Providing a remote area dental health service for Aboriginal and regional communities

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Aim: Aboriginal people living in remote communities have difficulty accessing dental care, driven by issues of affordability and geographic location. The RFDS in WA has embarked on the development of a Remote Area Dental Health Service (RADS) to try to address these needs.

Approach: While the RADS project is in its early development phase, our approach is planned to be two pronged:

• working in partnership with dental health services to identify and address gaps in current dental health service provision to remote communities with available dental clinic infrastructure

• seeking to fund and trial the delivery of dental health services from a mobile dental unit, which will provide RFDSWO dental teams with direct access into remote communities without dental clinic infrastructure.

Relevance: The RADS mobile unit will allow the provision of local, affordable high-quality dental service, including oral health advice, preventative care and simple routine dental care, and also provide a referral service for more complex dental procedures.

It is thought that the early phases of the project will see a focus on acute, interventional dental care with a shift towards prevention and maintenance of good oral dental care over time.


Results: In 2011–12 a pilot program providing a visiting dentist to Roebourne was such a success that after further discussions with dental health services, funding was made available to provide regular clinics in Wiluna and Warburton communities.

In six months the dental team conducted 10 clinics, saw over 500 patients and performed over 2200 dental procedures. The RADS is expected to continue to grow over the coming year and expand into other areas.

During 2012 RFDS developed a corporate partnership with Karara Mining to fund the purchase of a mobile dental clinic and the delivery of a dental and PHC service to residents across the mid-west region of WA. Pending successful application for supporting funding, the project is expected to be implemented in the second quarter of 2013.
Conclusion: The goal of the Remote Area Dental Service is improved oral health for Indigenous people, leading to improvements in general health and quality of life. We look forward to sharing the results of our RADS journey.