

## Section VIII Australia, New Zealand, South Pacific

### ***The Gudfala Tut Skul Program improves oral health in Vanuatu's school children***

Medical Sailing Ministries Inc., the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu and the Vanuatu Ministry of Health are raising awareness of the importance of oral health in preschool and school children and their families through a supervised brushing program.

A study in 2017 found that 70% of 5-7-year-olds in Vanuatu had tooth decay and bleeding gums. The 2018 Gudfala Tut Skul (Healthy Tooth School) pilot program provided equipment and lessons on brushing which resulted in a reduction in cases of toothache and significantly less plaque in the mouths of children who were brushing regularly. The program was expanded to cover 21 schools and kindergartens serving over 1,500 children. Participants were also given an extra brush to encourage family members to get involved.



**Children at schools across Vanuatu learn good brushing techniques that will help them to reduce common oral health problems. [View a gallery of photos.](#)**

By the end of 2022, further grants from the ICD and other supporters enabled the program to expand to cover 40 schools, reaching approximately 3,500 children and 12-15,000 family members. However, in March 2023, tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin caused severe damage across the islands and destroyed all the school-based resources for the program. Many schools were closed for months and as classes began to resume properly, the area was once again hit by a tropical cyclone. It was not until January 2024 that the program could begin to be properly resupplied, thanks to a grant from the ICD Global Visionary Fund. The program will be fully up and running once again towards the end of 2024.