RURAL ECOH – ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN ORAL HEALTH

Population health planning for rural Medicare Locals: Evaluating community participation for delivering outcomes.

Newsletter 2 July 2014

Project update

Since the last newsletter, all of the first round of workshops in Victoria and Queensland have been completed and the next series of workshops are underway. The second series of workshops focus on what works to improve oral health. Community members will be presented with case studies of 'typical' residents and asked to consider the following:

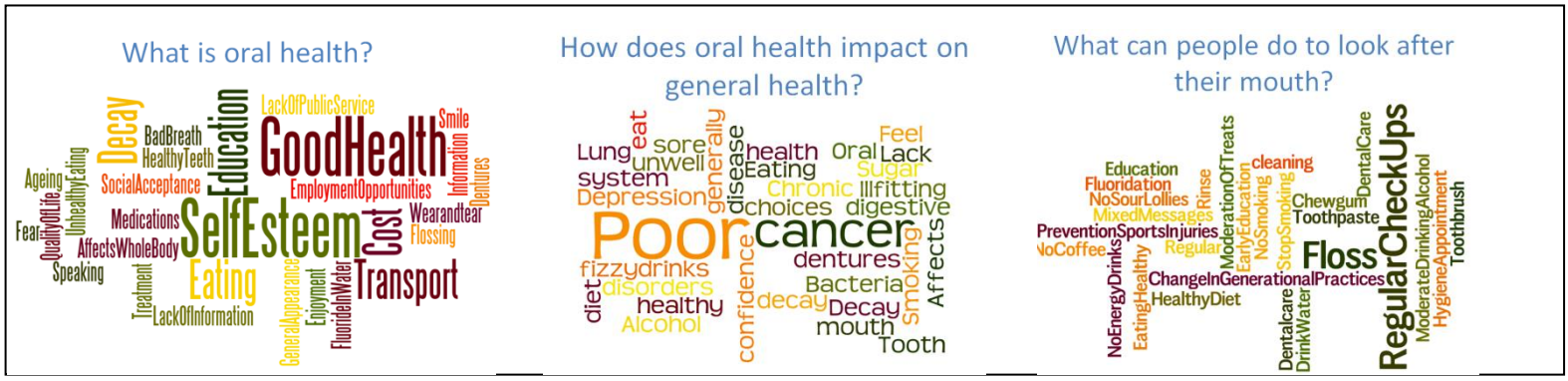
- What do you think might be the big issues?
- What do you think the community could do to help?
- In what ways do you think service delivery could be improved to help?

In this issue we will provide a short report on series one workshops from both research teams and an overview of some lessons learned.

Project update Queensland

To date the team have completed the first series workshops in all the communities and the second series of workshops will be completed by 10th July. Attendance at the workshops in series one was fairly consistent across each of the research sites with membership comprising of health, local community organisations, aged care, oral health, indigenous organisations. The discussion in all research sites highlighted a fairly broad perception of oral health and how it impacted on general health and wellbeing. Furthermore participants came up with an extensive range of strategies to improve oral health.

Figure 1: Examples from workshop discussion



Services available in to help improve oral health varied across each of the Queensland workshops however in all sites there was an acknowledgment that more could be done in terms of preventative education to key groups such as school aged children, aged communities and better promotion of oral health pathways so that the community can access services available to them, for example the child dental scheme.

Following workshop one, the Ingham and Hughenden participants were keen to have more oral health awareness in their communities. They asked the Rural ECOH team about the feasibility of dental students coming to deliver some education at key community events. With the help of Felicity Croker and JCU Dental, two final year students made the trip to Hughenden on 22nd May to attend their health expo. Armed with puppets and a tooth suit, the students provided oral health education to children and students from kindy through to high school. Dental students will also be travelling to the Ingham show on 4th July to present some oral health education to the community.

Pictured: Some very keen Hughenden students learning about oral health

Victoria Update

Series one workshops were completed over the month of May and series two workshops will be completed by the end of July. Attendance at the meetings varied across the communities with a fantastic turn out at the Kerang meeting. The people at the meetings took a holistic view of what oral health is and outlined how it is a “gateway” to the health of the rest of the body. This could also be viewed as a reflection of the health of the rest of the body.

Examples from workshop one discussion on what is oral health?

Community members contributing to the discussion at the workshops

There was agreement that poor oral health was largely preventable but also dependant on a whole range of characteristics including access to services, knowledge, transport and many more. The idea of oral health as a human right was interesting and one that stimulated a lot of discussion in Kerang. If we take a rights based approach it encourages us to think about things in a different way.

Lessons learned

A key learning from the project to date is the significance of face to face engagement in communities. Whilst it was important that the events were promoted widely through newspapers adverts, flyers and emails, rural communities valued the presence of the researchers in their towns. In addition having conversations and informal meetings with community groups helped develop local knowledge, forge relationships with interested community members and increased attendance to workshops. The timing of workshops also impacted on numbers so it was very useful to tap into the local newsletters and council events pages to find out what events were happening in the town.