

Opportunities for Collaboration between State Oral Health Programs and State Dental Hygienists' Associations to Improve Oral Health



Prepared by the Association of
State and Territorial Dental Directors and the
American Dental Hygienists' Association



State oral health programs (SOHP) are dental public health programs administered by state public health agencies, the District of Columbia and territories/jurisdictions to perform essential public health functions such as monitoring and collecting data on oral health status, developing policies to address community oral health needs, engaging partners, and assuring access to evidence-based oral disease prevention and treatment services. State associations within the American Dental Hygienists' Association (ADHA) are nonprofit professional associations whose members are dental hygienists practicing in a variety of healthcare settings and programs, including public health programs, who provide preventive dental care for people of all ages in all states. SOHPs and state associations work together and with other partners to address the oral health needs of the U.S. population, particularly those groups with significant oral health disparities.

What Can State Oral Health Programs and State Dental Hygienists' Associations Do Together?

- Promote oral health as essential to overall health and quality of life throughout the lifespan
- Advocate/testify for policy or legislative changes to improve the public's oral health and safety
- Promote medical-dental collaboration, particularly in risk assessment, counseling, referrals and follow up
- Promote and support evidence-based in-office and community-based prevention services
- Promote community water fluoridation and respond to challenges to its benefits
- Convene and participate in oral health coalitions, summits and forums
- Help develop and monitor state and national oral health plans with other stakeholders
- Participate in Basic Screening Surveys to gather data for oral health programs surveys
- Promote and enroll families in public or private dental insurance programs
- Provide oral health information to the public using "plain language" in culturally relevant ways
- Support and participate in volunteer events to provide screenings, preventive services, counseling and dental care
- Collect, analyze, summarize and use public and private sector oral health information to highlight needs and disparities
- Develop and participate in efforts to evaluate effectiveness, availability and quality of oral health programs and services
- Provide and sponsor joint continuing education and leadership development opportunities
- Offer expertise /advice/support to committees, boards and task forces
- Write articles for newsletters, journals and press releases
- Provide student learning experiences for dental, dental hygiene, dental assisting and other health professions schools

"We look to the state dental hygienists' association to partner on increasing access to preventive care. Dental hygienists are instrumental in delivering services in school-based sealant programs and promoting prevention strategies in communities."

Merry Jo Thoele, MPH, RDH, Dental Director, Minnesota Oral Health Program

When issues arise that do not result in consensus, both groups should strive to share key conditions to create collective impact. The framework should share a common agenda, shared measurement, mutually reinforcing activities, and continuous communication. Keys to successful collaboration include 1) having a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem; 2) collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants so efforts remain aligned; 3) reinforce mutual activities while supporting other activities; 4) establishing mutual respect and trust for each other's agendas; and 5) creating transparency in decision making and communication.

Collaborations between SOHPs and State Dental Hygienists' Associations serve as an excellent platform to address state and community oral health issues, especially among underserved populations. Identifying areas of common ground that fall within their missions and help to meet the needs of underserved groups will benefit everyone and serve as a collaborative model for other organizations.

This publication was supported by Grant/Cooperative Agreement No. 1U58DP004919-01 from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to ASTDD. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of the CDC.