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Aagaard calls for action on national dentist shortages

Minister for Health and Community Services Minister Jane Aagaard will push for the easing of Federal Government restrictions on the recruitment of overseas-trained dentists to help overcome a national dental workforce shortage.

Mrs Aagaard will also call for Commonwealth support for the funding of an increased number of Australian university placements for dentistry at the Australian Health Ministers’ Conference this week.

"There is a shortage of dentists and the Northern Territory is no exception," Mrs Aagaard said.

"I will present a paper addressing the issue of adequacy and timeframes of existing strategies to improve the labour market supply of dentists – in particular in rural and remote Australia where people experience greater difficulties in accessing dental services."

Mrs Aagaard said strategies to improve oral health were critical in improving overall health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who faced greater adversity because of their limited access to dental services in remote and isolated areas.

"As the majority of Aboriginal people in northern Australia live in remote and rural areas, the shortfall has greatest impact on those with the poorest health," Mrs Aagaard said.

"This jurisdiction also has a higher proportion of public sector clientele and more rapid population growth."

Mrs Aagaard said that there were approximately 220 Australian dental graduates every year, but this number would need to increase by 120 each year to develop a self-sufficient dental labour force.

"I will be asking my interstate counterparts, along with the Federal Government to support a proposal for more funded places for dentistry.

"In addition urgent consideration needs to be given to the easing of our restrictions on the recruitment of overseas trained dentists. A comprehensive national approach is required with strategies that fast-track recruitment and direct those dentists into the rural and remote areas and of course the public sector."

Mrs Aagaard said the NT Government had allocated an additional $1.6 million funding to be allocated to oral health services across the next three financial years.