

## BUSINESS

# COVID-19: Gold Coast dental roll-up forced to retract statement that all staff were to be stood down

**Embattled dental group Smiles Inclusive has been forced to make an embarrassing backflip after telling staff last night that they had been stood down.**

Alister Thomson, Business Editor, Gold Coast Bulletin

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[EMBATTLED dental group Smiles Inclusive](#) has been forced to make an embarrassing backflip after telling staff last night that they had been stood down.

The Burleigh-based company, which operates about 50 clinics under the Totally Smiles banner mostly across the east coast, told workers last night that the company had been forced to “stand down all staff effective immediately”.

“The first attachment is a letter for casual employees informing them they will no longer be rostered,” the email reads.

“The second attachment is a letter informing full-time and part-time employees of the stand down.”



 John Camacho. (AAP Image/Richard Waugh)

## [SMILES INCLUSIVE: RIVAL 1300 SMILES BUYS TWO PRACTICES FROM GROUP](#)


However, this afternoon CEO Tony McCormack sent another message apologising for the email and stating it came from a “misunderstanding”.

He said the business was planning for a transition to a shutdown due to reduced bookings from patients.

“The next phase is a progressive stand down of full and part-time staff. However, this is intended to be in conjunction with JVP’s, principal dentists and practice managers.”

Like most industries, dentistry is under pressure because of the COVID-19 pandemic.



 Patient bookings are down in the wake of COVID-19. Photo: iStock

## SMILES INCLUSIVE: DISGRUNTLED DENTISTS THREATEN CLASS ACTION

Dental practices are classified as essential. However, The Australian Dental Association has issued advice asking members to restrict its procedures to treatment that does not generate an aerosol, which removes 90 per cent of emergency procedures.


Dr Philip Makepeace, who runs Totally Smiles Bundaberg, said the email was sent to him by a member of his staff.

“It created an immediate reaction,” he said.

“I was notified by a member of my staff who was basically beside herself, very emotional.

“The general feeling (of staff) was they have not stood us down, they have fired us.”



 Patient bookings have dropped off for Totally Smiles clinics. Photo: iStock

Dr Makepeace said he had since been assured it was a mistake and should not have been sent.

“They have now said we can continue under the ADA guidelines at our discretion.”

He said he would close as of midday today and does not plan to reopen until the first week of May.

“They (Smiles) are not prepared to keep the doors open and pay staff and they are expecting emergency treatment to be done by call in (on call staff) and I’ve elected not to participate partly for logistic reasons and partly for medical reasons.”

He said patients would be referred to other providers in the area.

Dr John Camacho, who runs Smiles clinics in Western Australia and has been a vocal critic of management, said staff were “despondent” following the email.

“They are lacking any understanding or insight in terms of how they can treated this way without any guidance or heads up,” he said.

“One moment you are told they are stood down and a few hours later an email is sent out to half-retract what you are told to say you can continue working along the lines of profitability.

“That is not what you do in health.”

Smile shares are in a [trading halt](#) as the company still has not filed its half-year results.

In FY19 the company [slumped to a \\$31 million net loss](#).