Refugee Oral Health

Sector Capacity Building Project

To support and strengthen the capacity of public dental services in Victoria to deliver responsive oral health care with clients of refugee and asylum seeker background.

In response to the identified oral health needs of people of refugee backgrounds living in Victoria, the Department of Health has implemented two policies that identify refugees and asylum seekers as a priority access group and provide for fee exemption at public dental health services. Newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers are entitled to the next available appointment for general and denture care.

The Victorian Refugee Health Network, auspiced by the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture (Foundation House), have worked in partnership with Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) to implement a Department of Health (DH) funded Refugee Oral Health Sector Capacity Building Project. The Project was overseen by a Project Advisory Group that included oral health staff and clinicians, researchers, settlement services, DHSV and DH.

This project aimed to strengthen oral health service access and delivery, by bringing together oral health services and other key services to share and further develop expertise, service capacity and resources, building on existing projects and programs.

There are two main activities that have resulted from this Project:

Map and link existing oral health resources onto the Victorian Refugee Health Network website

Develop and evaluate a targeted education program in refugee oral health with public dental services in high refugee settlement areas

The ‘whole of service’ approach aims to unpack the service’s access and delivery, including a mix of didactic, observational and experiential learning about refugee experiences, communicating cross-culturally, refugee health issues, working with the impact of detention, torture and trauma and referral between services (general practice, settlement services, refugee health team etc); TEP is currently being piloted with Western Region Health Centre, Oral Health Program.

A review specific to refugees reports that people are twice as likely to go for dental treatment when they are actively examined and referred by a physician. When making a referral, it is helpful to inform your client about what to expect at a public dental clinic, including specific information such as a number of appointments may be needed to complete a course of care; wait time with priority group access generally takes days to weeks for an appointment (though there are exceptions at some services with high volumes of priority group access clients); clients are entitled to a free interpreter; and clients are encouraged to bring any evidence of asylum seeker status or refugee background with them to their appointment (e.g. paperwork from DIAC, referral from settlement services etc). Referrals to dental should contain as much information as necessary to support an oral health assessment, including clinical and social risk factors that may affect oral health outcome. GPs are encouraged to provide letters of referral to oral health services to promote effective and co-ordinated care.

1 State Government of Victoria, Public dental fees policy, Department of Health, August 2011.
2 State Government of Victoria, Eligibility and priority access for public dental services policy, Department of Health, July 2010.
3 Oral health resources for work with refugee and asylum seeker clients, including dental health policies, oral health literature and reports, health promotion materials, tip sheets for working with interpreters, etc
4 The ‘whole of service’ approach aims to unpack the service’s access and delivery, including a mix of didactic, observational and experiential learning about refugee experiences, communicating cross-culturally, refugee health issues, working with the impact of detention, torture and trauma and referral between services (general practice, settlement services, refugee health team etc); TEP is currently being piloted with Western Region Health Centre, Oral Health Program.
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What have we done?

- **Needs Assessment**
  - Survey with public oral health staff & services
  - Literature review

- **Resource Mapping**
  - Oral health policies
  - Bilingual dental information
  - Working cross culturally guides and tipsheets
  - Interactive (web-based) resources
  - Oral health literature and resources

- **Develop and collate oral health care and health promotion resources**
  - Factsheets for dental health staff and clinicans
  - Model of care: refugee oral health

- **Identify and promote ‘good practice’**
  - Implement and evaluate a refugee oral health Targeted Education Program
  - Centralising refugee oral health resources on the Victorian Refugee Network website with links to other relevant sites

Where are we now?

We will continue to update the information and resources shared on the Victorian Refugee Health Network website despite the project coming to completion.

Get involved with this process by sharing any relevant information, resources or research that you find useful in your work with refugees and asylum seekers that is related to oral health, including referral into and out of oral health services.

Simply share your information and/or feedback by emailing refugeehealth@foundationhouse.org.au or call Victorian Refugee Health Network, Health Sector Development, Foundation House, at 9389 8908.

www.refugeehealthnetwork.org.au