celebrate
10 years of Smiles 4 Miles
Special thanks to all those who contributed to this booklet and to every Smiles 4 Miles coordinator and educator who works hard to improve the oral health of Victoria’s children every day.
10 great years of

Smiles 4 Miles has been helping the kids of Victoria to Drink Well, Eat Well and Clean Well for a decade and to celebrate the program’s 10th birthday, we have put together 10 stories from various sites across Victoria.

These stories paint a picture of just some of the great initiatives our Smiles 4 Miles coordinators and early childhood educators are working on as they strive towards achieving their Smiles 4 Miles award.

I am very proud of our Smiles 4 Miles program and in 2012, when the program was awarded the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation Award for Building Health Through Education, I was thrilled to see that others appreciated the work our coordinators and educators are doing too.

Smiles 4 Miles has grown significantly since it commenced in 2004. Starting with 776 children from 16 early childhood services, it now reaches over 31,000 children across 563 early childhood services and it is only through the dedication and commitment of the DHSV team, the Smiles 4 Miles Coordinators, the early childhood educators and the kindergarten, preschool and childcare communities that this has been possible.

Thank you to every one of you who has helped make this program such a success over the past 10 years. Thanks also to the Victorian children and their families who have so enthusiastically embraced the program and made it what it is today.

Best wishes,

Dr Deborah Cole
CEO Dental Health Services Victoria
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Knox Social and Community Health has been able to significantly boost the number of preschool aged children accessing dental services, and tick off several Smiles 4 Miles criteria at the same time.

Knox wanted to create an easy referral pathway for families of preschool children participating in the Smiles 4 Miles program. Educators provided families with information about the public dental service and displayed the “I want to be a Clean well Kid” register in the foyer of the early childhood service twice a year. Parents wanting their child to have a dental check-up simply put their details on the sheet, and the Smiles 4 Miles Coordinator contacted them to arrange a suitable appointment.

In addition, Knox Social and Community Health, offer incursions to all Smiles 4 Miles early childhood services.

In a 45 minute interactive session, an oral health professional covers why teeth are important and how children can best look after their teeth. Children have the opportunity to dress up like an oral health professional such as a dentist and play the ‘happy or sad tooth’ game.

Smiles 4 Miles incursions are so popular with educators that Knox are often booked out three to four months in advance. Feedback from these sessions has been positive, and educators report that Smiles 4 Miles incursions are very useful to help children learn what to expect when they visit the dentist.

Since Knox started Smiles 4 Miles, twice as many preschool aged children now access the service.
The Lower Hume Primary Care Partnership (PCP) began coordinating Smiles 4 Miles within the Mitchell and Murrindindi Shires in 2012.

In 2014, Lower Hume PCP implemented a new approach to increase the reach of the program and the impact of its key messages. This also helped to ensure its sites were still engaged in the program.

The Primary Care Partnership began encouraging registrations beyond kindergartens and as a result, Smiles 4 Miles registrations have grown from 12 services (mostly kindergartens) in 2012 to 41 services including kindergartens, an early childhood intervention program, special school prep class, long day care, family day care, playgroups and neighbourhood or community house childcare programs in 2014.

The Lower Hume Smiles 4 Miles Coordinator has supported 17 of the 41 registered services to achieve their Smiles 4 Miles award.

In 2013 and 2014 Lower Hume PCP focussed on forming partnerships with public and private dental clinics and local government. As a result, Kilmore Dental & Specialist Centre supports the Clean Well message by visiting Smiles 4 Miles services within Mitchell Shire annually. Fourteen Mitchell and Murrindindi Shire maternal and child health centres were also encouraged to promote oral health and were given information to disseminate to families.

To reach even more community members, Lower Hume PCP spoke to people at community events about nutrition and its impact on oral health.

By working with other health and community services, Lower Hume PCP has increased exposure for the Smiles 4 Miles program and its key messages and has helped to better inform the community about their oral health, wellbeing and dental services.

Contact: Jaimie Poorter | Jaimie.Poorter@seymourhealth.org.au

WINNER: Community Oral Health Champion
Jaimie Poorter
Recognising the importance of reinforcing positive health behaviours in the home, the Northern District Community Health Service (NDCHS) team chose to prioritise family engagement when they joined Smiles 4 Miles.

While some families receive information through sessions held at their kindergarten, the NDCHS team was interested in opportunities for families to learn about key oral health messages in their own homes.

Many kindergartens have successful programs where children are rostered to take home an item, for example a teddy bear, to learn about responsibility and caring for others. This allows children to share experiences with their families and present back to their peers. Knowing that this creates excitement among children, a similar idea was piloted where families borrow the newly designed ‘Smiles Family Bag’ for a one week period.

The first edition of the Smiles Family Bag was distributed in August 2014 containing:

- a letter from the kindergarten teacher and the NDCHS Smiles 4 Miles team introducing the bag and giving ideas for using the bag at home
- healthy eating and going to the dentist books
- Smiles 4 Miles fact sheets, colouring sheets and family brushing charts
- information on local dental services
- Department of Health and Aging brochure on healthy eating for children
- a puppet and DVD
- a plastic portion control plate demonstrating the type and portion sizes of foods for children

This pilot aimed to determine if the resource was an effective family engagement tool and whether children enjoyed using the bag to learn about oral health. The bag will be evaluated mid-2015.

“We have been using the bag for a few weeks now to link in with our lovely lunch box award. The child then takes it home for a few days and returns it filling in a workbook page with their family. Some children draw, add photos and add ways to take good care of their teeth at home. It’s very successful and the children are excited when it’s their turn.”

Kim Mason - Leitchville Preschool Teacher

Contact: Tanya Maher-Toose | tanya@ndchs.org.au
The Early Years Network in Maroondah and the Yarra Ranges was set up by EACH Social and Community Health to support early childhood services who had registered for the Achievement Program. The Maroondah health promotion team identified that it would also be an ideal avenue to support centres to achieve the Smiles 4 Miles award while working towards the healthy eating and oral health benchmarks in the Achievement Program.

There are currently 13 services registered in Smiles 4 Miles. Two of the Smiles 4 Miles centres belonging to the network had approximately 40% of children from refugee backgrounds, many newly arrived. The oral health status of recently arrived refugees compares poorly with the general Australian population. Consultations with parents and staff showed that migrant families were likely to have missed healthy eating information and should be helped to better understand what to include in a healthy lunchbox.

A working group including representatives from EACH, the two services and the Migrant Information Centre developed a lunchbox workshop tailored to migrant families.

Workshops used images to talk about the benefits of a healthy lunchbox, Drink Well and Eat Well key messages, identifying high sugar and fat foods and drinks, and referrals to local public dental services with interpreters supporting the delivery.

Families enjoyed sample healthy lunchboxes and took home pictorial recipes and translated information.

Many parents who were not from a refugee background also attended and feedback received was positive. The kindergartens now use the slides from the workshop to aid discussion with new families attending parent information sessions.

Contact: Maria Nicolaou | mnicolaou@each.com.au
Merri Community Health Services (MCHS) provides services for the inner north of Melbourne, primarily in the Moreland area which includes the suburbs of Brunswick, Coburg, Oak Park, Glenroy and Fawkner.

Their community has diverse and complex needs and a growing population of newly arrived and refugee families in the area; 34% of the community was born overseas and many families (39%) speak a language other than English at home. There are also a large number of kindergartens and childcare services in the area.

MCHS prioritise the kindergartens and child care centres Smiles 4 Miles supports by conducting a needs assessment and thorough consultation with council support services, to ensure settings with the most need have access to the Smiles 4 Miles program.

This year, to share the Smiles 4 Miles key oral health messages with a larger number of children and their families, the Smiles 4 Miles coordinator has been involved in an oral health education program with local council support services; including preschool field officers, inclusion support facilitators, family day care staff and school holiday program staff.

These workers visit local children’s services or work directly with children on a daily basis and are a great source of information for early childhood educators, children and their families. They are often asked about the health and wellbeing of the children they work with, including their oral health and appropriate referral pathways.

This education program is building the capacity of council staff to help ensure the sustainability of Smiles 4 Miles in Moreland.
Moira Shire is a three hour drive north of Melbourne and includes the townships of Cobram, Yarrawonga, Numurkah and Nathalia. The community health service in each of these towns works in partnership with the others to deliver the Smiles 4 Miles program across the shire.

Smiles 4 Miles has been running in the region for the past three years with 13 centres registered. A key contact from each health service works directly with early childhood services in their area and the coordinator in Numurkah liaises with Dental Health Services Victoria.

In November each year, the Moira Shire Smiles 4 Miles network invites early childhood service staff to attend a showcase evening. This networking event allows centres to get together and share what they are doing as part of the Smiles 4 Miles program and learn from each other. A guest presenter also attends (usually a dentist) and an education component is conducted to update centre staff on the Smiles 4 Miles program. For the past two years a member of the Dental Health Services Victoria Smiles 4 Miles team has also attended.

An award ceremony is held at the end of the event to celebrate centres who have recently achieved their Smiles 4 Miles award.

The showcase evening has received very positive feedback, with 92% of attendees last year reporting an increased understanding of and confidence about the Smiles 4 Miles program.

Contact: Erin Soutter | souttere@ndhs.org.au

Working smarter
Moira Shire
Year commenced: 2011 | No. of services: 13
Demelza Diacogiorgis, Smiles 4 Miles Coordinator at Ballarat Community Health has built a partnership with Ballarat Health Services which has enabled oral health professionals to visit local preschools.

An important part of the Smiles 4 Miles program is to link Smiles 4 Miles early childhood services with the local dental agency. Through the program, approximately 1400 children in the Ballarat area have participated in an oral health education session over the last seven years. This long term initiative aims to familiarise children with the dental team and encourage referrals to the local dental clinic.

Each 30 minute session with the oral health professional covers ‘everyday’ and ‘sometimes’ foods and the importance of looking after teeth. Everyone has the opportunity to dress up as a dentist or patient – even the teachers!

Kinder Teacher, Dianne Shaw said the children enjoyed getting involved through song and dance, and loved getting dressed up as a dentist or patient. Dianne believed the session was informative yet simple enough for the children to understand which is shown by the children’s comments (below).

The classroom sessions provide an opportunity to distribute information to families promoting the local dental clinic and encouraging them to book their children in for a dental check-up.

These visits also assist services to achieve Criterion #7 of their Smiles 4 Miles award - ‘Provide families with information on dental services and healthy eating initiatives’.

Ballarat Community Health currently has 83% of their 23 services awarded.

“They taught me about good things and bad things to eat.”
Bella, 5

“I learnt what was healthy for my teeth.”
Brodye, 5

“The dentist puts a coat on and a mask on their face which goes over their ears.”
Blake, 5

“My favourite part was getting dressed up as a patient.”
Latiah, 4

Contact: Demelza Diacogiorgis | demelzar@bchc.org.au
Successful partnerships

Bendigo Health

Year commenced: 2012 | No. of services: 22

Bendigo Health joined the Smiles 4 Miles program in 2012. At that time, the program was incorporated into the Integrated Health Promotion Plan and coordinated by the health promotion team.

As a Healthy Together Victoria site, Bendigo Health recognised that early childhood services in the area would be working on both Smiles 4 Miles and the Healthy Together Achievement Program. Smiles 4 Miles was identified as a good way to meet the requirements of the Achievement Program’s healthy eating and oral health benchmark.

Bendigo Health and Healthy Together Bendigo (HTB) established a collaborative relationship to achieve their shared goal of promoting oral health and healthy eating within early childhood services.

An integrated health promotion partnership plan was developed with HTB, Bendigo Health and the Loddon Mallee Preschool Association (LMPA), outlining roles and responsibilities.

HTB and Bendigo Health work with early childhood services to support the Achievement Program which has eight benchmarks. They were encouraged to select the healthy eating and oral health priority and register for the Smiles 4 Miles program to achieve this benchmark. This ensured a consistent approach to engaging with and supporting early childhood services.

The successful partnership saw the number of services registering to participate in Smiles 4 Miles double from six to 12 (this number has since increased to 22).

It also resulted in the successful implementation of a cluster-wide LMPA and YMCA oral health and healthy eating policy, allowing services to fully meet Smiles 4 Miles award requirements and Achievement Program requirements.

Contact: Pauline Noble | PNolan@bendigohealth.org.au
Maryborough District Health Service (MDHS) is engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in oral health education and improving access to public dental services in the Loddon Mallee region.

The Meeting Place is a safe, healthy and supportive environment for Aboriginal children to learn about their culture and heritage, run by the community.

As a funded Smiles 4 Miles site, MDHS worked with DHSV to implement an adapted version of the Smiles 4 Miles program called ‘Clean Cuzzies’. As part of that program, children have developed their own Clean Cuzzies characters – Brushing Bro Bat and Grinnin’ Gal Gure (DjaDjaWurrung for kangaroo).

MDHS dental staff have worked closely with The Meeting Place to familiarise children with the clinic and to provide education sessions, outreach screening and coordinate referrals where required.

School holiday block sessions have been made available to treat children referred after a screening, with transport provided by Castlemaine Community Health Service. Appointments can also be made for family members at the same time.

An oral health project officer was recruited to undertake this work in 2014, with the Loddon Mallee Oral Health Network and MDHS overseeing the project. A working group, including representatives from Castlemaine District Community Health, MDHS dental clinic, DHSV, Medicare Local and The Meeting Place also support the project.

This work has improved the connection between The Meeting Place and the MDHS dental clinic and it is hoped that it will help improve access to the public dental service for The Meeting Place families and the wider community.
Twice a year, the Smiles 4 Miles coordinator in Greater Shepparton visits Goulburn Ovens Institute of TAFE in Shepparton to provide a lecture to the Certificate III Children’s Service’s students.

The lecture on oral health and nutrition runs for 90 minutes and includes information on the Australian Dietary Guidelines, as well as an overview of the Smiles 4 Miles program and information on each of the program’s key oral health messages - Drink Well, Eat Well and Clean Well.

Students are interested to hear about what causes tooth decay and are often surprised at the sugar content of common drinks. They also show a keen interest in how to brush teeth and how to care for knocked out and broken teeth.

The TAFE students are given general oral health information, as well as a book on fluoridation and the details of local dental services for their reference.

Since the Smiles 4 Miles Coordinator visits have commenced, the students have shown an increase in their knowledge of sugar content in drinks and what tooth decay is. This information will no doubt be valuable in their future roles as educators in early childhood services.

They may even be delivering the Smiles 4 Miles program one day!

Contact: Jessica Orr | healthpromotion@gvhealth.org.au