

National Oral Health Survey, Vanuatu 2017

PCV
HEALTH



Vanuatu Rotary Dental Van

BACKGROUND - NATIONAL ORAL HEALTH SURVEY 2017

There is a need to highlight the growing prevalence and impact of poor oral health in the people of Vanuatu as a result of several factors, including increasing sugar consumption, and to assist with formulation of a National Oral Health Plan that takes into consideration the current limitations on oral health resources and expenditure. It will also provide baseline data for the WHO world oral health data bank to assist with ongoing planning of oral health services in the archipelago with respect to monitoring effectiveness of government programs and directing where resources are best expended. From experience at PCV Health, Vanuatu Dental Care, a greater proportion of current resources might be directed towards education, prevention and early intervention.

The survey will follow the WHO, Oral Health Surveys, Basic Methods, 5th Edition manual adapted for use in Vanuatu, and will include a total sample of around 3000 participants randomly selected from five different age groups covering approximately 1% of the total population and representing more than 30 of the 63 inhabited islands in the archipelago. Several other organisations actively involved in oral health programs in Vanuatu have also agreed to assist in conducting the survey. These include teams from Dr. David Goldsmith -Ballarat West Rotary Group, Auckland NZ, Australian Christian Dental Aid, Marine Reach (MV Pacific Hope), Butterfly Trust, Medical Sailing Ministries as well as government dental workers at Vanuatu Ministry of Health and private dental practitioners.

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So... why conduct a National Oral Health Survey in Vanuatu?

1. Firstly, to provide reliable baseline data for the WHO global oral health bank. The last survey undertaken in Vanuatu was a limited WHO assignment undertaken in 1991.
2. Currently there is no formally adopted National Oral Health Plan (NOHP).
Dental services appear to be confined mainly to urban centres in proximity to or associated with hospitals. Most appear to be overwhelmed with demand for emergency dental services.
3. Vanuatu is a challenging environment for delivery of oral health services, and a NOHP needs to be tailored to meet the specific needs and challenges imposed by many factors including financial constraints, isolation, problems with communication and transport, variations in equipment, lack of maintenance services, differences in culture, lack of local training facilities, and so on.
Fluoridation is not possible for geographical reasons. Moreover, naturally occurring fluoride varies widely throughout the archipelago for example, high in Ambae and Ambrym where a study undertaken in 1974 found 50% of children had fluorosis compared to only 1% of the children elsewhere.
Vanuatu does not have the financial resources to fund any substantial upgrades to traditional dental services. Even if they did, traditional approaches will not solve the problem.
The situation calls for dental services that do not follow a traditional model of oral health care services found in a developed country.
There needs to be a much greater emphasis on education, prevention and low technology caries management methods, many of which could be deployed through existing government departments and personnel with appropriate training.
4. The NOHP needs to focus on improving general oral health status for the whole population rather than on single isolated oral interventions.
Caries and periodontal diseases are major oral health problems, so primary intervention and low technology procedures must therefore be a priority.
Partnerships need to be developed between oral health care authorities and those responsible for health and education, as well as churches, which have an influential role in Vanuatu, and village leaders.
To save costs, there should be a significant emphasis on building and maintaining an ancillary oral health care workforce utilising existing government employees from the above groups.
There also needs to be an auditing process, especially for this ancillary workforce.
5. Having visited several primary schools in Port Vila and asked teachers if they have children who miss school or are sleepy in class due to toothache preventing sleep at night, the answer has invariably been "Yes, it happens frequently," which begs the question, "How does this impact on education and families of children affected by dental pain?"
In the NOHS Vanuatu a much larger section in the questionnaire related to the prevalence and impact of dental pain has been added in order to encourage authorities to take action.
6. To prepare a NOHP it is necessary to have baseline data to know what we are dealing with and also to monitor any changes in oral health status over time

