



Royal Flying Doctor Service SOUTH EASTERN SECTION

Media Release

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National Dental Health Week - Flying Doctor Says Alternative Delivery Models Can Improve Dental Health in the Bush

If oral health provision in rural and remote Australia is to improve, Government and health service providers will need to think beyond traditional, fixed location metropolitan models of delivery, say the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS).

During National Dental Health Week (August 4- 11) the RFDS is highlighting the inequity in oral health and access to services that exists between metropolitan and rural/ remote Australia.

The number of practising dentists per 100,000 people is 57 in NSW metropolitan areas and 34 in inner regional areas, dropping to 18 and 11 in outer regional and remote/ very remote areas.¹

This pattern is reflected in the oral health of NSW children aged 5- 6 years. In outer regional and remote/ very remote areas, the mean number of primary and permanent teeth decayed, missing, or filled because of dental caries is double that in metropolitan areas.²

A fresh approach to dental delivery

Lyn Mayne, Senior Dentist at the RFDS South Eastern Section since 1998 maintains that the RFDS mobile and fly-in fly-out clinics are examples of a fresh approach to the delivery of oral health services to people in the bush in an economic, efficient way.

“We took the view if we can fly in a doctor to conduct clinics in remote communities, we could fly in a dentist at the same time.”

“The South Eastern Section has operated a full-time dental service out of Broken Hill since 1998, and The Outback Oral Treatment and Health (TOOTH) program from our Dubbo Base since 2012. Both testify to the viability of the mobile dental model. Dentists also travel on our week-long “fly-in fly-out” clinics visiting remote stations and towns not regularly serviced by the RFDS.”

“Between them, they delivered dental services to some 4,400 patients through 566 clinics in 22 locations during 2012/13. In both locations we have significantly improved the dental health of the patients using our service.”

“Access is important as dental problems can also affect general health, leading to problems with diabetes, stroke, heart problems, pneumonia and low birth weight in babies.”

¹ The Australian Dental Association, National Dental Update, August 2005

http://www.ada.org.au/app_cmslib/media/lib/0702/m44830_v1_access%20to%20rural%20oral%20health%20careaugust05.pdf

² NSW Health, *Oral Health 2020: A Strategic Framework for Dental Health in NSW* pg 4

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/oralhealth/Documents/oral-health-2020.pdf>

The RFDS is the only organisation with the infrastructure to provide more rural and remote Australians with the oral healthcare they need. Its nationwide network of 21 RFDS bases and over 60 aircraft delivers health services to remote and isolated areas across 90 per cent of Australia's land mass.

"The RFDS has developed expertise in delivering a range of mobile oral health clinics nationally," said Greg Sam, Chief Executive Officer of the RFDS South Eastern Section.

"We would like to see an expanded network of mobile and fly-in fly-out clinics supported by stable, long-term investment,"

"The only way to turn the statistics around is to provide access to oral healthcare for all Australians, regardless of where they live."

- ENDS -

For more information or photographs, contact

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Notes to Editors

RFDS oral health services include:

- A partnership with the University of Adelaide to provide oral health services to 5 remote areas in South Australia;
- Providing the means and coordination for students from the University of Melbourne and volunteer dentists to provide outreach services in Victoria;
- The QCoal Community Dental Service travelling around rural and remote Queensland;
- A partnership with the WA Government to provide much needed services to 5 remote areas in Western Australia; and
- the TOOTH (The Outback Oral Treatment and Health) program, launched in 2012 in partnership with the Investec and Gonski foundations, providing fly-in clinics for urgent and preventative dental care to 1,600 residents of remote NSW.

Nationally, Australians aged 15 or older living outside capital cities have poorer dental health than their city counterparts - they have higher rates of periodontal disease and tooth decay, they have 25 per-cent more missing teeth and are 1.7 times more likely to have no natural teeth.

Children living in rural and remote areas experience between 25 to 30 per-cent more dental caries than metropolitan children aged 11 – 12 years and 25 – 30 per-cent more extreme disease experienced in 'baby' teeth.

Available data tells us that while there are over 90 oral health professionals per 100,000 people in metropolitan areas of Australia, there are only 37 oral health professionals per 100,000 people in remote and very remote Australia (AIHW, 2011)

ABOUT THE ROYAL FLYING DOCTOR SERVICE

The not-for-profit Royal Flying Doctor Service has been taking the finest care to the furthest corners of Australia since 1928. The service provides 24 hour emergency cover to 90% of the Australian continent, via a modern fleet of specially equipped aircraft. In the past year, the South Eastern Section flew the equivalent of 6.5 round trips to the moon as it facilitated over 4,700 clinics, took over 5,000 telehealth calls, had over 54,000 patient contacts and transported almost 8,600 patients.