

Tonga Visit July 2023

This two-week visit involved several initiatives for Tonga that will benefit many Tongan people, especially children:

1. Mobile Dental Van
2. Early learning English education books
3. New dental clinic and Sick Bay for Tonga High School
4. Medical and other donations from Melbourne Donations-in-Kind,
5. Clinical Orthodontic training

Mobile Dental Truck

A low mileage T2 domiciliary dental truck donated by Dental Health Services Victoria (DHSV) was shipped to Tonga from Melbourne and delivered to the Tonga Ministry of Health to use in its school-based MaliMali (Schools Preventive Dentistry) program. Before shipping, modifications were made to the power system for use in Tongan schools, including converting from 3-phase to single-phase power so that all functions of the van can be operated from a domestic power outlet.

Two school dental therapists (Liz Cobbledick and Stephanie Veal) were sponsored by DHSV and joined the Rotary team for one week to help set up and stock the van and to demonstrate its operation and maintenance. The truck was commissioned in an opening ceremony by the Minister of Health for Tonga, Dr. Saia Piukalu, and Vaiola Hospital dental staff, and is now fully operational and in use in Tonga.



The Minister of Health Hon. Dr. Saia Piukalu performs the handover ceremony for the school dental van with AHC and dental staff

Teacher Education Books

New early learning education books were donated by Rotary are part of a program for teachers to introduce children aged 5-7 to English language literacy and numeracy. It is a professionally designed system of reading and writing, based on phonetics by Of Primary Importance Pty. Ltd. Each system consists of 64 graded learning activities. We delivered 7 pallets (260 boxes of books), sufficient to supply all junior government schools in Tonga. Disadvantaged and outer island schools will be allocated first.

New Dental Clinic and Sick Bay for Tonga High School.

This project followed last year's successful visit when we installed similar dental and medical facilities at Queen Salote College, Apifo'ou College, and Tupou College. This Tonga High School project was specifically requested by the Prime Minister of Tonga and was a joint collaborative project with the school and its alumni for the school's 75th anniversary. Ballarat West Rotary and ICD provided the dental equipment including two dental chairs, compressors, suction, motors mobile cabinetry, supplies, handpieces surgical instruments, autoclaves, ultrasonics, intra-oral cameras, etc. The school itself raised \$4.7 million Pa'anga (~AUS \$ 3 million) from past students to provide the building, a library and rooms for the sick bay and dental clinic. The school prepared air conditioning and a sink for the sick room. The sick room includes 3 hospital beds, a BP monitor, linen and medical dressings. We were greatly honoured by King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau'u of Tonga performing the opening ceremony of the new dental clinic.



The new dental clinic at Tonga High School



*(Left): Opening ceremony of new dental clinic, King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau'u with ICD Fellow Dr. Sisilia Fusi
(Right): Dr. Deborah Sykes and Dr. Susitina Piukala at the Vaiola Hospital in Tonga*

Specialist Orthodontist and Senior Lecturer Dr. Deborah Sykes continued her close clinical association with Tongan Dentist Dr Susitina Piukala, forged in Ballarat back in 2016. This has resulted in Tongan children being provided with a new specialist dental service that otherwise would not have existed. Dr. Sykes conducted orthodontic training and donated a large amount of supplies of specialist equipment and supplies for Tonga.

We were truly honoured and encouraged by the support we received for these projects from Tongan dignitaries with the three opening ceremonies performed by the Prime Minister of Tonga Hu'akavameiliku; Honourable Dr. Saia Piukalu, the Tongan Minister of Health; the acting Australian High Commissioner Miriam Carter; and King Tupou VI and Queen Nanasipau'u of Tonga - perhaps the highest accolades for this dental project.

Thank you to the ICD and DHSV for their generous support for this project.

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