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Oral Health program a finalist in national primary health awards

An oral health promotion team, that incorporated fluoride varnish into routine child health checks in remote Aboriginal communities, has been named a finalist in the 2013 HESTA Primary Health Care Awards.

The Healthy Smiles - Oral Health and Fluoride Varnish Program has been incorporated into the Healthy Under-5 Kids Well Child Health Checks, for all children from birth to age five. This is one of the core primary health care programs delivered in remote Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

The Oral Health Promotion Team of Oral Health Services — Department of Health in the Northern Territory — has been recognised as one of five finalists in the Team Excellence category for improving oral health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The awards recognise the dedication and professionalism of those working in primary health care including physiotherapists, dentists, pharmacists, therapists, GPs, rehabilitation professionals, health educators and medical practice managers.

Oral Health Program Director, Dr Chris Handbury, said the Oral Health Promotion Team successively incorporated regular dental checks — called 'Lift the Lip' assessments — as well as six-monthly applications of fluoride varnish from age 18 months, into the routine child health checks conducted by registered nurses and Aboriginal health practitioners in remote communities.

"Research has shown that regular application of fluoride varnish can reduce dental decay by up to a third," Dr Handbury said.

"To address this issue, a training program for registered nurses and Aboriginal health practitioners was developed to enable these health professionals to apply fluoride varnish on Aboriginal children from 18 months old, during the routine child health checks.

"As a result, thousands of young children in the Northern Territory now have access to a safe, effective and affordable preventive program which aims to reduce dental decay."

The judges commended the nomination for demonstrating an innovative approach to providing a targeted training program in Indigenous communities.

Oral Health Promotion Manager, Alana Booth, and the other finalists will be flown to Melbourne for an awards dinner on 6 June 2013, when the winners will be revealed.

A \$30,000 prize pool will be shared among the winners, courtesy of long-term HESTA awards sponsor, ME Bank. The Team Excellence Award winner will receive a \$10,000 development grant to put towards the implementation of their program or initiative. The Young Leader and Individual Distinction Award winners will each receive a \$5,000 ME Bank *EveryDay* Transaction Account and a \$5,000 education grant.

HESTA is the leading super fund for health and community services, with more than 750,000 members and \$22 billion in assets. More people in health and community services choose HESTA for their super.

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