



Media Release

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## Going the Extra Mile for Bright Smiles

By raising over \$23 million since its inception in 1990 the Outback Car Trek (OBT), a week-long event featuring over 100 pre-1978 cars, has become a major fundraiser for the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). The 27<sup>th</sup> OBT leaves Narrabri on Sunday, 5 June bound for Port Douglas in Far North Queensland.

At the other end of the spectrum “Bright Smiles,” an OBT offshoot event featuring some 20 motorbike riders, takes to the road this Thursday (April 28) for an inaugural four-day bitumen event.

Starting at Wiseman’s Ferry, just north of Sydney, the riders will travel 1,000 kms through Quirindi, Dubbo and Mudgee, by way of some picturesque back roads, before finishing up at Windsor on Monday, May 2. They are aiming to raise \$50,000 to support, The Outback Oral Therapy and Health (TOOTH) program, part of the RFDS South Eastern Section’s (RFDS SE) oral health service.

“The OBT directly supported the TOOTH program for a few years and when one of our regular Trekkers with connections to the oral health industry suggested we continue to support it, I didn’t need much persuading,” said OBT and Bright Smiles organiser Bill Patrick.

“We are looking to grow the event over the next few years to some 40- 50 riders so we can continue to support the great work this program is doing.”

“The riders will be visiting the RFDS SE Base at Dubbo to meet the TOOTH team, look over an aircraft and inspect the base facilities.”

Launched in 2012 as a unique public/private partnership between the Investec Foundation, the Gonski Foundation and the RFDS’ South Eastern Section (RFDS SE), the program’s aim is 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. Since its inception the TOOTH program has provided over 1,100 clinics and treated almost 7,000 patients in the communities of Bourke, Collarenebri, Goodooga and Lightning Ridge, where access to dental care was either non-existent or extremely challenging.

Data 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 the first three years the program halved the decay in children attending TOOTH clinics and established a consistently declining pattern of decay in adults.

“Those smiles will not only be brighter because the money is going towards better oral health, but because that will translate directly into better overall health,” said TOOTH dentist Dr Kah Chong.

“Our research shows oral disease, particularly when left untreated, is associated with certain cardiovascular diseases, respiratory illnesses, and other chronic diseases. Other common conditions such as endocarditis (inflammation of the lining of the heart), stroke, aspiration pneumonia, diabetes, kidney disease, and some adverse pregnancy outcomes, are also associated with poor oral health.”

“We are very keen to get the message out into the community as I don’t think most people understand just how much poor oral health can impact them.’

Despite the work of the TOOTH program and the RFDS SE’s other dental health clinics which have been operating for over two decades, there are still large oral health and dental care access disparities between those living in remote, rural or regional areas and those in the cities. These were highlighted by the 2015 *Filling the Gap* report released by the RFDS. They found:

- **Childhood cavities** are 55% higher for remote area children than children in major cities, and the number of filled teeth in remote area is double that of city children.
- **Tooth Decay:** A quarter (23%) of adults in major cities have untreated tooth decay, but this rises to one third (37%) of remote area residents;
- **Indigenous:** More than half (57%) of Indigenous Australians have one or more teeth affected by decay;
- **Visits to the Dentist:** Six in ten (63%) major city adults visited a dentist in a year, compared to little more than four in ten (45%) visiting a dentist in remote areas;
- **Extractions:** One in three (33%) remote area residents had a tooth extraction in a year compared to little more than one in ten (12%) people from major cities;
- **Lack of Dentists:** Cities have three times as many working dentists than country areas, with 72 dentists for every 100,000 people in cities compared to only 22 for every 100,000 people in the country.

“These statistics are a stark reminder of the impact of poor oral health in rural communities through insufficient access to dental health services. It’s making people sick and is entirely preventable,” said Greg Sam, Chief Executive Officer of the RFDS SE.

“The RFDS SE’s goal for the period 2015- 19 is to reduce the well-documented gap in health and wellness between those living in remote, rural and regional areas and those in cities, but we can’t do it alone.”

“To that end the Bright Smiles fundraiser is a welcome addition to the great fundraising work that Bill and all the Outback Car Trek participants already do on our behalf and will help the Flying Doctor put bright smiles on many more faces over the coming years.”

To support the Bright Smiles fundraiser go to <https://everydayhero.com.au/event/brightsmilescharityride2016>

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For more information or photographs, contact:

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### **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 conducted almost 5,000 clinics, took over 6,400 telehealth calls, had over 53,500 patient contacts and transported almost 8,500 patients.

