

Collaborative partnership to implement oral health care into primary health care

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Most up to date universal thinking strongly advocates that 'health' should be inclusive of oral health; something not traditionally embraced by the general health sector. An integrated partnership approach is needed to reduce the risk of oral disease and promote good oral health.

Poor and untreated dental decay can affect quality of life including our ability to eat, drink and speak; social confidence and self esteem and directly impact on our general health as we get older. Dental caries is the single most common chronic disease of childhood. Around 50% of pre-school aged children in Australia have already had some experience of tooth decay by the time they commence school. There is a strong link between socio-economic status and health which is often reflected in patterns of oral health and disease. Aboriginal children have on average twice the dental decay rates as non-Aboriginal children and are estimated to be up to 4 times higher in remote and very remote areas. Oral disease is a preventable condition but prevention must be started early.

In partnership with a government remote oral health service (GROHS), a non-government rural and remote health service (NGRRHS) has utilised the GROHS's training package to train registered non-oral health professionals across Queensland. Training has been delivered by both a face to face theory and practical workshop and through online theory modules with a shortened face to face practical workshop.

Child and Family Health/Clinical Nurse Specialists, Community Nurses, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners, Remote Nurses, General Practitioners and Paediatricians are much better placed than oral health professionals to access, engage and guide new parents in their communities about the importance of oral health. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners, in particular, have significant potential to improve oral health outcomes for their families and their communities.

Inclusion of a Lift the Lip oral health risk assessment, the provision of age relevant anticipatory guidance/oral health messages and the application of fluoride varnish in Early Childhood Health Checks is an acknowledgement of the importance of good oral health from an early age in primary health care.

The NGRRHS's engagement with its stakeholders sees remote health care staff being trained in the underpinning oral health knowledge and practical skills that will enable them to effectively complete these oral health components.

The Program is a population health program based on a continuum of preventive oral health care. NGRRHS has faced a number of challenges in delivering the full range of preventive oral health strategies to Queensland children. The presentation will discuss these challenges; however it will present the considerable achievements that have been realised by working in partnership with the GROHS, Queensland dental authorities and with our remote health stakeholders.