



Media Release

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New TOOTH dental therapist aims to brush up Outback dental health

A year ago Prashiela Shandil was completing her Bachelor's degree in Oral Health at Otago University in New Zealand, never dreaming she would end up in the Australian Outback, let alone work for the iconic Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) on The Outback Oral Therapy and Health (TOOTH) program.

"It's an amazing opportunity and a million miles from where I'd thought I'd be a year ago," said Prashiela who has spent time in both Australia and New Zealand while growing up and completing her education.

"I am passionate about improving oral health and want to use my skills in areas where they are most needed and from that perspective the indigenous participation rate of 49% in the TOOTH program made this role very attractive."

Prashiela has some big boots to fill. Her predecessor, Rebecca Hovington, was widely praised for her tireless community work and played a big part in TOOTH's success.

"I am thrilled at being able to continue the work of the TOOTH program, not only with the children, but by providing hygiene and oral health education to the many adults who suffer with chronic diseases too."

Launched in 2012, the unique public/private \$2.5m partnership between the Investec Foundation, the Gonski Foundation and the RFDS' South Eastern Section (RFDS SE) aims to improve the oral health of some of NSW's most vulnerable and remote communities.

When TOOTH began, significant levels of untreated dental decay, some five times higher than the national average, were discovered in both adults and children in Central Western NSW. During the past three years the program has held 695 clinics and treated almost 5,000 patients in the communities of Bourke, Collarenebri, Goodooga and Lightning Ridge, where access to dental care was either non-existent or extremely challenging.

Data from the past three years shows a decrease in untreated dental decay in both adult and child patients and a substantial overall improvement in dental health in all four locations. In just three years the program has halved the decay in children attending TOOTH clinics and established a consistently declining pattern of decay in adults.

New 2015 first-quarter data shows a continuation of those positive trends with TOOTH providing comprehensive care to an additional 360 patients at 57 clinics.

"Compared to previous quarters we are also now seeing less patients whose last dental visit was more than two years ago, signifying that patients are now visiting the dentist more often," said TOOTH dentist, Dr Kah Chong.

"Patients are now looking forward to having complete courses of treatment, rather than just making emergency visits. With the continuation of TOOTH Program, we look forward to being able to provide ongoing oral health care and education,"

“Although the improvement in children’s oral health has been more pronounced, we are making progress with the adult population too. The adult decayed, missing, and filled teeth (DMFT) score (used by dentists to assess oral health in populations) decreased slightly from last quarter, a trend that has now continued for eight quarters.”

“The positive results achieved by TOOTH demonstrate the positive benefits of good dental access, but also highlights the need for ongoing oral health services to these remote areas.”

Contrary to recent media reporting, the TOOTH program will not be closing. Despite the end of seed funding by Investec Foundation and the Gonski Foundation, the RFDS will continue to operate clinic services as normal.

“The South Eastern Section will continue to fund the TOOTH program with support from our donors, while we continue discussions with potential corporate, charity and community partners, as well as the state and Federal governments,” said Greg Sam, Chief Executive Officer of the RFDS SE.

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For more information or photographs, contact:
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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 6.25 round trips to the moon as it conducted over 5,000 clinics, took over 6,000 telehealth calls, had over 53,000 patient contacts and transported almost 8,400 patients.