

Preliminary insights into rural Australians' experiences of oral health care

WHY IT MATTERS

People living in rural Australia have more tooth decay and are more likely to need hospital care for dental issues than people living in cities. Rural people have less access to dentists and fluoridated water and are less involved in rural health research. This means we still do not fully understand their oral health needs.

WHAT WE LOOKED FOR



We explored the oral health care experiences of members of Australia's Rural Health Consumer Panel (RHCP) using an online survey. The survey was open between November 2023 and September 2024.

Read the paper



WHAT WE FOUND (KEY FINDINGS)



Response to survey
139 RHCP members



Age (years)
Median 61



Gender
75% Female



Education
73% tertiary qualifications

Members that had an oral health appointment in the last 12 months

62% visited oral health professional



38% did not have oral health appointment

Dentist was the most common oral health professional visited.



Private health insurance coverage was associated with more regular dental and oral health check-ups.

Key challenges in accessing oral health care



Cost



Distance travelled to receive care



Wait times for an appointment

"...if the dentist doesn't come it's a 400 km return trip..."

"...Waiting for public dental care impacted on my oral health. Consequently, I have had 4 teeth extracted in the past 2 years as alternate forms of treatment were either not offered, timely, or affordable..."

WHAT THIS MEANS (NEXT STEPS)

The Rural Health Consumer Panel lets rural people share their experiences in research about issues that affect them. Cost, travel distance and long wait times were key barriers to oral health care in rural areas. Improving affordability and exploring new ways to deliver dental services could help improve oral health for rural Australians. Further research is needed to better understand rural experiences and develop solutions with rural communities.

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MORE INFORMATION?

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