

Grants tackle dental issues



DENTAL decay is more common among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children than any other Australian youngsters.

That's why the Australian Dental Association and the Wrigley Foundation used Dental Health Week to provide grants to programs tackling tooth decay in remote locations. The Filling the Gap program, which uses volunteer dentists and assistants, received a \$5000 grant to expand its operations to include an Indigenous community in northern NSW and South Australia.

Previously, the program has operated in far north Queensland, in association with the Wuchopperen Health Service.

Filling the Gap secretary Ivor Epstein said there was a national shortage of dental professionals available to treat remote Aboriginal communities.

"There is a dental black hole in many Indigenous communities," he said.

"The Wuchopperen Health Service in far north Queensland struggled to secure a permanent dentist for close to a decade – the waiting list for dental care stretched to over a year which was causing people with minor problems to develop acute or chronic conditions.



H4H dentists treating an Aboriginal patient as part of their program.

"Filling the Gap was founded in 2006 to recruit dentists to volunteer their services for one to two weeks at a time. In return, we provide all flights and accommodation and our volunteers come away knowing they have made a real difference.

"In five years, we have recorded significant reductions to the community's dental care waiting lists, and are now seeing a gradual shift from predominantly emergency procedures to more comprehensive and conservative treatments."

Filling The Gap will use the grant to provide 10-15 weeks of care for those in need, which will result in up to 450 treatment sessions.

HOPE4HEALTH, a student-run charity founded by Griffith University students, also received a grant. H4H has been active in helping treat dental issues in Cherbourg, south-east Queensland.

Through its grant, H4H will be able to buy equipment to provide restorative, surgical and preventive care services at the Cherbourg Emergency Dental Clinic.

Another program, Tooth Mob, which is part of the Charlie Perkins Trust, also received a grant. Partnering with Sunrise Health Services Aboriginal Corporation (which operates in ten communities east of Katherine) and NT Health, Tooth Mob recruits volunteer dental teams to provide treatment and train staff in these communities to equip them with the capacity to provide ongoing oral health promotion and education.

The grant will allow Tooth Mob to recruit and place one dental team consisting of two dentists and two dental nurses at the Jilkminggan Health Centre in the NT for about ten days to relieve its acute patient backlog.

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ACT Labor branch move gives more Indigenous recognition



CHRIS BOURKE



AUSTRALIAN Capital Territory MP Chris Bourke has welcomed a Labor Party move to give more recognition to Canberra Indigenous people.

The ACT Labor Branch will now allocate two conference delegate positions to members of the ACT Indigenous Labor Network. These delegates will have full

voting rights at future conferences.

"I congratulate the ACT Branch of the ALP in supporting this forward thinking and progressive motion," Dr Bourke, an Aboriginal man, said.

"ACT ALP is leading the nation. Queensland already has provisions for two members of its network to attend the Queensland state conference, but these

delegates do not have full voting rights.

"This is another step in assuring affirmative action for Indigenous Australians in the democratic process.

"Half a million Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly under-represented in our political processes, so measures such as these will ensure their voices are heard."

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