

## **Assessing the barriers for improvement to oral health for Colac-Otway adolescents**

Large numbers of adolescents within the Colac Area Health area (Colac-Otway region of Victoria, Australia) do not seek dental care and those attending community dental clinics experience alarming rates of dental caries. While attendance rates are decreasing, caries rates are subsequently increasing. Untreated dental caries is an increased burden to the health care system and leads to absenteeism from school, disruptive behaviours and health co-morbidities.

The aim of this study was to identify any barriers for improvement to oral health for Colac-Otway adolescents.

The project was delivered by a collaboration between Barwon Health and Colac Area Health Dental Departments. Funding was provided by the Alliance for a Cavity Free Future Community Grant supported by Colgate. Ethical approval was obtained from Barwon Health HREC – 15/89, the Victorian Department of Education and Training and the Catholic Diocese of Ballarat Education.

### **Implementation:**

One hundred and forty three students (aged 12 – 17 years) were surveyed at four Secondary Schools throughout the Colac-Otway region using the World Health Organization Oral Health Questionnaire for Children (Annex 8) and

the Modified Dental Anxiety Scale (MDAS).

Dental screenings were completed using the International Caries Detection and Assessment System (ICDAS). Toothbrushes and toothpaste from Colgate-Palmolive Pty. Ltd. distributed to adolescents. Students identified at high risk were provided with a referral for further treatment.

### **Outcomes from Project:**

Links between unfavourable patterns of dental hygiene (brushing less than 2 times per day), increased soft drink consumption and increased dental caries were observed.

Students benefited from improved oral health hygiene.

Students were reported as most anxious when asked about receiving local anaesthetic injections, receiving a filling compared to having teeth scaled and polished, waiting for treatment or visiting the dentist tomorrow ( $p=0.05$ ).

Outcomes from this study addressing the barriers for improvement to oral health for adolescents will guide the following oral health promotion phase of the program to improve adolescent oral health.

### **Further Information:**

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