

Media Release

The Hon James Merlino MP
Acting Premier
Minister for Education
Minister for Mental Health



Tuesday, 27 April 2021

SMILE SQUAD TO VISIT EVEN MORE SCHOOLS FROM TERM TWO

Thousands more Victorian school students will get free dental check-ups, with a major expansion of the Andrews Labor Government's landmark free dental program.

Acting Premier James Merlino and Minister for Health Martin Foley today announced 161 new primary and secondary schools will be invited to take part in *Smile Squad* for Term 2, following a temporary pause during the pandemic.

From Term 2, *Smile Squad* vans will be rolling out to schools in 10 new Local Government Areas: Ararat, Banyule, Bass Coast, Darebin, Monash, Northern Grampians, Southern Grampians, Warrnambool, Yarra and Yarra Ranges.

In total, more than 500 schools will participate in 2021, offering free dental treatment to more than 200,000 Victorian students.

The *Smile Squad* provides free dental care to children across Victoria, saving families hundreds of dollars a year.

The vans provide free check-ups and treatment, including teeth cleaning, fluoride application, fissure sealants, fillings, root canals and any other non-cosmetic treatments to ensure our kids have healthy teeth.

Dental conditions are the highest single cause of preventable hospitalisations for kids under 10 in Victoria.

Smile Squad encourages all Victorian children and their families to keep looking after their oral health by eating well, drinking tap water, and brushing twice a day with fluoride toothpaste.

In March 2020, all non-urgent public dental procedures – including *Smile Squad* vans – were suspended in response to the global pandemic. This necessary year long pause means the program will now be rolled out to all public schools by the end of 2023.

Once fully rolled out, the \$321.9 million free dental care program will offer check-ups and dental treatment to more than 630,000 public school kids every year – saving families time and money.

Quotes attributable to Acting Premier James Merlino

"Smiles Squad gives our kids health smiles and saves parents time and money – so its expansion is great news for families."

"A quarter of children in Victoria have untreated tooth decay – treating it can be expensive. That's why we've brought the dental van back to give kids free, convenient check-ups at schools across the state."

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Martin Foley

"Good dental health is critical for good overall health – that's why we are taking action to prevent tooth decay and keep smiles bright and healthy."