

Southern Cross first opened for business in 1961, introducing health insurance to New Zealanders and laying the foundations for one of New Zealand's most enduring, best known and trusted brands. Southern Cross was established because its founders strongly believed New Zealanders should have on-going access to private healthcare options.

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## The biggest Smile yet – free dental care for low income Kiwis

Tuesday, 28 August 2018 by *Campbell Gibson*

Hundreds of low-income adults throughout the country will receive free dental care in mid-September, thanks to a joint campaign by Southern Cross Health Trust and New Zealand Dental Association.

Smile NZ Free Dental Day is now in its fourth year and this year's event is expected to be the largest yet, with 78 dentists volunteering to treat 925 patients.

The free dental days will run from 10–24 September with 55 dental practices from Auckland to Invercargill participating.

People who hold a Community Services Card are eligible. They will be given a 30 to 40 minute appointment for a single dental treatment, and will receive oral health education and a free hygiene pack. Available treatments include fillings, tooth restorations, extractions, fluoride applications and pain relief.

Dentists donate their time while the Southern Cross Health Trust provides funding to the dental practices for the use of their premises, equipment and dental assistants.

Southern Cross Health Trust Chief Executive Terry Moore says appointments for Smile NZ are filled each year, showing the high level of demand for dental care among low income adults.

"There are virtually no government subsidies for adult dental care, apart from some services provided by WINZ and some DHBs. Combine this with the cost of care, and it means dental treatment is difficult to access for many people who already struggle to make ends meet. Smile NZ is one of the ways we fulfil our aim of making healthcare more accessible for Kiwis."

New Zealand Dental Association Chief Executive David Crum says he would like to thank the dentists volunteering their time and expertise to help make this event the largest since it started.

"Smile NZ changes hundreds of people's lives each year, whether it's allowing people to be more proud of their smile or alleviating pain. This wouldn't be possible without the dentists who are generously volunteering 365 hours of their own time."

Lower Hutt dentist David Excell, who is participating in Smile NZ, says it is unfortunate that dentistry has almost become a luxury service for some.

"I think all dentists realise there are a huge number of people in our communities who are struggling to just pay the bills and get by. Dentist fees for adults are not subsidised by the government, unlike doctor fees. It's rewarding, and humbling, to be able take part in the Smile NZ Free Dental Days, providing what is often a simple treatment that helps relieve pain and make life a little easier. It's priceless really."

Thanks to Smile NZ, from 2015 to 2017 more than 2,200 people have benefitted from hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of dental treatment provided by more than 200 dentists.

Bookings are essential, so patients must call 0800 FREE SMILE/0800 373 376. Appointments will be available on a first-come first-served basis and many are already full.

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