

Poor dental health impacting on Aboriginal mums

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University of Adelaide researchers are calling for a greater sensitivity towards Aboriginal women in dental clinics and improved accessibility to dental care.

This follows research that finds pregnant Aboriginal women are a vulnerable population who suffer from multiple dental health and social problems.

Associate Professor Lisa Jamieson, Director of the Indigenous Oral Health Unit at the University of Adelaide, studied 446 women pregnant with Aboriginal children and found that:

- they were six times more likely to need a tooth extraction than those in the general population;
- they were twice as likely to need fillings;
- more likely to visit the dentist because of [dental pain](#);
- nearly two-thirds avoided dental care because of cost; and
- four out of every five women would have difficulty paying a \$100 dental bill.
- In addition to their oral health problems, Associate Professor Jamieson studied [social factors](#) impacting on the women.

She found that nearly 90% were unemployed, almost half did not own a car, more than one third had five or more people staying in their house, a large proportion already had four or more children, and more than two-thirds of the women also cared for children who were not their own.

"Aboriginal women are experiencing profound social and oral [health inequalities](#) compared with the rest of society. This is a group that we really need to worry about," Associate Professor Jamieson says.

"Poor oral health in mothers can place developing and newborn children at risk. For example, pregnant women who have missing or sore teeth feel that they are unable to eat certain foods. This food avoidance means they're often not getting the nutrients they or their baby need.

"Also, although babies are born without bacteria in their mouths, if the mother's oral health is poor, she can pass her bacteria onto the baby at an early stage. The baby's teeth are attacked by bacteria from the mother as the teeth are coming through. This is a serious situation at an early age."

Associate Professor Jamieson says there should be a greater awareness of the impact of [oral health](#) on Aboriginal women's general health, as well as a better understanding of their needs in [dental clinics](#).

"The clinic setting frequently doesn't allow for group visits but we know that the group is important to Aboriginal women, so there should be more flexibility to allow for this. Dental services need to be more sensitive to Aboriginal women's needs more broadly, because they are at the extreme end of the disease profile," she says.

The results of this study are published in the current issue of the *Australian Dental Journal*.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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