

Access for Aboriginal Groups

The Saturday Morning Clinic at Plenty Valley
Community Health: Improving Indigenous
access to dental and other health services

Maarten Post

Plenty Valley Community Health

- Plenty Valley Community Health (PVCH) is a medium sized community health service having an EFT 156.88 (20.90 of which are dental) located in Melbourne's outer northern suburbs.
- PVCH services the City of Whittlesea which includes the densely populated and ethnically diverse suburbs of Epping, Lalor, Thomastown and Bundoora as well as rural areas to the north including the Whittlesea township and King Lake

PVCH Catchment

- The City of Whittlesea is one of the most rapidly growing and largest municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne. This growth is expected to accelerate over the next two decades with an increase of over 50,000 persons over the next ten years.
- The City of Whittlesea has the fourth highest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in metropolitan Melbourne, experiencing a 24% increase in the Indigenous population between 2001 to 2006.

Indigenous Clients

- During the period 2003/2004 – 2007/2008 fifty clients using mainstream clinical services identified themselves as Indigenous
- Given the ABS data referred to earlier this did not sit well at PVCH and the PVCH Senior Management Team resolved to do something to become more attractive to the growing Indigenous population in the City of Whittlesea

Aboriginal Health Worker

- PVCH employed an Aboriginal Health Worker to help us in our desire to become a viable alternative to the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service for Indigenous clients living within the PVCH catchment.
- It is important to bear in mind that PVCH did not want to be in competition with VAHS but to be a realistic option for healthcare services for Indigenous clients.

What Did We Do?

- We actively sought out Indigenous residents, particularly young mums and provided supported parenting programs and we listened to their needs
- We formed a partnership with VAHS
- As well as a host of other initiatives, we initiated one off dental days where mothers brought their pre-school children to PVCH for a free dental checkup.

What Did We Do?

- The one off dental days were promoted as yarning sessions so while the children were having their teeth seen to, the mothers were addressed by PVCH clinical staff about general healthcare issues and of course dental healthcare.
- PVCH undertook a variety of actions that brought the name of PVCH to the attention of the local Aboriginal community - one such action was appointing an Aboriginal person to our Board of Directors

What Did We Do?

- The one off dental days were very successful and for a long time we wanted to run an Indigenous specific dental clinic similar to the “Survivors of Torture” dental clinic that PVCH was running
- It is true to say however, that the then Manager of Dental Services was not keen on the idea and nothing eventuated.

The New Manager

- Last year a new manager of dental services was employed
- The new Manager was very open to the idea of an Aboriginal dental service and actively worked to make the concept of an Aboriginal dental clinic a reality.
- He was very aware of the fact that if PVCH was to introduce an Aboriginal dental clinic it could not fail as it would set back all our efforts of working with the Indigenous population of the City of Whittlesea.

What Did We Do?

- Alex Thomas already a dentist at VAHS was approached and asked if he would be willing to provide a culturally appropriate dental service to Indigenous clients at PVCH.
- PVCH undertook a “Cultural Audit” in order to determine how “Aboriginal Aware” all PVCH staff were, and what shortcomings there were in both staff attitude and PVCH procedures.

What Did We Do?

- We settled on Saturday mornings as our Aboriginal Dental Clinic time and advertised by word of mouth and through both print and local Aboriginal radio our Saturday morning program
- Alex supported having longer appointment times for Indigenous clients
- We appointed an additional Aboriginal Health Worker to make appointments, follow up with clients and meet and greet clients when they arrived

What Did We Do?

- We established a fees policy specifically for Aboriginal clients.
- We arranged for a community health nurse to be present on Saturday mornings in order for her to sit and talk with clients and their families in order to make referrals for other health related issues that become apparent through her “chats”
- Other clinicians such as the Diabetes Nurse Educator, Podiatrist, etc. attend on occasions.

What Happens Saturday Mornings?

- Transport is provided if necessary by a PVCH Aboriginal Worker but if necessary a taxi voucher is provided
- All fees are waived for clients with a concession card.
- Non-concession card holders are charged the lowest possible fee.
- A breakfast club operates.
- PVCH becomes a meeting place on Saturday mornings

Outcomes

- Since the inception of the PVCH Indigenous Dental Saturday, PVCH Dental has treated in excess of 300 presentations.
- This is not a lot admittedly, but prior to the Saturday morning dental clinic PVCH had as previously stated, 50 clients who identified as Aboriginal



Other Outcomes