

SUNBURY

# Push to save dental scheme

Barry Kennedy

## MPS SAY AXING OF BENEFITS PROGRAM WOULD HURT REGION

DENTAL care in children could flounder with the potential axing of the child dental benefits scheme, McEwen federal Labor MP Rob Mitchell says.

Mr Mitchell was joined by opposition health spokeswoman Catherine King on a visit to Sunbury Community Health Centre last Monday.

The electorate of McEwen, which includes Sunbury, had the greatest take-up of

the scheme of all Victorian electorates and the second most in the country.

"These cuts will have a devastating impact on the young families in McEwen," Mr Mitchell said.

"Health Department figures show towns and communities in our area were the second highest users of the scheme in Australia."

In 2015, 17,000 families in

McEwen used the scheme, Mr Mitchell said.

Sunbury Community Health chief executive Philip Ripper said while the scheme had not rolled out at the health centre – eligible children are referred to dentists for up to \$1000 of dental care every two years – space had been freed up on the four chairs in the Macedon St community clinic.

Mr Ripper said a direct benefit from the program was a reduction in waiting lists from an estimated 21 months to about 15.

"We took the whole-system approach with this program when it was introduced," he said.

"The leading cause for hospital admissions in children is related to oral health so it is really important.

"What we have found is with less children seeing us we have had more space and seen a lot more adolescents and young adults."

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull told Parliament earlier this month the scheme was under review with only a 30 per cent take up of eligible children using it.

"We have to ensure we are

getting the most effective outcomes for the taxpayers' dollars," Mr Turnbull said.

Ms King said the benefit of the scheme was improving the health of whole families.

"What the Australian Dental Association has told us is that it is reaching children from families who have never accessed dental services before," she said.

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