Oral health status

Oral health status data is collected for most clients presenting for public dental care at the initial examination before any treatment is undertaken. The data below summarises the prevalence of tooth decay for clients residing in the North Western Melbourne PHN compared with the whole of Victoria. Note the data is only for clients accessing public oral health services (predominantly concession card holders) in 2014/15 and does not represent the overall general population.

Water fluoridation

Water fluoridation helps protect teeth against decay, and is the most effective way of allowing everybody access to the benefits of fluoride. Scientific studies have shown that water fluoridation is a safe and effective way to reduce tooth decay. Children living in optimally fluoridated areas experience considerably less tooth decay than those in areas without optimal fluoridation.

Ninety per cent of Victorian communities now drink water with either naturally-occurring or added fluoride. Water fluoridation is an effective, inexpensive and socially equal way to reduce tooth decay in children and adults.

The map opposite provides water fluoridation levels by postcode for the North Western Melbourne PHN.

Data source: Environmental Health Unit – Dept. of Health and Human Services
Eligible population

Eligibility for public oral health services includes all children aged 0 – 12 years and young people/adults 13 years and above who are health care or pensioner concession card holders or dependents of concession card holders.

It is estimated there are just over 638,000 people (265,000 children; 373,000 adults) residing in the North Western Melbourne PHN eligible for public oral health services. This represents about 43% of the total PHN population.

Over a two year period, 26% of the eligible population in the North Western Melbourne PHN access care at a public dental clinic.

Access to public oral health services

Eligible people seeking urgent care are assessed using the Emergency Demand Management Strategy and provided emergency care within an appropriate time frame. Those requiring non urgent care, that may follow emergency treatment, can choose to be placed on the appropriate non-urgent care waiting list. There are two waiting lists for non-urgent public dental care:

- General Waiting List
- Denture Waiting List

Note – people who have priority access* to dental care are offered the next available appointment and are not placed on a waiting list.

*Includes all children and young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, homeless people, pregnant women, refugee and asylum seekers and registered clients of mental health and disability services.

The data opposite summarises the average waiting time for those offered care in each quarter for all agencies within the North Western Melbourne PHN compared with the statewide average wait times. Wait time is measured from the date of placement on the wait list to the date of offer of care.
Public dental clinics

For public oral health services within the North Western Melbourne Primary Health Network (PHN), there are a total of 253 chairs across 22 clinics managed by 10 agencies. This includes the Royal Dental Hospital of Melbourne that has 139 chairs at the Carlton site. The map below provides the location and number of chairs for each public dental clinic within the North Western Melbourne PHN.
Oral health promotion initiatives

Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) also provides oral health promotion programs across your Primary Health Network.

Healthy Families Healthy Smiles supports health and early childhood professionals, working with children aged 0-3 years and pregnant women, to embed oral health promotion into their everyday practice. A range of training and professional development packages are available to support midwives, maternal and child health nurses, early childhood professionals, GPs, practice nurses, Aboriginal health services, dietitians and pharmacists.

The Smiles4Miles program is another initiative that aims to improve the oral health of children and their families in high risk areas across Victoria. Early childhood services such as kindergartens and day care centres play an important role in promoting young children’s oral health.

Smiles 4 Miles assists early childhood services to encourage and promote good oral health habits and healthy eating among children in their care.

In the North Western Melbourne PHN, there are currently 40 early childhood services participating in Smiles 4 Miles reaching approximately 2,500 children. North Richmond Community Health, Merri Health and Cobaw Community Health Service are funded to coordinate this activity.

For more information about health promotion activity in your catchment or to discuss opportunities to work together, e-mail health.promotion@dhsv.org.au or visit www.dhsv.org.au/oral-health-programs

LGA oral health profiles

Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) in partnership with the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) has also developed oral health profiles for local government to promote oral health in their community. Statistical profiles of each LGA include indicators that may have an impact on oral health relating to:

- smoking rates
- consumption of fruit and vegetables
- soft drink consumption
- tooth brushing frequency
- breastfeeding rates
- preventable hospital admission rates for dental conditions for children aged 0-4 years.

The LGA profiles can be accessed at https://www.dhsv.org.au/oralhealthprofiles

For more information on promoting oral health in your network please email art@dhsv.org.au