

American Dental Education Association and Head Start: Envisioning Future Collaborations to Improve Oral Health

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Prepared by:

Anne Hopewell, M.S.W.
Health Systems Research, Inc.

Jane Steffensen, M.P.H., C.H.E.S.
Department of Community Dentistry
University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio



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Executive Summary

In 1999, the Head Start Bureau (HSB), the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS, then the Health Care Financing Administration), and the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) convened a National Head Start Partners Oral Health Forum to focus attention on early childhood oral health. The purpose of the forum was to discuss strategies for improving oral health status among young children, and for increasing collaboration at the Federal, State, and local levels to enhance access to oral health services.

One outcome of this National Forum was the formulation of an Intra-Agency Agreement between the Office of Head Start (OHS, then the Head Start Bureau), Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and HRSA's Maternal and Child Health Bureau (MCHB) to develop linkages to support oral health in Head Start. As part of this agreement, the Bureaus decided to sponsor forums to determine how organizations and agencies could work together to improve the oral health of participants in Head Start, including a series of forums with professional dental organizations. The success of the twelve regional forums and three professional organization forums conducted between 2001 and 2005 led to additional funds being made available for three additional professional organization forums to be held in 2006. The Hispanic Dental Association held its forum in February followed by a meeting of the American Dental Education Association (ADEA) in June 2006.

On June 23rd, ADEA members convened in Washington DC to discuss strategies for enhancing the capacity of their members to engage in collaborative opportunities with Head Start and Early Head Start programs across the country. ADEA is the premier organization representing academic dental education. Membership in ADEA includes both academic institutions and the individual deans, students, faculty within these institutions as well as corporate membership. Academic dental institutions are a fundamental underpinning of the nation's infrastructure for oral health improvements. As education institutions, dental schools, allied dental education and advanced dental education programs are the source of a qualified workforce, influencing both the number and types of oral health providers. As centers of discovery, academic dental institutions

ensure that oral health practice evolves through research and the transfer of the latest science. As providers of care, academic dental institutions are a safety net for the underserved, centers of pioneering tertiary care, and contributors to the well-being of their communities through accessible oral health services.

ADEA's commitment to service learning and to educating students regarding the oral health needs of the very young is clear in the following statement excerpted from ADEA's President's Commission on Access Report entitled, "Improving the Oral Health Status of All Americans: Roles and Responsibilities of Dental Institutions"

"As academic dental institutions consider workforce requirements, the curriculum should be examined in light of different points of entry into dental practice. Such a process should include education about the needs of special groups such as the very young, the aged and the mentally and physically disabled, the medically compromised, and the underserved. Increased attention must be given to rendering culturally competent care. The process should involve strong guidance in the professional socialization of future practitioners and should encourage students to practice in underserved areas and to participate in outreach programs and community service...Learning about public health issues and the development of public health competencies are important components of the educational experience. Practical steps include exposing students to the delivery of care in a community-based setting as early as possible in the educational process."

Thirty ADEA members representing four of the organization's major constituencies: deans, allied programs, pediatric dentistry, and community and preventive dentistry met for one day to discuss ways members can collaborate with Head Start for the purpose of addressing oral health issues of underserved populations within their institutional communities. Participants were selected due to their expressed interest and range of experience in building community collaborations and increasing access to care for young children. Among the participants at the forum were key leadership in the organization,

such as ADEA past-presidents, deans, prominent allied health professionals, as well as, the Chief Dental Officer of the Maternal and Child Health Bureau and the Coordinator of the Intra-agency Agreement from the Office of Head Start. Collectively, they represented the spectrum of ADEA membership and a broad range of expertise and experiences collaborating with partners in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

The day long interactive discussion provided an overview of the Head Start and Early Head Start programs, presentations on some successful partnerships currently in place and strategies for future collaboration. Participants identified the following activities for ADEA members to consider:

- Participating in the development of a Web conference on how to partner with HS on oral health issues
- Supporting a Symposium on HS and Oral Health to be conducted in conjunction with ADEA's Annual Meeting
- Volunteering for ADEA committees on curricula development and accreditation
- Committing to facilitating one collaborative activity between their institution or organization and a local HS program
- Disseminating information on Early Childhood Caries (ECCs) at meetings, workshops and conferences
- Increasing advocacy at the Federal, State and local levels regarding access to dental care for participants in HS as well as populations eligible for HS.

Forum participants also discussed possible content for a future Web based audioconference to inform other interested ADEA members about this opportunity. Among the topics for consideration were:

- An overview of the EHS/HS programs and activities – HS 101
- Presentation by a dental education institution on current successful HS partnering activities

- Synopsis of the value of service learning for students and residents from dental schools and allied dental education programs
- “Testimony” by a parent with a child attending HS or former student on the importance of access to oral health prevention and oral health care
- Review of ways dental and allied dental students and programs can partner with HS
- Possible video clips regarding HS and/or oral health
- Web “tours” of the Office of Head Start (OHS), Association of State and Territorial Dental Directors (ASTDD) or the National Oral Health Resource Center Web sites

In addition to these activities, the attendees discussed a variety of future actions that they could undertake to improve the oral health of participants in EHS/HS programs. A full report can be found on the National Head Start Oral Health Resource Center web site at:

<http://www.mchoralhealth.org/HeadStart/index.html>.