

## Smile Brazil Helps Seniors, 75% of Which Are Toothless

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Over 48 million people in Brazil have received free dental care since March, 2004, when the Ministry of Health launched the Smiling Brazil program. This is the first time the country has developed a national oral hygiene policy, with projected allocations of US\$ 500 million (1.3 billion reais) through next year.

Of the planned total of 400 dental specialty centers, 126 have already been installed, attending 75 municipalities in 20 states. The number of staff teams has grown from 4,260 to 9,000.

The Smiling Brazil program extends the care offered by the Brazilian public health system, denominated the Unified Health System (SUS), which used to be limited to basic services such as fluoride applications and fillings.

Now the population also has access to surgical procedures, canal and gum treatments, prostheses, and oral cancer diagnoses.

The results of an oral health study conducted by the Ministry of Health between May, 2002, and October, 2003, covering 108,921 individuals, among children, adults, and senior citizens, are disturbing: 13% of the adolescents and 6% of the adults had never been to a dentist.

Nearly 27% of the children between 18 and 36 months had already had a cavity. Among children who had already reached the age of 5, this percentage amounts to almost 60%.

The World Health Organization's (WHO) target for 2000 was for 50% of children in this age group to be free of caries. According to the national coordinator of Oral Health of the Ministry of Health, Gilberto Pucca, the program should allow this target to be met.

"We are fluoridating public water supplies in various Brazilian cities," Pucca informed.

According to him, this measure reduces caries by 50%, especially among children, and will place Brazil within the WHO's guidelines shortly.

According to the study, the index of toothlessness is also high. Among adults between 30 and 44, 30% lack teeth, and among senior citizens, this percentage comes to 75%.

One of the goals of the program is to reach, by the end of 2006, 50% of the senior citizens and adults who are in need of dental prostheses.

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