commonwealth government on 7 January 2013 providing South Australia's support to the NPA.

Since then, we have been in detailed discussions with the commonwealth to make a deal that would have the biggest impact on dental services in South Australia. South Australia has been offered maximum funding of \$27.7 million over three years from this year. Of this \$27.7 million, South Australia will receive \$5.6 million in this financial year, which will be paid upfront based upon the implementation plan being signed and the provision of a progress report.

This new implementation plan describes activity aimed at reducing existing waiting lists and providing help for people at risk of oral health problems. Funding will make dental services in South Australia even better and will be directed to reducing dental waiting lists. This will include engaging both public and private providers to increase activity.

By the end of May this year the SA Dental Service will have sent out 11,000 offers of general dental care to people on public waiting lists. This is a fivefold increase over the normal rate of about 2,000 offers a month. From May to August 28,000 letters of offers of care will have been sent to public dental patients, compared to 11,200 offers of care the same time last year. These activities will help reduce dental waiting lists which have grown in recent months owing to the closure of the commonwealth's chronic disease dental scheme.

This closure contributed to an increase in demand for general dental care in South Australia by 58 percent over the most recent four months. With confirmation by the federal Minister for Health of funding this week, the average waiting time across the state is expected to reduce to around seven or eight months by December, from the current 12 months.

In the Port Pirie/Clare area, the National Partnership Agreement will allow reductions in waiting times and improve access to dental care for low income earners. South Australia already has one of the most efficient public dental services in the country, with 30 percent more effort than the national average. The government wants to make certain South Australians have timely access to public dental care when they need it, and these extra services will ensure that this continues.