

Frequently Asked Questions about Interplast



This is a list of questions asked at District Conference Showcases or Rotary Club presentations. If you have another question that is not here, please don't hesitate to email the Rotary Coordinator, Janette Etherington, at janette.etherington@interplast.org.au.

What does Interplast do?

Interplast changes lives! We do this by providing free plastic and reconstructive surgeries, post-operative care, and allied health treatment to patients in developing nations across Asia and the Pacific region where this care is not accessible. Interplast currently has partnerships with 17 countries.

Apart from surgery, how does Interplast change lives?

We change the lives of our patients, their families and their communities. For example, by repairing a cleft lip a child is able to learn to speak clearly, and look like all the other kids in their village or town. This means they will no longer be ostracised or bullied because they look different.

Many kids with visible conditions like clefts drop out of school. Some are even hidden away by their families because there is stigma and shame attached to a condition that is not understood.

Children with cleft palates struggle to eat and drink properly – often the food comes back out from their nose – as well as speak clearly. Because eating and drinking normally is so difficult, the children can often be malnourished and unwell.

A child with a cleft requires much more care than any other child, meaning that an adult in the family has a large part of their day taken up caring for the child. This prevents them from earning income for the family, and otherwise participating in family/community life.

A child with a repaired cleft can go to school, get an education, and be in a better position to earn an income for not just their family, but their own family when they marry.

All of this benefits the community by having members who can contribute to all facets of community life.

How does Interplast choose which countries it works in?

Interplast only works in countries where we are invited to do so. Interplast has MOUs in place with the Ministries of Health and the hospitals we partner with. We establish the need of the local clinicians, and provide the services they have requested.

Is Interplast a Rotary project?

Interplast was co-founded by a Rotarian and a surgeon in 1983. Rotarians, Clubs and Districts have continued the relationship ever since then. Interplast is now an independent charity which Rotary Clubs and Rotarians across Rotary South Pacific provide significant support for in a number of ways.

We have long-standing relationships with many of our partner countries – we have been going to Fiji since 1983 for example. In Samoa, the same volunteers have been visiting for 17 years. Our volunteers

build close relationships with the in-country clinicians, and will often provide remote advice, mentoring and training long after the team has returned home.

Is the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons still involved with Interplast?

Interplast's volunteer surgeons are members of the college, and RACS selects 4 members to be directors on the Interplast Board. Up until July 2026 Interplast's office was in the RACS building in Spring St, East Melbourne.

How many volunteers does Interplast have, and how many hours do they contribute to Interplast programs each year?

For **FY26**, we had **58 clinical volunteers** contribute **407 days** across all of our programs.

Do you have enough volunteers, and how do you find them?

We currently have enough volunteers, and are getting regular offers from clinicians interested in volunteering for us. Word of mouth from our existing volunteers is the most powerful driver of offers of volunteer help.

Where does Interplast's money come from?

About 20% comes from Rotarians, Clubs and Districts across Australia and New Zealand. The rest comes from individual donations, corporate donors, bequests, and various fundraising activities.

We apply for as many grants as we can from trusts and foundations, but many specify that the programs must be delivered in Australia, which means that we are not eligible.

Does Interplast receive government funding?

Interplast receives some funding from the Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

DFAT funding must attract a 5:1 contribution from Interplast, so \$1,000 from DFAT requires Interplast to contribute \$200 raised from the Australian community.

Does Interplast have paid staff?

Yes, we do. We need paid staff to ensure that we can be fully compliant with the requirements of the Australian Government and DFAT, in order to receive that funding.

Are there many external compliance requirements for Interplast?

Interplast is subject to a range of different compliance frameworks. The DFAT requirements are the most extensive. We also comply with the Australian Council for International Development framework, the Australian Charities & Not-for-Profit Commission requirements, as well as our own rigorous standards.

Are Interplast and ROMAC (Rotary Oceania Medical Aid for Children) connected/the same organisation?

No, the organisations are completely separate.

Interplast's model is to send volunteers to our partner countries, and to train the local clinicians. Our patients are children and adults of any age.

[ROMAC](#) treats children under 16 years of age. ROMAC's model is to bring a child patient and their guardian/parent to Australia or New Zealand for treatment.

Interplast performs plastic and reconstructive surgery to restore function and enable the patient to live as full a life as possible. ROMAC provides life-giving and/or dignity-restoring surgery, with medical treatment not available in the patients' own countries.

Does Interplast work with ROMAC?

Interplast has an MOU with ROMAC, so that if either organisation identifies a potential patient that the other is better suited to treat, a referral can be made to try to facilitate the necessary care for the patient. Interplast advises ROMAC of our planned surgical visits so that potential ROMAC patients can be added to Interplast's triage list for assessment.

How many patients has Interplast helped over the years?

Interplast has treated over **27,000 patients** across Asia and the Pacific since 1983.

How many clinicians has Interplast trained?

Interplast has offered training to over 8,500 medical personnel. This includes in-person training and mentoring, as well as webinars and on-line training sessions. Our training is offered to surgeons, anaesthetists, and nurses, as well as allied health clinicians, such as speech therapists and physiotherapists.

27,000 patients, and nearly 9,000 clinicians trained, are our proudest achievements!

Is Interplast just a fly-in, fly-out charity?

No – we believe in providing patient care where the patient has the support of their whole community, with every patient interaction also being a training opportunity for the local clinicians. We want to build sustainable health care in our partner countries. In an ideal world, we would do ourselves out of a job, because there would be no need for us to provide our services.

How many programs does Interplast run each year?

In **FY26** Interplast ran **37** programs, including:

- 4 Surgical
- 3 Nurse Education
- 4 Diabetic Foot Care
- 8 Assistive Technology
- 3 Burns treatment

How much does an Interplast program cost?

Currently a one-week surgical program in the Pacific costs approximately **\$80-90,000**. Allied Health programs such as our Diabetic Foot Care training and outreach, cost much less - from \$20-\$30,000 depending on the program.

The average cost of a surgical procedure is just **\$1,500**, due to the fact that all of our clinicians donate their time, taking annual leave or unpaid leave from their jobs in Australia and New Zealand.

When you consider that the same procedure in an Australian hospital would cost thousands, if not tens of thousands of dollars, a Rotary donation to Interplast delivers an exceptional return on investment.

Why are so many of Interplast's patients treated for cleft lips and cleft palates?

Cleft lips and palates occur in babies born around the world. The difference between countries like Australia and New Zealand, and developing nations in Asia and the Pacific where Interplast works, is that in developed nations, babies born with a cleft lip receive surgery within weeks of their birth. Those born with a cleft palate receive surgery within the first year of life. These surgeries are not available to most of the population in the countries where Interplast works.

Why does Interplast treat so many patients for burns?

In developing nations, open fires are often used for heating and cooking. Gas and electricity are not available, or irregularly available, so wood, charcoal, or liquids such as oil, petrol or kerosene can be used. Open flames, liquid fuel and small children can be a disastrous combination.

There is little first aid knowledge in developing nations, and often no doctor or hospital within easy reach. Burns that are not treated appropriately cause severe contractures as they heal, resulting in physical incapacity and disfigurement for the patient.

What other conditions does Interplast treat?

Interplast's volunteers also provide treatment for tumours; traumatic injuries such as those caused by machete wounds and by motorbike accidents; diabetic amputees who have lost feet or lower limbs due to the disease.

Interplast's nurses work in the operating theatres and provide post-operative care for patients. Interplast also works with local physiotherapists and prosthetists to provide mobility aids such as prosthetic limbs, wheelchairs, and other mobility aids, and to train the patients in how to use them.

In recent years we have been providing community education and clinician training in Pacific nations, designed to prevent the unnecessary amputation of lower limbs due to untreated complications of Diabetes type 2.

Does Interplast see patients who need additional surgery to the one they have had?

It is not unusual for patients to return for additional surgery if their conditions are severe. Pasilio, in Tonga, who was severely burnt as a 4 year old when his t-shirt caught fire, has had 2 Interplast burns contractures surgeries, and needs at least one more due to the extensive area of burnt skin.

Sometimes patients will present with more than one condition – for example Risati in Samoa has had 2

surgeries for a cleft lip and cleft palate, and needs 2 more as he has syndactyly on both hands – his 2 middle fingers are joined together. He will have 4 surgeries over 4 surgical program visits.

Does Interplast work with Operation Cleft?

[Operation Cleft](#) contracts the services of Bangladeshi plastic surgeons to provide surgery for patients with cleft lips and palates in Bangladesh.

Interplast won't duplicate services already provided in a partner country.

Can I volunteer to go on an Interplast program?

Interplast's clinical volunteers are all currently registered and practising medical professionals, resident in Australia or New Zealand. They use their annual leave or unpaid leave to take time away from their jobs to volunteer for Interplast. If you are interested in volunteering for Interplast, please email contactus@interplast.org.au.

How can I support Interplast?

Interplast needs passionate Rotarians to promote Interplast's work to Rotarians and Rotary Clubs across Australia and New Zealand. If you would like to volunteer to be an Interplast Champion in your area, please email Janette Etherington, at janette.etherington@interplast.org.au.

You can donate to Interplast via our website.

We have volunteers who knit teddies for us – they are given to every child patient we see to take their minds off the strange environment they are suddenly finding themselves in. The pattern is on the website.

You can organise a fundraiser for Interplast, and the Interplast fundraising staff can help with this.