

KEY MESSAGES

Perceptions and beliefs regarding the oral health of Aboriginal adults in Perth and key rural centres, Western Australia

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Policy context

Current models of care are not reducing the disparity in oral health between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. Poor oral health in Aboriginal Australians is a significant concern. Evidence suggests that, despite dental caries being largely preventable (theoretically), Aboriginal Australians (whether living in metropolitan or rural areas) have worse periodontal disease, more decayed teeth and untreated dental caries than non-Aboriginal Australians. Current health care delivery systems need reviewing for their effectiveness in providing services that improve oral health outcomes, are culturally appropriate and understand the issues that many Aboriginal people face including marginalisation, racism and socio-economic disadvantage. Knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives of oral health and dental services is integral to developing responsive and appropriate oral health services that focus on upstream approaches such as preventing disease as well as providing tertiary dental care. This project was designed to respond to a pressing need to generate new knowledge and identify practical solutions to improve the provision of adequate oral health care to Aboriginal people.

Key messages

Barriers outside an individual's control can impact on Aboriginal people making optimum oral health choices. These include cost of services and those associated with providing a healthy diet for families, long waiting times and discrimination from service providers resulting in reluctance to access dental services except for emergency treatment. Oral health is important to Aboriginal people yet current models of care are not meeting their needs, are accessed for treatment not prevention, and are not reducing disparities in oral health between Aboriginal and other Australians.

There is a need for:

- > Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal sectors to work together to effectively respond to Aboriginal people's concerns and generate new knowledge to improve oral health outcomes through more responsive systems of care.
- > Flexible, tailored, and accessible inter-professional models of care that are focused on education, prevention and treatment, are free from discrimination, and are more appropriate to addressing the oral health needs of Aboriginal people.
- > More resources for the development of culturally appropriate oral health promotion materials that respond to the particular needs and knowledge gaps within Aboriginal communities.
- > Serious consideration and resources to provision of different services in appropriate community based settings as well as utilising Aboriginal community liaison workers.

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