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## **Integrated curative and public oral health school outreach to Penama Province: An evaluation of implementing the Health Promoting Schools Program in rural Vanuatu**

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### **Abstract**

**Background:** Dental caries and periodontal diseases remain amongst the highest of preventable lifestyle diseases in developing nations and are a challenge for Vanuatu's under resourced curative and public oral health services. The National Oral Health Survey (NOHS) reveals the seriousness of dental problems in remote as well as the urban areas. Efforts in oral health prevention and curative services are mostly centered in the main towns of Port Vila and Luganville. Child oral health programs are being implemented under the umbrella of the Health Promoting Schools (HPS) and the Gudfala Tut Skul (GTSP) programs, both of which advocate for early intervention and prevention.

**Methods:** This report is based on the outcomes of a school based Integrated Oral, Eye, ENT outreach to Penama Province. The outreach was a collaboration between curative services and public health under the HPS initiative. Schools across the 10 area councils of Penama province were targeted for program implementation. Children were screened, given awareness of basic oral health and hygiene principles, toothbrushing demonstration and provided with toothbrush and toothpaste kits. Pain relieving dental extractions were offered at these locations. Data was collected on standard HPS treatment need forms.

**Results:** Data from 14 schools and surrounding communities was captured across 8 Area Councils. A total of 1355 students were screened along with 289 adults. 1496 students received oral health awareness and 787 received supervised brushing instructions. 2110 oral hygiene kits were distributed. 77% of the pain relief extractions involved adults. Consequently, there is a high proportion of untreated dental disease in children who have been screened and require follow-up.

**Discussion:** Dental pain relief treatment factored into a school screening program in rural Vanuatu has its challenges given the severe lack of dental human resource. Adults with chronic dental pain out-accessed the service over children. Guidelines for rural oral health outreach should ensure all vulnerable groups have access to mobile dental services. A conceptual framework is proposed as a result of this report.