

## What oral health services do rural communities think they need?

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The Rural ECOH study is underway in six Australian rural communities across Victoria and Queensland. The study was designed to systematically and robustly evaluate the usefulness of 'Remote Service Futures'; an evidence-based method of community participation that has been successfully used in the United Kingdom. Using oral health as a focus, the study aimed to invite local people to actively engage in discussions about what their community needed and contribute to the design of fully costed, evidence based strategies to address oral health challenges.

The 'Remote Service Futures' method consists of a structured workshop series and planning tool to capture community views, evaluate evidence relevant to a health issue and culminates in a planning exercise to develop an oral health plan. The developed plan is then implemented and community members monitor implementation. The co-design approach enables communities to determine what is most important to them, rather than relying on a one size fits all approach. In this presentation we will discuss the experience of engaging with the communities, themes from the workshops and present the oral health plans designed by the communities.

To date this three-year study has generated extensive evidence on the value of communities working together to bring different perspectives on the issue of oral health. The study contributes to knowledge on testing new methods for collaborative health planning. Evidence of the impacts of community participation on health planning has relevance at policy and practice levels.