



## SA Dental Service

### Client Survey 2010-11: Summary of Findings

SA Dental Service is committed to regularly monitoring, reviewing and improving the quality and safety of services provided to its clients.

Conducting a client survey was seen as one way in which client experiences could be captured and the results used to inform continuous improvement activities.

Agreement to focus the 2010-11 survey on the interface between consumer rights and informed decision-making resulted from consultation with the Consumer Advisory Panel and SA Dental Service senior managers.

Rights relating to Safety, Communication, Participation and Comment provided the framework for the survey. These rights were referenced from the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights. This Charter describes rights which are considered essential in ensuring that wherever and whenever care is provided, it is of high quality and safe.

In SA Dental Service, these particular rights are reflected in a belief that the core minimum service expectations for clients who access public dental care should include

- gaining a clear understanding of their dental situation
- being informed of their treatment options and possible risks
- being informed of associated costs
- providing consent
- being provided with professional, timely and caring treatment.

**The SA Dental Service Client Survey 2010-11 therefore sought to ascertain the level of importance clients place on these service features, in addition to gaining an idea of the extent to which these components actually occur in practice from the client's perspective.**

To this end, a random sample of 3,000 clients who were recently seen at a SA Dental Service clinic were surveyed. Of the 3,000 surveys distributed, 1,282 (43%) were completed and returned.

There were positive results in many areas . . . . .

Ninety eight percent (98%) of School Dental Service (SDS) and 96% of Adelaide Dental Hospital (ADH) / Community Dental Service (CDS) respondents agreed that the service components identified by SA Dental Service as central to good practice, were indeed important.

In response to a set of questions which tested "this is what happened for me", 90.5% of SDS and 85.8% of adult respondents (ADH / CDS) indicated that these service components were in evidence from their experience.

Further, 89.2% of SDS and 78.9% of ADH / CDS respondents registered overall high levels of satisfaction with the information provided about their treatment.

Of the 1,282 respondents, 682 (53%) also added free text comments, of which 466 (68%) were positive.

The positive comments made by respondents regarding their service experience generally highlighted the provision of clear, informative and timely communication. These favourable experiences were noted as being further enhanced by the accompanying positive and respectful attitude conveyed by clinicians and administrative staff.

These comments were consistent regardless of whether a respondent accessed a general or emergency course of care; whether or not a copayment applied; or whether the service was provided by an SDS, CDS or the ADH.

### ... whilst achieving good results in other areas remains a challenge

For 200 (29%) respondents who commented that their experience was unsatisfactory, it was not surprising that they expressed directly opposite views about staff and the service provided because the expected, positive attributes associated with attitude, behaviour and/or practice were perceived to be absent.

#### Specifically

- 20.3% of SDS and 16.8% of ADH / CDS respondents claimed they were not made aware of the ways in which they could pay for their dental care, although for many SDS clients a copayment did not apply
- 10.5% of SDS and 16.9% of ADH / CDS respondents claimed they were not informed of any foreseeable risks associated in having or not having recommended dental treatment
- 21.1% of SDS and 20.0% of ADH / CDS respondents claimed they were not made aware that they could ask for their / their child's treatment to cease and would be advised of the consequences of doing so
- 20.4% of ADH / CDS respondents claimed that they were not made aware that, if appropriate and manageable, they could have someone with them for support during treatment.

Based on an analysis of all SA Dental Service client feedback, the main triggers for client complaints are

- limited access to services (including waiting periods and waiting list processes)
- difficulties with clinical treatment / treatment pathways and system navigation
- poor communication / staff attitude
- use of the Relative Needs Index (RNI - a questionnaire-based tool used to prioritise and equitably manage service demand)
- being treated by students
- treatment costs (including payment processes).

Whilst some of these issues reflect deliberate organisational, service management strategies, the negative experiences described by survey respondents nonetheless

reinforced that these service aspects are indeed the main reasons for client dissatisfaction.

### Summary of findings

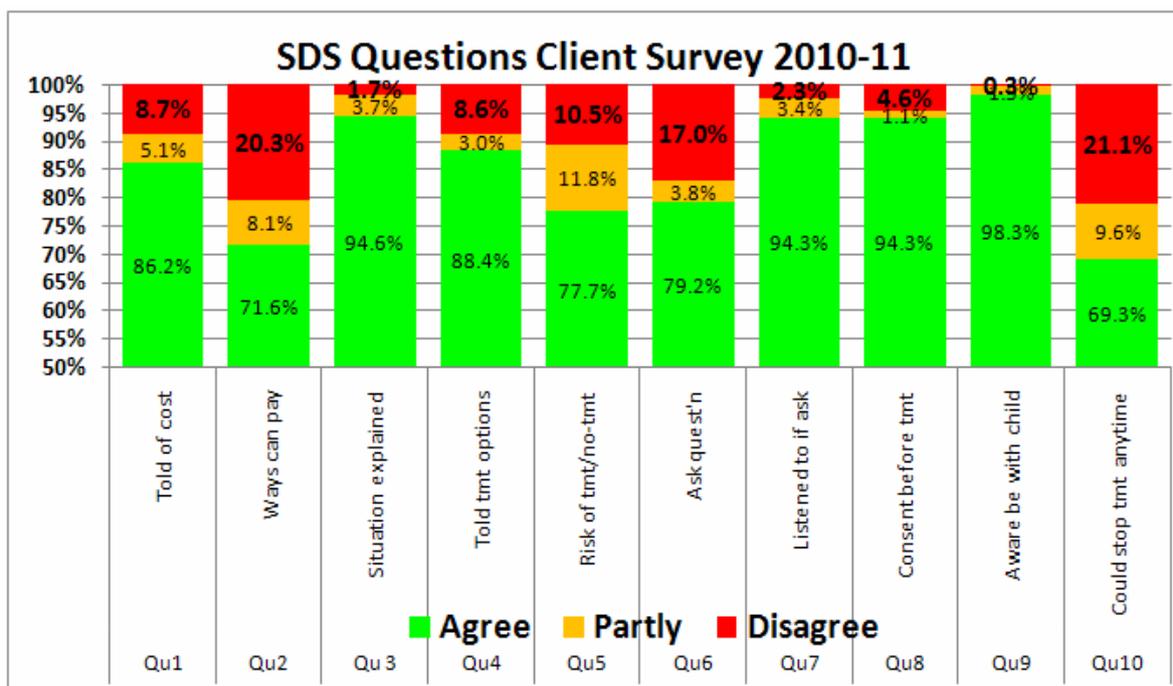
In summary, the survey results

- provide substantial feedback from respondents indicating that the core minimum service components referred to in the survey are important to and expected by clients and that clients will respond negatively where these service features are not evidenced in practice
- indicate that implementation of these service dimensions is variable across the organisation. This remains the case even when allowing for the questionable outcomes which inadvertently resulted because of the deliberate inclusion of two negatively worded survey questions. The framing of these two questions is considered to have compromised the interpretation of survey results to some extent. Hence caution is required when considering the associated responses.

The 2010-11 survey results reinforce that SA Dental Service is correctly focused on implementing the referred to key service features. However, they also indicate that if SA Dental Service is to increase the consistency and quality of service, there is room for improvement across all clinics related to informing clients of their rights, service delivery processes and associated costs.

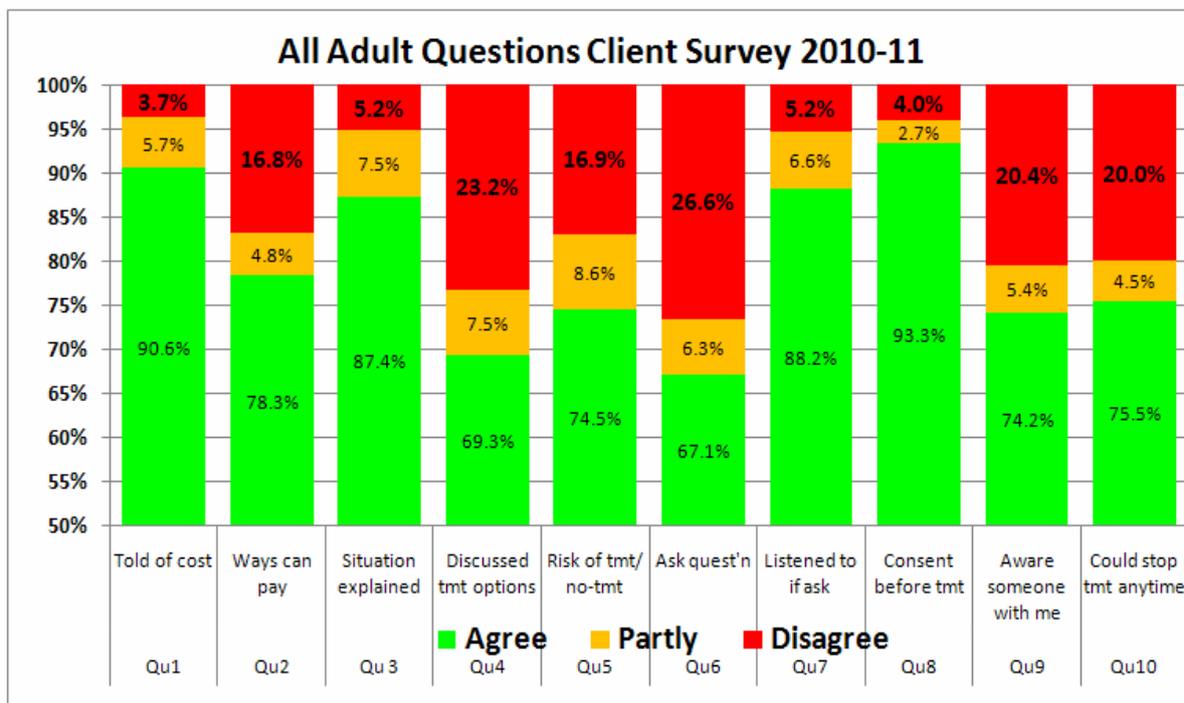
The following two figures identify areas requiring attention in order to improve service interactions with clients across SA Dental Service.

**Figure 1: This is what happened for me: Proportion Agreement with Statements (Parents of children - School Dental Service (SDS) clinics)**



Note Y-axis scale commences at 50% for readability

**Figure 8: This is what happened for me: Proportion Agreement with Statements (Adults – Community Dental Service Clinics and Adelaide Dental Hospital)**  
*Note Y-axis scale commences at 50% for readability*



## Recommendations

To enhance highly valued good practice, it was recommended that senior practitioners, clinical leaders and managers in particular, actively promote and reinforce in everyday practice, implementation of the core service components identified as integral to effective service provision ie

- clarity regarding dental diagnosis, treatment options, possible risks and associated treatment costs
- obtaining informed consent
- providing professional, timely and caring treatment.

Specifically, clinicians and/or administrative staff need to ensure that

- all clients are made aware of the ways in which they can pay for their dental care, or similarly advised where a copayment does not apply
- adults in particular are informed of any foreseeable risks associated in having or not having recommended dental treatment
- all clients are informed that they can ask for their / their child's treatment to cease and will be advised of the consequences of doing so
- adults in particular are made aware that, if appropriate and manageable, they can have someone with them for support during treatment.

To enhance service quality, it was recommended that the SA Dental Service Executive

- draws attention to the survey results and reinforces the expectation that customer service principles must drive best practice in relation to interpersonal communication and clinical interventions
- cultivates a culture that seeks out and welcomes feedback
- ensures that issues are promptly addressed as they arise in keeping with SA Dental Service client feedback and complaints management procedures
- ensures that ineffective staff performance in relation to clients is actively managed
- ensures that training for all staff regarding good customer service remains on the training agenda.

**SA Dental Service sincerely thanks the 1,282 people who completed the 2010-11 client survey. The feedback was invaluable and will be used to help improve services.**