



SMILE: Kasey Watson receives advice from Dr Helen Milner at Casuarina Dental Clinic yesterday. The NT Government has vowed to cut long-term dental waiting lists. Picture: STUART WALMSLEY

\$1.5m 'blitz' on dental waiting lists

By **NICK CALACOURAS**

A FAILURE to recruit dentists to the Territory has left 4500 people waiting for an appointment for up to four years.

Health Minister Kon Vatskalis yesterday launched a blitz to attack these waiting lists over the next six months.

"We're going to hit the

waiting list and hit it hard," he said.

Aspen Medical were awarded a \$1.5 million contract to perform the blitz of 1350 patients — ensuring that up to 4000 mouths will be treated in total.

The blitz is expected to reduce the waiting list by at least a third.

Mr Vatskalis said Alice Springs had no difficulties recruiting

dentists and had filled all positions — leaving only 150 people on the waiting list.

He said it baffled him that Alice Springs could find dentists but they were as "rare as hen's teeth" in Darwin.

"It could be the perception, it could be they could earn a lot more money down south rather than come to Darwin," he said.

Mr Vatskalis said only people needing long-term treatment were on the waiting list.

Those needing emergency treatment — including a toothache — should see a GP and be referred to a private dentist, and have the cost covered by Medicare.

"People with a toothache can be seen very very quickly," he said.