

# Media Release

**The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP**

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Health Infrastructure

Minister for Ambulance Services



Wednesday, 6 August 2024

## IMPROVING EARLY CHILDHOOD DENTAL HEALTH

The Allan Labor Government is ensuring the youngest Victorians have healthy and happy smiles, with the successful *Smiles 4 Miles* program celebrating 20 years of outreach.

Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas congratulated staff and clinicians who have delivered the program to more than 579,000 children at 775 early childhood centres across the state since 2004.

The *Smiles 4 Miles* program works closely with early childhood centres helping them to improve the oral health of preschool aged children and their families by encouraging healthy eating and drinking and good oral hygiene habits.

The program delivers training to early childhood workers to enhance their knowledge of oral health, and also provides practical resources including fact sheets, newsletter inserts and curriculum ideas to childcare centres.

With this support these early childhood centres can offer *Smiles 4 Miles* programs for free to all eligible preschool aged children enrolled with them.

To commemorate 20 years of *Smiles 4 Miles*, Dental Health Services Victoria is awarding a series of grants to local services across the state to help them purchase educational materials such as big teeth models and picture books.

Almost half of all children aged five to ten years old have signs of tooth decay and dental conditions are the highest cause of all potentially preventable hospitalisations in children aged under ten.

The Allan Labor Government is ensuring Victorians have access to oral health care with this year's budget investing more than \$250 million in the state's dental services.

This build on the investment of more than \$321 million over four years in the *Victorian Budget 2019/20* to deliver the School Dental Program which provides free dental care at all government schools.

### Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

*"The earlier we teach our children how to keep their teeth clean, the more likely they are to continue these good habits throughout their life, so the Smiles 4 Miles program is providing an invaluable service to our community."*

*"We're supporting a range of initiatives to improve the oral health of Victorians, including another successful program being Smile Squad, which recently celebrated the milestone of providing oral health care to 100,000 Victorian school students."*