

9 August 2023

Hole in rural dental workforce needs urgent filling

Dental Health Week 2023

7 to 13 August 2023

www.teeth.org.au/dental-health-week

It's not just doctors who are in short supply in the bush – so too are dentists – and it is a big hole in the rural health workforce that needs urgent filling, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has warned.

Speaking during Dental Health Week 2023 (7-13 August), **RDAA President Dr Megan Belot** said the already poorer oral health of many rural and remote Australians is being further jeopardised by a lack of access to dental care – due to the continuing shortage of rural dentists and the high cost of dental care for those on low incomes.

“Unfortunately, we have the perfect storm of oral healthcare happening right here in rural Australia” **Dr Belot said.**

“Rural and remote Australians already tend to have poorer diets than their urban counterparts (including consuming more sugary foods and drinks), as well as higher rates of smoking and alcohol consumption, and poorer oral healthcare.

“There is also less access to fluoridated water in many rural and remote communities, particularly for those who drink tankwater rather than town supplies.

“The cost of dental care for those on lower average incomes – and difficulties accessing a dentist in many rural communities – are also significant impediments for rural and remote Australians in seeking the dental care they need.

“Given these challenges, it is crucial that dental care is made as affordable and accessible as possible.

“That includes introducing better supports for low income earners and other disadvantaged Australians to afford dental care, and implementing improved measures to entice more dentists to work in the bush.

“Much like medical students, dental students who were raised in a rural area – or who have had a chance to experience rural dental practice – are much more likely to choose to work rurally after graduation.

“Given this, we need to expand the number of dental schools in regional Australia (and provide better financial support to the universities to do this), make it easier for dental students to access good quality rural placements for longer periods of time, and better support the rural dental practices that offer those placements.

“There is also a critical need to encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to go on to study dentistry.

“These measures would go a long way to delivering much better dental outcomes for rural and remote Australians now and into the future.”

Dr Belot said it is still crucial for rural and remote Australians to undertake regular personal dental care and get regular dental check-ups.

This includes:

- [Brushing your teeth twice a day with fluoride toothpaste](#)
- [Cleaning between your teeth daily using floss or interdental brushes](#)
- [Eating a healthy, balanced diet and limiting added sugar intake](#)
- [Visiting the dentist regularly for check-ups and preventive care](#)





MEDIA RELEASE

A high resolution photo of Dr Megan Belot is [available here](#).
The above photo in lower resolution (online use) is [available here](#).

Available for interview:

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