
Pacific Heads of Health Meeting, 22-23 July 2020

1 Pacific Island Program (PIP) Overview

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has been implementing the **Pacific Islands Program (PIP)** since 1995 to address gaps in specialised clinical service provision in the Pacific. The PIP is funded to deliver a range of tertiary health services and training activities at the request of Pacific Ministries of Health with the objective *'to strengthen and consolidate specialised clinical service delivery in the Pacific region'*. The PIP aims to achieve the following program outcomes:

1. Prioritised Pacific specialised clinical service professionals have improved competencies,
2. Pacific Island Countries receive quality visiting medical teams that meet their priority clinical and training needs,
3. Pacific Ministries of Health better identify and prioritise specialised clinical service and training needs, to inform Ministry of Health planning,
4. Pacific specialised clinical education institutions and Pacific professional clinical organisations have better educational resources.

Current program achievements include deployment of more than 600 volunteer medical teams to 11 Pacific Island countries. These visiting teams have conducted over 90,000 consultations and 26,000 procedures. RACS Global Health has also worked to elevate education and training by facilitating the delivery of hundreds of workshops and courses, alongside clinical teaching, and mentoring. This program will be implemented throughout 2021 and 2022 based on the priorities set by Pacific Heads of Health and their respective teams.

RACS is currently waiting to learn what the Regional priorities for 2021 are to ensure the PIP continues to align to needs, is well coordinated, and the nature and volume of activity will not overwhelm local medical teams.

2 Continuing support during the COVID-19 pandemic

RACS has pivoted the PIP to ensure contact with, and support for Pacific health staff continues. Since April 2020, RACS has hosted regular online forums for both nursing and surgical specialties. The nursing forums have provided a key source of information and support in relation to COVID-19 preparedness and training. The surgical forums focus on case discussions, case presentations and peer support. The following quote is indicative of the response from Pacific participants:

'One of the best zoom sessions I've attended so far. Session content was really beneficial to our setting. Looking forward to future sessions' (nurse participant).

3 National Surgery, Obstetrics & Anaesthesia Plans (NSOAPS)

Following the 13th Pacific Health Ministers Meeting (PHMM) resolution, Pacific Community (SPC), with assistance from RACS and the Global Surgery and Social Change Program at Harvard Medical School was tasked with progressing the development of the NSOAPS in the Pacific region. Five countries (Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Tonga, and Vanuatu) we're selected for the pilot program.

The initial desktop mapping exercise has been completed for the selected countries. The teams are now moving to develop the in-country consultation process. Activities are expected to be completed over a 3-month period with a report back to the Heads of Health meeting to follow.

4 Future Program Directions

RACS is in the process of developing a **Pacific Regional Strategy** which will provide direction and coherence of RACS future health-focused programming in the Pacific. The regional strategy will be based on RACS broader **Global Health Strategy** which prioritises health system strengthening, capacity building of the health workforce and effective partnerships. Whilst RACS' deployment of visiting medical teams (VMTs) supports immediate needs of patients for specialist surgical procedures, it is also firmly focused on capacity building through the training and mentoring that is incorporated into visits and complements other focused capacity building support.

Future RACS programs in the Pacific will continue to have a strong focus on capacity building, health system strengthening and regionalisation. This approach will underpin the further development of specialist hubs across the region that support surgery, training and mentoring by PICs for PICS in an uncertain future where health security will be contingent upon locally, sustainable strategies that engage international support strategically.