

Dentists receive the drilling

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It has benefitted many [PLHIV](#) [1] Person (or people) Living with HIV. This term is now preferred over the older PLWHA. since it was adopted in 2007, but the Medicare dental rebate scheme is currently receiving full-on root canal surgery.

Created under the former Howard government, the scheme was to cost \$377 million over four years; however, more than \$484 million was claimed last year alone. This budgetary blow-out has forced the current government to employ a task force to audit around 250 dentists.

While a couple of dentists have been exposed as blatantly rorting the system, most have simply been utilising the scheme to provide patients with essential dental care. Unfortunately, unless they have left an immaculate paper trail, many may be forced to repay the government monies they have already claimed on work already done.

The Australian Dental Association (ADA) claims that the scheme, not dentists, should be blamed. ADA president Neil Hewson attests that most incorrect claims were due to administrative errors, and that only a minority were guilty of fraud. 'To place dentists as the demons in this scenario is unjust,' he said.

One dentist who has provided care to a large number of PLHIV claims he is being personally targeted over a simple misunderstanding in his reading of a factsheet provided by Medicare prior to the scheme's commencement. It calls for the dentist to provide a 'written quote or cost estimate' to a patient prior to work being done. While every patient received a verbal cost estimate, he says, the auditors are now requiring proof that it was provided in writing.

'This is not about poor quality of work or even about us over-charging for it,' he said. 'It has come down to nit-picking in an attempt to retract money we have legitimately claimed.'

Federal Human Services Minister Chris Bowen has been quoted as saying: 'Until we can abolish this scheme, it is important that we work to make sure that money claimed incorrectly is paid back to the taxpayer.'

Not all dentists have been prepared to treat PLHIV under the Medicare rebate scheme. It's a pity those who have are getting such a hard time. They deserve our full support.

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Links:

[1] <http://www.napwa.org.au/glossary/term/689>