Poor water quality may be factor in high consumption of sugary drinks

By DI

CANBERRA, Australia: The poor state of Australians’ oral health has received much needed attention over recent years. For some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those living in remote communities, their oral health is being severely compromised owing to the consumption of sugary drinks, according to a recent study by researchers from the Australian National University (ANU).

According to Rethink Sugary Drink, some male Australians aged between 12 and 24 consume 5.5 litres of soft drinks, sports drinks or energy drinks a day. High consumption of such beverages has had a huge impact on the oral health of many people, and calls for better labelling and sugar tax have been made to help mitigate the situation. However, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities, it is not only that they are consuming these drinks, but also, according to this recent study, many of them feel that they have no healthier option, owing to the poor quality of drinking water. Families living in regional and remote settings have expressed concern about the safety and quality of drinking water, said lead author Dr Katherine Thurber.

What is perhaps more concerning is that the habit of high consumption of sugary drinks is introduced at a very young age. In the study, researchers focused their attention on infants and toddlers aged 0–3 years. Data was gathered from 900 participants, and the results showed that 50% had consumed any form of sugary drink. Cordial was the beverage most commonly consumed at 47%, followed by soft drinks at 15% and sweetened tea and coffee at 13%. The remaining 50% of the participants had not consumed any form of sugary drink in their first three years of life, which researchers noted as a positive in the otherwise concerning results.

Speaking about what could be done to make improvements, Thurber said, “Families need relevant advice from health professionals, but improving information and knowledge is only one part of the solution. We also need programmes and policies to improve the social determinants of health if we want to improve nutrition.”

The gap between the oral health of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians is closing, which indicates that the national focus on the issue may be having an impact. As reported by the researchers at ANU, babies and toddlers living in cities and regional centres were significantly less likely to consume sugary drinks than were children in remote areas. However, as reported recently by Dental Tribune International, 90% of Australian adults experience caries in their permanent teeth, and therefore, there is still plenty of work to be done.

The study, titled “Sugar-sweetened beverage consumption among Indigenous Australian children aged 0–3 years and association with sociodemographic, life circumstances and health factors,” was published on 28 August 2019 in Public Health Nutrition, ahead of inclusion in an issue.
New data paints a clearer picture about Australian dental practitioners

By DTI

SYDNEY, Australia: Understanding the dental industry is a key function of the Dental Board of Australia, and the board plays an important role in the regulation of dental practitioners. Recently, the board released data on the state of the profession with regard to new registrations. The data gathered informs the board’s decisions on standards, codes and guidelines for the dental profession.

Statistics released by the Dental Board of Australia show that there were 101 new registrations of dental practitioners across Australia during the period of 1 April to 30 June 2019. (Photograph: wavebreakmedia/Shutterstock)

According to the latest data, during the period of 1 April to 30 June 2019, an additional 101 dental practitioners registered across Australia, pushing the number of registrants overall to 23,730, of which 17,727 were dentists. Breaking down the numbers by sex, the report stated that 51.8% were female (12,304) and 48.2% male (11,426) and that 494 women and 1,274 men held specialist registration.

In addition to the data on new registrations and sex, the data from the Dental Board of Australia painted a clearer picture on where dental professionals are working. It shows that the majority of registrants are based in either New South Wales or Victoria (29.20% and 23.33%, respectively). The next largest groups practise in Queensland (20.21%), Western Australia (11.54%) and South Australia (8.26%).

The Dental Board of Australia noted that its functions include:

- registering dentists, students, dental specialists, dental therapists, dental hygienists, oral health therapists and dental prosthetists;
- developing standards, codes and guidelines for the dental profession;
- handling notifications, complaints, investigations and disciplinary hearings;
- overseeing the assessment of overseas-trained practitioners who wish to practise in Australia; and
- approving accreditation standards and accredited courses of study.

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