

Alliance for a Cavity Free Future: Community Grant 2015

"Dental caries prevention and treatment for children in out of home care"

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Brief Summary

Project Aims: To develop and embed an oral-health module into an online professional development resource to address needs identified by key stakeholders to educate and promote the importance of oral health to the professional carers (both residential and foster carers) who look after young people in out-of-home care (OOHC).

Brief Background: Young people in OOHC are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in Australia; it is not surprising therefore, that their healthy eating and oral health are compromised. But carers can underestimate the health needs of children in their care, and lack the knowledge or motivation to identify health needs or change health behaviours. This signals a need to develop evidenced-based tools and support materials that build the capacity of carers to establish effective healthy eating and oral health regimes to prevent and/or manage oral health issues in the young people they look after.

Project Summary: This project involved working across institutions and bringing together stakeholders from Department Human Services, Dental Health Services Victoria, and Community Service Organisations (CSOs) with the aim of improving the oral health in children in OOHC. Focus groups were run to collect information from residential workers and foster carers about their current knowledge and attitudes about oral health. Stakeholder meetings were run to identify opportunities for greater inter- and intra-institutional collaboration to achieve efficiencies in children's access, tracking, and treatment completions. An oral-health module was developed in consultation with CSOs and carers for use as a professional development module in induction or ongoing PD programs including the efficacious Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) program. The draft oral-health module is an interactive module, designed for online delivery, which responds to needs identified in focus groups. The following topics are included: Importance of good oral health; Departmental Dental Policy; Consequences of poor oral health; Dental decay: Progression and development; Avoiding dental decay; Other problems (dental erosion, gum disease, tooth trauma); Techniques to improve cooperation in children; Additional resources. Ethics approval for the focus groups and a pilot study of the effectiveness of the oral-health module in improving a range of outcomes was obtained from Department Health and Human Services and Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee. Assessments were developed to assess staff learning against core competencies, including knowledge (pre-post quizzes were built in to the oral-health module); oral health and dietary behaviours (pre-post audits of oral hygiene equipment, oral hygiene regimes, and shopping receipts will be used as a proxy measure of household diet); children's oral health (pre-post in-house oral health examinations (dmft/DMFT, bleeding on probing, plaque/debris) will be generously conducted by DHSV dental providers. The pilot study of the oral-health module has been designed and will commence in 2018.

Following successful piloting, further focus groups will be used to provide feedback from carers re module content and accessibility. Feedback will also be sought from participating CSOs and dental providers. The module will be modified and a final version embedded with the online HEAL resource as well as being made available to organisations expressing interest.

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