

Date:

25 May 2001

Subject

NIB to put smile on 20,000 Sydney faces

More than 20,000 Sydney-based NIB Health Fund members will benefit each year from services available at the health insurer's first Dental & Eye Care Centre in the city's CBD.

The Federal Minister for Health & Aged Care, The Hon. Dr Michael Wooldridge MP, officially opened the Dental & Eye Care Centre today.

The Centre, located at 333 George St, is the culmination of almost 10 years of development work, and represents a significant asset for the fund's fast-growing membership base across greater Sydney.

The Dental & Eye Care Centre provides fund members with dental and optical services at minimal cost, with some diagnostic dental services provided at benefit cost, which means no out-of-pocket expenses for members.

Dr Wooldridge congratulated NIB on embracing business development strategies that were making private health cover an attractive option for more and more Australians.

"This is a clear example of a health fund using the benefits derived from recent Federal Government initiatives as a platform for sustained membership growth based on delivery of improved services for members," Dr Wooldridge said.

"NIB is to be congratulated for its commitment to providing its members with greater access to essential health services at substantially reduced costs, thereby making a valuable contribution to the public/private health mix."

NIB's Managing Director, Mr Colin Rogers, told today's official opening that the facility represented a multi-million investment in the fund's Sydney-based membership.

"This facility is designed to deliver quality services in the two areas of highest demand: dental and optical services, and our experience in the first 10 weeks of operation certainly reflects this," Mr Rogers said.

"The Dental Centre has performed more than 3500 services since we opened the doors on March 12, with 500 bookings confirmed in the first week of operation. In the co-located Eye Care Centre, we have been handling well over 200 optical patients a week.

"On these figures and our list of bookings, this centre will become the largest and busiest of any of NIB's subsidiary businesses and a major force in the respective dental and optical services markets."

The Sydney Dental & Eye Care Centre is NIB's second joint operation of this type.

Its first co-located facility in Newcastle was established three years ago and is now handling almost 30,000 dental patients and 10,000 optical patients a year.

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Media Release

"NIB's membership growth in the greater Sydney region over the past 18 months has been among the strongest of any health fund," Mr Rogers said.

For the 12 months to March 2001, NIB's total membership growth was 31.4%, well above the industry average of 26%*.

"Our success has been based around delivery of first-class health care services at affordable prices, and we are delighted to be able to offer greater diversity and convenience to our Sydney-based membership." In 49 years of operation, NIB has grown from modest beginnings in Newcastle to become the fourth largest health insurer in NSW and one of the top six in Australia.

NIB Health Funds provides national coverage through a network of almost 50 branches from Queensland through to South Australia together with a growing network of agencies.

* Private Health Insurance Administrative Council (PHIAC) membership figures at end March 2001.

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