

# Australian volunteers step up to improve the oral health of some of the country's most vulnerable communities



## The Mars Wrigley Foundation and Australian Dental Health Foundation congratulate the recipients of the 2021 Healthier Smiles Community Service Grants

In recent years, while there have been substantial improvements in oral health in Australia<sup>1</sup>, this positive trend is starting to decline, particularly in remote and disadvantaged communities.<sup>1</sup> Differences between the oral health of children in cities and rural communities is widening. People living in major cities are 13% more likely to visit a dentist for a check-up than those in regional areas, and untreated dental decay is twice as likely to affect children living in remote parts of Australia than in major cities.<sup>1</sup> Every day, Australians living in remote or disadvantaged communities encounter a number of barriers to good oral health, such as poor diet, access to dental facilities, financial pressure, and lower health literacy, all of which greatly impact the health equity of those living in this country.<sup>1</sup>

Now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, the Mars Wrigley Foundation and Australian Dental Health Foundation (ADHF) Healthier Smiles Community Service Grants program is a well-established initiative supporting dentists and dental students from across Australia who seek to improve oral health outcomes by providing screening, treatment, and education to those who need it most.

This year, the Mars Wrigley Foundation has awarded US\$82,000 (approx. AU\$111,000)\* in Grant funding to 10 worthy projects, and is excited to announce the 2021 winners.

"Over the past decade, the Healthier Smiles Community Service Grants program has provided more than AU\$1 million worth of funding to volunteer dentists and dental students seeking to improve the oral health outcomes of some of Australia's most vulnerable community members.

This year's Grant funding has been awarded to deserving volunteers who are going above and beyond to make a difference to the health – and the smiles – of Australians. We continue to be impressed with the work carried out by Grant recipients and we look forward to seeing this year's results!"

– Alicia Collins, on behalf of the Mars Wrigley Foundation

"The ADHF applauds 2021's successful Grantees. The ADHF continues to be proud of our members working to deliver services that are vital to ensuring equity in access to oral healthcare services and education across Australia, especially during a period that has been difficult for many members of the community."

– Dr Richard Olive, Chairman Advisory Board, Australian Dental Health Foundation

## This Year's Grant Recipients



## Healthier Smiles Community Service Grants

### Carevan Foundation: The Tooth Fairy's Best Friend - Digital Oral Health Literacy Project

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that many oral health promotion programs have had to pivot to develop online or digital content. To help improve oral health outcomes for some of the most vulnerable in the community, the Sun Smiles Team will work closely with the Deakin University FreelancingHUB and the Dental Hygienists Association of Australia to develop a suite of digital oral health resources based on the successful children's picture book "Who is the Tooth Fairy's Best Friend?". These resources will be distributed online and through social media. Additionally, as part of the program, more than 1000 school children in Homebush, Albury and Wodonga will receive a Tooth Fairy Kit, with children's toothbrushes, paste, and other oral health resources.



### Smyla Australia: Smyla Oral Health Program

A team of volunteer dentists and hygienists will provide paediatric dentistry care to more than 1000 at-risk members of the community, including refugees and immigrants living in low socio-economic areas of NSW. Beyond screening and treatment, the program will also educate more than 1000 families and teachers on good oral health habits. All participating children will receive a free dental check-up.

### Westmead Centre for Oral Health: Western Sydney Oral and Aboriginal Health Program

Incidence of multiple caries and untreated dental disease tends to be higher in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This has been linked to poorer accessibility of services and lack of cultural awareness of service providers (AIHW 2021). In response to this, the Westmead Specialist Paediatric Department teamed up with the Western Sydney Aboriginal Health Unit (AHU) to collaborate and integrate services to improve oral health referral and access for the local Aboriginal community. The team will do this by improving the delivery of oral care education and resources. It will provide oral health education to health-care professionals, such as the AHU Midwifery Team and child and family health nurses. The collaborative approach will help improve early identification of risk factors and presence of oral disease in children, and provide a referral pathway for accessing care.



### HOPE4HEALTH, Griffith University: Cherbourg Volunteer Dental Clinic

Cherbourg is the most disadvantaged community in Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics Census data - 2016). The Indigenous people of Cherbourg experience many health inequalities, including a lack of access to regular dental services. With the Grant funding, HOPE4HEALTH representatives work in conjunction with the Cherbourg Regional Aboriginal and Islander Community Controlled Health Services to provide volunteer dental screening, treatment, and education. The clinic's aim is to allow the community of Cherbourg to transition from emergency intervention to preventative dental health through ongoing education and support.



### Moviliti Dental Care: Easy as Lift Look Report

Using online health training modules, this program will provide assessment tools for carers to help them identify, report, and refer oral health concerns of more than 500 aged-care residents living in central west Queensland. Additionally, ten aged-care facilities will receive supplemental mentoring and resources to further equip carers with the tools they need to support residents' overall oral health.



### Royal Flying Doctor Service Tasmania: Oral Health Prevention & Promotion

Royal Flying Doctor Service Tasmania (RFDS) will use Grant funding to travel to regional or remote communities to provide dental service to more than 3,500 children and adults. Based out of Launceston Airport, the RFDS team travels to provide same-day treatment, realistic treatment plans, and robust education programs to school children and adult patients. This Grant will allow the RFDS to increase the number of trips and the quality of care provided to vulnerable and Indigenous Tasmanians, with a focus on providing educational resources such as toothbrushes, toothpaste, floss, and tooth mousse for additional fluoride support for growing teeth.



### Your Community Health: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Improving Oral Health and Outcomes in the AOD Population

People with substance-use disorders experience greater and more severe dental caries and periodontal disease than the general population. However, they are also less likely to have received dental care (Baghaie et al. 2017). To help address this, the project team will use Grant funding to increase the accessibility of oral health education and disease stabilisation services for individuals experiencing illicit drug use or substance abuse within the Northern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne. The proposed project will harness cross-organisation engagement from the Needle Syringe Program, Steroid Education Program, Medical Pharmacotherapy Clinics, Counselling, and Oral Health services to promote oral health awareness, identify barriers to access, and trial innovative service delivery solutions to meet the needs of this at-risk group.



### University of Western Australia: Smiling Signs Auslan Resource

One in six Australians have some hearing loss and, according to 2016 Census data, there are approximately 12,000 people in Australia whose primary language is Auslan (Australian sign language). To date, there are no readily available resources about oral health in Auslan, meaning that deaf signing individuals are unable to access information about their oral treatment or health. This Grant will fund a publicly available digital resource to ensure adequate informed consent is obtained by dentists and to improve the standard of care for deaf patients.



### University of Western Australia: Healthy Mouths, Brighter Smiles

A largely student-run project, Healthy Mouths, Brighter Smiles will host interactive sessions at schools to educate and improve the oral health outcomes for children from low socio-economic areas. The project team will support oral health outcomes by providing age-appropriate education, oral health games, and trainings to improve teeth brushing habits. The program aims to not only improve the oral health outcomes for children from low socio-economic groups, but improve children's oral health-related quality of life while reducing the current disease burden and future dental health costs to the community.



### Shalom House: Shalom House Dental Rehabilitation Program

Shalom House is a self-funded rehabilitation program started by Peter Lyndon-James, who was himself a victim of his childhood and addictions. The program assists people to free them from addiction and debt through education and ongoing support. Most of the people in these programs, particularly victims of violence or those who have serious dental trauma, have not seen a dentist for many years. The Dental Rehabilitation Program will deliver free screening, treatment and education to improve the dental health of residents at Shalom House.



### About the Mars Wrigley Foundation

Established in 1987, the Mars Wrigley Foundation aspires to support People & Planet through oral health education, environmental stewardship, and local community partnerships. For more than 25 years, Wrigley has supported independent, clinical research into the benefits of chewing gum, including saliva stimulation and plaque acid neutralisation. The EXTRA® Oral Healthcare Program supports oral health professionals in the promotion of oral health benefits of chewing sugarfree gum as part of a regular oral care routine.

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2021. Canberra: AIHW.