

MEDIA RELEASE

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA

DATE: WEDNESDAY 4 JULY 2012

ATTENTION: Chiefs of Staff, News Directors



New research centre to focus on healthy smiles

People living in rural areas have poorer oral health than their city-dwelling counterparts - why this is the case is unclear.

Our aging population also has a variety of oral health problems.

UTAS' University Department of Rural Health (UDRH), in the UTAS Faculty of Health Science, is now part of a national Centre for Research Excellence (CRE) in Primary Oral Health Care that aims to tackle these issues.

The CRE is the result of a \$7.5 million boost for primary health research, with the ANU Australian Primary Health Care Research Institute announcing funding to establish three new CREs in primary health care.

The UTAS UDRH team will be engaged in and lead research projects in the areas of "rural oral health" and "successful aging and oral health".

The CRE will be funded with \$2,500,000 over four years. Funds will be distributed across the three lead universities - UTAS, University of WA and University of Adelaide.

Lead UTAS researcher Dr Len Crocombe, Senior Research Fellow at UDRH, said non-capital city residents are more likely to suffer tooth loss, wear dentures and avoid certain foods due to dental problems, among other oral-care issues.

"Whatever is making rural oral health poorer than capital city oral health is not being adequately managed.

"Our research projects will investigate the attitudes, barriers and enablers of dental practitioners to living and working in rural areas," Dr Crocombe said.

"We will also examine how more collaborative, interprofessional systems of care can have a positive impact on the oral health of residents and also identify gaps in policy approaches to oral health in rural and remote areas."

Associate Professor Erica Bell, Deputy Director at the UDRH, will lead research into how to develop better oral health policy for disadvantaged groups.

Two more projects will focus on aging and oral health.

Dr Tony Barnett, Director and Head of UDRH, said the Department was “delighted” to be part of the CRE.

“We are looking forward to tackling these important issues with our colleagues and to using our combined research expertise to move towards having a healthier rural and aging population in Australia into the future.”

To organise an interview with Dr Len Crocombe, please contact Cherie Cooper, details below.

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