

Warrnambool City Council

GSK Childhood Immunisation Awards submission

Category: A significant increase in, or attainment of, high immunization coverage in children over 12 months of age.

Background:

Located in rural Victoria, Warrnambool City Council provides 48% of infant immunisation, with the remainder being provided by General Practices, and other health service providers. The Council had seen cohort 3 immunisation rates plummet to 88.24% during the September 2005 ACIR calculation.

The initiative:

When Warrnambool City Council realized that its once impressive childhood immunisations rates were slipping a few years ago, it took the matter in hand.

A dedicated council immunisation officer and nurse, Ms Alison Elliott, was employed to review and overhaul the service. "Affected in part by parent complacency, language difficulties, active anti-immunisation and alternative medicine lobbyists, non-core staff, a venue with limited parking, unsuitable times and a multitude of often confusing schedule changes to parents - our sessions had caught a disease," the council wrote in its award submission.

Ms Elliott formed alliances with local indigenous and migrant health services as well as the local division of general practice. The council started a two-year trial of appointment-based clinics and in February this year, it ceased the traditional mass immunisation clinics permanently and replaced them with weekly, appointment-based clinics, which included Saturday morning and Tuesday evening clinics to accommodate working parents.

Close alliances with the Maternal & Child Health nurses, the Sudanese community health nurse and local Aboriginal nurse were developed to promote immunisation among those communities, and an enhanced home immunisation service was introduced for families with a history of poor attendance at clinics.

For the four-year-old vaccinations, the service contacts parents via the kindergarten and childcare services and runs specific clinics with promotional items (balloons, stickers, videos and kinder paintings) to reduce children's anxiety.

"With the traditional queues now replaced with the more relaxed atmosphere of appointment-based, user-friendly clinics incorporating quick turnaround times, soft colours and lighting, soothing music, engaging staff, diversional therapy (full credit to the Wiggles and TeleTubbies), our clinics are now showing increases, both in both attendance numbers and coverage rates," the council stated in its submission. "Both parents and children are more content, our immunisation staff work as a team and we reckon we have got it right".

The result:

Council received a 76% increase in attendance numbers at appointment based immunisation clinics over a two year period. Council Manager of Health and Local Laws, Mr Murray Murfett, said the fully-immunised coverage rate for cohort three stood at 88.24% in September 2005. By June this year, it had increased to 96.74%.