

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP
Leader of the House
Minister for Health
Minister for Health Infrastructure
Minister for Ambulance Services



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CLEAN TEETH (AND TUSKS) AT THE ZOO THESE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

The Allan Labor Government is making sure the animals aren't the only ones with clean teeth these school holidays, with the Smile Squad delivering free dental check-ups to kids at Melbourne Zoo today.

The bright orange Smile Squad vans and the highly skilled teams will also host fun interactive activities, hand out hundreds of free oral health kits, and encourage kids that just like the seals, tigers and wombats, they also need to eat, drink and clean their teeth well.

Oral disease is one of the most common and expensive diseases to treat, but it is also the most preventable.

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

Smile Squad offers students in government primary, secondary and specialist schools free check-ups and treatment – including teeth cleaning, fluoride application, fissure sealants, fillings, and root canals.

While Melbourne Zoo's residents are unable to brush their own teeth, they have learned to voluntarily open their mouths on request from zookeepers, allowing stress-free oral health care.

The animals act as ambassadors for Zoos Victoria's partnership with Dental Health Services Victoria, inspiring the Zoo's youngest visitors who visit for free during school holidays, as well as weekends and public holidays to maintain good oral hygiene.

Across Australia, a quarter of children have untreated tooth decay and in Victoria dental conditions are the highest cause of preventable hospitalisations for children under 10.

Smile Squad has already provided more than 180,000 individual appointments and handed out more than 500,000 oral health packs.

The Labor Government has invested more than \$320 million to roll out Smile Squad to every government school – and a further \$17 million to expand to all low-fee independent and Catholic schools from 2026 – saving parents time and money.

Quote attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"Smile Squad is all about bringing healthy smiles to families wherever they are, and with thousands of Victorians heading to the Zoo during the school holidays, there is no better place for them to visit."

Quote attributable to Dental Health Services Victoria CEO Susan McKee

"We're partnering with Zoos Victoria these school holidays to reach even more Victorian families and ensure even more kids get the advice and care they need to be set up for good oral health for life."

Quote attributable to Zoos Victoria CEO Dr Jenny Gray

"Zoos Victoria has partnered with Dental Health Services Victoria since 2017, with the animals at our four zoos the perfect ambassadors to create awareness about the importance of oral healthcare."