Australian Dental Association still opposed to possible health fund merger

By DTI

Canberra, Australia: With a population already struggling with poor oral health, the planned merger between HBF and HCF, two of Australia’s largest private health care providers, could mean more pain for the consumer. However, despite the A$4 billion deal being close to receiving approval from the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), the Australian Dental Association (ADA) has continued to be firm in its opposition.

Declaring its commitment to the Australian consumer when the merger was first announced, the ADA recently sent the ACCC a request that the deal be blocked, stating that people should be put before profits and that the dental market should operate in a free and fair manner.

In a previous statement, ADA President Dr Hugo Sachs said that “there is little evidence that consumers are getting adequate value for money when it comes to their private health insurance, yet taxpayers’ funds are underwriting the industry to the sum of A$6 billion per annum in the form of the private health insurance rebate.”

Now, with the ACCC not far from making a decision on the merger, Sachs recently said that, owing to her selective use of data in an article she wrote, no one should trust what Private Healthcare Australia CEO Dr Rachel David says.

Commenting on the article, Sachs said: “Dr David’s selective use of data suggesting that health fund payments for dental services are increasing fails to reflect the fact that while the number of services provided may have increased, the amount rebated by health funds has actually decreased.”

Sachs went on to say that David continues to shift the cause of premium increases towards providers’ fees. However, he noted that dental fees are not the problem, as they have remained below the Consumer Price Index for many years. “With year on year increases in premiums, large profit margins and increasing subsidisation by taxpayers, it’s time that health funds gave back to patients and increased the rebates, not just for dental treatments but across the board.”